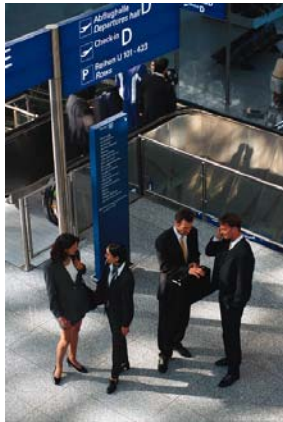


Leveraging Your Talent Investment through Repatriation

Dr. Mark Frederick, IOR Director of Global Talent Management

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Your company has made significant investments in expat assignments but the retention numbers are grim. How you can turn this around, retain and engage your employees, and leverage their experience to develop global leaders?



Expatriates Seek Professional Development

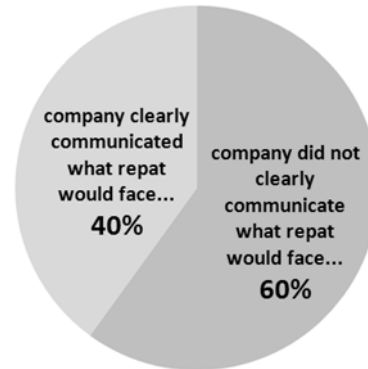
Of the many stages of expatriate assignment support services, repatriation is arguably the stage where companies struggle the most. So often employers fail to

capitalize on the developmental benefits their employees gain from living and working in another culture. In a recent study from Monash University in Australia, 98% of employees surveyed cited “career development” as their top reason for accepting an expatriate assignment. Employees understand that in order to increase their skill set in an increasingly global and competitive marketplace, expatriate experience is an extremely valuable asset. They particularly want to be able to apply their new skills and knowledge when returning home.

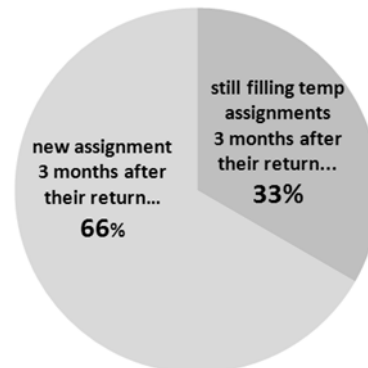
Companies Are Not Engaging Their Repatriates

While expatriate employee expectations are high on the developmental side, the reality they face as repatriates is rather grim.

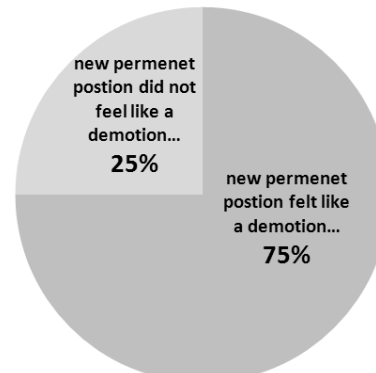
- **60% report that their company did not clearly communicate what they would face upon return**



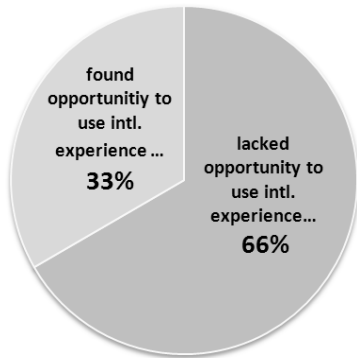
- **33% were still filling temporary assignments 3 months after their return to the U.S.**



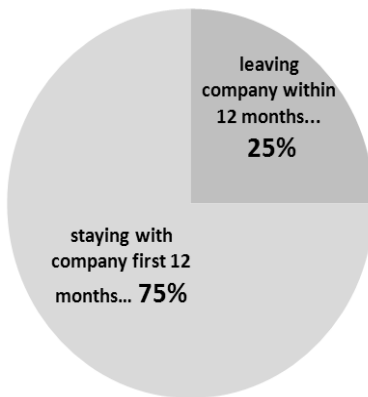
- **75% of those who obtained a permanent position coming home reported that it felt like a demotion**



- **66% said they lacked opportunities to put their international experience to work**



- **25% leaving the company within 12 months**



(Center for Global Assignments, 2010)

This final statistic is the most disturbing... **25% leaving the company within 12 months.** Clearly companies are not re-integrating their expatriate populations well, resulting in a loss of talent.

From a strategic talent standpoint, it is very troubling for companies to be investing so much capital into expatriate assignments, only to develop those employees into global leaders for their competition.

Repatriation Is More Challenging than Expatriation

Expatriates often imagine that they will have a wonderful homecoming, that everyone will be interested in their unique experiences and that their companies will have them applying their new skill sets. Unfortunately, many report that they experience a return to the ordinary as well as relative anonymity at their workplace. Because employers are not managing repatriates' expectations, their sense of culture shock is far greater than what they were anticipating. Additionally, what expatriates essentially face when living in a new culture is a confrontation with difference – people behaving differently from what they are comfortable with. When expatriates come home, they confront a more dramatic realization - they are the ones who are different.

Advice from recent corporate expats...

“Actively stay in front of management in the home country so that you are not out-of-sight-out-of-mind.”

“Do not take your home country contacts for granted; do not let those relationships lapse.”

“Take care not to identify so closely with your overseas assignment that leaving to return home becomes jarring.”

The Value Repatriates Provide

The changes expatriates experience during their assignment provide incredible value for their companies. **Most return with a far more sophisticated understanding of how their company works globally and a “bigger picture” view.** This gives them a different perspective on company processes and operations, which often leads to innovative ideas as they analyze and question how things get done. Repatriates also greatly increase their level of intercultural competence, which helps them communicate more effectively with others as well as become more fluent with different business practices.

As companies continue to globalize, they need leaders with higher levels of intercultural competence to successfully integrate their talent and operations around the world. **Repatriates often provide the best talent pool for identifying global leaders.**

What Companies Should Be Doing

Recent trends show that effective repatriation starts with expatriate selection. The more companies take a long term talent management approach to expatriate assignments, the more likely they are to be successful developing and retaining their talent. Companies should maintain contact with their expatriates and plan for their return. Ideally, companies should be assigning a mentor prior to departure who regularly engages with the expatriate. This can be done in conjunction with leadership development professionals, as they have a good idea about succession planning and likely mentor candidates. Three months prior to return there, should be a strategic “what next” discussion with the expatriate. This is the time to carefully set realistic expectations. Given the challenging economy, there might not be an ideal position immediately, but communicating this early on and mentioning potential openings begins to create meaningful dialogue. There should also be a company “reorientation” session to get comfortable with changes and potential new leadership. After a few weeks of adjustment, have the repatriate facilitate a workshop that highlights their experiences and summarizes key learnings. This can also be featured in a company’s internal blog or forum to share with others.

The key is to maintain contact with the expatriate and give them a sense of connection to the company that will engage their new capabilities once they return, which results in an increased value proposition for all.

Dr. Mark Frederick, IOR Director of Global Talent Management, recently gave a presentation at the West Coast Global Mobility Forum in San Francisco on February 2, 2011. The topic was “Dynamics of Repatriation – A Talent Management Approach”. The above is an executive summary of the content.

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