

KRESTON: THRIVING ON CHANGE AND OPPORTUNITY

After almost a decade at Morison KSi, Liza Robbins has moved to Kreston International. *IAB* spoke with Robbins to discuss what brought on the change, and what her initial plans are

International Accounting Bulletin: *How did the move come about, and what attracted you to Kreston?*

Liza Robbins: I had followed Kreston with interest and admiration for almost 10 years. Jon Lisby [previous CEO and current COO] and I enjoyed a friendly professional relationship during this time, allowing me to build up a good understanding of Kreston. I was sorry to read earlier this year that Jon had announced that he would be leaving in May 2019; I thought what a loss that would be to the network and my contact base!

I had been approached by other associations and networks over the years, but when I was contacted by Kreston it was the first and only time I agreed to speak to a competitor about a potential move. I knew Jon already, and when I met the representatives of the board, I continued to be impressed. It was clear from the first interview that we ‘got’ each other and enjoyed a shared culture and outlook.

Aside from already having positive insights into Kreston, and enjoying meeting the board, after 10 years in the association world, the logical next step for me was to move into the network world. I loved much of my previous role, but there were always limitations on the monitoring and improving of quality, and member firms were missing important client bids as they were not a member of a network through Forum of Firms membership.

I have experienced these frustrations from an association point of view, so I am excited to no longer be limited in these ever-more-important areas and be able to seize these issues as opportunities in my new role to deliver stronger member benefits. I am very business focused, and networks are better positioned to deliver business benefits.

IAB: What did you learn at Morison KSi that you want to bring to the role?

LR: I joined without any experience of the association and network world, but with my transferable skills and great support, the association achieved a lot. I now have 10 years’ direct experience, plus my transferable skills, so I am a much stronger candidate than I was 10 years ago, and I plan to achieve even more!

The key lessons are that, every year, member firms demand more, specifically in the area of real business and client opportunities. The competitive landscape is increasingly tough, and associations and networks that do not deliver will ultimately not survive.

Despite the pressure to deliver business and client opportunities, associations and networks are made up of people, and you have to treat people with care, respect and transparency – and have a strict adherence to good governance. You will never please all the people all of the time, but the manner in which you operate will either build or erode trust, and without trust an organisation is rarely sustainable.

IAB: What are your immediate plans in the role?

LR: To get on with business! With 10 years’ experience and having Jon as COO, I have been fast-tracked into my role and am already settled. My immediate goal has been to update and reinvigorate our strategy to ensure that we continue on an ambitious path.

Our strategic plan sits on six key strategic pillars, each of which has an action plan for successful implementation. The culmination of all this strategy work will be the presentation of our strategic plan to members at our *World Conference* in October 2018, and

their feedback and buy-in will be imperative for success. Then we will move into the implementation of the plan to deliver the member benefits – I am action-focused, so I am keenly awaiting this phase.

The strategic work has been balanced with continuous meetings and conversations with our stakeholders – board directors, member firms, team members and strategy partners – to seek their feedback and guidance. I have always been active in meeting with potential external partners and participating in industry events, which I have continued – albeit now proudly under the Kreston flag.

IAB: Are there any geographic or service lines you intend to focus on?

LR: Kreston already has excellent geographical coverage, but we will continuously review our representation, particularly in key markets, to ensure that we have the required depth, breadth and strength. Kreston will further increase its focus on service lines based on those with international growth potential and our member firms’ expertise. We see tremendous growth in some of these areas.

IAB: How do you see the industry changing in the next few years? How can Kreston members be prepared?

LR: The industry has continuously changed, but the rate and nature of change is currently at its fastest and most complex.

There are numerous factors driving this: technology, mergers of mid-tier firms, potential new competitors, the profession’s public reputation, the changing global political and regulatory landscape, the challenge to attract and retain talent; rising demand for professional services in emerging countries, increased opportunities for new service lines – the list could go on and on!

Many people are concerned by the nature and pace of change, whereas I like it! I do not want to work in a dusty profession that continues with business as usual year after year. I like the challenge, and of course the opportunity that change brings.

Those people, firms and networks who cannot cope with change will not survive, and will be replaced by those that adapt and thrive on change. Kreston plays a very important role in ensuring that our people and firms are in the latter group. This starts with making ourselves and our firms aware of emerging and new trends, and then organising ourselves to address the key trends and monitor the secondary trends. The key is to find the experts within Kreston and engage them. ■