



## **Sucks in the city**

### **How far would you go to work in a relaxing environment?**

There used to be just one place for an ambitious business owner – the city. And as close to the heart of the city as it is possible to get. Now, many businesses could be based anywhere there's broadband. So why would you battle traffic, crowds, pollution and city prices every day when you could be working out of town?

“I really do feel as if I have the best of both worlds now,” says Jill Chivers who, as Director of The Corporate Compass, creates and delivers corporate training programs all over Australia. “I live in an idyllic, relaxing environment and my business is more successful than ever. It's perfect.”

When Chivers started her own business in 2002 she worked at home just south of Sydney with a virtual office in the city. “Even that recently, I wasn't sure I'd be taken seriously with an address in Bundeena,” she says. Then, when her husband left his city job a year later, they decided to think seriously about what they really wanted from life.

“We felt we'd had enough of Sydney,” she says. “We'd always loved the Sunshine Coast, and we were starting to realise there was no good reason for not moving there.

“I'm lucky in that, when I'm working, I'm either using someone else's office, a conference centre or an hotel, so I don't need my own local work space,” she continues. “And, by this time, I had established a core group of loyal clients who didn't really care where I lived as long as I turned up to do the training as promised. All I really needed to decide was whether the benefits of living in Queensland would outweigh the disadvantages of having to fly to my presentations rather than drive. In the end it was no contest.”

Chivers says she feels much more relaxed now, but that's not because she's slowed down.

“There’s still a tendency for city people to think you’ve moved so that you can lie under a palm tree drinking coffee. I think quite a few sea changers find themselves working a bit harder because they feel the need to be totally professional.”

Chivers also believes it’s even more important to have a foundation of sound business skills when you change location. “If you aren’t right on top of managing your time and cash flow, for instance, the business will fall apart the minute you move.”

Life coach Belinda Merry agrees that preparation is fundamental to the success of a sea change. But first you need to know exactly what you’re preparing for.

“Some people think they’re moving towards something new and exciting when they’re really trying to move away from something they’d like to escape,” she says. “Others may want freedom and flexibility, but would be able to get what they need simply by working at home. The first step has to be clarifying precisely what you’re looking for – and that’s not necessarily an instant process. It could take years, especially if the needs of two or more people have to be taken into consideration.”

Merry is herself a sea changer, moving from Melbourne to Maleny in Queensland 18 months ago.

“We had never heard of Maleny until we visited a friend, yet we bought a house there within three days of arriving,” she says. “On the surface that sounds like a very spur-of-the-moment decision but, in fact, it had been five years in the making.”

In that time, Merry and her partner had compiled and refined a comprehensive check list of their needs and preferences.

“Some things were simple,” she says. “Being within a 90 minute drive of an international airport, hills rather than ocean views and a modern house were easy to agree on. In other areas, we needed to work out a compromise. But, by the time we came across it, we were primed to recognise our perfect home.”

Like Chivers, Merry’s business has flourished since the move. She coaches clients in New Zealand, Hong Kong, the US, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK as well as Australia, and she speaks and sells her books at coaching conferences around the world.

“I love the idea that I can run an international business from a place as beautiful as Maleny – but it does throw up a few interesting challenges,” says Merry. “When you’re working in what is essentially a holiday environment, and your corporate outfit is a pink sarong, you really need to be very good at staying focussed!”

**If you’re considering an escape from the city, here are some points to consider.**

**How much will you miss your family and friends?**

People are always keen to visit when you live in a beautiful location – but will this be enough?

**Have you planned a way to integrate into the new community?**

You will inevitably feel isolated until you get to know people in your new community, but it could be a while since you had to think about making new friends. If you're running your own business, and especially if you're working at home, you may need to make an effort to meet people.

**How much do you know about the weather?**

A surprising number of people allow themselves to be seduced by a couple of weeks of perfect weather. If you're not used to tropical heat, humidity or the cold of the mountains, be sure to experience the extremes before deciding you could live with them.

**Can you still do what you want to do?**

If you have a passion for the theatre, opera, ballet or the symphony, will the distance you need to travel to attend a performance mean you end up losing an important aspect of your life?

**What will you miss about the city?**

Some sea changers are shocked to discover that things they take for granted in the city simply don't exist in their new home. Good restaurants, home delivery services, couriers, overnight mail – if there's anything you can't function without, check it's there before you move.