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# Q&A

- Bev Meekel -

## What are your interests outside recruitment?

I really enjoy live entertainment and I make time to attend theatre & shows – Nathaniel and John Vlismas are two of my favourite SA entertainers.

I also love to travel and am fortunate that I've been able to incorporate traveling globally to visit clients etc., into my business activities.

My dream holiday is to go to Lapland – Snowmobiling & the Ice Hotel appeal to me. One of my best experiences was swimming with Dolphins in Mocambique. I enjoy champagne; love peking duck & dim sum. I'm a novice golfer and at home I have several pets and a wonderful daughter to dote on.

## How long have you been in recruitment?

I established Optivet, trading as Bev Meekel Consulting in 2001 and have been directly involved in recruitment for about ten years.

It's a profession that has an endless supply of lessons and I learn something new every day.

## How has the optical market from changed in the last couple of years, from a recruitment perspective?

The dramatic increase in practice numbers over the past few years resulted in a shortage of experienced support staff. This naturally resulted in an increase of salaries for experienced staff, which was evident in the BMC / EyeCare Salary Survey conducted in 2008. Practice Assistants have been attracted from other areas & trained up.

The inception of part-time National Diploma courses in Optical Dispensing in Cape Town and Johannesburg has made it possible for practice assistants and optical technicians or me-

chanics to study and qualify as Dispensing Opticians.

The first 3 year part-time courses have produced approximately 40 newly qualified DO's.

Professional satisfaction seems to be on the wane, with many optometrists seeking management and commercial positions which they perceive to be more stimulating and rewarding.

## Do you find that there is an increase or a decrease in the number of candidates available?

There has been an increase recently, possibly due to adjustments taking place in the retail industry. Exceptional candidates will always be a scarce commodity.

## What are the challenges that lie ahead for recruitment in the South African industry?

Our big challenge will be to get professionals to work outside of the main centres.

Other specialist recruiters have seen their candidate bases shrink as skilled people

emigrate. We haven't seen that in optics to any worrying extent yet.

Always a concern to established recruitment businesses are the 'fly-by-night' agencies who perceive recruitment as being an easy way of making 'a fast buck'. Often undertakings made cannot be kept and clients and candidates are left in the lurch. These 'operators' damage the image of recruitment specialists and are usually not affiliated to any reputable associations.

## Do you find that there has been an increase in optometrists wanting to go and practice overseas?

Most definitely. In the early part of 2008 the trend was most apparent. The main motivators were crime, Eskom (remember the rush for generators?) and the worsening economic climate. Most professionals who are interested in emigrating, cite security and education as the reasons for wanting to relocate. Fortunately there are still very good international

opportunities for South African professionals that enable them to take this step.

## How important is technology for your business?

Extremely. My business is about communication. Without the internet and email we would not be able to function. Broadband allows us to communicate instantly across the world at any time. My website has to have been the most productive investment I have made, followed closely by the database we use to track jobs and candidates. I continually invest in updating our technology including computers, mobile phones and software.

## How important is teamwork for your business?

Teamwork is the cornerstone of any business. At BMC, I encourage consultants to support each other by sharing information, completing certain routine tasks as a team and in supporting each other's efforts when required.

## Do you find that you have to be proactive?

Absolutely yes! From the time I decided that there was potential in specialist recruitment I have had to 'get in there and make it happen'. I have taken an active lead in assisting optometrists in their preparation for the UK & OCANZ exams by arranging seminars and making study aids & books available. I also promote the local & international distance learning & part-time Dispensing courses. By introducing the Joint Venture concept available to South Africans in the Netherlands, UK & now Australia & New Zealand, have assisted practitioners to own their own practices in foreign countries. By representing a number of clients in Trinidad & Tobago, have paved the way for SA optometrists & dispensing opticians to work on contract in the Caribbean. Optivet (BMC) also recently set up an office in New Zealand.

One thing is very clear to me and that is that no-one else is going to make your dream come true – You have to make it happen!

Words from one of Madonna's songs:

*"What are you waiting for?  
Nobody's gonna show you how"*

## Describe a day in the life of Bev Meekel.

I don't really have a set routine other than rising early and working late. Of course every day has its challenges. The technology I sing the praises of can be tricky to manage! Instant responses are expected and this can be demanding and create 'time pressure'. I monitor my email constantly but I can only act on high priority issues during the working day. With a team of 5 consultants I find that managing the business and providing support as well as dealing with the areas of recruitment I handle personally, occupies most of a regular day.

I still enjoy meeting with clients and interviewing applicants – I find it necessary to stay in touch with the core of the business. Practice sales, co-ordinating seminars and being involved in the industry in general keep me well-occupied.

Fortunately I have an excellent team who assist me.

In the evenings I can concentrate on the day's communications. I also use this time to strategise and plan, propose new business and communicate telephonically with my international clients. Trinidad being 8 hours behind SA and Australia & NZ about 10 hours ahead, allows for late night productivity!

I do make time for my family, friends, pets and some R&R as well.

Week-ends are always a great time for me to clear the desk or take in a show.

## What keeps you motivated about your work?

I am driven by the commitment I make to my clients and candidates. I always strive to deliver more than is expected. There is nothing better than the satisfaction of clients acknowledging a job well done or a candidate placed in a position which has a positive impact on their life.

Of course the security and comfort of a successful business plays an important role. I also like to see my employees do well and enjoy being a part of this business.

## Frustrations?

I do get frustrated with inefficiency, poor service and lack of commitment. I have high standards in these areas.

## The future?

I look forward to being able to continue to provide an excellent service to all clients and applicants, together with my consultants, who are an integral part of the success of BMC.

I would like to continue to expand my international representation.

I have always kept a special phrase, which was written & given to me by my daughter about 15 years ago, close to my desk. It reads:

*"The difference between mediocrity & excellence is passion!"*