

ICSA Member case studies



Michelle Mendes

Director, Mercatoria (Suisse) S.A

What is your current role?

I am currently Director of Mercatoria (Suisse) S.A., a financial services provider located throughout Europe, the Caribbean and North America.

What other roles have you held prior to your current one?

I was Head of Marketing and Business Development at a global software company. Compliance and legal issues were a serious concern for the company and my Chartered Secretary background along with my experience in marketing and business development was a crucial factor in my success in the position. I was a Manager, Legal Affairs, at an international publically traded technology company where I worked closely with in-house counsel to manage compliance and all issues relating to public filings and outstanding issues with the SEC. Prior to that, I was Manager, Investor Relations, at a national real estate development firm that built and managed luxury seniors' retirement residences. Prior to that, I was a sole proprietor of my own consulting company where I provided management consulting services.

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

I established and headed up the European headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. I am responsible for group-wide compliance in various jurisdictions and sourcing market opportunities in new jurisdictions.

What is a typical working day for you?

My daily tasks are varied each day. My day can involve any of the following: working closely with clients to ensure that periodic business transactions are enacted – these can be daily, weekly or monthly; network with potential clients and service providers; research new products for the company offering; review trust deeds and corporate documents for filing and registration; ensure that statutory books are maintained internationally and according to each jurisdiction's guidelines; stay abreast of changing regulations; and, of course, attend board meetings and ensure all documentation is duly noted.

What is your educational/training background?

- Masters of Business Administration, Space Commerce, International Space University, Strasbourg, France
- Bachelor of General Studies Degree, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada
- Fund Management Certificate, Isle of Man Fund Management Association, Isle of Man
- Associate of the Chartered Instituted of Secretaries, Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators, Toronto, Canada
- Canadian Securities Course, Canadian Securities Institute, Vancouver, Canada
- Canadian Insurance Course, Canadian Securities Institute, Vancouver, Canada
- Life License Qualification Program, Canadian Securities Institute, Vancouver, Canada

What skills and qualities are required for your role?

Attention to detail, diplomacy, strategic thinking, multi-tasking, time management, interpersonal and communication skills, ability to take responsibility and good judgement.

Which elements of your role do you most enjoy?

Anything that involves interaction with others, project oriented work, proposals, research and fact-checking.

Which elements of your role do you least enjoy?

Minute-taking and trying to keep up with the myriad of international regulatory changes; trying to implement internal controls and procedures to meet the tight timelines set out by regulatory bodies. →

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How do you see your career developing?

Because the group is fairly small, in comparison with other providers, I would like to see the group grow to a stage where we can hire more staff that we can grow and nurture in their careers.

What advice would you offer to a graduate or a current student studying the scheme?

Never stop learning. Your best asset is your desire to learn. Asking questions is not a deficiency, it is an asset. The more you learn the more potential you have to grow your career.

Is there any other information you consider relevant?

Finding a good mentor is the key to your success. There are many mentorship programs that can give you access to knowledge and networks that might not be otherwise possible.

How has your training helped you carry out your role?

The in-depth knowledge provided by ICSA modules is tremendously valuable. From my module notes and books, I was able to create a database of references that I use almost on a daily basis. The coverage of topics was very thorough. They have provided me the framework upon which I can analyse and provide a meaningful contribution on an executive level. Prior to ICSA I was on the 'learn as you go' program; ICSA showed me how much I knew but, more importantly, what I did not know.

What do you think are the particular benefits of becoming a Chartered Secretary?

It is a designation that is highly recognised in Commonwealth countries, and of late the USA, which sets you apart from the masses of people that have undergraduate degrees. In fact, I was informed by the admissions committee of the International Space University, where I am taking my EMBA in Space Commerce, that my ICSA qualification was what set me apart in a very competitive program. Many lawyers/solicitors specifically get the ICSA qualification to set them apart from others in their profession. In any career pursuit, ICSA provides a wholly rounded education of business, legal, compliance of trust and company structures.

What made you decide to become a Chartered Secretary?

I knew my career had hit a ceiling and wanted to take it to the next level. After my research, I also realised that it was a well recognised designation which could take my career in a variety of directions.

Would you recommend the ICSA qualification to others?

Absolutely. The ICSA qualification is really the foundation to any good career. It gives you the tools to launch your career. ■