

Keeping It Together While You Are Apart; A Basic International Travel Communication Toolkit

Technology has made staying connected in long distance relationships possible in a way that was inconceivable a decade ago. At the same time, self and employer expectations of what we can accomplish in a day has grown exponentially. Most people are chronically overscheduled. Statistics show high divorce rates and family conflict in people who expatriate or travel frequently. To maintain the relationships you value long distance, you need a committed plan.

Some Practical Relationship Strategies to Stay Connected Before You Travel

- Set up a specific communication plan that includes multiple ways to keep your relationship connection flowing over time zones and distance. Talk directly and specifically to family and loved ones about how you will stay emotionally connected. Use it all; email, scheduled phone or video calls, blog, and don't forget to include snail mail letters and post cards.
- International travel stress depletes everyone in a family not just the traveler. Be proactive to avoid resentment which can ruin a relationship. Be realistic and get additional support such as extra child care or vacations for a partner who is at home while the other travels.
- Cultivate consciousness about the cumulative changes in your life. All change, even positive change is stressful with the cumulative effects bringing on depression and physical illness. Take and keep your change inventory including things such as: moving- even locally, births, deaths and other family phase of life events, career changes or relationship problems. Enlist those closest to you as consultants to help you prioritize and pare down your commitments to the bare essentials before you travel.

Prepare Your Personal Travel Stress Reduction Plan

- Investigate a variety of jet lag minimizing techniques, try them on brief trips first if possible. Although sleep prescriptions can be a resource, there are many more options.
Read up, search the web, and consult colleagues who travel.
- What kind of exercise and meditation works for you? Depending on where you travel jogging or walking may not be safe or an option. Bring exercise and relaxation CD's.
- Favorite clothing, snack food, reading material and music are comforts. They will reduce culture shock, exhaustion and keep you thinking clearly in the strangest surroundings. Take some favorites even when luggage space is lean.
- Avoid alcohol to relax or reduce stress. It is hard to undo an embarrassing situation which can harm your business or social relationships.

What will make homecoming the best it can be?

- Talk to family and friends about reentry stress adjustments. What are Family and friends assumptions about your travel and expectations when you return?
- You will be tired from travel. Your partner or family may be upset about important events you missed. First get some rest and then be open to discussion.
- Plan some things for everyone to look forward to keeping in mind the different ages and roles in the family. Of great importance is time alone for you and your partner/spouse to reconnect emotionally. This sets the tone and support you both need to move on to the next things on your life agenda.