

International Exposure is Invaluable in a Digital



Your Assignment Abroad – Kick-start Your Career and Broaden Your Horizon

Economy with Increasingly Fewer Boundaries

An international assignment provides you with professional experience and helps you acquire valuable soft skills and broaden your horizon, and your experience abroad can give you additional confidence. Working abroad can give you interesting work and life experiences that will always be a part of you. Living and working abroad is your competitive advantage and can accelerate your career. Working abroad is both a great opportunity and a major challenge – on a professional as well as on a personal level, and usually means a drastic change in your lifestyle. With all these advantages, currently, only 20 percent of the internationally mobile population are women.

There are many perks that come with working abroad that expand your overall career development: networking, building a stronger career, learning local regulations and procedures for other countries, and improving your language skills. Moreover, flexibility and empathy of working with people of other cultures, learning to work with different management styles, and developing a stronger CQ (Cultural Intelligence) are skills that will

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stay with you for life. Knowing the cultural norms and nuances of the host country can provide invaluable insights into finding ways to open doors for you and your company. International exposure is, therefore, invaluable in a digital economy with increasingly fewer boundaries since a company's market growth is dependent on international understanding and experience.

Your Assignment Abroad can kick-start your career and broaden your horizon:

- ▶ 50 percent of the expats living and working abroad are between the ages of 20-39.
- ▶ 85 percent of those who "moved up by moving away" agreed international experience accelerated their careers.
- ▶ 78 percent agreed that it had a significant, positive impact on compensation.
- ▶ 71 percent agreed they were given greater responsibility earlier on in their career.

According to Nora Wu, Vice Chairwoman, Global Human Capital leader, PwC International Limited, "More women are in the workforce than ever before according to PwC's 2016 analysis; the Women

in Work Index. But while women have made substantial gains at work across the OECD, many discrepancies remain – including the presumptions businesses make about women and travel." (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/03/whats-really-stopping-women-from-working-abroad/>). Wu concedes that her global mindset, which she developed during her work abroad, was beneficial in leading her to her current position.

According to Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and C. Perry Yeatman in their book "Getting Ahead by Going Abroad", women are more successful in overseas assignments than men because of their natural feminine traits. Women are able to adapt to others' styles, and use a natural mix of emotional intelligence, intellect and feminine intuition. They

tend to think and work in an inclusive style (we) which is most common in collectivistic cultures (80 % of the world) compared to (20 % of the world) individualistic cultures. The authors state that: "Many of the traits now deemed critical to business success in the international marketplace are also emerging as the critical ones for tomorrow's great leaders."

Highly educated, career ambitious and career confident female millennials are entering the workforce in larger numbers than ever before. More than 70 percent of these are seeking global mobile careers, regardless of whether the assignments are long or short term since their key career priority is getting international experience. For companies to attract and retain this wave of talent, it is vital that they listen and adjust to the needs of this new generation of women who are seeking positions where opportunities to undertake international assignments are made available. Incorporating global mobility into the employee value proposition is a powerful way to develop future leadership talent and guarantee business success.

FEMALE TALENT IS BEING OVERLOOKED

Research shows that gaining international experience advances the careers further and faster for both genders – yet, when compared to their male peers, the best and brightest female talent is being overlooked for these opportunities. Fewer than 20 percent of women interested in international experiences compared to over 80 percent of their male peers believe that men and women have equal opportunity to undertake international assignments at their current employer, according to the PwC study: "Modern mobility: Moving Women with Purpose – Creating Gender Inclusive Global Mobility, March 2016". Moreover, the more senior the females were, the less they believed that they had equal opportunity to undertake an international assignment.

Currently, only 20 percent of the internationally mobile population are women. This is because of the outdated assumption that women with children don't want to work abroad. The PwC study showed that 41 percent of the women who were keen to undertake an international assignment were parents, compared with 40 percent of men.

Another barrier (27 %), according to the study, was the false assumption by many corporations that: "Women were concerned that they would be putting their partners' higher-salary income at risk. Yet, 82 percent of the female respondents to this research said that they were part of a dual career couple relationship, and 77 percent of those earned equal to, or more than their partner or spouse."

A study by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) came up with similar statistics. According to Matt Krentz, a BCG senior partner and coauthor of a BCG report: "An employee's willingness to travel fluctuates based on both personal and professional factors. But a person's family status should



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not be assumed to be a barrier to international opportunities within an organization. When companies overlook women for these assignments, it not only puts them at a disadvantage, it hurts the organization by weakening their leadership pipeline.”

EARLY MOBILITY

The majority of the men and women in the PwC study had a preference to gain international experience in the first six years of their careers. Using mobility to attract and develop top talent creates a more global mindset in the company, and yet, only 33 percent of international corporations have such a program in place. Those employers who have understood the mobile readiness of their employees and have integrated it into their workforce planning by creating an employee's mind-

set toward a global mobility culture are winning the war for attracting and retaining talent, thus reaping the benefits of developing a gender-diverse prospective leadership pool.

AIMING FOR GENDER-INCLUSIVE MOBILITY

It is essential, therefore, that global corporations identify and understand, and not just assume, the needs and barriers confronting their female employees. How many HR managers have surveyed the needs and mobility readiness across their workforce demographics and enhanced these data analytics to achieve gender-inclusive mobility? According to the PwC study, only 22 percent of organizations in the study said that they were actively trying to increase their female global mobility num-

ber. Although up to 69 percent conceded that mobility was an essential element in developing future leaders, they admitted that the culture of international mobility was not instilled and transparent in their organizations.

It is vital that international employers embed this element into their brand and accentuate gender-inclusive mobility in order to attract and retain talent. Studies conducted by Columbia University, McKinsey, and Goldman Sachs all concluded that having more women at the top improves the financial performance of a company. Catalyst, an independent research organization, who conducted a study of 353 Fortune 500 companies back in the 1990s, found that companies with the highest representation of women in senior management positions performed best, with one

third higher return on equity and a higher total return to shareholders. With as few as three women on the board, the company can outperform its competition. It is no wonder that, based on those studies, Zurich-based investment fund Naissance, launched a two billion Euro fund in 2009, specifically to invest in companies with women on their boards. But where will this supply of women come from without a more gender-inclusive mobility program?

PAST ASSUMPTIONS HOLDING WOMEN BACK

Women of Gen Y, and especially the Baby Boomer generation, were assumed to have different values concerning work and family. They tended to accept an alternative career path realizing that, sooner or later, they would have to choose between career and family, which would hinder their career. Their career would be temporarily interrupted by other obligations such as motherhood, her husband's career or ageing parents. To play on the safe side, many have taken positions where travel and promotion are least likely. This dilemma was labeled the "Pink Ghetto." This misconception disregards the importance of men taking on equal responsibility in the family. Mainstream media and culture are guilty of contributing to the under-representation of women in senior leadership positions through falsely stereotyping female roles. The stereotype family does not take into account that about one in five families in the USA alone are single mothers supporting their families.

Often, false assumptions that women have about themselves and what is required of them to become a leader, directly affects their aspirations and goals. Sheryl Sandberg (Facebook) in her book "Lean In"

feels that women hold themselves back because of lack of confidence and negative internalized messages we have developed since childhood such as being outspoken, aggressive and more powerful than men are wrong. Women lower their expectation, compromising their career to make room for their partners and children and continue to do the majority of housework and child care. "The blunt truth is that men still run the world. A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our

seen as a negative trait in women, so they don't do it and are not noticed as a result. According to Xiaowei Rose Luo, INSEAD Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship and Family Enterprise: "Diversity, sensitivity and an ability to take a holistic approach are feminine attributes and necessary qualities to becoming a successful global leader. The first step often requires women to adjust their mindsets, shed their limiting beliefs and maintain openness to the idea that many of their experiences



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Women have felt limited, regardless of the fact that research showed that, all leadership skills considered, there was no difference between men and women regarding their effectiveness. In fact, in some areas women were rated as being significantly more effective than men. Yet, during self-assessment, men rated themselves much higher than women. Where there is nothing wrong with a man boasting about his accomplishments and achievements, it is

have prepared them well to be leaders." A 2011 McKinsey report noted that men are promoted based on potential, whereas women are promoted based on their past accomplishments. This is where international experience, given the chance, would tremendously enhance a woman's career.

MENTORING AND SPONSORING

Mentorship and sponsorship are crucial for career progression: those with sponsors are more likely to get the best assignments and pay rises than those without. Unfor-

tunately for women, it is usually easier for men to find and maintain such relationships. Mentors are often people with whom you share an affinity, who can empathize with you and your situation; sponsors offer serious seniority, power, and influence. Although aware of the fact that mentors and sponsors are vital, women lack female role models in the workplace and outside the company, who have experience in successfully fulfilling international assignments. Such women would be valuable mentors and sponsors for female talent global mobility programs. Men could, and should, take over more of the responsibility of mentoring and sponsoring talented women.

INFORMAL AND FORMAL MENTORSHIPS

Mentorships have had a powerful influence on a people's careers and should not be underrated. Ask any successful person: Warren Buffett mentored Bill Gates, Barbara Walters and Maya Angelou mentored Oprah Winfrey, Bing Crosby mentored Frank Sinatra, Larry Summers (Harvard professor) was one of Sheryl Sandberg's mentors, Steve Jobs mentored Mark Zuckerberg, Christian Dior mentored Yves St. Laurent, Ray Charles mentored Quincy Jones. A mentor is necessary in everyone's life and can be anyone who can influence the others to follow their footsteps.

The majority of in-company mentoring schemes are managed by the HR Department. A study showed that women who found mentors through the formal in-house mentoring programs had a 50 percent higher chance of being promoted and landing overseas assignments than those without or with informal mentors (although it is recommended to have both). These mentors are women, and men, who have already worked as expats in other countries and can encourage female employees and share their experiences with those wanting to get international experience abroad. They have usually signed up

and been trained for the role and will have policies and procedures on the best way to connect.

Sponsors are people who will advocate for you in the workplace when you need to be more visible, they can help with pay rises and promotions and get you involved in high-profile assignments. If someone decides to sponsor you, it is because they believe in you and will do all they can to help you succeed. In order to be sponsored you have to be good, you need to stand out.

Although women enjoy the same career mentoring and coaching as men, there are critical differences in what they identify as "sponsoring" which is significantly inferior to that enjoyed by men. Why does this networking work for men, but not for women? One reason is the same barrier holding women back, namely not tooting their horn and leaning back instead of leaning in. Men still enjoy the 'old boy' situation of drinks after work, golfing at the weekend, etc. while a woman is more concerned with family.

Many organizations are faced with the challenge that many of the company's destinations are not favored destinations of the employees seeking overseas assignments. 48 percent of women and 35 percent of men in the PwC study said they would never relocate to the Middle East, while 43 percent of women and 39 percent of men said the same about Africa. International employers will need to identify any specific location barriers for females and adopt a modern, flexible approach to mobility in order to attract, retain and develop female talent.

The principle professional concerns females have identified around embarking on mobility assignments is repatriation. They are concerned about what their role would be upon repatriation (44 %). While long-term assignments are highest in demand (49 %)

women and men have broad preferences to favored mobility durations. 80 percent of the women agree that flexibility and choice in assignment packages would make international moves more appealing according to the PwC study. An ideal gender-inclusive mobility program should therefore include a repatriation program together with a flexible mobility solution that includes assignment choices, options, and duration packages to meet the diverse range of employee preferences such as the rise in dual-career couples, represented in today's workforce.

HOW WOMEN CAN PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL CAREERS

If your company does not have an international mobility program in place, you might decide to "do it on your own!" This is a lot more challenging since you will need to organize everything yourself instead of the luxury of having the HR department organize the entire relocation for you. Get ready for an uphill journey – you will be confronted with many of the issues you experience at home and certainly a few more.

Making the decision to relocate to a foreign country is a huge step so it is crucial that you take a thorough personal inventory to ensure that you have what it takes before embarking upon such a daring venture.

- ▶ Where is it that you want to go? You must understand both the working and social terrain.
- ▶ Are you going to Heaven or Hell with respect to putting your career first?
- ▶ What is the culture and how are women perceived in the job market there?
- ▶ How can you create a life outside the office?
- ▶ How fast is your clock ticking? If your short-term goal is to settle down, taking an overseas assignment might not be the right path for you.
- ▶ Be prepared for some things to go wrong along the way.

INTERNATIONAL JOB SEARCH

The possibilities posted on the Web can be overwhelming. It is therefore important to stay focused during your job search by looking at particular industries, skills terminology and position titles. You could find a position in a domestic company which has operations abroad and then request to move to one of these subsidiaries once you have proven yourself within the company: unlike domestic employers, an international employer is not going to be willing to teach you about the field.

Find out about visa requirements for foreign workers. Will you be able to change jobs once you're there? A good place to start is checking the embassy website of that country. Before you contact a prospective employer, be sure to research and have as much information about the company as possible so that you don't have a negative surprise once you are there. Contact people who already work there via LinkedIn, or other social network platforms.

Join InterNations (www.internations.org/) which has 390 global communities around the world. Join the one in your own city and meet expats from other parts of the world who can help you with your search and connect you with people and their local clubs in the country you would like to work in. This professional networking club is an excellent source for information about jobs and housing listings and local events and activities. Once you are in the foreign country you will not feel alone and isolated.

Put together a list of questions relating to living and working in your target country and then try to speak to as many women as possible who are living the experience. Clarify your networking goals by building an International Job Search Statement for your international job search.

International Job Search Statement is a document of maximum one page that clarifies:

- ▶ Your objective,
- ▶ Where you want to work – geographic regions of interest (city, country or region),
- ▶ The field you want to work in,
- ▶ The type of organization want to work in – target industries (such as nonprofit, school, or business),
- ▶ What you offer potential employers – an honest assessment of your skills / capabilities (including technical skills, soft skills, and language skills),
- ▶ Your timeline – long- or short term,
- ▶ Your salary requirements,
- ▶ Other relevant information.

Communicating your intention is most effective when you have clarity about your ideal job. It adds focus to your job search, and to your networking.

SALARY AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

An excellent destination is Iceland, whose newly elected female prime minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, has made Iceland the first country in the world to force companies to prove they pay all employees the same. Until then, women still earned around 14 percent less than men. At the time, Iceland's Equality and Social Affairs Minister, Thorsteinn Viglundsson, said: "Equal rights are human rights. We need to make sure that men and women enjoy equal opportunity in the workplace. It is our responsibility to take every measure to achieve that." Iceland has been ranked the best in the world for gender equality for nine years running, according to the World Economic Forum.

BENEFITS OF WORKING ABROAD

Working abroad can come with immense benefits for you and your career. Most women say they'd like to work abroad, so what's stopping them? A survey by Nat-

West reported that 83 percent of women who work say they think the experience will benefit them in terms of moving up the career ladder.

Working abroad shows that you are adventurous and willing to try new things; being flexible is always an asset in the eyes of management. Working in another country is an ideal way to improve your existing skills and learn new ones, making you more attractive to employers as well as being a beneficial add-on to your CV. Other advantages include improving international communication skills; building confidence and self-reliance; developing independence and personality; learning new working styles and build international networks. Moreover, future employers will be impressed with your initiative and flexibility. A 2013 report – Global Professionals on the Move – found that 66 percent of companies put a great value on international experience.

OTHER WAYS OF OBTAINING INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

1. Look inside your company first: In today's global economy almost every business has an overseas presence.

2. Go to business school abroad: Thinking about getting an MBA? There are a multitude of options to pursue including many programs that specialize in preparing business professionals for international assignments.

3. Internships Abroad: These are an excellent way to position yourself in an international career. Although an internship is a low-salaried position, it is a way for you to exchange work for knowledge, whether internationally or at home. The international internship can set you up to be in a good position for an entry-level position internationally. If you'd like to work for a specific international company and you see that they don't offer internships, simply propose the idea. Many companies love people who take initiative. Don't forget to

negotiate, if not for money then for accommodation, especially if the cost of living in that foreign city is higher than normal. Go the extra mile and “prepare” for the internship in the country of your choice before you go. Learn the language, the customs, learn about their economy, history, government. Building up your in-

Ursula von der Leyen, at the time German Labor Minister, estimated that burnout was costing Germany approximately ten billion Euros annually. She is quoted to have said, “Nothing is more expensive than sending a good worker into retirement in their mid-forties because they’re burned out.

These cases are no longer just the exception. It’s a trend that we have to do something about.” Companies are now realizing that healthy employees results in healthy bottom lines. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, has caught on - his motto? “Treat employees like family, and they will be loyal to give their all.” This is typically a female trait. So give us the chance to prove ourselves as capable leaders. We don’t want to take over, but demand our fair share. ●



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International understanding will be invaluable when you arrive. Once there, go beyond what is expected of you, even if you aren’t getting paid: it will help you in the future. Meet local people socially, make friends with co-workers, join a sports club. Additionally, make sure you take the chance to travel around the country.

ON A FINAL NOTE!

As Arianna Huffington put it her book “Thrive”, we are entering into our third women’s revolution. The first was led by the suffragettes over 100 years ago, the second to expand the role of women in society in decision making areas (this is still very much in progress), but we can no longer hold out for this third revolution to get underway. In the past, highly talented and well-educated women opted for abandoning their careers if they could afford to. They found it hard to survive in a ‘man’s work culture’ where success is at the cost of stress, sleep deprivation, addiction, and burnout. Burnout has been labeled “civilization’s disease’ by Belgian philosopher, Pascal Chabot. Men have proven, over and over again, that the way the work place is currently structured isn’t working out, not for men, and especially not for women. In 2011, German companies lost fifty-nine million workdays due to psychological illness – that was 80 percent in 15 years.

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