

FOREIGN ACCOUNT REPORTING RULES

MARKET SUMMARY: TULSA

DESTINATION PROFILE: LAGOS, NIGERIA

MOBILITY™

Magazine of Worldwide ERC®

June 2020

Build and Maintain a **TRUSTWORTHY BRAND**

WHY WOMEN AREN'T GOING

ON ASSIGNMENT

RELO EQ

THE SECRET TO PROFITABLE MOBILITY

OVERCOMING

CULTURE SHOCK



WORLDWIDE ERC®



WHERE

ARE THE

WON



Or, why are the numbers so low for female assignees?

By Morgan E. Wiedmann

MEN?



ur world is becoming more accepting of diversity and inclusiveness. But in mobility, one area is still lagging, and that's gender diversity.

When I learned that only 15% to 20% of international assignees are women, I was stunned, puzzled, and surprised, especially in 2020, when, now more than ever, women are holding leadership positions in a wide array of industries.

I wanted to dig deeper and learn why women are so underrepresented when it comes to going on assignments. Is this a matter of unconscious bias, reluctance to accept assignments when they are offered, or something else entirely? Are companies even aware of this, and are they doing anything to increase the number of women on assignment? And if so, what?

In the annual *Weichert Talent Survey*, we asked our colleagues whether they'd be interested in going on an assignment and found that approximately 20% of women responded positively. While that number is a little higher than the industry average of 14% that was reported in Mercer's 2017 edition of the *Worldwide Survey of International Assignment Policies and Practices*, it still has room for improvement. And it brought up more questions: Is it just that our colleagues love where they work? Or does it highlight a broader issue within business—that women are more hesitant to go on an assignment than men?

Next, I interviewed corporate mobility professionals around the world and found that 22% of women at their companies are going on assignment. So, I thought, OK, a little higher number here, but still, why so low?

Noting the lyrics of Beyoncé's song "Run the World (Girls)," it seems surprising that women are avoiding opportunities to advance not just their careers but their life experiences. So, I dug deeper into why women are not raising their hands to relocate, why they wouldn't want to take their career to another level with a move, what's holding them back, and what would entice them to take on an opportunity to relocate.

CULTURE, FAMILY, AND CAREER

Michelle Douglas, manager of global mobility for Walmart Canada, feels two variables—cultural shift



“Developing women’s careers is something that HR and talent management personnel need to focus more on if we want to see women put their hands up for assignments, promotions, and other things.”

– Mala Cornell, CPP Investment Board

and family dynamics—are preventing some women from going on an assignment.

Walmart Canada has several women on assignment right now, and Douglas believes that these women, who are working overseas and taking on diverse leadership roles, can serve as role models and inspire other women to do the same.

But add in family dynamics, and it becomes a larger issue around a woman's willingness to transplant her family. "Family is a huge part in the assignment [experience]," says Douglas. "As I think about some of the women whom we do have on assignment right now, they are women with small to midsize families. For these women to accept a new role was very much contingent on the comfort level of their family moving into the host country."

Mala Cornell, manager of global mobility for CPP Investment Board, says that being more vocal about career development opportunities could increase the number of female assignees. Cornell feels that women—in Canada, at least—aren't as apt to raise their hands, assuming that if their manager thought it was a good idea, he or she would approach them.

"If you're heads-down, too busy getting work done—and not really talking to other groups or finding out what is happening on a global scale, which requires a lot of discussion, not just email—you're not going to hear about these opportunities and have the chance to put your hand up for them. I think we can do better. Developing women's careers is something that HR and talent management personnel need to focus more on if we want to see women put their

Average Number of Women Assignees Reported by Companies



hands up for assignments, promotions, and other things,” says Cornell.

FROM AN ASSIGNEE'S POINT OF VIEW

Fiona Tsui, a former assignee and senior adviser, compensation, human resources, facilities, and office services, at CPP Investment Board, agrees that getting the word out about available international assignments more often—and sharing stories of those women who successfully go on assignment—can inspire, motivate, and be the key to getting more women to raise their hands for opportunities like these.

“Uncertainty is one of the things that discourage people from putting their hand up to say, ‘I do want to take this opportunity and try.’... It’s good for companies to advertise the type of programs they have to support women, and their employees in general, who go on assignment. I think it would entice people to go,” she says.

Tsui, a millennial, was excited for the opportunity to go to Hong Kong for three months, while her spouse stayed in Toronto. For her, this wasn’t just an opportunity to advance her skill set and grow in her career, but it was also a chance for her to experience work life in her country of origin.

Post-assignment, Tsui says she now looks at things with a different lens and cultural perspective, which she shares with her team back in Toronto. Her best advice to females interested in working overseas is this: “Have an open mind, and communicate your interest with your manager, so if there is something in the pipeline that the

company is planning, they are aware that you are interested in an opportunity to go abroad. Also talk to your family about it, and early, so you are prepared when the opportunity is available.”

For Barbara Lam, senior manager, global mobility, Asia-Pacific, for Avery Dennison Corp., not only does she work in corporate mobility, but she also has firsthand experience as a female assignee.

In late 2001, when Lam worked for a previous company, she had the opportunity to go on an assignment from Hong Kong to the Philippines for two years. This assignment gave Lam a different perspective on global mobility, which she is now able to apply to Avery Dennison’s program.

“Under our global mobility program, we took development, opportunity, and flexibility to ensure a good work-life balance for our employees. While it’s not specifically designed for women, it could be the reason that more women go on assignment,” explains Lam.

After her assignment, Lam relocated to the U.K. for almost four years and is now living and working in Hong Kong again. According to Lam, her experiences have shaped who she has become, personally and professionally.

THE COMPANY VIEW

At CPP Investment Board, Cornell explains, some regions provide shared cost or discount pricing for day care. Their global policies include parental leave, family leave, shared parental leave, time away from work, and flex work—critical benefits that support the whole family.



Although the number of women assignees is still exceptionally low, a shift may be coming, with factors such as younger generations and more women entering the workforce daily, along with changes in the ages at which women are having children.

It's hard to label these types of benefits as being merely to entice women to relocate: What about single women or single dads? Or women moving with kids or men moving on their own with kids? That is where the shift toward both diversity *and* inclusion has come into play.

"I've struggled with this, personally," says Cornell. "I don't feel it's up to the mobility policy to stipulate within its standard support—here we are calling out this one group of many diverse groups, and this is how we are going to support them. In a way, it can actually work against what your organization is trying to do in terms of diversity. Singling out one category—such as gender—doesn't necessarily help you. ... You could be enticing women to relocate, but you could be isolating other groups. For example, you could entice a woman with a family, but it could work against you if you have a single woman who doesn't have children or a husband, where they now feel they aren't being included or considered."

Avery Dennison's Lam agrees: "From the company as a whole, I am hearing more about the importance of inclusion these days. I think gender diversity was something people talked about a few years back."

Georgia Gordon-Martin, head of North America benefits and head of global mobility at Chemours, shares that they don't necessarily have a challenge attracting women to go on assignment, which may reflect their broader objective of selecting their talent

based on merit for the position, rather than their gender, marital status, or family size.

"We want the best talent, regardless of gender, so when we approach mobility discussions within the business, we certainly don't encourage gender-type conversations; it's more about the business determining whether or not an individual is appropriate for the role," says Gordon-Martin.

Walmart Canada's Douglas agrees. "Walmart is focused on selecting the best talent overall. ... We look at everything; we look at the entire picture," she says.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE OF MOBILITY

Although the number of women assignees is still exceptionally low, a shift may be coming, with factors such as younger generations and more women entering the workforce daily, along with changes in the ages at which women are having children.

"We are in an ever-changing world. ... We don't want to take 10 steps back and look into the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, where women played very minimal roles in the workforce and huge roles in the household. We now want to look forward ... where women are trying to balance both work and life—developing careers and being the mom and the wife," says Chemours' Gordon-Martin.

Lam foresees younger generations better balancing gender diversity. "They can just go, pick up their backpack, and say, 'I'm ready to go.' They are always looking for changes and are really keen on getting new

experiences, acquiring new skills, and going on international assignments to learn [about] new cultures and develop both skills at work and their careers," says Lam.

Gosia Piasecka Manos, HR-global rewards at Chemours, agrees that gender diversity should work itself out with the future younger workforce. "In an effort to attract and retain more female workforce talent ... the ratio of the population being on assignment should be offset and balanced between genders," Piasecka Manos says.

Millennials, and especially younger generations, are already raising their hands and starting these career development conversations early, sometimes even before the idea pops into management's mind. "Our younger generation is not afraid to ask to go on assignment or ask for things that my generation wouldn't even bother with, such as, 'My husband is relocating to London; can you move my job there?' They are much bolder, and I love that, which is great because, from a career development standpoint, I don't think they're going to worry what the policy says. ... They're going to ask anyway," says Cornell.

The final challenge then becomes how companies can not only increase the number of women assignees but also provide a set of policies and practices that balance fairness with inclusivity. As the talent shortage increases overall, more women enter the workforce, and mobility programs increase their flexibility, the future is looking bright for women looking for an assignment. As that happens, we must keep adapting programs to support an assignee experience that works for all. *M*

Morgan E. Wiedmann is a content specialist at Weichert Workforce Mobility. She can be reached at mwiedmann@weichertwm.com or +1 781 982 5006.

Keep the conversations going on this and other topics by participating in our online Community. Sign in at worldwideerc.org/community with your Worldwide ERC® username and password.



ADVERTISE WITH US

VISIBILITY

VIRTUAL EVENT
SPONSORSHIP

PRODUCT

DIGITAL &
PRINT

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

SPONSORED CONTENT
WEBINARS

TRAINING

LEARNING PORTAL
MEMBERSHIP
DESIGNATIONS



Meet Mobility Professionals Where They Are: [Here](#)

With a membership representing a diverse group of workforce professionals across the globe, leveraging talent mobility tools, technology and services, your organization's name and message will reach your best prospects when you advertise through us.

Our team is here to help, contact us!
SponsorshipandExhibits@worldwideerc.org
+1 703-842-3416

<https://www.worldwideerc.org/advertising-opportunities/>