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When 'Home' Is The World

Extending your business internationally by coaching Global Nomadic Leaders

Recently, numerous coaching schools have begun sprouting up and a plethora of coaches are pouring into the market. At present there is no official competency assessment required of coaches before they take on their first clients. This often leaves corporate clients at a loss about how to select experienced and competent coaches. While the art of Socratic questioning can be learned in coaching schools, using questions that are most pertinent for moving clients forward comes only with experience and practice.

To set themselves apart, skilled, experienced coaches combine expertise with specialized processes to carve out niche markets. One coaching specialization that is increasing in importance amongst multinationals and

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currently preoccupies leaders and human resources is how best to identify, develop and retain multicultural, diverse and highly mobile talent, or ‘Global Nomadic Leadership Development.’

What Are GNLS?

Global Nomadic Leadership Development focuses on coaching highly mobile leaders during the process of repatriation or expatriation within multinational companies. Global Nomadic Leaders (GNLS) are masters of multiculturalism, were raised in several countries and speak multiple languages. They are adaptive individuals who thrive on



change and are gifted with multicultural intelligence.

Amid accelerating change and globalization, multinational companies are in need of leaders who think globally, act locally and possess an exceptional ability to accelerate business development in complex cultural environments. The former CEO and current chairman

of Nestle, the largest food and beverage company in the world, states that top leadership positions at Nestle are available only for those who have lived and worked in several countries and speak several languages.ⁱ Jack Welch, past CEO and chairman of General Electric, believes the leaders of tomorrow will have spent time in Bombay, Hong Kong and Buenos Aires.

Greg Sherill, chairman of Tenneco, a car filter manufacturing company, points out that his CEO for Europe was born in India, grew up in Saudia Arabia, was educated in the U.S. and is now responsible for Europe.ⁱⁱ He explains that a person with this profile understands the

intricacies of small countries, each with their economic and political specificity, where economies of scale are a challenge. GNLs ensure a balance of products, customers and geographical representation. This diversity allows for buy-in from various constituencies.

Although there is a clear need for this type of leader, many of them fail miserably when sent on overseas assignments. Forty percent of senior-level external hires derail within the first 18 months of their transitions.ⁱⁱⁱ The cost of a failed senior-level transition is more than 10 times their base salary.^{iv} The primary cause for failure is the leader's misfit with the national and/or corporate culture.

The decision to send a leader abroad is often based solely on his/her technical skills or job performance. However, for a higher success rate expatriates should be

in political corruption, the entire 'raison d'être' would be shaken.

Even though the GNL is perceived as very resilient, s/he often has a need to call some place home. A person with this profile may break down and become rootless and restless when his/her family, which is a stabilizing factor, breaks up after one too many moves. Even though home might be a place they go to only two weeks a year, it nevertheless becomes a symbol of stability. It is a ritual, an anchor and place that is the same each time they come back to it. Home is one of the only things that remain stable amid constant change.

In these examples, the Global Nomadic Leader, faced with internal turmoil and a loss of stabilizing factors, will do what they know best – change scenarios. This is the critical moment when talented and groomed lead-

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further categorized into local leaders going abroad and GNLs. Local leaders going abroad have a strong cultural identity and generally intend to repatriate back 'home.' GNLs have moved multiple times while growing up and accumulated experience in shifting through cultural transitions. To this latter group, 'home' is everywhere and nowhere. GNLs readily understand how to run businesses and manage employees across cultures, promoting cohesion while respecting diversity. They easily shift among their internal cultural identities according to the situations they are faced with.

Stabilizing Factors

Global Nomadic Leaders love surfing the sea of change as long as their stabilizing factors are not pulled out from underneath them. A stabilizing factor can be a mission, a person, a family or it could also be a home. When faith in a mission is unshaken, an NGO from the Red Cross will risk his/her life at the frontier of warfare to save other lives. If the Red Cross were to be muddled

ers may pack their bags and leave a company without a second thought. A well-advised HR professional or an experienced coach, who is specialized in understanding the needs of this type of leader, can make all the difference in identifying, attracting and retaining people with this profile.

One of the most important recent developments in coaching is the focus on specialized processes and markets, such as working with Global Nomadic Leaders. This type of specialization makes it easier and more effective for the clients of coaches to choose the right coach with the right skills and experience to help them master their challenges. •

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ⁱ Burrus-Barbey, K (2000) "Interview: Leadership, global management, and future challenges: An interview with Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, chief executive officer of Nestlé SA: *Thunderbird International Business Review* 43(5): 495-506.

ⁱⁱ Interview in a plane ride from Germany to the U.S.

ⁱⁱⁱ Study from Center for Creative Leadership as cited in *Fortune* magazine. See Anne Fisher, "Don't Blow Your New Job," *Fortune*, 22 June 1998.

^{iv} *ibid*