

□ A LETTER TO NEW SPOUSES IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE □

Dear Colleague:

As you prepare to embark on your first foreign posting, I trust I may be permitted to offer some general suggestions which could help to make your life more interesting and fulfilling.

When a foreign assignment is first discussed, the subject that often provokes the most detailed and indeed the most heated debates is that concerning the accompanying spouse's career, and whether or not it should be placed "on hold" for the duration of the posting. Some spouses become unhappy, bored or depressed if they cannot work in another country during a diplomatic posting. You may be fortunate to be going to a country where you can legally work and pursue your career. If there is no reciprocal agreement between your own country and the one to which you are going, you might wish to consider working for nothing in your chosen field, either as a volunteer, or by giving classes so that others may benefit from your expertise. If your own Embassy cannot hire you, perhaps you can find employment at some other mission or international agency. Since you are accompanying your foreign service spouse to the post, we can then take it as a given that you have carefully considered all of the options regarding your career, and employment or lack of it in the country to which you are going. Once you arrive at the post, I am sure you will agree that it would be tedious and ungracious of you to complain that you "had to give up your career to come here". At the same time, it would be unfair of you to "punish" your spouse for your "sacrifices" by refusing to take part in those functions which are a normal part of diplomatic life, such as entertaining in your own home, or attending functions with your spouse. This is your spouse's first posting, something to

which he or she has been eagerly looking forward since joining the foreign service. It is an important career step, and you as the spouse can be a hindrance or a help, and your moral and psychological support is every bit as important as the staging of luncheons and dinners. Apart from the career aspects of the posting, it could also be treated as an adventure, and a splendid opportunity to learn new mores and ways of living, new cultures, languages, traditions and history.

Remember that your spouse is accredited to the country in which you will soon be arriving, and not to the diplomatic corps. Of course, it will be fun to get to know people from many different countries, and some will undoubtedly become good friends during your posting. Diplomatic organizations can be a means to an end, but membership in them should not be considered the end of your attempts to integrate yourself into life in the host country. Your objective should not be to compete with people from other missions

but to establish contacts with the locals from all walks of life.

But let us return for a moment to the subject of attending receptions. It is more advisable not to stick close to your spouse all the time, or to get in a little group and talk exclusively to the other spouses from your own mission. Strike out on your own, circulate and make contacts yourself. This may be difficult at first. But other people feel just as nervous as you do, and most of them are delighted when someone else breaks the ice. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" is a good dictum to remember where first names are concerned. Some countries are far more formal than others, and it is safer to follow local customs. In a more general sense, it is wise to always follow a go-slow policy with first names even where your own more senior colleagues and their spouses are concerned, so allow them to set the pace. In this way you will never be accused of being "pushy" or overly familiar with new people.



Yes I had some problems in convincing my spouse to come with me... So, shall it be: shipment by sea or air?