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## **“FAMILY MATTERS!”**

**Report on the Key Findings of the  
ExpatExpert.com/ AMJ Campbell  
International Relocation Survey**

**September 2008**

## Researcher's Note

This report on the key findings of the “Family Matters!” survey is being distributed free of charge as a service to the expatriate community globally, to consultants, coaches, managers, writers, researchers and anyone else working to improve the life of the mobile, global family.

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# Introduction

## The Importance of Understanding the Human Dimension of Relocation

The ExpatExpert.com/AMJ Campbell International Relocation Survey: “Family Matters!” was designed to provide a snapshot of how internationally mobile families view the support they receive during their relocations. It was also intended to give voice to a constituency normally not heard from in the realm of international assignment management, that is, the accompanying family. The information selected for the following pages is meant to highlight the major recurring themes.

Numerous surveys on global mobility appear each year to report on the state of expatriate assignment management and include key family challenges especially as they impact on the bottom line of business. They report on what organizations are presently doing to support accompanying families; where improvements can and are being made; and finally, they identify areas in which families need assistance in order to make a smooth transition as a successful moveable family during employment abroad.

The majority of industry surveys, however, reflect data collected *only* from global mobility specialists or international human resource managers of the reporting companies and organizations. In some cases, surveys report only statistics and exclude the stories which relate the experiences, both good and bad, of the family. For that reason, “Family Matters!” did not focus on the views of managers nor elicit only numbers. This report on the key findings is therefore narrative-driven, combining statistics with the first hand experiences of families actually living and experiencing the international assignment on a day to day basis.

While many families move for adventure or cross-cultural experiences, the majority of the families who responded to “Family Matters!” relocated for career advancement for him/herself or for their partners or parents. The comments, recommendations and anecdotes in this report reflect that. The results (especially the anecdotal) should serve as a blueprint for HR serving multinational companies or international organizations as a narrative ‘Best Practices’ from the perspective of family members.

The key findings of “Family Matters!” presented here, as well as the anecdotal data, illustrate that the needs of the mobile family are considerable. The survey also revealed that there is subtext. That is, family needs are nuanced. As a reason for an assignment failure, for example, it’s not enough to simply blame ‘family failure to adjust’. That one comment has multiple meanings.

The extensive anecdotal data collected and highlighted in this report (hundreds of additional comments could not be included) were obtained through answers provided to the many open-ended questions built into the survey.

Surveys of this type typically attract people who want a forum to vent their frustrations. So it should be noted in this brief introduction that many of the respondents say they are extremely happy with the support they were given (and many of their stories are included). If no support was forthcoming they found their own way with the help of other expats or their own inner resilience. Still others believe that looking after the family is the job of the family itself and none of the company or organization's business.

As that self-sufficient group represented the minority of respondents, the primary focus of this report, therefore, is on those families who are struggling. As the late Dr. David Pollock, co-author of "Third Culture Kids", and the foremost authority on mobile family matters once observed: "The positives will take care of themselves. It's the negatives that need to be addressed."

In serving family needs, it's not only a company's bottom line which is at stake in areas such as attracting and retaining good employees who are productive and loyal and will not walk out the door to the competition upon repatriation. The family system—the relationships between partners and their relationships with their children—is also put at risk when a deployment is handled badly or with indifference.

Finally, this exercise was initiated by a journalist who has lectured, communicated, and advocated for thousands of expats around the world for over twenty years through international lecture series; through books and articles; and through a long-running website devoted entirely to the expat family. The stories and statistics confirm much of what the researcher hears first hand in the field and through correspondence via the Internet.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted between February 15, 2008 and June 1, 2008 using [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) for data collection. Information regarding the survey was posted on [www.expertexpert.com](http://www.expertexpert.com). With the kind and generous assistance of numerous individuals and expatriate family organizations globally and word-of-mouth marketing, expats became aware of this family-only survey.

Two academic consultants in the field of expatriation and cross-cultural management, Dr. Mila Lazarova of Simon Fraser University [www.sfu.ca](http://www.sfu.ca) in Vancouver and Dr. Anne Copeland of The Interchange Institute in Boston [www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org) were engaged as advisors in shaping the questions and to ensure the integrity of the analysis.

A wide spectrum of open-ended questions was asked concerning the entire family. This explains the extensive reporting in this survey by narrative rather than statistics, although those are contained here too.

Data may not add up because of missing responses.

## Participant Details

Any and/or all immediate family members 14 or over were asked to participate.

For the purposes of this survey, 'family' was described using a definition from The Vanier Institute of the Family, of Ottawa, Canada.

*Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:*

- *physical maintenance and care of group members*
- *addition of new members through procreation or adoption*
- *socialization of children*
- *social control of members*
- *production, consumption, distribution of goods and services, and,*
- *affective nurturance – love*

656 participants in total

72.5% female

27.7% male

94.7% were in a married or committed relationship

1.6% single parents

.6% divorced

.3% widowed

3% children

63.1% relocated because of a partner's career

31.5% relocated because of their own career

5.6% relocated because of both careers

Age of respondents:

The majority of respondent was in the age range of 36-45 or 38.7%

1.8% between 14 and 18

2.1% between 19 and 25

29.1% between 26 and 35

22.9% between 46 and 55

5.5% over 55

34.8% had no children with them

17.1% had one child with them

45.7% were on assignment with two or more children

2.5% reported "I am one of the children"

The ages of the children on accompanying on assignment were as follows:

- 8.9% were newborns
- 33.6% between 1 and 4
- 42.6% between 5 and 9
- 40.9% between 10 and 14
- 25.4% between 15 and 18
- 8.2% were over 18

Respondents were at various stages in the posting cycle:

- 2.5% were in the pre-departure stage
- 5.8% were in the new location less than three months
- 64.2% were presently on assignment
- 9.2% were relocating again in the next 6 months
- 7.1% were about to be repatriated
- 11.4% were repatriated

Respondents were relocated by the following types of organizations:

- 82.6% by corporations
- 13.1% by government agencies
- 2.6% by non-profit agencies
- 1.6% by academic institutions

Respondents reported from 62 countries:

Angola, Armenia, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Cayman Islands, Chile, China, Croatia, Ecuador, France, Germany, Guyana, Italy, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea, Latvia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, The Netherlands, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Panama, Peru, The Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, South Africa, Switzerland, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam, UAE, UK and USA.

Citizenship of the respondents represented 44 countries:

Armenia, Australia, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mexico, The Netherlands, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Uganda, Taiwan, Thailand, UK, USA and Zimbabwe.



## Key Findings

### 1. There is a disconnect in communication between headquarters and families about policies and training.

Companies have reported in numerous global surveys that they make cross-cultural training workshops and other pre-departure training available to almost all of their families. The respondents to “Family Matters!” reported a different story, illustrating that such support may be written down in policy, but is neither being communicated nor implemented.

The question was asked:

Which of the following were offered any training before your current relocation? Please check all the boxes which apply.

63.7% respondents said no one at all

19.6% respondents said the working partner and the accompanying spouse

12.1% respondents said the working partner(s)

6.1% respondents said the working partner, accompanying spouse and children

The question was asked:

Did the company or sponsoring organization communicate directly with family members (other than the employee) about the current move?

76.2% respondents said no

24% respondents said yes

The question was asked:

Did anyone from the company or sponsoring organization communicate directly with accompanying family members about the relocation after you arrived?

69.7% respondents said no

30.5% respondents said yes

Anecdotally:

*“I think there should be a closer relation with the expat’s home HR. Policies regarding benefits should be tighter to avoid any issues before/during/after the expatriation program. There should be better communication of the expectations of the home office to the expat and to the office he is relocating to, in order to enable the best possible experience.”*

*“Explanation of company policy is required.”*

*“Direct contact with the company in-house relocation division...”*

*“I don’t trust HR and would not want to rely on them (6 moves so far all in different countries, 5 continents). I found out all the information on expat websites now.”*

*“The company claims to provide assistance with area orientation, setting up services (opening bank accounts, gym memberships) locating shopping facilities, language classes and driving orientation. None of this actually happened.”*

## **2. Marital breakdown was given the highest rating for factors impacting negatively on international assignments.**

The question was asked:

How would you rate the following statements cited often as top reasons why a relocation fails?

The following are themes and percentage of respondents who said ‘very important’:

69.6% respondents said marital breakdown

66.7% respondents said child’s education

66.3% respondents said spousal resistance in the first instance to move

56.4% respondents said spousal career concerns

49.3% respondents said adjustment in general

The question was asked:

Do you believe lack of relocation support contributes to tension in the marital relationship?

87.2% respondents said yes

12.8% said no

The question was asked:

Do you believe relocation-related tensions in the marital relationship filter down to the family?

92.5% responded yes

7.5% said no

Anecdotally:

*“Kids can sense the tension no matter how hard you try to protect them from it.”*

*“Children feel tension. They have very good radar for this. I say this because I am a TCK. I had this experience as a child and I am now giving my own children the same experience. I could always tell when things weren’t going smoothly.”*

*“If Mom and Dad are frustrated, everyone is. Simple as that.”*

*“We have chosen to live a life where we move more or less every three years and we expect there to be difficulties but we are 100% sure that this is how we live our life. We accept the tensions and they make us closer - the only thing which creates tension for us is the working partner being forced to travel on business right at the beginning of the relocation which has happened once. That is something which should never happen.”*

*“Dad gets caught up in work, mum gets caught up in unpacking, brother plays his games, I read my books. No one really goes out of their way to talk to each other.”*

*“[We have] less patience with the kids. We all get frustrated and much more arguing goes on. Kids want time with their friends, but we are so busy dealing with the move, it’s hard to make everyone happy. Start to feel like your life is a constant “move” either coming or going or figuring out where you are going next.”*

*“Communication in a family is crucial. If you are unable to express your ups and downs there is no need for the family unit and members of the family to look elsewhere for happiness. If everyone is there for each-other every step of the way, the family has a greater chance of being close and remaining happy.”*

*“Unfortunately, my husband is the only one for me to talk to about problems and then he has to handle them whether with HR or the relocation company. He comes home late at night and the list is waiting for him and I have no other options but to go to him.”*

*“Everyone tries to put on a brave face and show the world how well they are coping, when secretly, the ‘wheels may be falling off’, behind closed doors.”*

*“My husband and I were newlyweds and we welcomed the opportunity and adventure to live abroad. Unfortunately, living in [ \_\_\_\_ ] was not as glamorous as we anticipated as my husband began working horrendous hours, I had difficulty finding a job and I received no career support. It created a very stressful environment for our new marriage without any counseling or support from the company.”*

*“I think lack of support for the family can create tensions between the working partner who has to deal with a new workplace and the partner (usually the mother) who has to deal with all the issues involving the home and children. The mother is hesitant to burden her husband with the problems she is facing when she knows he has his hands full at work, yet it can be very difficult for her trying to get everyone settled and happy by herself. Any tensions between partners will filter down to the family. It is unrealistic to think that they won’t, no matter how much they try to deal with it.”*

*“Many marriages and families have problems before they relocate. Relocation exacerbates those issues, especially if they aren’t confronted immediately, while relocation also isolates the family from known outside support networks.”*

*“The children and I are closer but the demands of my husband’s job have made him absent. It has been stressful on our relationship and I am sad that he is losing out on raising his children. He feels that life here is more expensive and the extra hours help pay for this. Also, he needs to prove himself at this new position so has taken on more than his share. He has always been a workaholic but here it is more difficult because I have been removed from my job, and my community of friends and support. It feels lonely at times.”*

*“Our family (my husband and I) have not grown apart. Neither have our relationships with our extended families (parents, aunts, uncles, etc.). However, given where we are in life (no children), it has been extremely difficult to be away from our friends.”*

*“My father now works in China (before, we lived with him wherever he worked), whilst I live in England with my Mum and sisters. So we see him for about a week every two or three months. My sisters and I are all at separate boarding schools (we used to all go the same day school), so during term time we see each other for one or two days a week.”*

*“Initially, after every move we have had, we are not as close due to the stresses of the move. We typically argue more. My husband is busy re-establishing himself at work, and I am dealing with the details of the move, unpacking, getting utilities set up, etc. while simultaneously trying to re-establish myself once again. This has meant at varying times, seeking employment, friends, a support network, etc. Since we are now settled here, we have reached that equilibrium again.”*

*“Men end up having affairs and women end up being lonely.”*

### **3. Look-see visits should be increased to reduce education and housing stresses which impact on family**

The question was asked:

Were you offered a ‘look-see’ visit of your new location?

50.5% responded yes

44.9 responded no

4.7% responded to ‘what is a ‘look-see’ visit?’

Anecdotally:

*“Look-see visit funding meant we were able to choose home and school in advance of arrival.”*

*“We came for a look-see at our own cost - which was very useful because it allowed us to visit schools that required a personal interview for acceptance. It would have been nice if the company had acknowledged that it's very difficult to choose and get your children into the right schools for them without visiting first.”*

*“I didn't like the people we had [for school assistance] but once we made our wishes clear, we had good assistance and ended up with our children in very good schools. Housing assistance was OK. The rest was non-existent, but we've moved and lived overseas several times, so I didn't miss it much. (They got lucky.)”*

#### **4. Financial stresses are impacting negatively on families.**

Anecdotally:

*“Even though we have been separated by boarding schools, we have remained close through phone, e-mail, frequent visits, and trips together. This has not been easy and is often a considerable expense to us.”*

*“Our family grew apart at first....and are now back to good. The reason we grew apart is definitely over finances. I felt isolated and missed my friends and resentful that we felt "broke" and it appeared to be on me to get a job - when there were so many things we needed to do that required me to be home (nothing is open late or on weekends in Europe for the most part). In addition, we had tension building between us with the lack of information from the company on our living and financial arrangements before we moved...And, we had a really healthy and strong marriage for a long time before the relocation.”*

*“We fought quite a bit about our finances and how some of the relocation support allowances were not enough to make up for my pay decrease due to relocation. We also fight about children's education quite a bit as they are not currently in top schools which also lack after school activities.”*

*“There has been a lot of strain on us with the process of moving back, when we can go, what the company is paying for etc. My husband will have to stay longer because his work is not finished but we need to get the kids back to start school in the fall so we will be separated for quite a while. This all*

*causes arguments because every conversation revolves around the stress of the move.”*

*“Work has become the focus of my husband's life. This is to be expected but since I don't have a job to consume my life. There is a division... It is no longer OUR money (even though it is) - we both know it's his. And that is very difficult to accustom one's self to.”*

*“Financial stress can be another source of problems. A dramatic change in the cost of living between locations puts stress on the family. For example, here in \_\_\_\_, I know US families who save less now - despite rent and schools being paid for - because of the huge cost of living here as well as the loss of a second income.”*

## **5. Accompanying spouse's happiness is key to family closeness after relocation.**

The question was asked:

How would you describe your family before the relocation?

77.0% said very close

21.3% said somewhat close

1.1% said not very close

.06% said not close at all

The question was asked:

How would you describe your family after the relocation?

75.9% said very close

19.2% said somewhat close

4.2% said not very close

.08% said not close at all

The question was asked:

If you felt your family was closer after a relocation, can you rate the contributing factors that relate to organizational support?

72.1% rated 'the accompanying partner was happy' as very important

64.6% and 64.0% rated housing was sufficient and the new schools were of high quality

58.8% said there were no tensions regarding finances

58.4% said they all had arrived together

54.9% said our moving company delivered everything in a timely manner

37.1% said we were given good information about our new home

33.7% said we were privy to all relocation policies

31.8% said we were given a lot of advance notice of the move

Anecdotaly:

*“If the trailing spouse isn’t happy, no one is happy. Kids know instantly. If kids don’t settle, trailing spouse unhappy, then the whole thing is a nightmare.”*

*“While I wanted to move, my wife did not. Settling in and integrating has been a challenge for her, and she hasn’t really embraced living in the new location because she wasn’t very happy to be moving there in the first place.”*

*“I think it has been harder for my husband to be close to us. He is working more hours and at same time he is the one that has to handle the majority of household issues. I end up complaining to him and then he tries to track down the appropriate people to fix things. There has been a tremendous amount of stress put on him because he is the go-to person for everything. There is no one for me to communicate with regarding issues in the home.”*

## **6. Families want, first and foremost, assurances of a contact at the new destination to help family settle in and who the spouse can direct questions.**

The question was asked:

Could you rate what should be included in a company or sponsoring organization’s relocation policy in order to meet the needs of the family?

66.4% said assurances of a contact at new destination for help settling in was very important

64.6% said assistance for moving procedures if employee sent ahead

64.2% said funding for look-see visits

64.0% said school search funding

56.9% said language training

56.0% said spouse involved in preliminary discussions of any relocation

46.4% said strict procedures for financial reimbursements

43.8% said health assessments for entire family

42.3% said translation services

40.1% said family/spousal associations

39.9% said cross-cultural training provided for entire family

37.7% said career counseling for accompanying spouse

Anecdotaly:

*“Had there been a local or ‘on the ground’ consultant to help out when we first arrived, perhaps some of the benefits of the new location could have been shown immediately rather than us having to fumble around in the dark to discover them on our own.”*

*“We have a different person for every query and only telephone support and they change roles almost weekly so you have to start again each time you chase anything up. It would also be helpful if the spouse was recognized as dealing with most of the every day tasks and spoken/emailed directly. All my telephone calls result in is my husband getting an email which is unhelpful when he is traveling on the other side of the globe.”*

The question was asked:

What kind of assistance do you get at your new location? Check all the boxes which apply:

77.9% checked real estate assistance

64.2% checked work permit

49.7% checked set up of bank accounts

34.6% checked medical support (names of doctors, dentists etc)

29.8% checked school search assistance

23.9% checked shopping familiarization

18.2% checked handyman services

10.5% checked technical assistance for home computers

9.1% checked career counseling

3.0% checked baby-sitting services

## **7. Acknowledgment of the contribution of the accompanying family is an important component to a successful relocation.**

The question was asked:

Have you personally ever received acknowledgement and/or gratitude from the company which relocated your family for your contribution to the relocation?

Please check all the boxes which apply:

12.7% responded yes, before we relocated

17.1% responded yes, after we relocated

1.5% responded yes, after we returned home

61.2% responded no, before we relocated

66.9% responded no, after we relocated

32.4% responded no, after we repatriated.

Anecdotally:

From those who did receive some acknowledgement:

*“I thought it was a great ‘personal touch’ that made us feel much more welcome in this foreign country.”*

*“I feel the accompanying spouse should receive acknowledgement. This would really help in the transition to the new location.”*



*“Positive to know that there is recognition for the effort. The ability to connect and maintain ongoing contact with executive leadership while on assignment is important for ensuring a feeling of being ‘linked’ while away.”*

*“It’s always nice to be appreciated. However, it was more important to me that my husband appreciated all that I was handling so that he could concentrate on the career side of things.”*

*“It did validate that I was making an important contribution by the sacrifice I had made in my career to support my husband on this difficult assignment.”*

*“Completely impacted. My husband goes to work just like he did before, but my children & my life are totally changed. We are on the other side of the world, don’t know the language, can’t drive. It’s very hard.”*

*“In my circumstance, the relocation was my choice and was a fantastic opportunity for me. Therefore, gratitude was not sought but acknowledgement was given in the sense I was introduced to the new team etc which made the process of settling in easier.”*

*“It’s important to be considered a team member in this process. Acknowledgment is also critical from the working partner for the HUGE effort required to move home and family every 3 years or so.”*

*“Very important to feel like it was a worthwhile decision. It would have been nice to receive one after repatriating, too.”*

*“You have got to be kidding on that question! My husband’s paycheck was sufficient!”*

From those who did not receive any acknowledgement:

*“Although after 15 months I can see the benefits of being here, it would have been a nice thing if my company had simply re-assured my wife (within the first month or two).”*

*“Although this relocation could have been a great thing for the firm, the US firm has behaved at every step as though they are doing us the HUGEST favour in the history of man... My feelings toward the US firm are so negative due to their treatment of us, that I would insist on going back.”*

*“As I said to my husband after our third move: I think the company would prefer to send me in the container as well, much easier.”*

*“We didn't receive any formal acknowledgement. People who I told about the move were supportive, and indicated that it would be good from a career standpoint. Given that our company would like to encourage these types of assignments, you would think that they would acknowledge all of the families that have accepted such assignments. God knows, we get enough communications telling us every minute detail that happens within the firm.”*

*“Lack of recognition does not support or contribute to the level of motivation in the whole process.”*

*“I don't need them to acknowledge me or provide me with gratitude. I just need them to display in their actions that we aren't on vacation and that moving is a personal sacrifice.”*

*“The company gave us money and washed their hands of the entire situation so it was a very difficult transition.”*

*“Being appreciated is always welcomed. I don't expect anyone to thank me. However, I don't think people realize how difficult it can be and some validation would be helpful.”*

*“I think a lack of any formal acknowledgement of the spouse's personal sacrifices and huge contribution to make it all happen is largely overlooked. I have worked in HR in the oil industry and sat on the other side of the desk so I speak from personal experience. Staff within the company may feel sympathy for the spouses but in my experience this is an area that the oil industry finds difficult to deal with. They might at best throw money at the spouses by offering to reimburse payment for courses and such like, but a simple 'thank you', a direct acknowledgement would make a difference as well.”*

*“I didn't even consider this aspect until now. We chose to take the relocation opportunity offered, because we thought it would be a great experience for all of us. I don't necessarily expect gratitude from the company.”*

## What Do Families Recommend? A Narrative “Best Practices”

The following represents only a small sample of the informative responses received:

**In your opinion, what relocation support did you receive that helped your family the most either before or after your current move?**

*“The nicest support when we first arrive at a new post is to have a neighbour stop by, or to have a spouse with similarly-aged children contact me. We have had 4 overseas posts, and at 1 of those, we got that kind of friendly attention. A plate of cookies, an offer to take us to the supermarket. It made all the difference, and we remember it as our favorite post.”*

*“Early notification of location gave us time to get used to the idea and learn/research on our own.”*

*“Knowing where the decent suburbs were. What bank to use; how to get a social [security number]. We also got help on how to lease a car which we were able to order from our home country. We were given extra money for living expenses and they gave us extra as the only house we could find to rent was more than their original budget. Having the extra cash was great as we have no credit history here.”*

*“Our membership to FOCUS [local expat community organization] was wonderful and offered the support we needed that we did not receive from my husband’s company.”*

*“A fantastic moving company who gave us details of all important dates, help on all aspects of the move, electrical info and so on.”*

*“What I most appreciated was that we were able to sort out accommodation prior to arriving thus minimizing time spent in hotels unlike others I know who spent literally months in hotels.”*

*“Reference material, although weighty, did make suggestions about what to send in air freight, and what to send in sea freight.”*

*“Visas and work permit done for us as well as help getting local driving licenses. We had help finding accommodation; help with driver taking us to places to orientate ourselves; help moving in with getting people set the*

*utilities (gas, water, electricity, internet, telephone); help with a translator at first; being told how to buy a car where, how much; meeting families who can share their experiences of school and living.”*

*“The intensive language course for my partner was invaluable.”*

*“Organized events helped us to meet new people.”*

*“Exchanging emails and phone calls with our predecessor and learning about the house (we were assigned to live in the same house), what to bring, what to expect, etc. Also, it helped having a sponsor. Someone to take me around and show me the shops and businesses that I would need while posted there.”*

*“There was a handbook that was helpful. It was the only consolidated source of information.”*

*“New line manager’s support and flexibility as I encountered problems.”*

*“They said we could buy whatever furniture we needed and not to worry about price, etc. that actually took a lot of pressure off of us to get our house settled in and start living.”*

*“After my husband accepted employment, we were given a house hunting trip. Since I was nursing, and needed access to a refrigerator, etc., they allowed us to upgrade our hotel to one that had a kitchenette and two bedrooms so my mother could stay with us and care for the baby while we looked for a house.”*

*“I also hired a coach to help me set up my business here and build a network. This is indirectly funded by the company as I receive a EUR 2.400 allowance annually to take courses.”*

*“Transition information for our kids life as a TCK (third culture kid).”*

*“The temporary living accommodation was very nice and helped to bridge what could have been a difficult transition before moving into permanent housing.”*

*“Pick-up service from the airport with delivery to a serviced apartment with some food and drink provided on arrival.”*

*“Flying me and my son home business class to have my baby.”*

*“The real estate agent fee expense reimbursement.”*

*“Being able to travel home frequently (my husband did not relocate).”*

*“Direct person to talk to (who managed process for me).”*

*“Introduction to other company families that had been transferred abroad (or were here from abroad) before our first move. I still have my notes from those conversations seventeen years ago. I make a point of consulting those notes periodically even still, especially before we get together with a couple considering the possibility of an international assignment.”*

*“Spontaneous help when I had to fly home and a family member was sick (financial and booking of flight).”*

*“Face to face meeting with our HR expat counselor once we arrived.”*

*“We received a very generous moving allowance. We also received several books about culture shock, and some brochures about moving to the UK -- all very helpful (although I think the more helpful items were provided by the moving company rather than by my spouse’s firm). The firm’s assistance with the work permit and visas was also extremely valuable.”*

*“Information about the living conditions in the new location; advice for career development for the accompanying spouse; details about the local school(s) and the number of people attending them from the expat community; information about the availability of internet connectivity and speed.”*

*“Assistance with moving pets; this was very helpful.”*

*“Assurances of medical reimbursement in a foreign country.”*

*“Company signing lease on our behalf, so we didn’t have to wait for residence permits to move into permanent accommodation.”*

*“Paid for inoculations and kenneling for the pets so that they could leave us before the packing-up started and we could pick them up once we’d already settled in.”*

## More of the Respondents' Own Words

### Why do relocations fail?

*"I can't say from personal experience because ours has been a success!"*

*"Insufficient flex time for working partner at new location to fully support the family's transition. "*

*"The candidate is not suited to the job. Poor cultural fit with the host country and hence is not able to deliver the business results. The stress at work can be played out at home affecting marital and family relationships and often compounded by spouse career concerns. Other causes - location specific challenges. Wrong timing of the move versus life cycle of family, that is, leaving elderly sick parents. Marital infidelity.*

*"The work that the relocated spouse ends up doing isn't what was agreed, and ends up frustrated as a result."*

*"Some families are moving with very high expectations, some of which are out of reality."*

*"Children's adjustment to a new country. The happiness of your kids is highly connected to the success of a relocation. If they don't adjust well and are happy in their new home, then I see little chance that a relocation can be successful. This year alone, we have seen three families leave within their first year because the children were not happy here."*

*"The actual job responsibility is different than the job responsibility before relocation. Most of the time, the actual job responsibility tends to be much more demanding than it was when you interviewed."*

*"Extended family (other children) in the home country, who are not moving with the expat family. They can be a big concern for the partner (mother mostly), and this gives a lot of stress on the marriage."*

*"As a female and my career driving our relocation, one reason I see for relocations failing or women leaving upon repatriation is due to having children. Upon assignment, I do not feel that I really have the flexibility to start my family (being the one who signed up for the assignment). This is a challenge that companies will have to address given more career focused women in the workplace."*

*“Sometimes, they are just too hard. In my case, as a single parent, it has been much harder than I ever imagined and there is no appreciation for this. I worry every day about the safety of my daughter. Policies assume one is either single with no kids or that there is a spouse that will be able to take care of things.”*

*“Inherent lack of ‘adventurous spirit’ among those participating in the move. If the people moving see the glass half empty not half full it will be more difficult to see the changes to come as anything but irritating.”*

*“Ever changing project management, and wearing an employee out with unreasonable work expectations due to the cost of having the employee relocate. Just because it may be expensive to have the employee on a project doesn't mean the employee owes the company 80 hours a week.”*

*“The location being very different from what was expected (either unreal expectations or expectation not clearly defined beforehand). A person being willing to take a hardship assignment then learning that it is significantly worse than anyone had explained it would be.”*

*“Tendency for people to forget they have the ability to assess a situation and make a decision for themselves without some half-baked expert telling them what to do. Humans are all endowed with a certain degree of common sense, it flourishes when exercised.”*

*“Elderly family members back home (for some families.) A lack of suitable accommodation and facilities. Security issues in high-crime areas or political unrest. Job expectation was not what was expected. Travel time back and forth to office is considerable and therefore eating into family time.”*

*“Lack of family support back ‘home’ can be huge. If parents or grandparents are not supportive of their adult children’s decision, this can weigh heavily when struggling through transition. If calling home is a broken record of discouragement, then you might just want to get on a plane and go back to make the record stop.”*

*“Sometimes they may fail due to problems with other expatriates on the field. You are often put with people you didn’t know before and are expected to work with them and have a social life with them. At times this causes tensions between different personalities and may cause problems in the work environment or the families of those workers.”*

*“Mid life crisis (affairs, ‘Big Fish in the Little Pond Syndrome’). Unrealistic pressure from HQ on employees’ performance (not taking into consideration cultural differences in the office, paperwork and hierarchical systems to get things done/signed off etc)....employee feels frustrated and unsupported. ALCOHOL.”*

## Partner availability for arrival of shipment and its impact on success of mobile family.

The first question asked was:

Was the working partner at your new home when the movers arrived with your shipment?

62.3% responded yes

37.7% responded no

A follow up question asked was:

If you answered no to the previous question what reasons were given. Check each box that applies:

8.7% said company would not let him/her off to meet movers

66.5% said employee felt he/she couldn't take the time off

30.1% said employee was out of town on the same day shipment arrived

Those who answered yes to partner being available for arrival of shipment described the impact as follows:

*“Good influence, very positive, and made us fell ‘this is our new home’.”*

*“Huge impact. This made it seem like the move was a legitimate part of the job, rather than some extra duty for the partner to be stuck with. It gave the impression that family and the family's adjustment are important.”*

*“It is very important that the working partner be present during pack out and when the shipment arrives at the new home. Both of these events are stressful and should be shared. Sometimes, double ‘authority’ is necessary, depending on the culture of the location.”*

*“Absolutely!! Living in third world countries where the women are still considered by the ‘locals’ as part of the shipment, having a (big) husband around was of extremely important when unpacking!”*

*“Yes, very stressful that he was not here....I was totally overwhelmed and it really knocked me off my feet for a few days. It wasn't so much that company would not let him off, he felt he didn't need to be here. Big mistake which he now agrees with!”*

*“This had a positive impact because both my wife and I needed time to make sure all of our stuff was delivered and needed time to unpack and set up our home so that we both felt at home. Unpacking is stressful as well so the fact that I had paid time off to do this was great.”*

*“The fact that my organization gave me time off to be there meant we were able to experience it together and face the issues together.”*



## **In your opinion, what does a successful moveable family look like?**

*“A successful moveable family should be close and well adjusted before any move is considered. We have found that any family problems are only magnified by a move especially overseas.”*

*“A successful moveable family is one whose members are psychologically healthy and have a close, loving relationship with each other and with extended family.”*

*“Like us! Sense of humour, independent, close marriage, tight family, willing to put up with things and muck in when necessary, happy.”*

*“Flexible, dynamic, respectful of differences. People who find their bearings quickly and feel integrated in their own respective activities, (work, school, social). Enjoy and participate in what the country has to offer (friendliness, culture, food, leisure, vacations...)”*

*“Adaptable, enjoy moving to new countries as underlying general aim, find different experiences fun, have a sense of humour to fall back on. When there are difficulties know that it is not the end of the world and patience and effort will eventually prevail. Able to deal with tiredness and stress as symptoms which will pass.”*

*“Independent from the outside, very strong in the inside, the family members are the pillars, these never move and are strong (trust each other, love each other, care for one another, communicate about all the questions that puzzle the move, make sure all are getting what they want from it and if not, help find ways to get them settled, all should find his/her place, this enable all the rest to move without affecting the family.”*

*“Just to take a stab at it, I think a family needs the working partner to be willing to do the administrative details (like being home for the pack-outs and the deliveries) and to be attentive to letting the family know as soon as he/she knows where they are going next, when, etc. The spouse needs a good sponsor when he/she arrives at a new post, in order to have someone to ask questions of and in order to start feeling connected to the new location. The kids need to find a buddy or two, and need to like their house. As a family, we only have each other, so we need to make our house our haven.”*

*“Both partners employed in jobs they enjoy, fully informed by both employers, offered assistance with children’s and pet issues. Employer makes effort to ease the transition and to ensure employee is happy; maybe pay for a trip or two back home.”*

*“A family who relies first and foremost on each other for emotional support and companionship; children who have spent most of their early years with mom at home, not in daycare; a husband who doesn’t travel constantly; and being open with each other about where we’re going next.”*

*“I think the base of a successful moveable family is a great team of two partners, who not only look at a move as ‘what do I win/lose’, but ‘what does it bring to our team?’ In a team, there are no winners or losers, because you’re a team. Once kids are involved, the most important thing is to make them feel comfortable with the upcoming move and changes. If you believe in yourself as parents and you believe this move is going to contribute to your overall life-experience, the children will look at it that way. But if you’re scared, if you don’t like the new destination, if you feel resentment towards your partner because once again he/she is moving up and you just have to follow, that’s where things start going off road.”*

*“Willing to ask for help. Willing to be more forgiving of each other and of themselves. Supportive and understanding of each other. Able to maintain ‘ordinary’ things done previously as a family.”*

*“Being realistic about where they are moving to and knowing that adjusting to a new country is a process for everyone. Being open-minded about the country they are moving to and an ability to re-create themselves in a new environment. A sense of adventure and a sense of humor. Open communication and dialog about concerns of each family member.”*

*“Most importantly a family that operates as a team and believes that together they will be successful. Even if it is your first international assignment - you must believe you will be successful as a family.”*

*“Well informed about the relocation, giving time to adjust (one to two weeks to sort all aspects of relocating) being guided during the first month or so of the obligation, financial planning and other aspects of the new relocation.”*

*“The employee works hard but is not a workaholic, enjoying time with the family, whether to socialize or explore the new environment. The spouse is good at making friends, having them over for dinner, tea, playgroups, and comfortable with the necessary period of time being ‘stupid’ -- ineffective at all the key tasks of running a household, incapable of speaking the local language well, and essentially spendthrift as things are purchased as they are recognized, not when on sale at the best shop for that kind of thing.”*

*“They look like anyone else. The difference is in their perspective on the world. What a successful moveable family SOUNDS like might be more apt. They sound like people who have a broader outlook on their home country and the rest of the world. They sound like they have a more open, thoughtful view*

*of people in other countries and what their opinions and concerns are. ...They sound like people who have learned to accept things the way they actually are, even when they are different from what they've experienced at 'home' or the way they would like things to be, and to help themselves get the most from it. They do all this even when being part of a 'moveable family' was not something they may have chosen for themselves."*

*"I feel we are a successful moveable family. My children and I have had to move countries and stay with family for a few months after hurricanes, including new schools, and they have adjusted very well. Although my husband works long hours and is frequently away, I understand that we can't 'have it all' - I can't expect to live in another county with my husband earning an excellent salary, and be able to afford for me to stay at home with the children, and be able to afford frequent travel for shopping, a cleaner, a gardener etc and have my husband not work long hours. I support him in his career, I support what he chooses to do, and the luxuries it enables us to afford, such as me being able to be at home with the children.. My children know how lucky we are, and know why their Daddy works so hard. We accept this, it works for us, and we are happy."*

*"A successful moveable family is one in which each family member feels welcome, safe and valued not only as a member of his/her family but also in the new community in which they live. A successful moveable family has a positive outlook about their new environment and a willingness to be open to new situations and opportunities as they arise."*

# Conclusion

## Families Need a Clearer Picture

Statistics do not tell the entire story about families and international relocation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the wealth of anecdotal information gathered in the “Family Matters!” survey. Tempting as it may be to do so, unmet family needs as well as other challenges contributing to an unsuccessful international assignment cannot simply be lumped together in one blanket phrase like “family failed to adjust”. The honesty of the respondents who took the time to provide thoughtful and honest answers, illustrate clearly just how nuanced these challenges can be.

That subtext, first referenced in the introduction to this report, can be demonstrated through an analysis of the responses to just one of the open-ended question asked: “If you were advising another family about to relocate, what would you tell them are most important pieces of support to ask for?” In their replies, participants demonstrated that each challenge has multiple elements.

In the area of housing, for example, some respondents said expats should ask for extra housing allowances, especially in environments of quickly rising prices such as in Asia. Others needed help selecting the best and safest locations, including the best location related to local schools. A third sizable group talked about the need for temporary housing to be provided for extended periods of time, so that they are not pressured to get into the first offer they run into.

The subject of schools went beyond the quality of the school itself and extended to related issues like child-care and day care as both necessary and largely ignored by companies.

In financial matters, beyond reimbursements and salaries mentioned earlier, a number of people suggested that expatriates should get everything they are promised in writing before departure, as they feel the company often tries to deny them things they thought were a part of the package.

Contacts with both other expats and locals were sought, with some respondents referring to expatriate associations or social clubs, and others to spousal support associations. Interestingly, some talked about the need to have contacts who are not company managers so that they can ask questions about the relocations freely without questions being politicized to a point that he/she was no longer willing to ask any questions to avoid any potential complications.

The question also yielded notice of other concerns, the biggest among them being transportation challenges, especially early in the assignment. Many people recommended asking for a car and/or a driver at the beginning. Some needed help with driver licensing in the host country.

Another recurring theme was the need for some time off work for the repatriated employee shortly after arrival to set their affairs in order rather than plunge them directly into work.

Above all else, what resonated throughout the responses was a desperate need for *clarity* of the conditions of assignments financial and otherwise. That can't be accomplished without an organization having a complete picture of the moving experience for the family which must then be followed up with an effective system for communicating the complete terms and conditions of the move abroad.

In order to truly understand the human dimension of relocation, this survey concludes that people's *experiences* must share equal importance with statistics. Numbers aren't moving; families are: mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, employees, children, even pets. To only report numbers, without giving an equal voice to experiences, is to tell only half of the story regarding the needs of the family and as a result, provide insufficient support.

Finally, the accompanying family's contribution to the success of the assignment needs to be acknowledged, appreciated, and respected for its strategic role in nurturing the employee. Family does indeed matter. The stronger the accompanying family feels, the less distracted and happier the employee will be both physically and emotionally, capable of carrying out his or her overseas assignment in a way that is profitable for the company or organization, and enriching for the family.

## About ExpatExpert.com and AMJ Campbell International

ExpatExpert.com has been providing expatriate families worldwide with articles, chat groups, individualized responses to questions of both a practical and emotional nature, and numerous links to sites of importance to families since 1998. It is the website of well-known Canadian author Robin Pascoe, who has written five widely-used books on global living as a family who also lectures internationally.

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

AMJ Campbell International, a Canadian company, is widely recognized as one of the world's leading international corporate relocation specialists. Dedicated to exceptional personalized service, the company delivers consistent performance of high quality and value. It achieves this through time-tested quality processes, years of experience, and a serious investment in its people, equipment, and an extensive global partner network.

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For further information about arranging lectures, webinars or just general inquires about the findings of this survey, please contact Robin Pascoe at [robinpascoe@shaw.ca](mailto:robinpascoe@shaw.ca) or call 1 604 990 4532.