



Engaging and Retaining Expats

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Expatriate assignments aren't for everyone—they require quite a bit of adaptability, flexibility, cultural awareness, and independence. Not only are expats lives in upheaval as they settle themselves and, possibly, their families in a new country, but often they have committed to achieving certain critical goals of the organization; after all, the company is investing in their relocation for a specific business reason.

Employees with a specialized skill set, whether technical or professional are difficult to find and recruit, behooving the proactive organization to invest special effort in retaining expat workers. The Kenexa Research Institute's annual survey of a random sample of 1,000 workers in 14 different countries showed that, in 2008, 29% of expats thought often about looking for a new job. This percentage is just slightly lower than non-expats, 32% of whom often thought about leaving. In other words, just under a third of the expat workforce in these countries is ready to jump ship.

Previous research has demonstrated that engaged workers are more likely stay, and an analysis of WorkTrends™ data divulged the top 10 drivers of expat engagement:

- Confidence in the organization's future
- Safety is an organizational priority
- A promising future at the organization
- Support for employees' efforts to balance work and family/personal responsibilities
- Senior management's ability to deal with challenges
- An opportunity to improve skills
- A genuine commitment to social responsibility
- Liking the work
- Satisfaction with recognition
- Customers' satisfaction with products and services

In general, expats feel more favorably than non-expats about the drivers of engagement, but less than half of expats feel that their organization supports their efforts to balance their work and personal lives (49%) and that they have a promising future

with the organization (49%). Slightly over half of expats are satisfied with the recognition they receive (50%) and are given an opportunity to improve skills (54%). With other drivers scoring in the high 50 to mid 60 percentile, there is good news: 83% of expats like the work they are doing.

If the lowest-scoring engagement drivers are targeted for improvement, HR can look to supporting work/life balance and offering a more promising future. Talking with expats and brainstorming on ways to support work/life balance can be a source for new ideas, which might include furnishing webcams to stay connected with loved ones or providing standards for after-hours communication with expats. HR practitioners can formalize post-assignment career paths. Verbalizing how the experience of and skills learned during their assignment will contribute to career goal achievement provides motivation to persevere and a clear line of sight into work life when they return. By providing a vision for the future, expats won't look elsewhere to create a vision of their own. ■

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