



# Human Resources and Customer Service Consulti

Home | Blog | Clients | Resources | About Us | Contact Us

## Our Services

### Employee Focus

[Employee Opinion Survey](#)

[Employee Turnover](#)

[Compensation and Benefits](#)

[Employee Training](#)

[Performance Management](#)

[360 Degree Feedback](#)

[Employee Assessment](#)

[Employee Motivation, Morale and Innovative HR Practices](#)

### Customer Focus

[Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

[Mystery Shopping](#)

## Subscribe to E-Zine

### HR News and Views

[View current and archived issues here.](#)

Subscribe to **HR News and Views**, and receive a **free bag of stories!**

Your Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

- Subscribe me
- Unsubscribe me

## HR News and Views

May 31, 2006

### Contents

[This Month](#)

[Feature Article](#)

An interview with Yvonne McNulty on "Global Mobility: The impact of trailing spouses on assignment success."

[Resources](#)

[Subscribe / Unsubscribe details](#)

### This Month

Recent research produced by GMAC Global Relocation Services and the National Trade Council shows that 21% percent of expatriate employees leave their companies in the midst of international assignments while another 23% do so within a year of returning from one. Yet, global mobility continues to be on the increase.

Family issues are the primary reason why international assignments are declined and are often a significant cause of failure in an international assignment. In this month's issue, **featuring an interview with Yvonne McNulty**, founder of [www.thetrailingspouse.com](http://www.thetrailingspouse.com), we discuss some of the major issues that confront trailing spouses going on an international assignment.

The trailing spouse is defined as 'the person in a relationship, who gives up his/her job in order to follow the other person to a new location where that person has found employment.'

Her study on the subject carried out over a period of 4 years is remarkable in many ways; perhaps for the first time feedback was taken from trailing spouses (264 respondents) to find out what concerns them, what matters to them.

On a personal note, having been a trailing spouse myself, the study deeply resonates with me. Organizations would do well to examine how they could apply the findings in order to increase the Return on Investment on expatriate

Quote of the Month  
*HAPPINES. Connect."*

Recent Article  
**HR News May 2006**  
An interview with Yvonne McNulty on "Global Mobility: The impact of trailing spouses on assignment success."

**HR News April 2006**  
The challenge of finding Talent in the twenty-first century

**HR News March 2006**  
"Why should I be concerned about my Network?"

[More](#)

[Our Privacy Policy](#)

assignments. This subject incidentally is focus of Yvonne McNulty's doctoral research.

Happy reading and warm wishes,  
Deepa

([www.jigyasaconsulting.com](http://www.jigyasaconsulting.com))

[Back to Top](#)

### **An interview with Yvonne McNulty on "Global Mobility: The impact of Trailing Spouses on assignment success."**

Excerpts from an interview with her:

#### **On lack of experience in the organization**

**Yvonne McNulty:** "The biggest issue from the organizational perspective is that spouses feel that people in HR department, those responsible for managing the move didn't have enough experience and didn't quite understand the real issues that face an international move. The families were frustrated dealing with people who were personnel working within the HR department did not really understand their needs, didn't understand why sometimes exceptions to policies are necessary. It was the number one complaint of spouses. Almost, every second or third spouse raised the issue."

#### **On poor communication between the organization and spouse**

**Yvonne McNulty:** "The second issue that came up was lack of communication between the company and the spouse. Usually in most organizations the expatriate does not carry out the majority of the moving, the administrative work is usually left to the spouse. Yet it is the expatriate who is the link to the organization. But the expatriate is usually working right up to the day of the move in the home country and is also expected to hit the ground running in the new location. All the back bone of the move gets left to the spouse to handle, yet all the information from the organization about the move gets communicated to the expatriate and not to the spouse. The information reaches the spouse only by chance, if any. It's not that the expatriate is deliberately keeping it from the spouse but it's a busy time during an international move."

"What spouses want is; a more direct communication between the organization and them, certainly keeping the expatriate in the loop and not to rely on the information shared by the expatriate at home. The organization fails to realize who is really the back bone of the move. They should look at how they can improve the process of communication."

#### **On Need for flexibility at a policy level**

**Yvonne McNulty:** "Many organizations have outsourced the entire process and left the communication to the vendors. Yet a vendor can't approve an exception to policy. They may say, 'no, it's not a policy.' So spouses may want to talk to HR to seek an exception. We are not talking of any big exception or a lot of money. For example, many organizations send the expatriate and the spouse on a familiarization trip and exception can be made if they have teenage children and they would like the teenage children to go on a familiarization trip with them. This could very much impact their decision. But if the company policy is that only the husband and wife can go on a familiarization trip then the vendor is likely to say no. What the spouse really wants to do is talk to someone in HR and explain to them why they are asking for the exception. It may not impact those with younger children very much but certainly those with teenage children should be given the consideration."

"One thing that organizations can do is that not all benefits in the policy are necessarily availed of by the family. So there is an expectation that if something is not paid, something else will be picked up; some other exceptions could be made."

#### **On key Best Practices in managing assignments involving international relocation**

**Yvonne McNulty:** "If you talk to HR managers, they will tell you anecdotally without looking at hard data that, without doubt the number one reason for stress in an assignment is because of family. The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), widely prevalent in America, provides a whole range of services for the family. It's especially good for international employees. EAP provides for family counselling, medical attention if needed, lawyers if you need one and that kind of thing. It is optional and totally confidential. So, the family gets the support they need and the organization does not feel like its breaching the line. That I find is a very good practice. I myself used the EAP provider twice in the USA which proved invaluable. It was really good."

"Typically there is an internal struggle that goes on about identity, adjustment and which needs to be acknowledged and addressed. I think an EAP kind of programme can step in and help a lot. That was one of the main findings from the research, what I call the intrinsic support. If organizations can address this in some way, then the family could move over the rough spots a lot more easily. It could help and make a difference in making an assignment chug along instead of festering and becoming a problem of a bigger magnitude later."

#### **On involving the spouse in the selection process**

**Yvonne McNulty:** "Many organizations involve the spouses in the selection process. There are programmes available where you can put the expatriate through a selection programme to see if they are suitable for a location they are going to and whether they have the necessary attributes. Now they are putting the spouse through the same programme as well. That I think is a very good practice. It is

programme as well. That I think is a very good practice. It is a very good offering for an expatriate who really wants an assignment because it is good for his or her career, but wants to minimise the challenges to the family."

"The best thing that HR can do is to ask the family. They'd be surprised at the simple and uncomplicated things that actually help. There might be a spouse who has put her career on hold. She may be a doctor or a lawyer, her request would be, she might like the company to pay for the subscription fees for a couple of journals that she would have subscribed while at work or membership to a professional association or something like that. Some may wish to go back to University and expect funding for University degree. Another spouse could have a request for phone expenses to be paid. A flexible option, that a spouse could avail would be much better than a fixed allowance that currently many organizations have."

### **On differences in how the male or female trailing spouse handles the relocation issue**

**Yvonne McNulty:** "The biggest issue between genders is that women tend to take ownership of their husband's careers while men don't take ownership of their wives'. It means: a woman assumes the position of the husband's job. For example; a VP's wife, takes whatever happens in her husband's job, very personally; she is very involved in his career. Men don't draw any identity from their wife's career. The husband would respect the relationship between her and the organization. He will be affected by the issues in the job but will stay out of it. Women tend not to stay out of the male expatriate and the relationship with his organization."

"Men have an innate sense of working it out themselves. Women on the other hand tend to reach out and seek support. 23% of the expatriate workforce is now made up of women, a much larger number compared to less than the 12% five years ago. In my research, 10% of the sample was trailing husbands. I think that was a pretty significant."

[Back to Top](#)

### **Resources**

[www.thetrailingspouse.com](http://www.thetrailingspouse.com)

[www.gmacglobalrelocation.com](http://www.gmacglobalrelocation.com)

[Back to Top](#)

### **Subscribe / Unsubscribe**

Please visit our website [www.jigyasaconsulting.com](http://www.jigyasaconsulting.com) to subscribe or unsubscribe yourself from this mailing list.

OR

To subscribe, please email to: [on-1400@ezezine.com](mailto:on-1400@ezezine.com)  
To unsubscribe, please email to: [off-1400@ezezine.com](mailto:off-1400@ezezine.com)

[Back to Top](#)

**To learn more about how we can help...**  
**Call now: +65 97514107**  
**[Click Here to Email Now](#)**

[Back to Top](#)

© 2004 Jigyasa. All Rights Reserved.  
[Copyright & Privacy](#)