

THE SWITCH

From trader to retailer

Chris Ferguson is used to explaining the ins and outs of his former career. After all, his job as a minutes trader in the telecommunications industry is something most know little about.

"It's a form of commodity trading, like equities," he says. "When you call London, the call goes over five different markets and each of those minutes are traded."

Ferguson landed in minutes trading after finishing his university degree in Edinburgh.

"I then went to London and got a job as a commercial business analyst for companies like Shell, BP and other companies like British Telecom," he says.

It was his background within telecommunications that led to him being offered the position as a trader. "It was a step up," he says. "You use your people skills, as you're working with different nationalities from across the world, as well as your analytical skills."

Ferguson spent his last few years in Europe as the director of new business with IDT Global. The job taught him a lot about making deals in different cultural contexts.

"I was away every second week in Europe, particularly when the eastern European market sprang open with deregulation," he says.

"In Russia you had a shot of vodka before you did business. Eastern Europeans like to build a relationship before doing business, which usually meant going out for dinner the night before a meeting to earn their trust."

After more than a decade overseas, Ferguson was ready to head home.

"The bakery chain Ferguson Plarre has been in my family for five generations [it's co-owned by two

families]. We're 110 years old this year," he says.

Ferguson's business experience led to him taking on the role of retail manager, which means he looks after the 52 shops in the Ferguson Plarre network (most are franchises). "I visit the shops to discuss everything from sales to leasing arrangements, or to help them deal with issues that happen through the week," he says.

Ferguson says his time overseas helps him now. "I learnt a lot in a business sense but also in the worldly sense... I developed myself and my appreciation of people, cultures and my understanding of management."

While he's no longer part of the fast-paced life in London, Ferguson's weeks are still busy.

"I start work at 7am and finish at 6 or 7pm," he says. "I get through my emails and then get on the road and try to beat the traffic. I like to get to the shops first thing in the morning, as you have a good chance to chat to them then and you see the product come in and can check the quality."

As a retail manager, Ferguson says he's a sounding board for the company's franchisees. "It's about hearing their issues. You can't solve everyone's problems but at least you can listen to them," he says.

Ferguson says he's still trying to get his work-life balance under control. "The business is medium size, so dealing with the different number of people involved can be challenging, as is trying to fit time into the week to see as many franchisees as possible. It's a seven-day-a-week business. If something's an issue on a Sunday you have to be available."

SUE WHITE



THEN NOW

SALARY £150,000 (\$236,000). "I was a lot better off financially in London than back here!"

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "Pretty good. You could get across to Europe on a Friday afternoon, but life was fast-paced. The business and social intertwined and you were expected to go for regular drinks and dinners."

HOURS 60 hours a week – five days a week, 12 hours a day (7.30am to 7.30pm).

SALARY \$130,000.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE "You're pretty much working 5½ days but you're always on call if something happens."

HOURS 55-60 hours a week.

MISS "Coming back home is good but it's slower and more family-oriented. You feel like you're part of something but it's easy to throw yourself into 100 per cent work."

CHALLENGES "Learning to operate with family and find my niche in the family business is both rewarding and challenging"

LINK
fergusonplarre.com.au



Sweet deal ... Chris Ferguson left a job as a telecommunications minutes trader (left) for a career in his family's baker chain (above). Photo: Rodger Cummins

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