

PREFACE

One reality of foreign service life is rotationality. Employees, their spouses and dependants repeatedly pack up and promote Canada's interests around the globe. This is the rock on which families find themselves as an employee's career in the foreign service progresses. It influences decisions about schooling, housing, financial planning, spousal employment and family management.

The last twenty-five years have introduced a deluge of new demands, options and social pressures on every segment of society, rendering life more complex for everyone including, naturally, the people of the foreign service. Both outsiders and insiders have analyzed and dissected this lifestyle with an eye to organizing it into understandable parts. Their conclusions, in general, are the same. First, people who live a peripatetic international life share the same range of eccentricities and concerns as the rest of society. Secondly, there is a predictable pattern to an international move that assists in planning and managing these transitions.

There is the same degree of physical or mental illness, indebtedness, substance abuse, family breakdown, violence or troubled children as among non-rotational people. That we are normal seems to surprise outsiders and, sometimes, ourselves. Coping with its own normalcy is part of the transition struggle; it is very easy to blame it all on the rotational life rather than accept personal responsibility.

The artificially inflated lifestyle, the illusion of privilege make it easy to ignore problems. The constant moving itself is used as a problem solving device. This is a delusion; it is only a problem postponed.

Generalities are misleading but I feel there are some attributes which characterize successful foreign service people. Success has nothing to do with rank or stream but with effective adaptation to the rotational lifestyle. They have a non-judgemental tolerance for difference and accept change as normal, even desirable. They do not feel threatened by exposure to new ideas and beliefs. They are independent, highly individualistic and addicted to the acquisition of information. They have a tendency towards intellectual analysis and rationalization of life's events. They are reticent among non-foreign service people but they make lifelong friends of their colleagues with whom they share experiences.

How do people thrive within this mobile milieu?

Awareness of the rhythm of relocation, its perks and pitfalls, is the first step. Knowledge of the services, assistance and information available through the Posting Centre, the Employee Assistance Program, the Foreign Service Directives (FSDs), the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers and the Foreign Service Community Association, and various