

FROM ABROAD

INTERNATIONAL MENTORS: Words of Wisdom



IN TODAY'S GLOBAL MARKETPLACE, it's becoming increasingly common for women to work abroad, especially now that such experience has proven to fast-track your career. But even more than traditional domestic assignments, a strong mentor relationship remains one of the most important aspects of a successful assignment for globetrotting professionals.

Mentors are "safe ground" in that they provide counsel outside the traditional corporate hierarchy and within an environment built on trust and open, honest dialogue.

Mentors can be used as a sounding board for perplexing cultural and political issues, and they can help you interpret the experiences to navigate the new waters. They provide pointers on how to make the most of your time abroad for both professional and personal growth. They open doors and make introductions to help you expand your growing network. Mentors

advise you on how to market your new-found skills back home to keep you top-of-mind with senior management, as well as pave the way for successful repatriation.

The vast majority of women interviewed for *Get Ahead By Going Abroad* agreed their mentors played a significant role in assisting them with cultural exchanges and reentry process.

"While working in London, I called my mentor frequently to understand cultural nuances so that I could put them into perspective," says Gretchen Moxcey of Deloitte. "I also spent considerable

time understanding the importance of repatriation challenges to ensure success."

I had a similar experience with my mentor, a seasoned internationalist who had worked on three continents. He helped me integrate back into the HQs operations quickly by interpreting my experience for those who hadn't worked abroad.

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He went to bat for me with the executive management team illustrating how my global skills were both valuable and directly applicable to a position that involved a significant promotion upon my return.

Finding an effective mentor and tapping into their wisdom efficiently isn't always easy. To mentor beyond borders takes an experienced internationalist. According to Anna Catalano, a senior board executive who has lived and worked in London and Beijing and served as mentor to scores of professionals around the world, "Mentoring global employees should be hard-wired into the relocation effort, and something that should begin before a professional leaves for her overseas post."

But companies can't always make the best mentor connections. Be prepared to take charge and seek out the best one for you. Ask around. Network. Question those who are abroad – and those who have recently

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returned. Find out who the international players are and who has a reputation as a mentor within your field. Don't be limited to industry compatibility, geographic proximity or gender; if the person is right for you, go with her or him.

Once you find your mentor, how do you go about making the most of this vital relationship? Collected from women who have served in both capacities, a few ground rules are key:

1. Define your needs and set expectations.
2. Be specific about time commitment and sensitive to international time zones.
3. Keep your conversations focused and objective-based.
4. Take direction and provide feedback on your progress.

Once you've got the relationship going, keep in mind it is both an investment and a give-and-take. You are responsible to drive the relationship and ensure that your mentor understands your needs and receives feedback on your progress. A mentor derives as much benefit as you do.

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Celia Berk, managing director human resources worldwide for Burson-Marsteller agrees, "I've witnessed many successful mentoring relationships around the world. The best are always mutual and this is especially true in the global arena with multiple generations and cultures co-existing in the workplace."

Tara Whitehead, vice president of Amdocs, notes that your career will be much richer if you reach out to meet the people who stir your professional soul. After 20

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years, she mentors not only others in her company but also offers guidance and advice for students at Goizueta Business School at Emory University. She sums up the mentor relationship: "If your mentor believes in you personally and in whatever you are trying to accomplish, that relationship will be absolutely fundamental to your success."

As global assignments become more common, there exists both a greater need for mentors and an increase in developing ones. As a result, I and so many of my peers and global girlfriends mentor globe-trotting individuals. We believe in giving back after having received so much throughout our international careers. |

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