

Different strokes for different folks: Customizing relocation for different generations

BY PAUL FRANCIS

“It takes different strokes to move the world,” says the classic TV theme song, and apparently the same applies to today’s mobile workforce.

Traditionally, most relocation policies were developed with a reward-based focus and largely balanced on the candidate’s status, tender and position in the company. As the employer-worker relationship shifts from a hierarchical culture to a more transactional relationship, today’s workforce looks for policies that are directed towards their individual circumstances.

Whereas a relocation policy was seen as a way to provide “perks” and incentive to relocate, it is now recognized as an important aspect of return on investment, productivity and the success of an organization’s larger mandate. For companies

to remain successful, they will want to consider moving away from the reward-based policy and adopt a more “generational” approach.

The standard one-size-fits-all reward-based policy can fail to consider the real impact of generational tendencies when a candidate is considering a transfer. Policy terms such as “new hire,” “mid-management” or “executive” assume that everyone in these categories is in the same age bracket with very similar needs, but this just isn’t the case when one considers the generational-intermingling of today’s workforce.

Employees under 40 years of age will represent a significant portion of Canada’s workforce by 2010 with a fair portion of them in the middle and executive management of business. This shift will impact how policies (including relocation) and the terms of reference companies use to classify their employees are applied.

So how do the generations differ when it comes to relocation drivers?

Under 30 years of age

The focus of the under-30 generation is “What will this give me?”

They are generally very confident in their ability to be mobile, and will seek out opportunities.

The relocation candidate’s top considerations are:

- experience and challenge;
- career advancement; and
- personal growth.

Support needs include home or rental search. Most times in this category, HR professionals are proposing the relocation to a candidate with fewer family responsibilities and a need for quicker personal gratification.

A typical scenario plays out as follows: John is a 27-year-old IT manager who has been offered relocation from Toronto to Vancouver to manage a critical project for up to two years.

He is single and looks forward to the challenges and added responsibility. His needs are geared towards access to information on his own terms and support for living costs and a progressive lifestyle at the new location. John is an example of a management employee who does not fit the traditional framework of relocation policy.

His questions include:

“Is this going to be good for my career?”

“Is my lifestyle supported in the new location?”

“How will this affect my social life and friendships?”

How to relocate the age group: An IT company had project work that entailed bringing 20 employees from varying locations to Toronto for six to eight months. They were part of the under-30 group. We suggested that rather than placing them each in temporary housing, a choice would suit this group better. They tend to be self-directed and expect their offerings to be customized to their personal and lifestyle needs. Choices were established within the company’s budget, presented to the candidates, and represented a variety of lifestyle options: downtown versus uptown, gym versus social, transit versus driving. The “soft” budget dollars were then geared to settling-in services.

See Next Page

■ RELOCATION

Worker age changes relocation pitch

Continued Previous Page

30 to 50 years of age

This generation's focus is "What will this mean for me and my family?"

Although they are generally less confident in their ability to be mobile, they are hesitant to lose the opportunity.

A typical candidate's top considerations include:

- tools to engage the family;
- relevance to ongoing career direction; and
- spousal and family support.

Support needs include home purchase, spousal career, and school search and education assistance. Most times in this category, HR professionals are proposing the relocation to a candidate with complex family considerations and a need to balance career growth.

A typical scenario plays out as follows: Marie is a 10-year employee who is relocating to a new branch on the other side of the province as part of a corporate restructuring. This move means a lot of change for Marie, her working spouse David and her two teenage children. David's career tracking to the new location and retaining the children's advanced school curriculum are both critical aspects to the success of this relocation. Marie is an example of the most common relocation demographic, and yet traditional relocation policies don't support her needs.

Her questions include:

"I know this is good for me, but what about the rest of my household?"

"What reason can I give the girls for leaving their friends and school?"

"How quickly will David pick up his own career at the new location?"

How to relocate the age group: A manufacturing company was relocating from northern Ontario to the Niagara area in the south. Its relocation candidates fell into the 30- to 50-year-old bracket, with varying, and often complex, family dynamics. We were approached to do a large group presentation. An all-encompassing group presentation would not be effective for this group. Instead, it was decided to have three full days of "on location" counselling to allow individual meetings with candidates. Most importantly, the candidates were encouraged to invite their spouses. Support was then customized for spousal job assistance, education and school assistance, and with a better provision for daycare costs required during the house-hunting process. New location materials were developed for a family lifestyle.

Over 50 years of age

This generation's focus is "Where will this leave me?"

They are hesitant in ability and desire to be mobile, and are seeking to retain vested career paths.

A typical candidate's top

considerations include:

- tools to engage a trailing spouse;
- support while rounding out career; and
- synchronizing to longer-term personal goals.

The candidate's support needs may include home search, repatriation, and elder care and retirement considerations. Most times in this category, HR professionals are proposing the relocation to a candidate with less complex family considerations (although elder care can complicate this), and a need to balance projected personal goals.

A typical scenario plays out as follows: Andrew is a 57-year-old "new hire", a career marketing manager hired by a pharmaceutical firm to spearhead a new executive division. He's relocating from Calgary to the United Kingdom for up to five years. The company is very confident in Andrew's fit for the role and has pledged to support him accordingly. With kids already married or in college, his main concerns include elder care for an aging parent, a pending retirement during or immediately after completion of the mandate and critical support for repatriation. Andrew is an example of an emerging demographic as baby boomers approach retirement. Needed support is still lacking from most traditional relocation policies.

His questions include:

"What would I do with my parents? They depend on me."

"What about our plans to buy a home in Kelowna for retirement?"

"Will I receive support to return home when it's time?"

How to relocate the age group: Most of the employees at a mining engineering firm, which was closing its offices in Ontario and moving to Vancouver, were over 50 years old. They had never relocated before but were globally savvy as a result of longer careers. There was no need for an overly formal presentation. These candidates were quick decision-makers, with fewer family responsibilities to consider and established financial security. The new location materials were tailored to reflect their lifestyle options. The "soft" budget dollars went to elder care and spousal job assistance.

If companies consider a generational, demographic viewpoint when developing and delivering policy they will be in a better position for recruitment, retention, productivity and successful employee transfers. A tailored approach can be vital when initially approaching employees to consider relocation. With group moves in particular, it can be a compound problem when individual needs are not met or at least identified.

Paul Francis is vice-president of Toronto-based relocation firm NuPAD Solutions Canada. For more information contact (416) 847-3360 or paul@nupad.ca or visit www.nupad.ca.