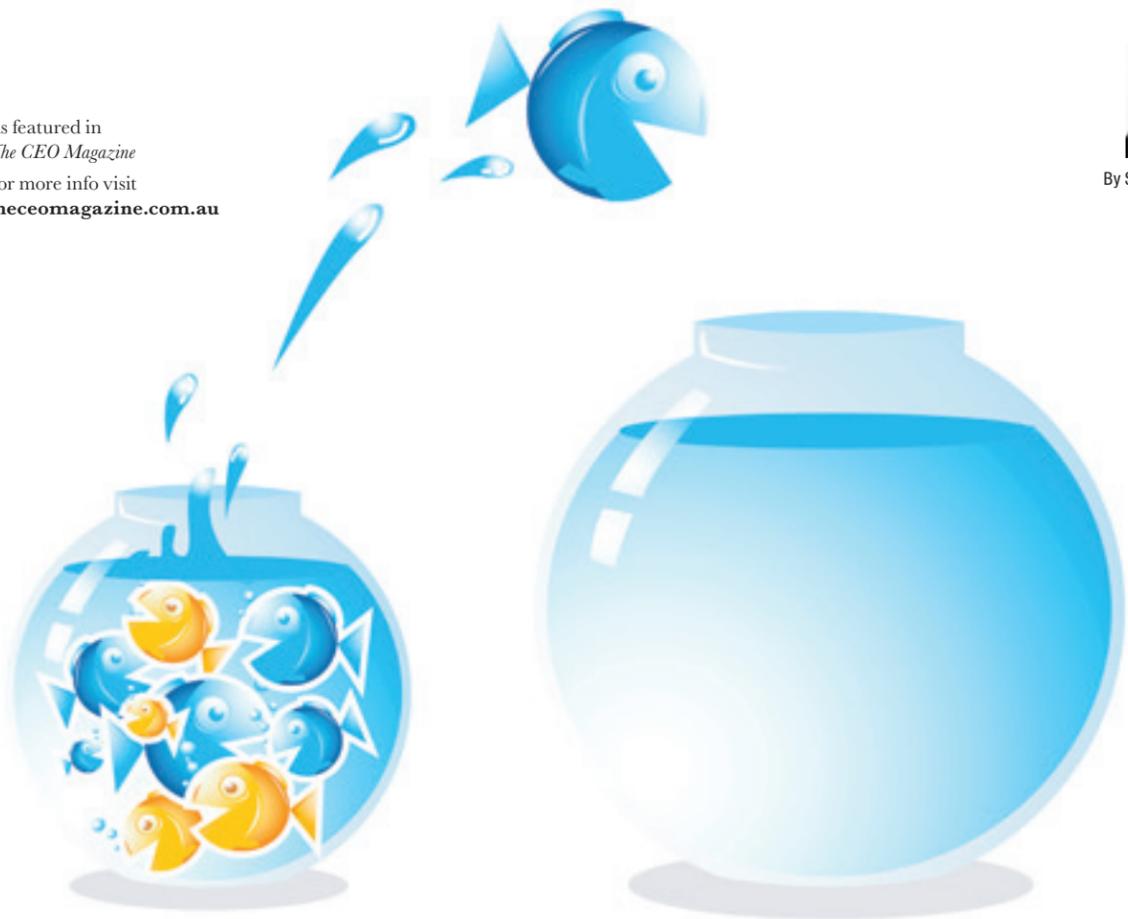




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By Sharon Swift

SIX STEPS to Relocation Success

In today's global business environment, international relocation of staff is inevitable and rising in number. A consistent relocation approach is essential for businesses looking to achieve mobile talent, competitive advantage, and engaged employees.

Australia's skills shortage is threatening to slow growth in many sectors, according to Boston Consulting Group. The need for businesses to look overseas to fill the gap is very real—and relocation is costly. There is a significant risk of companies wasting millions of dollars and suffering from reduced productivity if the relocation fails.

Executives and their mobility teams would be wise to consider the potential impact and disruption

this could have on their performance. 78 per cent of businesses surveyed by Ernst & Young's 2013 Global Mobility Effectiveness Survey stated that they do not measure the return on investment (ROI) of their mobility initiatives.

In addition to financial outlay, other factors such as engagement and productivity during the transition are important to consider. The huge adjustment involved in onboarding into a new role in a new country, at the same time as juggling the

personal transition, cannot be underestimated. The employee's performance during the assignment can also impact commercially if not planned and managed effectively.

As with any period of change, the prospect of relocating overseas can be overwhelming. The move itself will present logistical hurdles, personal disruption, and a rollercoaster of emotions for the whole family. In many cases, the prospect of a large international move, and the family disruption it can bring, is too much to bear. It may be that the right candidate is not willing to move, for fear of the unknown and the prospect of an arduous task ahead. A considered awareness of what a mammoth relocation means to a family unit and their future is critical.

These circumstances call for a considered mobility strategy, and a consistent approach to the management of staff movement itself. Every international move and transition navigates through a six-step 'SETTLE' process. Each phase brings with it elements of project management tasks, priorities, differing types of emotions, and pressure.

This six-step approach is a powerful framework when adapted to the perspective of a corporate relocation. A clear structure championed by internal stakeholders allows the very best chance of relocation success and, indeed, return on investment.

The six steps in summary:

1. **Size up**—the decision to relocate. Understand your employee's suitability for the role, have a plan for if and when they will repatriate, and consider the overall performance indicators of the move. Family and personal considerations are also key at this stage: according to the latest Ernst & Young Global Mobility Survey, 65 per cent of international relocations fail, mostly for personal reasons.

Proactive support and arming your employee with the tools and information to make the decision is the vital first step.

2. **Embark**—move planning and preparation. Organising the move is often left to the employee, a burden they could do without at a time of great upheaval and stress. It will likely clash with the pressure to perform at work. Given that dual career couples are today's norm, this is probably also the case for the spouse. The offer of hands-on support with administrative matters and preparing for the shipment can relieve the burden.

3. **Take up residence**—arrival support and orientation. Quite often, this is the only support offered by companies. This is the absolute minimum obligation for a mindful organisation with cognisance of the relocation's personal impact on the employee and their family. Arrival orientation and handholding with the home search and set-up, school appointments, and setting up a routine are all sensible offerings at this stage. This can expedite the onboarding process by maximising focus and engagement in the crucial early days.

4. **Tackle the necessities**—tedious administration. Help with navigating local authorities and a minefield of paperwork is a simple and effective way to lighten the load. This can significantly lessen distractions, ensuring staff are productive in their early days. Provision of a simple checklist and accompanying support can accelerate this niggly, yet essential, period.

5. **Learn the ropes**—cultural acclimatisation. Knowing 'how things work' is the next natural step, and this phase can be the 'danger zone' in terms of relocation progress. It occurs at

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a personal pace. Unsupported, this process can be isolating, cause frustration and, at worst, an early assignment termination. While your employee has a routine with work, the spouse and family have less structure in the early days, which may cause disharmony. The offer of spousal career support, and help with crossing cultural differences, can reap huge benefits if managed effectively.

6. **Explore and discover**—lifestyle. Australia consistently appears in the world's top countries in which people would like to live. While the prospect of moving so far away is daunting, without exception there is a fascination and curiosity about the amazing lifestyle on offer. Tips, advice, and guidance here can do wonders to maximise engagement and relocation success.

In addition to the practical logistics of an international move, there is the delicate matter of the emotional journey that accompanies it. The Ernst & Young Global Mobility Survey report advises that the relocation of the right candidate with the right preparation can still end in failure if the family isn't happy. Empathy and acknowledgement of the personal sacrifice should be top of mind throughout the process.

PwC's 15th Annual Global CEO Survey states, "Mobility is increasingly recognised as playing an important role in attracting, retaining, and engaging talent."

Encouraging staff with the right skills to mobilise must come with adequate support for the family. ●

About Sharon Swift
Sharon Swift is an author, entrepreneur, and seasoned expat, having moved across 14 countries in her lifetime. Sharon is the founder of The Expat Concierge, which helps expat families have a successful relocation and transition to life in Australia. For more information, visit theexpatconciierge.com.