

Relocation Stress

How HR can Support Relocation

Presented by Elva R. Metrick, M.S.W, R.S.W.

Western Region
Thursday 11-Sep-08
Delta Bow Valley
209 - 4th Ave SE
Calgary, AB



STRESS IS A FOUR LETTER WORD

**HELPING THE RELOCATED
EMPLOYEE AND THEIR
FAMILY**

WHAT IS STRESS

- ADJUSTING TO CHANGE
- SENSE OF LOSS OF CONTROL
- CONFUSION ON WHAT TO EXPECT OF ONESELF AND OTHERS
- TRYING TO MANAGE TOO MANY CHALLENGES AT THE SAME TIME

RELOCATION STRESS

- **EMPLOYEE**

- ADJUSTING TO CHANGED ROLE
- REDEVELOPING A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT
- LEARNING THE CORPORATE AND HOST/HOME CULTURE
- RESPONDING TO THEIR FAMILY

- **SPOUSE/FAMILY**

- CREATING A CHANGED LIFE
- INTEGRATING INTO THE COMMUNITY
- CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
- LACK OF SUPPORT FROM PEOPLE THAT ARE FAMILIAR

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

“Einstein’s creativity and perseverance were truly extraordinary. When he considered a problem important, he devoted to it whatever time and effort it might take to solve it. And he kept inventing new avenues of approach until he was successful.”

Dr. peter Bergman

Former Research Assistant to Dr. Albert Einstein

METHODS OF COPING WITH STRESS

- BECOME AWARE OF REACTIONS TO STRESSFUL SITUATIONS
- USE METHODS THAT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN THE PAST
- TAKE TIME TO REST DURING THE DAY
- RETAIN YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR
- COMMUNICATE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY
- ESTABLISH A SUPPORT SYSTEM

HR SUPPORT

- RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF STRESS
 - WITHDRAWL FOR OTHERS
 - TENDS TO BE CONFRONTATIONAL
 - TALKS OFTEN ABOUT HOW IT WAS DONE
 - FREQUENTLY ILL

HR SUPPORT

- PROVIDE MANAGERS WITH INFORMATION ON RELOCATION STRESS
- PROVIDE EMPLOYEE AND FAMILY WITH READING MATERIAL ON CULTURE SHOCK AND ADAPTATION
- CONNECT FAMILY WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE HAD OR ARE FACING A SIMILAIR EXPERIENCE
- MEET WITH EMPLOYEE EVERY TWO WEEKS FOR THE FIRST THREE MONTHS TO OFFER SUPPORT AND INFORMATION ON RESOURCES

MAKING A REFERRAL

- HAVE A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMPANIES EAP SERVICES
- IF THE COMPANY HAS RELOCATION SERVICE CALL THE CONTACT FOR SUGGESTIONS
- FOLLOW UP WITH EMPLOYEE IF THEY HAVE USED THE SUPPORT SERVICE

INTERNATIONAL RELOCATION: A CORPORATE AND FAMILY CHALLENGE

**Elva Mertick MSW RSW
CRA INTERNATIONAL**

During the last twelve years of consulting in the area of international relocation I have had the occasion to listen to the needs and expectations of international companies as well as those needs and concerns of the expatriate family. This unique opportunity of utilizing managerial, organizational and family assessment skills has helped me in identifying corporate and expatriate priorities.

Globalization is now the description of our workforce. Inherent in globalization is a necessary change in the way companies do their business and choose their work force. Equally it has changed the career opportunities for individuals in all aspects of our workforce. The growing opportunity to work internationally has challenged families to consider a change in lifestyle and familiarity. Families may focus on the enhancement of the career without having fully considered or understood the impact this change can have on them.

If a family and the employee are not prepared for this change it can become problematic to the company in terms of employee productivity, motivation and skill enhancement. If the family or employee cannot adapt to the change and must return home the cost to the company has now increased significantly.

WHAT DOES THE FAMILY NEED TO CONSIDER

Relocation whether it is internationally or cross border means change as well as gains and losses.

GAINS

Career/finances

Broaden family's life experiences

CHANGE/ADAPTATION

Language, life style, food, way of doing business, culture, children's education, physical and political environment.

LOSSES

Easier access to family and friends, familiar places and way of doing things, position in the community, spouse's career, and house.

WHAT DOES THE COMPANY NEED TO CONSIDER

In the recruitment process a significant focus is on skill set, motivation, creativity, adaptability, leadership and performance. However the potential expatriate's method of coping with change or the stability of the family and their ability to adapt to a new environment cannot be clearly determined in a recruitment interview. Therefore the organizational needs and expectations can be sabotaged by unknown psychological factors. When asked, the expatriate and their family will state they can manage the changes. As stated earlier they are often not aware of how these changes can impact on the family life.

Even cross border relocations can have an affect on the family. Think about a move you may have made for a job or education. The move may have meant moving to another province. Perhaps there was an initial state of disorientation or confusion until you became familiar with the streets, places, culture and friends. This experience is magnified when the relocation is to English speaking countries such as the United States, England or Australia. The language is the same but the business culture, host country traditions and communication are different.

Another consideration is that of separation for the family. Many families do not function well when they experience long periods of separation. When recruiting for rotational positions, business travelers, truck drivers or oil field workers it is important to determine the ability of the family to adjust to the absence of a parent and companion. Even if separation has been the family experience at home, separation in a foreign environment can create a new set of issues.

It is up to the expatriate and the family to manage the culture shock and cycle of adaptation. However, here are four preventative measures the company can institute to mitigate the negative impact of change. Consider at least one of the alternatives.

- Provide the family with reading material that will explain culture shock and adaptation. Consider those books that are more recently published and provide practical suggestions in coping with unexpected emotional responses. There is a great deal of reading material that can be given to the expatriate.
- Provide the expatriate with an accurate cultural orientation that is country and city specific.
- Integrate a family preparation/ assessment process as a part of the recruitment. The preparation is for the family, the assessment is a feedback to the company of risk factors that may affect the success of the assignment.
- Provide support, follow up and/or debriefing once the family has arrived in the host country.

To do none of these measures may place the expatriate and the company at a higher risk of a failed assignment. Failed assignments are too costly for all.

WAYS TO DEAL WITH STRESS

1. Take action. Try to stop avoiding the problems instead create a realistic plan.
2. Know yourself and your capabilities. Your best really is good enough.
3. Use humor.
4. Talk to someone you trust or will understand. Become comfortable saying out loud that you are feeling stressed. Identify what is making you feel this way.
5. When feeling anxious try visualizing a more peaceful, tranquil situation; breathe slowly, until you start to feel your body relax.
6. Play, but only compete against yourself not others. Read, walk, or exercise.
7. Identify what you have control over and can create change. The rest needs to be let go.
8. Note what makes you feel stressed or anxious and develop a changed method of dealing with that concern.
9. Try to work a head of an anticipated crisis by creating several alternative problem-solving plans that can potentially resolve the crisis.
10. Be an optimist. Think about the cup being half full. Life can feel better!
11. Make sure you take breaks in the middle of the day. Don't work just relax—good time to try that visualization.
12. Try to slow down. Chronic busyness or always in a hurry can cause poor decision making. Recognize when you have had too much and shift.
13. Stimulate yourself with something you enjoy in the middle of a boring task.
14. Develop supportive relationships.
15. Save your energy for those things that count. Give less time to those problems that give you little gain.
16. You are what you eat and drink. Think about your diet!
17. Imagine yourself being successful. Then start to relax and enjoy the challenge.
18. Take time to be alone. 'Me' time is always important.
19. Take time after work to unwind before you face the next task.
20. Be supportive of others, even when they make mistakes. This encourages them to support you and show respect.

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