

# Top Tips for a Successful Relocation



By Sharon Swift

More than a logistics exercise, relocating an employee has a personal impact. It can cause significant disruption and upheaval. Businesses wise to the factors that can lead to relocation success, or failure, stand a better chance of protecting the costly relocation investment.

International relocation is a costly but valuable fact of business. PwC's *Talent Mobility 2020* report predicts that international assignments will rise by 50 per cent by 2020, following an already steep increase over the past decade. International experience is now considered an essential rite of passage for emerging leaders. Mobility is also being widely acknowledged as a powerful attraction and retention strategy, according to PwC's *15th Annual CEO Survey*.

Businesses faced with increasing mobility among business units, or building a policy to cater for the need, can make costly and damaging mistakes if not considered strategically, and with an empathic approach. "Family and spouse issues continue to be the biggest challenges that threaten the success of international assignments," according to the Ernst & Young *Global Mobility Effectiveness Survey*. 65 per cent of international relocations fail or result in early repatriation, mostly due to personal issues. The spouse can suffer from the tremendous change and turmoil involved in the

move. Dual-career families are today's norm, so the professional cost to the spouse cannot be ignored, with a range of other issues to consider.

Despite being a major decision-maker and stakeholder in the move, the spouse and their needs can often be forgotten in the throes of the logistics. Ignoring their role in the move—and that they share the responsibility for the tasks involved—can be a costly mistake.

Research, planning, organising, budgeting, the prospect of a complete life change, and the upheaval are very disruptive for the entire family. These can all be daunting for the most seasoned expat, and even more so for a novice. The impact of taking on these responsibilities with minimal support can lead to resentment if left unsupported. That the burden falls on the family to handle these essential tasks on their own can lead to misinformation, mistakes, and an overall bad experience of the relocation process. This poor start can be devastating and, ultimately, costly for all involved.

Supporting the family, and especially the spouse, can make a big difference to an assignment's success. In addition to what could be considered a standard suite of arrival services, such as orientation, school searches, and finding a home, there is much more businesses can do to smooth the path.

While orientation and arrival support is essential to the settling-in process, careful planning and management of expectations help immensely. Sufficient time to digest the prospect of a lifestyle change and being away from loved ones allows the family to mentally prepare for the move. Knowing what to organise and expect also helps to frame their mindset. Many mistakenly assume that the relaxed Australian lifestyle means that everything, including adjusting to a new life, is easy. The reality can be different when the realisation that they are in a faraway land dawns.

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Knowing how things work, what emotions to expect, and where to turn to for support goes a long way to making the process bearable.

Here are some tips and considerations to enhance the employee experience, and increase the chances of relocation success.

- Offer a 'look-see tour' so your employee and their family can get a taste for life in Australia before they agree to the move. More than just a gesture, this is a powerful way to prevent anticipation, allows the family to start visualising what their life will be like, and can help with the planning and better decision-making for when they eventually land.
- Include cultural assimilation as part of the relocation package—from both a personal and a business perspective. Business culture and behaviours are subtly very different; an understanding of this can help allay any feeling of isolation in your employee. An insight into general Australian culture and values can help the family with their adjustment also. Many mistakenly presume that Australia is the same as any English-speaking Western culture, which is not the case in reality.

- Get really practical. Supply the family with information such as how things work—everything from Medicare, driving, banking, cultural nuances, tax, and compliance. Assist with budgeting by offering cost-of-living information. Knowledge that we take for granted, such as where to shop for furniture and groceries, what to do at the weekend, and where to eat out can significantly decrease their settling-in time—allowing your employee to focus on work.

- Proactively involve the spouse in the relocation process. Make them feel an integral and valued part of the process. Simple actions, like keeping them in the

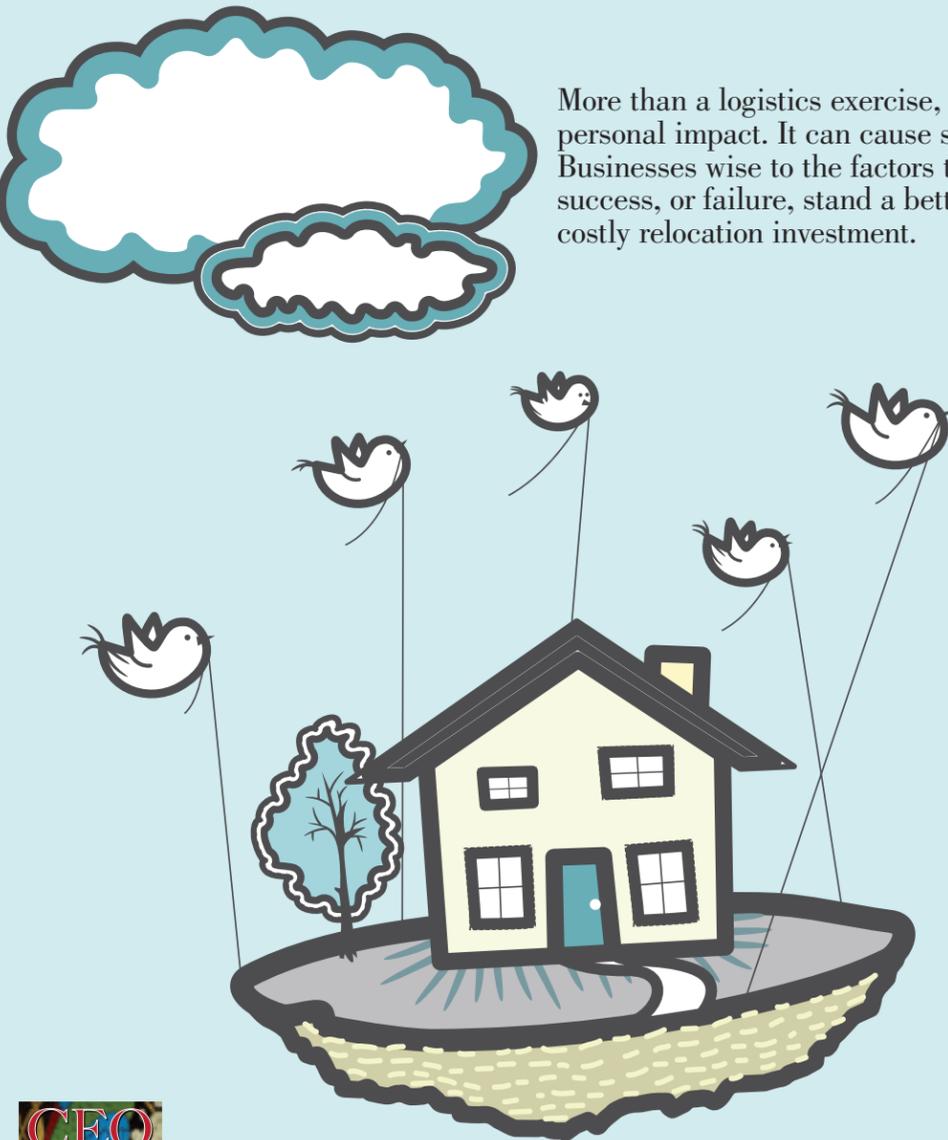
communication loop and seeking their counsel, can build a sense of loyalty and goodwill.

- Include spousal career support as part of the relocation package, which can reap multiple benefits. It softens the blow if they have had to sacrifice their job for the move, helps the family achieve a dual-income more quickly and, again, frees up your employee to be fully engaged at work, knowing that their spouse has help and support.
- Encourage and support your employee and their spouse with networking. This benefits the business by expanding interaction beyond the office environment, and can help the employee get 'stuck into' meeting new people, which provides confidence and a sense of settling in more quickly.

In addition to practical help, the emotional journey cannot be underestimated. The adventure of moving to Australia is an exciting prospect. However, there is stress, loneliness, and possible culture shock that can quickly ensue. The impact of change, and indeed methods of coping with it, is handled differently by everyone—even those within the same family unit. Acknowledging the whole family is important, to allow all involved to settle in at a similar pace.

Recognising the many facets of personal upheaval involved in a relocation requires a delicate balance of practical help and empathy throughout the process. Incorporating both into a mobility policy significantly increases the chance of assignment success, while achieving better engagement and loyalty. •

**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 [theexpatconcierge.com](http://theexpatconcierge.com).



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