



Savouring Each Victory

■ By Lei Na

It seems perfect for me to write about Charmaine, since I am on her team, and my desk is only a few steps away from her office. We spend almost every weekday together. However, when I get down to writing this piece, I have no idea where to begin. CEIBS' International Media Team is one of “tranquillity” with each member focused on his or her own responsibilities while contributing to the success of the overall team. If there is any exchange of ideas, instead of engaging in small talk, it will be direct, to the point and efficient. Meanwhile, team members are on good terms with each other. Although foreigners make up half the team, it embodies the ideal esteemed by ancient Chinese people: “Friendships between gentlemen should be as fresh as water” – whenever a team member is in need of help, others willingly give a hand. The one who sets the tone is Charmaine Clarke, Assistant Director of CEIBS Marketing and Communications Department.

I still remember that it was three in the morning when I received her first email, attached with a document I had requested for my job interview. That was beyond my wildest expectation. After joining the team, I heard the legend: Charmaine replies to emails at any time she is available – during work hours, midnight or the small hours of the morning. It seems she is online 24/7. Fortunately, even though she spends so much time on work herself, she has never asked us to follow suit, and has never uttered a word of self-praise.

In charge of the school's international media

communications, she has to be both bold and detail-oriented, innovative and precise, as well as keep inner peace while tackling complex issues. She compares her situation to “trying to avoid raindrops as I walk on egg shells”. Most of the time, we can only be the on-lookers of her busy life as she completes a succession of heavy tasks on her own. Until this interview, I was ignorant of her life story or the source of her courage. Now I know a bit more about her curiosity about the world around her, her unremitted quest for the breadth of life, as well as a series of magical coincidences that brought her to China, to CEIBS. While introducing CEIBS to the world, she also gives us a better impression of the world.

Read on for Charmaine's story at CEIBS:

Can you briefly tell us about your life before you came to China? How long have you lived in China? What's your overall impression of the country?

In my former life I was a journalist in my home country, Jamaica. I covered everything from violent street protests to a state visit – full of pomp and ceremony – by Queen Elizabeth; from local government meetings to the G15 Summit of regional leaders. I travelled to Wales, Germany, China, The Bahamas and more, on assignment.

I began as a cub reporter in the *Jamaica Observer Newspaper's* Western Bureau and by the time I resigned in 2005 to do my Master's degree in China I was part of the editorial department's core management team, working from the HQ in Kingston. I was in charge of the Sunday paper,

bureaus and correspondents.

It was a great career, though very stressful towards the end. I would wake up at 5am every Sunday morning to listen to the radio to see if there were any big stories I had missed.

Overall I enjoyed being a journalist, I just got bored after the majority of the job became editing other people's work. I like the thrill of being out in the field. But my mom used to get nervous when she occasionally saw me on TV, trying to do my job while caught up in the crowd running away from tear gas during a street protest. Of course by the time the news aired on TV, I would be safely back in office or even at home in my apartment.

As I mentioned before, I came to China to study. I successfully applied for a Chinese government scholarship to do a Master's Degree in International Finance at Shanghai University of Finance & Economics. I had been to China once before, for work, and I had absolutely loved that visit – except the food. I was among a group of about 15 journalists from the Caribbean. We met all these government officials and they served us very fancy food – sea cucumbers and bird's nest, even snake at one point – but we were not used to this type of cuisine. I would push the food around on my plate, pretending to eat, then find the nearest western fast food place that evening after I had written and filed my stories.

I've been here for the past 13 years and I still don't eat those things – but I consider China my second home. Nothing can replace Jamaica, of course, but China comes pretty close. What I like most about China is the way they harness tech to make life convenient – the plethora of car hailing apps, being able to order something online today and receive it tomorrow. These far outweigh whatever negatives come with being here.

What circumstances led to you joining CEIBS, do you still remember your first impression of the school?

A fellow founding member of the Caribbean Association in China (CAC) was hired as English Editor in the Marketing & Communications Department at CEIBS but he got a better job with a big bank, a job more in his field. He didn't want to leave CEIBS in the lurch so he recommended me as his replacement. At the time I was in my last semester at school, and apart from writing my thesis and doing volunteer PR work for the CAC, I had

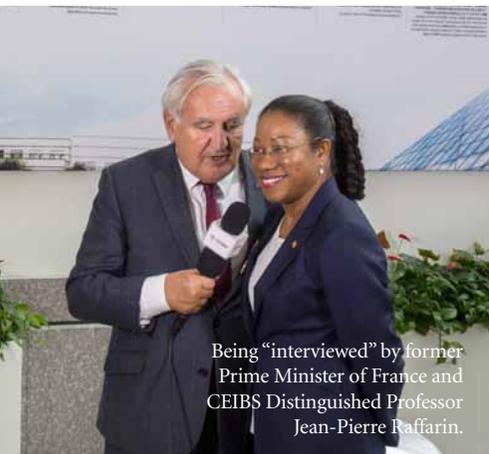


On the border of Germany and another European country, during a press visit.





On the job as a journalist in Jamaica, interviewing my boss' boss.



Being "interviewed" by former Prime Minister of France and CEIBS Distinguished Professor Jean-Pierre Raffarin.



On the job at CEIBS, taking notes during one of the many events at the Shanghai Campus.

the time. So I applied for the part-time job and was successful.

My first day on the job was June 25, 2007. It was also the day the King and Queen of Spain came to visit. What a start!

Can you describe your career path during the last ten years at CEIBS?

When I graduated in 2008, I was hired full time and given additional duties. Media relations were added to the list, I was responsible for the special BMT page on the website and I was to negotiate media partnerships, among other things. I was eventually promoted to Senior Associate Editor and the list of tasks just kept growing! But I liked that there were always opportunities to learn. I had to learn how to write an ad for TV, for example, by doing a Google search for the topic then through trial and error. I had no option but to learn... I had negotiated millions of RMB in free TV ads and the media partner needed me to provide the copy!



Receiving my certificate for completing a media course in Wales.

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Then in 2011 my then boss left and I was promoted to Assistant Director of Marketing & Communications. I immediately began the task of establishing CEIBS' presence on international social media. I realised it could be an efficient way of telling our story directly to the outside world, of showing potential students, and even potential faculty, what CEIBS is all about. Because of its entrepreneurial DNA, and the fact that it's still a relatively young b-school, CEIBS provides a lot of leeway to try new things. Today we have a strong presence on all the major international social media sites. It does help that now even the Chinese government has seen the value of communicating its message on these international social media platforms.

I also made a big push, when I got to director level, to integrate video into our communications effort as it was obviously the next wave back then. Now video is the norm, and we work to find even more innovative ways to communicate our message.

Can you tell us a bit about what you do at CEIBS? What's your favourite part?

I do a bit of everything at CEIBS. I have edited a fire drill, written or edited speeches for the school leadership, I have cleaned the mini studio when I needed it urgently for a TV interview. [The cleaning crew eventually came and they were very puzzled because there was no dust on the furniture]. But my official role is leading the team that is in charge of non-Chinese language external communications. This covers everything from the website and the alumni magazine, *TheLINK*, to handling media

interview requests, providing media tips and training to faculty, students and alumni, and contributing to the crafting and implementation of the school's overall communications strategy.

I savour each victory, no matter how small. I get a thrill when I pitch an interview topic to a reporter and he/she accepts it. I get a thrill when a professor accepts an interview request. I get a thrill when I write a story and all the words fall into place just right. I get a thrill when I see a team member master a new task. I must savour all these wins, no matter how small, because there are a lot of challenges.

One part of your work is communicating with the international media and leveraging those resources to help build the CEIBS brand. What are some of the channels typically used to introduce CEIBS to the rest of the world? And what kind of image of CEIBS do you want to deliver to the whole world?

I mentioned social media before – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, iTunesU. We also use traditional media – TV, radio, newspaper, magazines. Over the last 10 years I have seen the media landscape evolve and these changes have had an impact on how we craft content and the channels we use. For example, we have moved away from print ads and more towards digital. I would love to see us increase our ad spend in the international market but that has to be done in a strategic and sustained way for it to be effective. Now everyone is focused on digital ads, we need to strengthen our ad content in order to

stand out. We need to tell stories that evoke emotional responses and we need to take advantage of the technology out there (without abusing data or invading people's privacy) to do targeted campaigns. For at least 5 years. Then we may see improved recognition of the CEIBS brand outside of China.

How do you balance work and life? What do you do in your free time, what are your hobbies?

Well, I'm replying to your questions at 9:30pm on a Monday night, so that's an indicator of the level of my work-life balance. But seriously, a few years ago I made a decision that I would leave work at 6pm every day, no matter what. It helps that I need to walk my dog Ruff at 6:30pm. Of course I still reply to emails when I am home because that's the nature of the job. I get a lot of emails from media outside of China's time zone and I like to respond to their needs when they are at work.

I love reading but don't do enough reading just for pleasure, I spend most of the time reading the news as I need to be up to date for work. I love long walks, as it gives me time to think. I also enjoy simple things like hanging out with my friends in a teashop. I'm not into bars. I also spend a lot of time talking with my family and friends – all over the world – on the various social media apps.

I need to do more volunteer activities like the one I did with the CAC during summer break. We took a group of kids to the Shanghai Aquarium. I had done it a few years back but this time was even better! Nothing compares to the joy you get from making someone else happy!