

Alumni Profile: Gordon Clancy (MBA '86) by Mary Ann Gratton

Flexibility and humility are key to business success, says graduate

Roll up your sleeves, work hard, and don't grow an ego.

That's the advice of **Gordon Clancy** (MBA '86), the managing director of **Citigroup Venture Capital International** in Hong Kong. He has led Citigroup's Private Equity Investing group in Asia since 2001, and he says going to work each day means realizing how little you know.

"I work with a great team of people and we have a very open, collaborative working style," says Clancy, who has held increasingly responsible roles in Citigroup prior to his current position heading up the Asia Region for the Investment Advisor of the \$1.6 billion (U.S.) Citigroup Venture Capital International Growth Partnership, LP – among the largest private equity players in developing countries.

"One thing I've learned in this business is that every day when you get up and working, you'd better remember how little you know," says the low key executive who would rather avoid the limelight than be profiled in *Rotman* magazine. "It's an important approach in this business. You have to realize that you're not a superstar, and you'd better not start thinking that you are."

"I've seen it happen where people start to grow an ego, and they forget that their success is based on hard work, other people, and luck. They start to think it's all because of them, rather than all the factors that make investments work. It's very easy to start believing your own propaganda, which is a recipe for disaster."

Clancy oversees and collaborates with 20 people on the private equity team that he built up in the Hong Kong office. He sees his role as threefold: firstly, he plays an executive governance role as part of the global management committee that advises Citigroup on its global growth fund – work that involves participating in investment

committees, handling investor relations, and developing general policy. Secondly, he serves as coach and team leader for the Asia team that typically chooses five or six equity investments to pursue from among hundreds of possible investment opportunities examined each year. Thirdly, at the transaction level, he may also serve as the principal transactor who is looking into a particular investment.

He says it is vital to understand the goals and objectives of your organization, as well as your personal goals, to make sure they are all aligned. Citigroup's Venture Capital International operation in Hong Kong is not a core business for Citigroup, so Clancy strives to align the goals of his unit with the company's overall goals. The Hong Kong office deals with colleagues and investors in New York and London time zones, so he and his team often work 12-hour days at the office.

Travel is a large part of his job, and Clancy spends half of his time on airplanes traveling through Asia. Most trips are to China, an emerging economy that lacks the management culture and financial history of the West, but possesses a high level of government restrictions along with greater risks and higher levels of market volatility.

Clancy believes that creativity is at the heart of his work. "Our business is often about effectively creating an opportunity from something that is not obvious," says Clancy. "Investing in growth businesses in emerging markets requires hard work as well as creativity in solving problems and adapting to different environments. Every potential opportunity involves challenges to find solutions to turn something into an effective investment," he says. "You need the skills and talent of a multidisciplinary team in which everyone around you brings different strengths to get the job done. I



often say that private equity is like having the biggest case team that you could ever put together at a business school."

He notes that the business world has changed greatly since he earned his MBA, and career flexibility is crucial. "Back then, from a practical point of view, no-one knew what a derivative was, and private equity was not a business, so more than once I have ended up in a profession that didn't exist earlier in my life."

Prior to his current post, Clancy was responsible for Citigroup's private equity business in Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa. A native of Port Credit, west of Toronto, he lived in New York and then London before moving to Hong Kong.

The hours and travel demands of the job make it difficult for Clancy to pursue hobbies or leisure outside of the job. When he is not at work, he enjoys spending time with his family. He and his wife Jean have two grown daughters, Kimberley in Toronto, and Krista in New York, as well as five grandchildren. ■