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YOUR EXECUTIVE CAREER

To Help Women Advance, Their Trailing Spouses Get Job-Hunting Aid

More employers ease relocation for female managers by offering to help in husbands' search for work

By Joann S. Lublin

Behind many managerial women stands a trailing husband. He pulls up stakes and relocates when his partner gets a better role in a different locale.

John Van Lonkhuyzen has done this three times since 1995—the year after he and Nicola Morris got engaged. As his wife advanced in her career, the veteran lawyer moved to Washington, D.C., Westfield, N.J., and recently, Yarmouth, Maine. Their latest relocation was the first time Ms. Morris's employer offered to help him job hunt.

More female executives are moving ahead in their careers through geographic moves. And, increasingly, their employers lend a hand so their husbands can find work.

On average, women accounted for a record 23% of moves by North American employers in 2016—up from 17% in 2009, according to surveys of employers by Atlas Van Lines Inc. About 62% of employers provided job-hunting aid for spouses or partners of transferred staffers in 2017, compared with 33% in 2007, Atlas data shows.

"Companies consider such help a critical aspect of getting more women into leadership," says Lauren Herring, chief executive of Impact Group, a career and leadership development firm with job-hunting services for relocated spouses and partners.

Ms. Morris left an executive role with Verizon Communications Inc. in New Jersey to become a senior vice president of WEX Inc. in South Portland, Maine. While recruiting Ms. Morris, Chief Executive Melissa Smith offered to introduce Mr. Van Lonkhuyzen to law firms near the corporate-payments-services company.

Ms. Smith says she wanted to show she cared about supporting "both partners in their careers when they make a move."

Mr. Van Lonkhuyzen, a former lawyer



John Van Lonkhuyzen has moved three times since 1995 so his then-fiancée and now wife, Nicola Morris, could move up in her career. The couple now lives in Yarmouth, Maine. PHOTO: YOON S. BYUN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

for the U.S. Justice Department, didn't need the proposed introductions. He landed a partnership with Verrill Dana LLP, a Portland law firm, at the same time his wife joined WEX in 2014.

American Express Co. has helped mates of relocated staffers look for work since 2012. With women now nearly half of its transferees, many men accompanying them use these career services, says a spokeswoman.

AmEx's global program, expanded in 2016, now includes career coaches, job leads, résumé writing, office space and advice about negotiating job offers or starting a business. Most participating spouses and domestic partners find positions, the company says.

But international relocation can create challenges for trailing husbands. The most common reason for a rejected foreign assignment is a partner's unwillingness to move due to his or her career.

That is especially true for potential female transferees, concludes a new study by Ernst & Young LLP and NetExpatriate Inc., a coaching and training firm.

Six years ago, AmEx gave middle manager Corrina Davison a chance to leave her native Australia for a New York executive role. "It was our dream to work overseas," she remembers.

Her husband, Duncan Davison, an Australian student-teacher supervisor, says he hoped to launch a U.S. version of his Sydney University pilot project that helped elite teen swimmers handle competitive setbacks.

The executive trainer at an acculturation workshop for AmEx accompanying partners introduced Mr. Davison to a possible investor for his athlete project, though Mr. Davison dropped the idea after the United Nations International School hired him to teach physical education part-time. He soon advanced to director

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of athletics. He says he would move again for his wife's career because he believes he has become more employable globally.

Other men fear relocating for their wives will disrupt their career trajectories. Consider Joshua Kim, whose wife, Julie, is an oncologist and associate professor at Dartmouth's medical school in Hanover, N.H.

He faced the difficult decision of quitting a job he loved in 2006—he helped launch and run Quinnipiac University's online education unit—so she could take

the Dartmouth post. He had followed her twice before.

"Why do I have to be a trailing spouse a third time?" he recalls asking his wife.

Dr. Kim consulted for two years before joining Dartmouth's learning center and becoming head of digital learning initiatives there in 2014. "That kind of patience for a career move is a challenge," he says. "As a trailing husband, you have to be more creative and inventive."

Ms. Morris and Mr. Van Lonkhuyzen struggled with the same issue after her

Verizon promotion brought them to New Jersey from Washington in 2007. He fruitlessly sought jobs in corporate legal departments and government before getting a temporary Justice Department gig in Newark. Mr. Van Lonkhuyzen obtained a permanent New York DOJ spot in 2009.

That relocation "was hard for us," Ms. Morris says. But WEX "was a great fit for what I was looking for," she says, especially since both she and her husband grew up in Maine.