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Qualified into
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New York Secondment - Henry Stewart

Even after three months on secondment in the New York office, I am still confident that the correct spelling of the word “organise” should not include the letter “z”, the word “colour” requires a “u” as does the word that describes the person who lives in the house next door to you.

I maintain this position having had regular debates with American colleagues about the correct spelling and pronunciation of words, and treat the fact that the language in question is “English” and not “American” as being conclusive on the matter. Apparently, things are not viewed this clearly over the pond.

I arrived in New York keen to put faces to many of the names that I had become familiar with in the weeks leading up to my secondment. I was determined to keep an open mind, but deep down I was convinced that I would encounter a drastically different working culture and office environment from the one I had been used to in London. After all, the worldwide perception of New York lawyers is that they work extremely hard, often at the expense of a social life. I prepared myself to be introduced to what I suspected would be some very serious individuals, who would spend most of their daily lives in their offices and would have no time for small-talk. From the first day it was clear that this was far from the case. What greeted me was an office that enjoys a great atmosphere and a real feeling of camaraderie. Now don’t get me wrong, the legendary New York work ethic is very apparent, time is literally the most valuable commodity in the city, and must be used wisely, but what struck me instantly was how similar the dynamic is to that of the London office. I was given a warm welcome and felt at home very quickly.

There are certainly great differences between the London and New York offices. On the one hand there are the legal differences; there being a more complicated state and federal court system to get your head around in the States. There are also differences in style, both in terms of work

and the approach taken by certain individuals. One thing I most certainly don’t face in London is the daily attempts at mimicking my accent from a variety, if not all, of my colleagues. Truly awful attempts I have to say. However this made me feel comfortable to criticise criticize!

Whilst in the office I experienced a variety of types of work, including litigation and corporate. I was also able to work alongside many individuals from different offices and departments and helped advise on a number of English law and market issues. I also worked closely with one of my former supervisors in London, assisting with the hearing of an international arbitration, upon which I’d worked a year earlier. I had the opportunity to visit the impressive Boston office which was another great opportunity to put faces to the names of those that I will be working with back in London, which I know will be valuable for the future.

Away from the office I had the pleasure of getting to know one of the greatest cities on earth. I was lucky enough to catch a baseball game in the last year of the old Yankee Stadium, see Brett Favre play his first NFL game for the NY Jets against the Giants, and visit Madison Square Gardens. I was able to be a tourist at my own pace but also reap the benefits of being a resident which meant getting to know real New Yorkers on a day-to-day basis, something that is easily missed on a flying shopping trip.

Overall it has been an incredible few months both in terms of work and life experience; far too much to reduce down to an article. New York is an amazing city with some of the friendliest people I have come across. I will take a lot away from this but I am certainly returning to London speaking English and not American.

