

# *TRC White Paper: The Importance of Cultural & Language Training*

Companies commonly invest \$1 million or more in a typical international assignment, yet about 30 percent of assignees end up returning early and an alarming 70 percent do not achieve all of the goals established for the assignment.



In *When Cultures Collide*, Richard Lewis wrote, “People of different cultures share basic concepts but view them from different angles and perspectives, leading them to behave in manner which we may consider irrational or even in direct contradiction of what we hold sacred.”

Too often, we ascribe failed assignments to poor housing choices, unhappy spouses and children and misdirected emotions, but not to issues related to cultural differences. Careful cultural assessment and training, in fact, can mean the difference between a successful assignment and a costly, failed one.

## *Begin with Careful Candidate Assessment*

Certainly, it’s critical to select the right candidate for the assignment in the first place. One of the mistakes most commonly made is to reflexively pick the candidate with the best technical qualifications, with no consideration of how he or she (and his or her family) will function in a different location and culture.

It’s typically assumed that the hard-charging, effective executive in New York will be equally successful in Tokyo. In fact, taking an employee out of his or her comfort zone can utterly disrupt both professional and personal rhythms, upsetting the family unit and compromising workplace effectiveness. Cultural and language training can be a great help, but the candidate (and family) must already possess the flexibility and sense of adventure needed to succeed in a markedly different environment.

Before an offer is made, a certified cross-cultural training provider can assess the family’s flexibility and adaptability for an international assignment, using targeted tests and exercises as appropriate. Human resources professionals and hiring managers can use this information to determine the likelihood of a successful assignment and even to build a pool of vetted, prospective assignees.

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## *Continue with Pre-Departure Cultural and Language Training*

While planning the assignment, much attention is necessarily paid to housing, visa and immigration requirements and schools. Too often language and intercultural training are provided on a limited basis, if at all. Such false economy can prove costly, indeed.

Ideally, cultural and language training begin before departure. This is typically a hectic time, and not the most optimum environment for learning, but it's important to fit these programs into the schedule.

Pre-departure training will give the assignee the communication skills and capabilities to enter the new working environment smoothly. It will also help to give the spouse/partner and family the grounding to better understand the new culture and to put any feelings of dislocation into context.

## *Provide Destination Cultural and Language Training to Ease Settling-In*

If at all possible, cultural and language training should continue after the family has arrived at the destination location and has begun to settle in—anywhere from two weeks to four months after arrival. The assignee and family are now surrounded by the new culture but are probably not yet one with it.

While the assignee has the socialization and immersion afforded by the workplace, some family members do not automatically integrate into a new culture. They may limit themselves to expatriate neighborhoods, fail to gain at least functional ability in the local language or avoid trying to understand the local culture. This can cause the relocated family to pull away and become depressed.

Continued cultural and language training can give assignees and families the knowledge and confidence they need to reach out and fully embrace the local people and culture, resulting in a smoother transition and a more successful assignment.

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## About TRC Global Solutions

TRC Global Solutions is a leading employee relocation firm. Since 1987, TRC has delivered creative, cost-effective relocation and international assignment services across the U.S. and in 150+ countries worldwide. As an independent company, TRC is free from corporate bureaucracy, preconceived notions and conflicts of interest.

TRC helps clients achieve their business objectives by ensuring they have the *right* people in the *right* place at the *right* time, controlling costs and mitigating risks. TRC partners with its clients to develop a competitive, best-practice relocation program, drawing from a comprehensive range of relocation services, including US home selling, home finding and consulting services and complete international relocation services. TRC's eclectic client base represents a wide variety of products and services and ranges from smaller, start-up firms to Global 1000 companies.

## World Headquarters

TRC Global Solutions  
1042 East Juneau Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
USA

+1.414.226.4200 (direct)  
+1.800.783.5337 (toll-free)  
+1.414.226.4210 (fax)

[www.trcgs.com](http://www.trcgs.com)