

The Key to Expatriate Assignment Success? A Happy Spouse.

With expatriate attrition rates surpassing double that of domestic employees¹, more and more companies find themselves struggling to solve the “dual-career issue.”

In 2005, a record 60% of spouses were employed prior to their partner’s acceptance of an assignment overseas, yet only 1 in 3 of these were able to remain employed during the assignment¹. Clearly, such a sizeable disparity suggests that many trailing spouses either find it too difficult to continue their careers in the new country, or they simply don’t receive valuable enough guidance before the move to ensure their eligibility overseas.

But what does a seemingly peripheral issue like spousal employment have to do with the overall success of an expatriate assignment? Well, upon considering that 67% of expat employees report family concerns as the dominant cause of early returns from an assignment, and spouse / partner dissatisfaction is cited as the top reason for assignment failure¹, it follows logically that a discontented spouse unable to sustain his / her own career throughout an assignment *will* indirectly have a negative impact on the assignee.

Unfortunately for employers, such added stress at home often accompanies the employee into the workplace. Current studies show that work disruptions due to dependent responsibilities result in average productivity losses of \$6,825 USD per employee per year³, not to mention an average \$789 USD loss for each unscheduled absence². If these numbers weren’t costly enough on their own, consider multiplying them several times over when trying to figure the expense involved in establishing a successful replacement capable of finishing the assignment on time.

Accordingly, a strong case exists for a spousal support system that will prepare spouses / partners to obtain meaningful employment abroad and – therefore – increase the chances of the assignee successfully completing his / her assignment. Visa constraints, work permits, the length of time abroad, and certification issues, for example, can all hinder the job search process. More often than not, however, each can also be effectively addressed if foreseen long enough in advance to align accommodations.

This, of course, is where IMPACT Group’s Certified Professional Career Coaches can often make all the difference in ensuring the spouse has access to the information they need for continuing their career in the host country (wherever that may be). Due to our innovative virtual service model, coaches and spouse / partners can connect telephonically and/or over the web for on-call assistance whenever the spouse may need it.

¹ *Global Relocation Trends: 2005 Survey Report*. Performed by GMAC Global Relocation Services.

² *Value of Services Survey*. Performed by IMPACT Group.

³ Assuming a \$100,000 salary (plus benefits) employee loses at least an hour a day of productivity for the six-month period surrounding the move.

Most of the time, spouses are surprised to find out that, by conducting informed preparations, they really can resume work in their current career – or at least a closely related field. The traditional roadblocks (such as “What are the cultural norms for a résumé in XYZ country?” or “How do I get licensed in..?”) are addressed head on through the coach’s collaboration with our in-house Certified Professional Résumé Writers and Professional Researchers. Unlike our competition – who only provide templates and advice in helping the spouse write their own résumé – our writers will work one-on-one with the coach to develop a custom-tailored résumé that puts the spouse’s best foot forward in applying for a new job. In addition, our expert researchers take care of the arduous leg work involved in locating major employers / recruiters in the region so that the spouse isn’t just left out in the cold with résumé in hand and no place to go.

For the occasional case where license, certification, and/or work visa stipulations simply make it impossible for the spouse / partner to continue practicing their profession in the new location, our coaches can still help by suggesting several options to prevent any dreaded résumé “gapping” that often occurs when having to take significant time away from one’s career. Several options, including internet-based continuing education courses and local expat organizations, can all help the spouse stay in touch with their trade while out of the country on their partner’s assignment.

Many spouses are both surprised and delighted to learn that such opportunities exist for them abroad and – given the opportunity – often jump at the chance to take full advantage of these services. Again, it’s no secret that a happy spouse will inevitably translate into a happy employee who can remain focused on his / her assignment and be less likely to suffer costly workplace distractions. It is critical for the assignment’s overall success, however, that families become aware (in advance) of the options discussed above so that working spouses can the share the excitement of career transition *with* their partner – instead of just tagging along behind them.