



GLOBAL NOMADS AT HOME IN THE WORLD

Zeitweise in fremden Ländern zu leben und zu arbeiten ist aufregend und bereichernd, für den Rest der Familie aber oft ein Schock. ROBERT GIBSON fragte eine Expertin, wie man bei Auslandseinsätzen allen Beteiligten gerecht werden kann. [medium](#) [www.](#)

These days, many international business people are sent on assignments abroad for several years. Too many of these assignments, however, end early or are not as successful as they could have been, because of a failure to consider the needs of the business person's family. While the working expatriates may enjoy exciting opportunities in a familiar business world, their spouses and children often face considerable challenges.

Intercultural expert and former relocation specialist Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich spoke to *Business Spotlight* about her personal and professional experience of international moves with family members. Here she provides advice on getting the most from your move abroad.

How did you get involved in supporting families going abroad?

I'm a child of bicultural parents, with a Dutch father and an English mother. I've also moved many times, lived abroad, and returned to my passport country, the Netherlands. As long as I can remember, I've had a sense of being detached from that culture. I've never

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considered this to be anything negative, but have always had the feeling that I was on the outside looking in. It was both a comfortable and a strange position to be in; there was always a bit of a question mark at the back of my mind. I was not really sure what sort of cultural identity I had.

I then worked in an international business environment in France as a corporate banker, with people who were living and working abroad themselves. After some time in that job, I needed a career change, so I opened up a relocation agency. At first it was very much about logistics — helping people to find a house when living abroad. It then became much more than that.

What did you learn from your job as a relocation specialist?

Through my work, I started to ask myself questions about the experiences that I had lived through when I was abroad. When my clients asked me about the culture that we were in, I realized that there was a great

Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich is an intercultural expert who offers support to families moving abroad. She is the author, with Bettina Kaltenhäuser, of *Andere Länder, andere Kinder*, a guide to living abroad for children and their parents (see “For more information”, page 40). For details on van Swol-Ulbrich's work, see [www.consultus.net](#); she can be contacted at [seminars@consultus.net](#).



deal of learning to be done, not only on their part but on my part, too. One of the big steps I took was to move out of the relocation business into intercultural training. I realized that people didn't just need a house, but what they were really looking for was a home in that other culture. The experience of working for a French bank is also important for me in my work today. It helps me to understand the mechanisms in large organizations as well as the realities of the workplace. Working with the French, you obviously have to be able to speak French, which I did, but I still had to find out that just being able to speak their language was not enough. What I was lacking was a deeper understanding of what made them tick. The French also wanted to understand why the Dutch do things in a particular way and wondered why no one had ever told them that there is a better way of doing things — of course, the French way. I'm still moving constantly between cultures, as my English mother lives in the Netherlands, my Dutch father in Belgium and my German husband in China. You might ask where I live. Well, theoretically I live in Germany, but actually I live at the airport. ▶

assignment [ə'saɪnmənt]	Einsatz
challenge [ˈtʃælɪndʒ]	Herausforderung
corporate banker [ˌkɔːpəreɪt 'bæŋkə]	Bankangesellte(r) fürs Firmenkundengeschäft
detached: be ~ from sth. [drɪ'tætʃt]	sich nicht (ganz) zu etw. zugehörig fühlen
Dutch [dʌtʃ]	holländisch, niederländisch
environment [ɪn'vaɪrənmənt]	Umfeld
expatriate [eks'pætriət]	ständig im Ausland lebende Person
Netherlands: the ~ ['neðələndz]	die Niederlande
relocation [ˌriːləʊ'keɪʃən]	(berufsbedingter) Umzug
relocation agency [ˌriːləʊ'keɪʃən ˌeɪdʒənsi]	Firma für Umzugsorganisation
spouse [spaʊs]	Ehepartner(in)
tick: what makes sb. ~ [tɪk]	was in jmdm. vorgeht