

## Thousands of miles apart on Father's Day: Why split families are becoming a new business trend

Thousands of families will spend Father's Day apart this year – some due to the growing trend of split-family assignments for employees at some of the world's biggest multinational companies.

Historically employees have been reluctant to work abroad and leave their partner at home – but it seems attitudes and personal circumstances are changing.

We've recognized this phenomenon with our global clients and predict an increase in split-family assignments in 2015 – and a flurry of Skype calls home for fathers or mothers abroad on June 21!

"It's a significant trend and one that we've monitored closely," said Lisa Johnson, Global Practice Leader at Crown World Mobility's Consulting Services.

"We are used to seeing rotational assignment policies where the employee works almost around the clock for a few weeks in the host location, then travels home to be with family for a few weeks. This approach was and still is common in the oil and gas, mining and engineering industries," said Lisa. "But families that choose to be separated (split families) are a newer and growing trend in international assignments. It emerged initially as an accepted approach in Asia but is increasingly being applied globally."

A modern requirement for globally mobile employees, improved communications and a yearning for career development are some of the reasons cited for a greater willingness for families to live apart during an assignment, combined with the economics of families reliant on two incomes to pay the bills. The traditional "trailing spouse" is now something of the past.



## But what is it like working abroad thousands of miles from your family on Father's Day?

Peter Sewell, Regional Director for Crown World Mobility UK, Ireland and Northern Europe who is based in London, has personal experience of just how difficult it can be, after "commuting" to Thailand for two-and-a-half years in a previous role.

"I set up a global employment company in Thailand and spent up to six months a year traveling backwards and forwards while we set up the entity and developed a new team," said Peter. "Being away from my children so much was not easy. I tried to arrange my travel so that I was generally around for most special occasions. But I did feel bad missing my daughter's drama production and having to ask a friend to take my son to a Chelsea match. It's four years on and my daughter still reminds me every time that I travel on business, so it has obviously had a major impact on her. I ended up calling time on my job because of the impact that it was having on me and my family."

"But that's not to say there were no positives. I got to spend time working in a very different culture and it was a great experience for me. I feel incredibly close to the team that we created in Thailand and know that we achieved something special," added Peter. "My advice for anyone thinking about a split-family role is be clear on how long it will be for and ensure that you build in enough time for your family and not just work. Make sure that you have the right support structure in place."

Such assignments are rarely long-term solutions and companies are increasingly realizing they must provide extra support to make it work. This may include an increased number of home leave trips for the employee and reverse home leave for the family to visit the employee. Property maintenance may be provided to support the spouse/partner in the home location.



Lisa Johnson added: "When utilized on a long-term basis, the stress of the split-family lifestyle can overtake its benefits. Employee burn-out and family disruption are common side effects. But things are certainly changing.

Dual-career families, children's education needs and extended family responsibilities are some of the drivers, along with growing evidence that assignments abroad can boost your career. But it does mean that as Father's Day approaches there may well be more and more families spending the day apart."

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