

# Next Gen GM

## MY ASSIGNMENT TO COVID-LAND



**Within the space of a week, life here in New Zealand changed beyond recognition.**

Our Prime Minister took us into one of the fastest and strictest lockdowns on the planet. Offices and schools were closed, local and regional travel banned and the only online shopping available was for groceries. It felt just like moving to a new country named COVID-land. I am a former expat, now a Global Mobility problem solver and the Founder of Mobile Relocation, true to my past experience, I snapped into newly arrived expat mode.

**Without even realising it, I went through Hofstede's famous three phases of relocation as I adjusted to my new normal.**

### **1. The Honeymoon**

To be honest, professionally, lockdown was exciting at first. Our business was pivoting to meet the new and constantly changing needs of our corporate clients and their expats. We established our successful Mobile Expat Wellbeing Support Program for employees in limbo offshore, as well as expats in New Zealand. There was so much fascinating learning for me, from how to facilitate engaging group zoom sessions to collaborating with international expat mental health experts to build our program.

I thrive on fast-paced change, so, the initial move to COVID-land was a big rush. However, all honeymoons must come to an end, and close behind followed culture shock and disillusionment.

### **2. The Reality Started To Set In.**

Social norms in COVID-land were quite different to what I had been used to. It was disconcerting when people veered away or crossed the road to maintain the mandated two metre social distancing. Hugs and handshakes were no longer an option and I received cultural awareness training via politicians demonstrating the elbow bump on television.



Basic tasks I had taken for granted were so much harder, like supermarket shopping. COVID-land laws limited numbers in the store resulting in forty minute queues to get through the door. Many major brands were missing so I had to find substitutes and some products like toilet paper and flour were completely out of stock. My family was dislocated at a time when we needed each other most. I suddenly had my daughter back from university, two teenage sons doing remote learning from home and my husband 500KM away nursing his seriously ill father.

Late night and early morning zoom calls and supporting expats through some incredibly stressful situations started to take its toll. I began to feel tired and unmotivated. Then just to throw us all again, the rules in COVID-land changed, and we were allowed out of lockdown.

But did I want to go?

### **3. Acculturation, Building To Stability and Biculturalism**

Now I am at peace with COVID-land and our business certainly looks different. However, there are exciting new opportunities opening up with New Zealand's status as one of the few countries without community COVID transmission. My family are back in-situ, with fresh independent learning and working from home skills, plus a new pleasure in each other's company.

#### **Here is what I have learned and am taking forward.**

If you are the one who can see solutions to Global Mobility problems during a crisis, present them to others. Daily challenges preoccupied many of our clients and they jumped at our strategic input.

Relationships are at the heart of Global Mobility. When processes like immigration fell down, our personal contact and support got people through. Attention to mental health will be crucial to keep international talent productive in COVID-land long term. Relationships with our corporate clients have only become stronger as we have ridden the crisis alongside them and their employees. The thanks we received from our partners has meant a lot to the team and me too.

The resilience and exposure to change gained during my expat years helped me adjust to COVID-land. In turn that meant I could be stronger for my family, clients and the Mobile Relocation team, which I am very grateful for.

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