

Background

Relocating employees

When you offer an employee the career opportunity of an overseas assignment, you probably expect a positive response. After all, you are saying, 'we trust you to represent our company abroad'. It's a career advancement, there will be some kind of financial incentive, the chance to experience a new country and culture and to **broaden your business horizons**. What possible reason could your employee have for saying 'no'? Probably the number one reason any employee will turn down the offer of a foreign job placement is because of family. Many Human Resources managers fail to **see the bigger picture** which is that they may be putting the person in a position where they feel that it's a choice between career and family. The spouse may have to give up his or her current job, the children will have to move schools, a house might have to be sold or there may even be elderly relatives to consider. So everyone involved will need time to **weigh up the pros and cons**.

You should also not try to **hype up** an overseas opportunity. Does 'it's an exciting challenge in a potentially huge market with plenty of opportunity for a self-starter' really mean it's a job where you are on your own and have to create business from nothing. Any employee thinking of relocation needs the truth. Inaccurate information could eventually **lead to ill will** and do more harm than good. Here are a few tips for you to follow when managing a relocation. Remember that it's a huge investment and you simply cannot afford not to get every detail right.

Explain the differences

The changes in a new country can be both tangible and intangible. There are differences in laws and government bureaucracy. Health services vary from country to country. Simply finding the best places to shop can cause unnecessary stress. Then there is the new culture or 'ways of doing things'. Employees and their families will benefit from some kind of orientation into cultural awareness and differences. Language lessons are also highly recommended for everyone – even if

it's only a basic introduction to survival phrases before they leave and something more advanced once they arrive.

The spouse and children

If a spouse already works or is qualified in some area such as teaching, it is sometimes possible to arrange for a working visa or even a pre-arranged position in the new country. If the spouse doesn't intend to work, then find out about communities that may help the initial arrival; for example, some kind of club or network of expatriates that meet regularly. For many employees, one attraction could be that the relocation package includes paid education for their children. But the children will also be leaving friends at home and need some kind of access into a social group – perhaps a sports club. Finally, provide a list of contact details such as the details of a local doctor who speaks their language and the number of the local embassy or consulate.

The arrival

Whatever else happens, make sure the early days of the relocation go smoothly. Be sure that all travel arrangements are dealt with and that the employee and family are met and taken to their new home. Keep in regular contact and deal swiftly with any problems immediately. The uncertainty and potential for homesickness with family members means that they are prone to **make a mountain out of a mole hill**.

The return

So at last, after all your seamless planning, the employee and the family are enjoying their new life. The employee is creating lots of business and the spouse and children have happily settled into their new life of rich cultural experiences. But the process hasn't ended yet. Repatriation back to their home country can **throw up** its own difficulties with the returning employee looking for more challenge or expecting everything to be the same at work. The family will need to resettle and, having become used to the life elsewhere, may even suffer from reverse culture shock. You need to plan the return with the same care as the relocation overseas.

Exercises

1 Discuss these questions as a class.

- 1 What kinds of overseas opportunities are there for employees at your company?
- 2 If you were offered a post with your company in another country tomorrow, would you accept it? Why? Why not?

2 Read the text and answer the questions.

- 1 Who is the text written for?
- 2 At what stage does the planning and preparation for relocation end?

3 Read the text again. Which statements does the writer agree with?

- 1 Overseas opportunities should be made to sound as attractive as possible.
- 2 Employees should have comprehensive language lessons before moving to a new country.
- 3 It is not necessary for children to attend social clubs if they are attending school.
- 4 Employees should be met on arrival and transported to their new accommodation.
- 5 Culture shock can occur when moving both away from and back to your home country.

4 Work with a partner and do this role-play.

Student A: you are an HR manager who wants to offer an employee the chance for a relocation. Read the text again and make a list of reasons why relocation is a good opportunity. You can add some more reasons of your own as well.

Student B: you are an employee at Student B's firm. You have a family. Read the text again and make a list of the reasons why you might not accept the offer of a new job overseas. You can add some more reasons of your own as well.

When you are both ready, role-play a situation between the HR manager and employee. Student A can begin by making the offer and giving reasons why. Student B is interested in the offer, but should talk about his / her concerns. Try to reach a conclusion. Afterwards, tell the class what happened.

5 Replace the words in *italics* in 1–7 with the expressions in **bold** in the text.

- 1 Advertisers often *make something seem more impressive than it is* in order to sell it to us. _____
- 2 Gossip in the office can often *end with bad feeling*. _____
- 3 When people say anyone can run a business they don't *understand every issue*.

- 4 Lack of planning will always *produce unexpected and unwanted* problems.

- 5 Before we make a final decision, let's *compare the reasons for and against*.

- 6 People often say that travel can *help you to see a wider range of opportunities*.

- 7 This isn't a big problem so don't *change a very small problem into a big problem*.

6 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.

7 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions.

- 1 Other than relocation overseas, what are some other ways employees can broaden their horizons at work? How can companies help them do this?
- 2 What are some of the things that can lead to ill will in the work place? How can these things be avoided?