

Five tips to increase and support female assignees

The number of female assignees in international mobility programs has held steady over the last 20 years. Industry studies show only slight shifts with the high-end percentages usually around 20% and 16% often cited as the average. Even though a small number of industries and companies may have higher percentages, the number of female assignees overall remain low, accounting for less than 5% of the population. There are occasional demographic correlations of a company's general population, especially for those in traditionally male-dominated industries.

In 2014, Crown World Mobility conducted research on Global Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) and looked for links between D&I and Mobility. The research shows that across many industries, global companies with a wide-range of headquarter locations are investing heavily in D&I strategies. Their aim is to recruit and retain women in their organizations, especially for senior management positions. These companies see this as a business imperative that has a positive impact on their bottom line. For global companies that require senior leaders with international experience and a global perspective, any barriers to assignment opportunities for women need to be addressed.

A few leading-edge companies are finding creative ways to increase and support their female assignees. Taking the first step comes in all shapes and sizes. Crown World Mobility has selected some of our favorite tips and we encourage you to pick one step and get started:

- 1. Track data on female assignees** – How many female assignees do you currently have? How many have been on assignments in the past? And, where have they gone? Your gathered data can be quantitative or qualitative, depending on your resources and program size. For a combination of the two, send a short survey (using a tool such as a survey monkey) to current and past female assignees asking about their experience. Interviewing some of them can also provide interesting insight and anecdotes that can make your numbers come alive. It is important to have data and talking points to share with your leadership and HR colleagues and use it to support any policy or program changes.
- 2. Address female employees' barriers** – Are women offered assignments, but saying no? Find out why. Is it the timing, the policy, the locations, the assignment durations or their personal situations? Global companies may provide longer lead-time for female employees, giving them a window of up to five years to take an assignment role. This allows for more personal barriers to be addressed, like family planning or dual-career scenarios. Other companies offer the option to hire an employee's qualified spouse/partner in the host location which minimizes the income loss for the family. Other policies such as spouse/partner support in the form of a one-time allowance, help with obtaining a visa or providing job-finding assistance, are increasingly the norm in more developed mobility programs.

3. Address the assignment selection barriers

– Are some managers more inclined to offer or select male assignees rather than female assignees? Perhaps there is an unconscious bias in managers, making assumptions based on a personal judgment that needs to be addressed. Companies with strong D&I strategies are tackling this bias by providing specific training to their recruiters and to the managers selecting employees for international assignments. Ask your recruiting team if they can help you organize an unconscious bias program for your selection managers. Simply raising awareness of any company goals to increase the number of female assignees (by showing some data) and lifting barriers to reaching those goals would be a good starting point for your Global Mobility team. An email campaign, a presentation or a webinar will get the discussion going.

4. Support current female assignees – You could organize and offer webinars for current female assignees on global topics, and ask a senior woman in your organization to lead it. Select a senior level employee with international assignment experience of her own to speak to that experience and how it has influenced her career. This could be held quarterly or annually; a great low-cost way to show assignment Return on Investment and generate candidate pool interest. Another idea is to provide a network or directory of current and past female assignees on your Mobility intranet site as a way to connect female assignees. Interview female assignees and publish them internally, to highlight their profile and experience, (give it a logo, brand or name it, if you can). Connect senior women to younger female assignees to serve as mentors, buddies or simply to have a one-time conversation that engages and inspires them.

5. Review your policies and exceptions – A global company with best practices at linking D&I to Mobility recently rolled out new policies making past exceptions specific to female employees available as part of policy. Changes include providing support to divorced employees with custody of a child, allowing the child's other parent to visit the assignment location and for children to visit the non-accompanying parent more frequently. Split-family policies and extending eligibility to employee parents are also trends we see.

Conclusion

Increasing and supporting female assignees needs to finally get past the 20% data hump of the last 20 years. Hopefully this brief discussion and set of tips will help you and your team make a breakthrough. Remember that moving forward needs to fit your company culture, your team resources and it is best when aligned with HR and Business priorities. Pick one idea that feels like a good fit for you and get started. Be sure to share your experiences with your professional peers and partners. It is always inspiring to hear of someone's success.

For companies looking for additional solutions or interested in talking through some of the strategies highlighted in this document, please contact Lisa Johnson, Global Practice Leader for CWM's Consulting Services at ljohnson@crowneww.com.



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