

Executive Appointments

Being moved to where the action is – or sidelined?

Your Questions Answered

GILL PLIMMER

My company wants to send me to Malaysia. But I'm not sure I want to go as I fear I am being put out to pasture. The most important thing – if I am forced to accept – is to negotiate an improvement in pay and conditions, or at least to ensure they are comparable. How do I negotiate better terms?

Helen Pitcher, chairman of Iddas, which provides coaching, mentoring and consultancy services to boardroom members and senior executives, says:

You need to have a very grown-up career discussion right at the beginning that establishes what the move adds to your CV or whether you are being put out to pasture. Tell them: "My first reaction was that I'm being sidelined and I'm a little concerned about that."

Remember, it is in their interest to discuss it with you. They don't want the financial and emotional cost of a failed assignment and they need a well-motivated employee.

Negotiation involves being clear about what you want out of the situation and establishing how much

power you have in any given context. Be explicit about what you are asking for, whether it is more money or a private education for the children.

You might also ask for a coach, MBA or repatriation programme to be included in your package; something that will increase your long-term career options.

Establish your company's current policy or find out what comparable employers offer. It will be much easier to argue your case if there is a precedent than if you look to be breaking new ground, particularly where anything is visible and shiny. Nothing causes more consternation than one ex-pat being allowed something the others have not got. An extra financial allowance is better than a shiny new car and driver.

Say something like: "I've done some research into this area and my understanding is that international assignees can get a package that includes two visits to the UK etc." Ask if you can see the terms of the deal they are offering.

International assignments fail most often because the spouse doesn't take to the country, not because the employee doesn't cope with the job. So you need to focus on things that will help the family settle in quickly.

The company should agree to that as a distracted executive will only function at half speed.

I do know of one global bank some years ago where relocating the grand piano became the contentious issue. It might sound silly to some, but that executive knew their new life would not run smoothly without it.

Check that you are talking to the boss who has the power to grant your request. You may also want to do some subtle lobbying around them – your old boss, your new boss, a contact at the same level. Be charming and elegant. No one likes to feel they are being strong-armed or backed into a corner.

Mark Parkinson, a freelance business psychologist, coach and author, says:

I don't think you're being sidelined by being sent to Malaysia, Greece or Portugal maybe. But not east. You're going where the action is.

You need to ask for a meeting to discuss how you are doing at work and the role. Don't tip your boss off that you want to talk about the money. You want to catch them on the back foot. Most people find it hard to have a conversation about money and employers use this. People often don't get pay rises because they don't ask.



Smooth landing: a company sending an employee to Malaysia will not want the assign

Take control of the situation. Check out what other people have been paid and find out where your power lies. If you have some expertise or knowledge that other people don't have, or if you are

difficult to replace, you really can hold sway.

And have a plan B. Know what is going to happen if you are unsuccessful. Don't be bullied into it. Have the courage of your convictions