



How to Convince the Brass to Let You Work Abroad

The benefits of a global mobility program are compelling for both employees and employers — use them to make your case

BY KYLA COLBURN

Picture yourself working somewhere you've always wanted to live. Maybe it's somewhere hot and ocean-adjacent — Melbourne or Rio de Janeiro — or a bustling metropolis like Tokyo or New York, or a European capital brimming with old-world charm and sophistication. If this seems like a pie-in-the-sky fantasy with little real-world value, think again. In today's increasingly global workplace, global mobility programs are becoming more commonplace for the practical benefits they provide.

Kelly Dennis, now director of marketing for the Asmir Begovic Foundation, knows this first-hand from her past experience working at global consulting firm Ernst & Young (EY). EY offers both short- and long-term mobility programs to employees once they've been with the firm for at least two years. After working at the firm for two years, Dennis told her manager she was interested in transferring

abroad as part of her next development steps with the company.

"The first opportunity that came up was in San Jose and wasn't exactly what I was looking for," she says. "So, I decided to stay patient and wait for the perfect opportunity."

Next came a chance to transfer to EY's offices in London, England. Dennis jumped at the chance. She moved to Britain in 2010 to take on the role of graduate recruitment officer. "The firm had also just rolled out a new short-term secondment program in which they would provide full funding for the set-up and move of all internal employees moving abroad," she says.

Initially, the experience was supposed to last just a year, but Dennis stayed for seven, continuing to change roles and progress in her career with EY, a choice she says the Canadian firm was very supportive of. "I had no idea how

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valuable this experience would be and how much it would enhance both my life and career,” Dennis says.

Since EY is a global company, its provision of a global mobility program seems like a straightforward way to engage employees. But at a smaller company or one that doesn't offer a global mobility program, how can employees convince their boss to facilitate working abroad?

HIGHLIGHT THE BENEFITS FOR BOTH EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

The first logical step is to just ask for it. If Dennis hadn't approached her manager with a request to transfer overseas, it never would have happened. Employees asking for this perk should be clear that working abroad isn't just for fun; it's an opportunity to broaden their experience and skills.

An employee who has international experience is a real resource for employers, says Cissy Pau, principal consultant at Clear HR Consulting in Vancouver. She says that companies can benefit from staff “who have international work experience, who can appreciate and understand what it's like to work in another culture, and who can navigate the often-challenging task of assimilating into a foreign environment.”

When an employer has global offices, it's also a great way to share knowledge and expertise across borders. “A mobile workforce enables our firm to provide seamless global service to clients across our network and allows the employee to develop and grow in a fresh, engaging area of the business and the world,” says Kim Tabac, a partner and chief talent officer at Deloitte, another large professional services company, which has provided a formal employee mobility program for more than a decade.

Deloitte sends employees on mobility assignments for a defined period, typically 12 to 24 months, with the intention that they'll return to Deloitte Canada afterwards. In global roles, Deloitte employees can grow their career development opportunities, network with colleagues and other

professionals, learn foreign business concepts, expand their skillsets, experience a different culture, and truly understand what it means to live and work in a different part of the world, says Tabac.

Global mobility deepens the talent pool, says Pau. “It also can help with developing greater empathy, awareness and unity between employees of different cultures, nationalities and ethnicities.”

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For employers, a global mobility program can also be a powerful attraction and retention tool, Pau says. A company that wants to enhance an employee's career and life experience with an international appointment is demonstrating how much it values that employee. For Dennis, transferring to EY's London office was the beginning of the adventure of a lifetime, one that enriched her experience, skillsets and career prospects.

“We were able to travel around and see most of Europe and also experience living in a totally different country and culture. We made some amazing friends during our time in England and will forever be grateful to EY for being the reason that we had the opportunity to experience such an exciting time in our lives.





Taking the Plunge

Whether you're trying to talk yourself into taking the plunge to work abroad or sway your organization, here are some benefits of global mobility worth noting:

- 1 BUILDING** relationships with colleagues in other countries
 - 2 IMPROVING** cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication
 - 3 SHARING** new ideas and practices
 - 4 LEARNING** new languages and gaining new qualifications and skills
 - 5 INSTILLING** confidence, independence and self-reliance
 - 6 DEVELOPING** initiative and flexibility
 - 7 LEARNING** new working styles
 - 8 BUILDING** international networks
- 81%** of young people are willing to live outside their country of residence in order to find a job or advance their career

The first choice for working abroad is the **United States** (18.2%), followed by **Canada** (12.4%), **Britain** (9.6%), **Germany** (8.2%), **Australia** (5%), **Switzerland** (4.1%), **France** (3.8%), **Spain** (3.6%), **Sweden** (2.4%) and the **Netherlands** (2.3%)

Source: The World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Shapers Survey

"Living and working abroad has given me a whole new level of confidence and bravery, and I hope that our family will do something like that again one day," Dennis says.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN SETTING A PROGRAM UP FROM SCRATCH

While the specific steps required to put a global mobility program in place will differ from company to company, there are a few considerations to keep in mind.

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Parameters around the logistics of working abroad — such as performance expectations and deliverables, and how the company will cover moving, travel and accommodation — must first be determined. Additionally, assisting employees as they assimilate into a foreign work environment is critical. And, in the same way an employer would bring an employee back after parental leave, it's also important to establish a process to re-integrate employees back into their home environment when the international assignment comes to an end.

"A company may wish to evaluate how its mobility program is strongly aligned to global strategic business priorities, ensure that they have both flexible and cost-effective options to move talent internationally, create

equitable support packages based on the type of move, and consider establishing a strong team or mobility advisor to drive and support the program," says Tabac.

At KPMG, the international assignment program ranges from three months to two years, and the company believes there are many benefits to the program. However, facilitating the movement of employees does require clear and consistent policies, according to Rajini Sahanandan, KPMG's leader of global mobility.

"Employers should consider that moving people across borders comes with many compliance [issues] in areas such as immigration, benefits and taxation that must be addressed to ensure a successful program."

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES IS KEY

At EY, the human resources team actively promotes its mobility programs to current staff, says Dennis. "There are exchange programs, short-term secondments and also traditional transfers for someone looking for something more permanent.

"We have an internal portal where employees from all across the globe can log in and check current mobility opportunities in the company. I would say that most counselling managers are very supportive of these mobility conversations because it's an imbedded part of the culture and a huge key to increasing employee engagement and retention within the firm."

And, of course, staying in touch while employees are abroad is an important part of the process as well, says Tabac, adding that any new assignment, whether at home or abroad, can be daunting. "Participants receive continuous support from both their home and host member firm to ensure they feel supported and championed at every step." 

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