

# Going places to get ahead

**Young workers find international assignments can boost careers in global economy**



**CHANGE @ WORK**  
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**A**t a Q&A session with employees two weeks ago, Theresa Ahlstrom, managing partner in the Melville office of accounting firm KPMG LLP, fielded questions such as these:

“What opportunities do Long Island professionals have regarding global rotation [assignments]?” And, “When in my career is a good time to go?”

One employee she spoke with at the reception that followed was Eva Yan, who was born in China, came to the United States in 1993, became a citizen and came to work for the firm 4½ years ago. Yan’s interest? A rotational assignment in China.

The firm always has had global work opportunities, Ahlstrom says, but “I have never seen what I’ve been seeing in the last year or two” in terms of interest, especially on the part of Generation Y, those young people entering the workplace now.

This is in keeping with research the firm just conducted, a survey of 2,400 business students at colleges in the United States. Forty-seven percent said they would like to work abroad for an extended period, and another 40 percent said they would consider such a move. Sixty-one percent said such experience is important in today’s business world.

So what’s at play here, apart from a continuing buzz about emerging markets in areas such as China, India and Brazil?

For one thing, a growing number of employees managed to study or intern abroad during college. They may even have had high school and college volunteer experiences



**Eva Yan came to America in '93, got a degree at Hofstra and is now a senior accountant. She wants a rotation to China — to bring her skills there, see family and help bridge the two cultures.**

in places such as Kenya and Costa Rica. And, as we know, once the bug bites — have passport, will travel.

In addition to hands-on experiences abroad, technological innovations are playing a role: Through social networking sites anyone with a computer can have friends all over the world. And when you “can reach out to someone in a nanosecond through international cell phones and text messaging,” home doesn’t seem so far away, Ahlstrom says.

Yan, who received a degree in accounting from Hofstra University in 2004, says that besides seeing family and helping to meet the demand for her skills in her native land, she would hope to help bridge the cultural divide. That’s in keeping with a

characteristic that generational experts ascribe to young people today: the desire to make the world a better place. “I understand both U.S. and Chinese culture,” she says.

As for an overseas assignment: Ahlstrom advised her to wait until she has a year of managing experience. That jibes with advice from Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, co-author with C. Perry Yeatman of “Get Ahead by Going Abroad — A Woman’s Guide to Fast-track Career Success” (Collins, 24.95): “It pays to have a few years of technical know-how” before taking on an international assignment.

During speaking engagements at business schools, where students often already have experience in the business

world, Berdan says she’s hearing questions and comments like this one at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania: “I got a great job offer in London, but my boyfriend doesn’t have one yet.” Berdan’s advice: “Honey, take it!”

For one thing, Berdan and her co-author found that 83 percent of the 200 women professionals they surveyed — all of whom had worked overseas — said that their global experience helped speed up career advancement. And 71 percent said the experience led to increased responsibility.

If you’re interested in a foreign assignment, there’s no need to keep it a secret. Yan says she’s been telling everyone of her interest. “I’ve been talking to all of them,” she says

**Where U.S. companies send employees**

Western Europe	11,872
Asia-Pacific	7,976
Middle East	5,799

**Top fields for overseas assignments for women**

- 30 percent female — Nonprofit or charity, government or public
- 27 percent female — Legal, consulting or professional services
- 25 percent female — Advertising, media or publishing

SOURCE: ORC Worldwide 2006 survey of 894 multinational organizations, 48 percent based in the Americas

of partners in the office as well as managers there on rotation. “You can’t just wait and assume people will ask you.”

Providing such opportunities is on KPMG’s agenda. “It’s a business imperative to think and act globally,” says Manny Fernandez, national managing partner for campus recruiting for KPMG. Among the firm’s initiatives:

■ Last summer, 25 of the firm’s approximately 1,800 summer internships included four weeks in a foreign office. That number is expected to increase next summer to 100.

■ Training for 300 new employees, 100 of them from the United States, was held in Madrid earlier this year. That number is expected to triple next year, with Canada a likely location.

■ The firm is hosting KPMG employees from overseas offices. Recently, two senior auditors — one from Brussels, the other from Madrid — did 18-month and two-year stints in the Long Island office.

“We really are a global employer,” says Ahlstrom. “And I think we’re just at the beginning of this.”

## Older employees can work overseas, too

Workers at mid-career and those poised for a second career can also be candidates for overseas work experiences, though older workers, especially women, may be hesitant.

However, the world isn’t as unfriendly as many may think, say Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and C. Perry Yeatman, authors of “Get Ahead by Going Abroad — A Woman’s Guide to Fast-track Career Success” (Collins, 24.95). They

advise women, especially, not to write off a foreign assignment based on how they *think* they’ll be treated.

Even in some locations where local women are not offered opportunities, female workers sent by a big American concern can be looked at and treated with respect, say the authors, because they’re seen as VIPs.

Berdan, a former public relations

executive who did a three-year stint in Asia, says experiences in Japan and South Korea “may be a little rougher on women,” but China is a very good bet, as it has “a history of strong female leaders.” What’s more, she says, “a couple of gray hairs can help tremendously in China, where people respect older people.”

And one option she recommends — especially for those with few

money concerns — is to spend time working for nonprofits abroad, where pay is lower but demands on your time might also be lower, “so you can hang out and have fun.”

You can learn more about women’s overseas work experiences in an article called “Going Global” in this month’s *More* magazine, as well as at the Internet site called [GetAheadByGoingAbroad.com](http://GetAheadByGoingAbroad.com).