

# Net Expat Newsletter

BRUSSELS - LONDON - PARIS - THE HAGUE

In order to promote employees' international mobility, Net Expat helps expat partners find worthwhile work in their new host country through 6 programs covering 24 countries.

**Expert Opinion**

## Reflections on First Time Expatriation...

**Mrs. Traci Hughes**

Human Resources Director, Colgate Palmolive European Division, France



When I look back over the past 9 months, I cannot believe how things in my life have changed. My husband and I were your average dual career couple with 2 young children living in a wonderful neighborhood in Park Slope, Brooklyn, part of New York City. We had a shared personal goal to live abroad with our children and experience a different culture and customs. Little did I ever think that goal would become a reality: there were just too many variables to consider, namely leaving our families, career and friends. It seemed too unlikely. Then came the opportunity of a lifetime for us, the chance to live and work abroad for a time in

Paris, France. The challenges soon began. It was a move initiated by my company and trailing spouses have a difficult time getting work in France. The move would mean that my husband would have to temporarily suspend his 11-year legal career as a State Prosecutor. Our oldest child was set to enter kindergarten in a school we all loved.



We would obviously have to select a new school for him. Our infant daughter had been cared for by loving grandparents while we both worked. All of a sudden, this great offer started sounding less than great!

*Then the enormity of our decision hit us hard!*

I am pleased to say that with the most support coming from my husband, (who is the unsung hero of this saga) we decided to go for it in spite of all the obstacles and become first time expatriates. We had a blissful moment where we were giddy with our decision. Then the enormity of our decision hit us hard. We would be moving to a more expensive city and going from two incomes to one. Our son would have to start his formal education in a new environment and my husband would be taking time off from his career to care for our baby daughter! We persevered and forged ahead on our move. The barriers kept re-surfacing. Neither of us spoke French

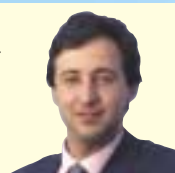


**Editorial**

## The right solution for the right partner

**Alain Verstandig**

Managing Director, Net Expat

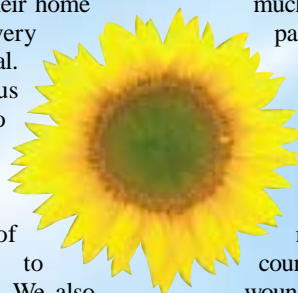


The cases of the couples we have to deal with are extraordinarily diverse, but the success factors in solving dual career issues are generally linked to our ability to understand their needs.

Some come to us for a quick job hunt, others expect clear answers and counseling to see what their professional future should be. This flexibility in our approach has enabled us to achieve a success rate of 83 % of dual career issues solved in less than three months.

As shown in the graph (see p.2), you can easily distinguish possible strategies by placing your partner along the "motivation to work" axis, and the "time vs. expatriation" line. As for the top left and right "areas" where motivation to work is 'high' to 'very high', we start coaching these partners before they even leave their home country, or very quickly after arrival. This gives us enough time to establish a genuine job search strategy for the country of destination, and to rewrite their CVs. We also minimize the need to maintain the partner's morale during the

critical period between the old job and the new one. Some 25 percent of our candidates only terminate their existing jobs when they have secured employment in the new host country. With those partners highly motivated to work, cases where solutions are left till later are much more complex. The partner 'discovers' our services after maybe six months of isolation in the new host country. In such cases our task is often, in the first instance, a matter of psychological counseling and healing the wounds left by a job search that produced nothing.



Dual Career

Mobility

Integration

Talents

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(‘Okay, how hard can it be? we’ll learn, right?’). The sheer energy required to figure out life in a new, unfamiliar culture was daunting (‘How many types

of cheese are there?’). We were exhausted all the time (‘Whose turn is it to get up with the baby?’). I worked later hours and regularly came home after our children

had eaten dinner and gone to bed (‘Mom, is that you?’). Many times I questioned if this upheaval of our lives was worth it. The answer is a resounding YES!! By leaving our familiar and comfortable surroundings and venturing out into the world (literally), we have learned a lot about ourselves. It may sound passé but you are really never too old to learn.

In my role as Human Resources

*We realize that it is critical to help support the family in as many ways as possible through the expatriation experience*

Director for Colgate Palmolive European Division, one of my main functions is to enable the movement of people into positions around Europe. Many times, the discussions that occur have little to do with the position and much to do with the effect of the move on the employee and his or her family. We realize that it is critical to help support the family in as many ways as possible through the expatriation experience. I freely share some of my own experiences with expatriation to help others understand that they are not alone.

I look forward to a follow-up note next year to let you know how it’s all working out! So far, so good... ■

## Our Customers

3M
Alcatel Microelectronics
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Delhaize Group
DuPont de Nemours
ExxonMobil
Gemplus
Honeywell
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Newell Rubbermaid
Procter & Gamble
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Sogem
Solvay
Tractebel
Tyco-electronics Raychem
UCB
Union Minière
UPS
...

## Editorial

For the two lower quarters, where the motivation to work might not be there, information is the key, and often comes before any action. These partners need counseling and time to figure out what level of professional involvement fits into their global picture. Listening and talking with them will help them survive the early isolation shocks. Only 70 % of these cases will enter one of our “Career Programs”, while 30 % will eventually decide not to become active professionally. Yes, partners’ expectations are diverse, and the worst thing to do is to offer the wrong cure for the pain! ■



## Thoughts

# Take a walk on the wild side?

**Alain Graffe**  
Program Manager  
Net Expat  
Belgium



If you are skilled in the meaning of words, you will know that an expatriate is someone who happens to find him or herself “outside the father’s country”. This endows country of origin with a fundamental value: it is the psychological “reference point” from which a person, like a cat in a new home, starts to explore the world reluctantly or enthusiastically, with sensible caution or businesslike verve.

This level of inquisitiveness depends on a curious x-factor

that always expresses itself in another type of relationship that can be summed up as follows: “I have to love what I know and am now leaving, in order to love what I do not know and am now about to discover.”

The degree of mobility in today’s world of work is profoundly changing the background to our different



*I have to love what I know and am now leaving, in order to love what I do not know and am now about to discover*

cultures. If the “reference” culture for the expatriate is an “open” one, then it will be enriched by the contact with a new one - and work with the coach will enrich the relationship even more. But if the culture is a “closed” one, it will react like a frightened oyster, and the coach will have to use all his or her skills to open it up again.

When I coach an expatriate partner, I find that the first

few minutes tell me a lot about a mental attitude that will be critical to the process of integrating with the new environment. And it is touching to witness, at the first meeting, a look of concern, of questioning, of expectation. We have to watch these signs as the days and weeks pass, as they will be the first to tell us whether the person is rising to the challenge or not.

It is when “the father’s country” endows the expatriate with a solid and reassuring culture, and the “mother country” gently and lovingly pushes the fledgling from the nest, that the expatriate and his or her family responds to this wonderful impulse to get a new perspective on life. ■

# Newsletter

## Testimonial

## Facing the camera ...

**Matthew Tewes**  
American Expat  
Spouse from  
NewellRubbermaid



Before arriving in Belgium from the United States, I knew that Belgium was full of major companies from around the world. So, I thought that it would be fairly easy to find a position as a recruiter for an IT group. I was in for a surprise.

I was introduced to Alain and his team at Net Expat and was immediately impressed by their expertise on what it was like to be an expat and what steps it would take for me to find that ideal position. Just as important, the "personality" of the group was very warm and genuine. This was extremely valuable, especially for moral

support, of which I would need a lot during this process.

After getting my CV written and translated into French and Dutch, it was time to get ready for a "hopeful" interview. I was to do a mock interview. And that could only mean one thing...I was going into "The Torture Chamber!"

Yes, Alain, preparing for a month, was ready to make me sweat. While facing a camera, he delivered question after question, while the camera was watching every nervous gesture as I squirmed around in my chair.

I did find the experience very beneficial, although horrific,

especially after we watched the video and I saw the habits, both positive and negative that I had never seen before. This both gave me confidence in some of my interview skills and helped me notice what I needed to correct for future "live" interviews.

By then, after many visits with my coach, Sally, I was getting feedback from companies about my CV. I was told

that I lacked the language skills or knowledge of the European market. It was true. But this was the surprise that I least suspected. I was at least hoping that the US and British companies, who must surely use

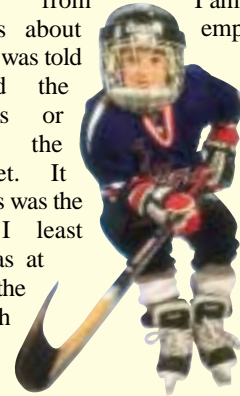
English, were interested in me. This was a difficult challenge.

This is where the moral support of Net Expat came in. They continued to push, told me to be patient and kept me focused. There were plenty of other companies out there.

I eventually did find that ideal position.

I am very grateful to my wife's employers, who provided access to Net Expat. They realize that the support given to a "trailing" spouse, is extremely important. If the employee's partner is happy, then the employee is happy and productive and therefore, in return, the employer is happy. In the end...everyone is happy. ■

*I am very grateful to my wife's employers, who provided access to Net Expat.*



## News

### What's up?

Net Expat was very pleased to be invited as speaker at the last CBI-ERC meeting "People management and the bottom line" in London on 11 & 12 June. Amanda Townshend and Alain Verstandig conducted a lively session on Dual Career issues.

The next day Nathalie Brotchi and Alain Verstandig flew to New York to attend the CRN's "6th Euro-North Atlantic HR Conference", organized in association with KPMG. We were delighted to address a 75 minutes presentation on "Family Issues & Employee Mobility" together with Steve Nord, VP Global Corporate Compensation from UPS. As always, Steve made a wonderful presentation, bringing his nice complementary vision to the Net Expat approach. Thank you Steve.

During the CRN conference, Net Expat received the "HR award of the year". Two other companies, and a great gentleman from Colgate Palmolive Mr. Phil Berry, were also honored.



## Survey

### HR workshop on Dual Career Issues

**Nathalie Brotchi**

Program  
Director Europe,  
Net Expat



We had a lot of pleasure organizing our last "HR workshop on Dual Career Issues" on May 29 in Brussels.

This training was exclusively targeted at corporate HR practitioners involved in international HR, with the objective of helping enhance the success of international assignments and international recruitment.

We had the pleasure of hosting representatives from Delhaize Group, DHL Worldwide Express, ExxonMobil, Janssen

Pharmaceutica, Lhoist Group, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Siemens and Tate & Lyle PLC.

This workshop was a real success, as indicated by all the participants who rated the workshop as "good" or "very good" (50 % rated it as "very good"). The limited number of participants ensured very interactive and dynamic sessions.

On their evaluation forms, participants indicated that they gained a better understanding of dual career issues. They felt they had received tools to identify potential mobility problems and generate best solutions.

Here are some of their comments: "... professionalism, quality & clarity of information", "... excellent

benchmarking from participants", "very mixed audience with expat experience", "not much was missing ...".

Based on this success, Net Expat will run another workshop in Brussels on August 28th 2001 from 8:30 - 12:30. If you are interested in participating, contact us now at [workshop@netexpat.com](mailto:workshop@netexpat.com) as the number of participants will be strictly limited! ■



# Net Expat Newsletter

## Forum

### Realising Value from International Mobility

**Michael Elia**

Managing Director, Expat Technology Forum, UK



With companies increasingly wishing to define themselves as 'global', international mobility has taken on a new impetus. Whereas historically the transfer of technical skills or the desire to impose headquarters' processes and culture were the primary drivers for expatriation, today businesses see a culturally diverse workforce as an essential ingredient of the truly global organisation. However, with the trend towards self-managed careers, open resourcing and employee self-service, is there a danger that companies have become so 'hands-off' that they might fail to manage their investment

in international mobility so as to realise a return?

In contrast to those assignments which are designed to fill a recognised technical skill gap in a host business, the increasing proportion of assignments which are aimed at developing the new cadre of global managers is unlikely to deliver a return on investment during the assignment itself. The value that is 'added' to the individual will typically be



realised by the organisation post-assignment, either back in the home country or in another posting which demands the kind of international experience to which the assignee has been exposed.

One of several ground-breaking solutions developed by the Expat Technology Forum on behalf of its Members is the 'Assignment Value' tool. This allows assignments to be differentiated according to their underlying business drivers, thereby helping to ensure clarity in the assignment initiation process and alignment between the various assignment stakeholders. It enables the business to justify and manage an assignment in terms of its value proposition (ROI) rather than simply its cost. The 20+ current Members of ETF include: AstraZeneca, BP, GKN, Norsk Hydro, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Reuters, Shell and Standard Chartered Bank. Internet: [www.etf-online.com](http://www.etf-online.com) - Telephone: +44 (0)1344 898007

The inevitable conclusion is that companies aspiring to be 'global' face a greater risk in realising the full value of their investment in international mobility due to the longer time-scale over which the return will be obtained. Since companies typically categorise assignments by duration (e.g. short-term and long-term) rather than business drivers, the opportunity to manage this risk through targeted policies is limited. However, the increased attention being paid to dual career / family issues, post-assignment career

progression, and other areas of policy designed to ensure the longer-term retention of assignees, is evidence that businesses sense the need for change. All that they lack is a clear framework within which to develop their international mobility strategy. ■

#### Some profiles

#### Looking for that specific profile?

We have a lot of candidates who are actively looking to pursue their careers. Don't hesitate to contact us if you are interested, **it's completely free of charge**

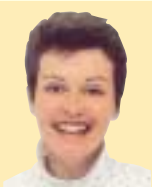
Do you want more information? Don't hesitate to contact us at [jobs@netexpat.com](mailto:jobs@netexpat.com).

## Welcome

### Net Expat UK

**Amanda Townshend**

Development Manager, Net Expat UK



Having recently returned from the USA, I was very pleased to join Net Expat. I will bring my marketing and development skills to the UK team, adding to the extensive international HR experience of our Programme Directors,

Beverly, Sally and Jim.

As an expatriate for much of my husband's career with BP Amoco, I understand the difficulties an accompanying partner is faced with in a new country. However, I strongly believe that every partner can make the expatriate years most rewarding. Yes, the first few months are tough, but with support and initiative, most expatriate families can make the most of their time

abroad in every sense.

Being an accompanying spouse per se has given me opportunities I would not have otherwise had. Challenging new projects, from international executive search, marketing consultancy and, most recently, promoting the first British Curriculum School in the

USA, have helped to balance career and family life.

Recognising the benefits for long term employee performance, I have no doubt that international companies will continue to evaluate Net Expat's range of programmes as valuable tools for successful global mobility. ■



NET EXPAT specialises in helping spouses/partners of expatriates to find worthwhile and fulfilling work in their new host country. Would you like more information?

NET EXPAT

See also our [Web site at](http://www.netexpat.com)

<http://www.netexpat.com>

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