

**Cross-cultural Coaching:  
Being Empowered in the Face of Common Expatriate Dilemmas**

**Andrew L. Miser  
Cross-cultural Coach and Consultant**

**Oshikan Sjodin-Bunse  
Positive Psychology Coach and Facilitator**

This paper presents some of the common cross-cultural dilemmas that expatriates and their families face when they move to a new country. These dilemmas, such as not understanding the foreign country's social norms and rules, daily challenges to personal and cultural values, difficulty communicating, disruptions in family functioning and a loss of identity, can leave expatriates in a state of disempowerment. This paper discusses the unique role that professional coaching has in providing expatriates a forum where they can learn to effectively navigate these common cultural dilemmas and to move from a state of disempowerment, when it occurs, to a state of empowerment. The state of empowerment is defined as the ability to influence, to exert personal power and to have significance in the face of life's circumstances. Specifically, professional coaching in a cross-cultural context can empower expatriates in shifting from being disconnected from others, judgmental, victimized, ineffective, off balance and reactive to being connected with others, accepting, responsible, effective, resilient and creative. Finally, a host of coaching tools are presented that can give expatriates and their families the means to effectively and successfully adapt to a new culture and to design lives they desire in their new country.

## **Introduction**

Having the opportunity to work and live abroad can be a very exciting prospect for expatriates and their families who are redesigning their lives, changing their careers, or looking to travel. When moving to a foreign country, expatriates have opportunities for learning about other cultures, for challenging themselves in new ways, and for living more adventurous and exciting lives. Along with those new adventures and opportunities, however, comes a whole host of dilemmas, such as learning the cultural values and social norms of the host country, learning a foreign language, navigating through governmental bureaucracies, managing the logistics of daily living, making new friends, and being far away from one's family and social network. These dilemmas naturally occur in the process of making such a daring commitment to relocate internationally. They can't be avoided.

A "dilemma" is "a perplexing or awkward situation."<sup>1</sup> Synonyms for the word "dilemma" include conundrum, predicament, quandary, fix, or pickle. A dilemma implies a set of

---

<sup>1</sup> Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition. (1957) New York: The World Publishing Company.

circumstances in which a person may find it difficult to navigate or to see things clearly. For people who move abroad, feeling confused and frustrated, not knowing what to do or where to turn, feeling awkward and ill at ease, and feeling disconnected and alone are all common experiences. For many expatriates and their family members such experiences and the symptoms of culture adjustment, including homesickness, withdrawal, sleep disturbance, anxiety and sadness, accompany adjusting to life in a foreign country.

This paper will not only present a number of cross-cultural dilemmas, but will also outline the impact these dilemmas can have on the expatriate and their family. The impact of these expatriate dilemmas often occurs for the expatriate as an overall state of disempowerment that is correlated with the mental, emotional and physical symptoms of cultural adjustment, often referred to as “cultural shock,” a phenomenon that is well documented in the cross-cultural literature (Copeland, 2009). Disempowerment is defined as the experience or the state of being deprived of influence (the capacity to produce effects on other people in one’s life), personal power, or importance (having significance or personal or social consequence).<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, this paper will specifically look at the value of professional coaching in assisting expatriates in dealing powerfully and effectively with the common dilemmas of international living. Specific coaching tools will be presented that can support expatriates and their families in successfully adjusting to their new culture, in restoring a state of empowerment in their lives and in fully participating in their new host country. Empowerment, in contrast to disempowerment, is viewed as the state or a way of being in which a person experiences having influence, personal power and importance in their lives. This paper will distinguish six specific experiential aspects of this state of personal empowerment and how cross-cultural coaching can help expatriates attain this level of fulfillment. Successful expatriate adjustment and participation will reflect an expatriates’ experience of themselves as being at choice, being connected, being grounded, being accepting, being creative, and being effective.

### **Common Dilemmas for Expatriates and their Families**

Copeland (2009) identifies a number of specific adjustment dilemmas for expatriates and their families when moving to a new country as well as when returning home. Some of these adjustment dilemmas and their potential impact of expatriates are presented in this next section.

- *Loss of a sense of belonging.* Living as a foreigner in another country shifts one’s status to that of a minority member of the host country. This loss of majority status can be uncomfortable and disconcerting, leaving the expatriate with the sense of disconnection, of feeling different, and of not belonging. This loss of a sense of personal importance or majority status can leave an expatriate feeling not known and not understood.
- *Loss of the ability to communicate.* Moving to a new country that requires the expatriate and their family to learn a new language can be one of the most challenging dilemmas of international living. In almost every exchange or interaction with another person in a new culture, an expatriate can feel awkward, embarrassed, ineffective, and misunderstood. Not being understood can be frustrating, uncomfortable and upsetting. Being ill at ease, feeling uncomfortable, or feeling apologetic for one’s awkwardness may accompany daily interactions with others. When this kind of experience is repeated day in and day out for an

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com)

expatriate learning a new language, the expatriate can have feelings of fatigue, depression, anxiety, and anger at not being able to effectively and easily communicate with others. Even after an expatriate learns a basic competency in their foreign language, there is no guarantee that he or she will pick up important contextual and relational cues or understand the communication styles of other people in their new culture.

- *Loss of one's support system.* Leaving family, friends and long-time work colleagues to take on an international assignment is a major dilemma for an expatriate and their family. Feeling lonely, disconnected and sad can be a naturally part of an expatriate's adjustment to a new culture. That loss of emotional, social, and practical support can be a very challenging aspect of international living. Developing a meaningful new social network is important in adjusting to a new culture.
- *Changes in family functioning.* An international relocation can put much stress on a family's functioning. Changes in work and household responsibilities, in parental roles, in daily habits and schedules, in cultural rules and expectations and in family and social support can all have an impact on the health and well-being of the family. Living with a sense of uncertainty and a loss of security is common for expatriate families as each member of the family simultaneously goes through their own cross-cultural adjustment. Each family member can feel as though the rug has been pulled out from underneath him or her. For expatriate parents, it can be disconcerting and anxiety provoking, if their children are adjusting poorly and showing persistent anger or sadness about having had to move. Parents, while intellectually rationalizing the move as enriching, can feel guilty and regretful over their child's unhappiness. Initially, expatriate parents can find it difficult to manage the range and intensity of emotions that are occurring in the family and that it can take considerable time to reach a new sense of family equilibrium and stability.
- *Stress in doing practical tasks.* Another much more practical dilemma for expatriates and their families is waking up each morning to realize that, in almost every situation, there will be things to learn anew. Dealing with not knowing what to do and having feelings of ineffectiveness incompetence, and frustration are common experiences that can pervade the life of an expatriate. It can be that way at the doctor's office, at the dentist's office, at the drug store, in the local restaurant, at the bank, at the tax office, and at the post office. Things just work differently in other countries. The rules of the road are not the same. It can take months before a newcomer feels confident negotiating all the practical tasks that must be mastered in a new country.
- *Stress of being misperceived.* Moving to a new country potentially exposes the new expatriate and their family to being perceived in culturally stereotyped ways. Also, expatriates may have some strongly formed judgments and beliefs about the people of their new country. Being misperceived by host nationals can lead initially to feelings of not being understood and of being judged and, over time if adjustments are not made, to feelings of bitterness and resentment.
- *Loss of understanding of social norms.* Social and cultural norms give people who live in a given community or culture clarity around how to behave and what to do in a myriad of social situations and contexts. In the first months of living in a new country expatriates must cope with not knowing what to do, what to expect, or how to behave in a certain social situations. The lack of the implicit and explicit knowledge around the social norms and rules in areas such as dining, personal space, greetings, punctuality, gift-giving, and self-

promotion, etc., creates opportunities for the new expatriate to feel socially awkward and self-conscious. Living day in and day out with his kind of uncertainty can be uncomfortable, tiresome and frustrating.

- *Challenges to one's cultural values.* Moving to a new country and learning to live in another culture requires expatriates to confront challenges to important cultural values that are at the foundation of who they consider themselves to be. A person having grown up in America and who has internalized the cultural values of individualism, optimism, hard work, and competition may be challenged when coping with life in a host country where the cultural values of socialism, collectivism, and an external locus of control predominate. Dealing with challenges to one's own cultural values can leave an expatriate feeling unsettled, disconnected, unsupported and even resentful.
- *Loss of Identity.* Living in a new culture and the all encompassing changes that occur in one's life as the result of an international relocation can leave an expatriate wondering, "Who I am?" or "What am I doing?" All the familiar guideposts that give a person their sense of self can undergo a radical change. This dilemma requires the expatriate to be "at choice" and responsible for the choice they made to move internationally and to stay anchored in those personal values that are important to them.
- *People are not interested in finding out about expatriate life.* When expatriates return home, there are additional challenges that are unexpected and can be difficult. Many friends and family members are unable to fully appreciate what it was like for the expatriate and their family living in a foreign country. People may show little interest or understanding in the many ways that the expatriate, now a repatriate, has changed in their worldview, their values or their abilities. This experience can be disconnecting and leave the returning expatriate with the sense that his or her own homeland is foreign to them.
- *Being a stranger in a familiar land.* Expatriates who return to their home country report that it takes several years to experience being "at home" again. Living internationally can impact one's life in ways that is hard to understand even after being home two or three years. Expatriates' view of the world and their place in it changes. Their values and what is important to them change. Returning expatriates begin a journey of integrating their international experience into their new lives that can be much more difficult and last much longer than they had initially expected. Being home again can feel both "familiar" and "strange" at the same time.
- *International expertise is not recognized upon returning home.* Many expatriates experience that their new level of international expertise goes completely unrecognized by other people in their lives and by colleagues at work. When their international knowledge is not put to good use or appreciated by one's employer and co-workers, a repatriate can feel undervalued and frustrated. This dilemma is all too common for returning expatriates.

The impact of each of the common dilemmas outlined above in the lives of expatriates and repatriates could be described as a state of disempowerment or an experience of a loss of importance, personal power or influence. The state of disempowerment, more specifically, can be thought of as an expatriate's sense of having a loss of connection, "OK-ness," control, effectiveness, balance and certainty in his or her day-to-day life. The next section of this paper will examine the role that cross-cultural coaching can play in assisting expatriates and their families to feel empowered and to adjust successfully to life in their new host country.

## **The Promise of Cross-cultural Coaching**

Professional coaching is a powerful relationship for people making important changes in their lives, designing their future, and taking committed action to realize their visions and goals (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998; Williams & Davis, 2002). Rosinski (2003) has defined coaching as “the art of facilitating the unleashing of people’s potential to reach, meaningful, important objectives.” Cross-cultural coaching is a relationship that expatriates, their spouses and family members can have with a professionally trained and certified coach who has experience working within a cross-cultural context. A cross-cultural coach is also someone who has intercultural expertise, who has had international experience and who understands the kinds of cross-cultural dilemmas that expatriates may encounter.

Cross-cultural coaching is an ongoing relationship for expatriates and/or expatriate couples who are committed to taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires in the context of an international assignment. In partnership with their coach, expatriates co-create a safe, supportive and confidential relationship in which they can focus their attention on what is important to them and gain clarity and awareness of what's going on with them in their adjustment to international living. “Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client’s level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support and feedback.”<sup>3</sup> Coaches are trained to hold their clients as naturally capable and able, as whole and complete, and as creative and resourceful in tackling life’s challenges as they create and fulfill the vision they have for their lives (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998)

It is becoming increasingly recognized that professional coaching, including couple’s coaching, is uniquely suited to help expatriates and their families in effectively meeting the dilemmas inherent in international living. The advantages of professional coaching for expatriates include (Miser, & Miser, 2009):

- A coaching relationship is a flexible and responsive resource that an expatriate can request when needed over the course of an expatriate assignment.
- The expatriate can choose to contract with a professional coach who is from their home country and who speaks their own language.
- The coaching itself can be done in the expatriate’s home, at an agreed upon location or over the telephone.
- The expatriate can achieve desired outcomes in relatively short periods of time (two to six months).
- Professional coaching is less stigmatizing and more “user friendly” than traditional mental health services with which an expatriate and their family may not be comfortable accessing in their host country.
- A trained certified coach can help the expatriate seek therapeutic services within the local community if more intense psychological adjustments should be needed.
- Lastly, a certified coach is professionally trained and understands the importance of confidentiality.

A coaching relationship can provide expatriates and their families a rich opportunity to explore their values and what is important to them, what they are passionate about, what they are concerned about, and what kind of life they envision for their lives in their new host country. Through periodic conversations with a professional coach, expatriates are able to enhance the

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org)

quality of their lives, achieve their personal and career goals and be supported in living passionate, balanced and fulfilling lives.

### ***The Focus of Cross-cultural Coaching: A State of Personal Empowerment***

At the heart of professional coaching is a commitment to work with people such that they are empowered to have the life they envision and to enjoy the life they have. The expatriate brings their life, their dreams, their agenda and their goals to the coaching relationship while the coach is responsible for the process of coaching. The coach and expatriate design a committed relationship that has as its purpose the personal empowerment of the expatriate in manifesting the life he or she desires.

More specifically, coaching can assist the expatriate and their family to move with greater velocity and ease from a state of disempowerment, when it occurs, to a state of empowerment. When expatriates confront the dilemmas of international living, they often report experiencing a sense of disconnectedness from others, feeling like a victim, feeling reactive and off balance and consider themselves ineffective in what they undertake. The focus of coaching is on assisting the expatriate to move in the direction of personal empowerment or expanding the ability to influence, to exert personal power and to have significance in the affairs of one's life. In the process of living, adapting to and thriving in a new culture, the expatriate can move toward empowerment and mastery in six transformative ways:

- The expatriate transforms from being disconnected to being connected, including having the experience of:
  - Being recognized or seen
  - Being understood
  - Being known
  - Feeling as though one belongs
  - Feeling “at home” in the host culture
  
- The expatriate shifts from being judgmental to being accepting, including having the experience of:
  - Being open to different experiences, cultures, people, lifestyles, etc.
  - Being curious and inquisitive about others
  - Seeing situations through the lens, “There is nothing wrong” and “All is okay”
  - Being whole and complete
  - Appreciating cultural differences
  - Learning about different cultures
  - Seeing a common humanity
  - Sharing with others
  
- The expatriate transforms from being a victim to being responsible, including having the experience of:
  - Being the author of your own life
  - Being “at choice” or “at cause” in one's life
  - Having a say in one's life and one's future
  - Being anchored in and committed to what is important
  - Being aware of one's values
  - Making choices in alignment with one's values

- Being able to see the big picture
  - Having power in dealing with life's difficulties
  - Being able to see different perspectives
- The expatriate moves from being ineffective to being effective, including having the experience of:
    - Being confident
    - Being competent
    - Feeling valuable
    - Feeling useful
    - Being successful
    - Dealing powerfully with not knowing
    - Moving forward with certainty
    - Being able to handle whatever life delivers
    - Learning new things with ease and without upset
- The expatriate shifts from being off balance to being in balance, including having the experience of:
    - Being anchored
    - Being grounded
    - Being settled
    - Feeling safe and secure
    - Feeling calm and composed
    - Being even-tempered or even-keeled
    - Being satisfied and fulfilled
    - Making peace with life's circumstances
    - Being resilient
- The expatriate changes from being reactive to being creative, including having the experience of:
    - Being generative
    - Designing one's life and one's future
    - Feeling good about one's future
    - Feeling positive about what is possible
    - Taking risk with confidence
    - Making one's life happen
    - Accomplishing one's goals and objectives
    - Making plans of action
    - Fulfilling personal projects
    - Fulfilling ones dreams and aspirations

Many expatriates share that their international living is a transformative experience, one in which they undergo a fundamental shift in who they are in the world. Some will say they experience themselves as "world citizens" or others will sense that they have a new understanding of life that stretches across cultures. Professional coaching can be an important resource for expatriates undergoing changes in who they consider themselves to be and how they understand their contribution in the world.

## Cross-cultural Coaching Tools for Personal Empowerment

Learning about the common expatriate dilemmas and about the stages of cultural adjustment often occurs for the first time for many expatriates in the cross-cultural training they attend as part of the services included in their international assignment package. Being aware of what to expect in an international move is important and prepares the expatriate and their family for their eventual move and subsequent adjustment. Living with the cross-cultural dilemmas outlined above is distinct, however, from talking about them. It is the difference between talking about playing baseball and actually playing the game. Coaching is for people who are “in the game” or “on the field” of life. A coach is someone who works directly with people to empower them in what they are up to in life and in dealing powerfully with life’s dilemmas as they fulfill on their dreams and aspirations.

A strong case has been made for the inclusion of cross-cultural coaching services in the package of benefits that are offered to expatriates and their families over the life cycle of their international assignment (Miser, & Miser, 2009; Miser, 2010). It is only after the expatriate and his or her family make their commitment to pull up stakes, put everything at risk and move to a new country, that everything transforms. It is at that moment, that the expatriate steps out on his new playing field and begins to confront all the adjustment challenges inherent in an international assignment. It is at this time that professional coaching can be of greatest benefit. A professional coach can help to normalize the process of change and assist the expatriate and his family in meeting the challenges that life presents “head on.” The following are some specific coaching tools for personal empowerment, i.e., generative conversations for supporting expatriates and their families to experience a sense of influence, personal power, and importance in their lives.

- *Creating a context.* Expatriates can use a cross-cultural coaching relationship as a forum for talking about the life they wish to create for themselves during an international assignment. For instance, expatriates can create a context for their lives that gives them meaning and purpose in the face of the challenges on their journey. Their coach is a committed listener who can remind them of the contextual frame they have created for the lives. An example of such a context might be, “I am a world citizen seeking international understanding and peace.” An expatriate couple might co-create a context of “possibility, partnership and passion” for themselves and their family in their life abroad.
- *Connecting with values.* Expatriates can use a coaching relationship to clarify what is important, what they value and what they find compelling in their lives. A coach can assist their client in adopting a new perspective for their lives in specific situations by stepping back and gaining a bigger, or meta-view, at any given moment and in any given set of circumstances. This kind of meta-frame assists the expatriate to appreciate how cultural influences outside of their immediate view might be impacting their present situation. The expatriate can see more clearly how what is important to them might guide their action in different situations.
- *Making powerful choices.* When an expatriate and their spouse consider accepting an expatriate assignment, they must make an important and life-altering choice. Making these kinds of choices powerfully requires expatriates to fully consider all the “pros” and “cons” for either accepting a potential international assignment or declining the opportunity. After such a discussion, an expatriate and their partner can be better able to deal with the myriad of logistical, financial, and emotional aspects of the assignment that arise after they choose to

accept the expatriate assignment. A coach can assist expatriates in making life choices freely and without regret and in stepping forward onto their chosen path powerfully.

- *Identifying personal strengths.* Through identifying and putting to use personal strengths and abilities, individuals can achieve greater happiness and well-being (Seligman, 2004). A cross-cultural coach can work with expatriates and their families in not only discovering their strengths and abilities, but also in expanding their capacities for successful international adjustment. Rather than focusing on personal weaknesses, expatriates can benefit from incorporating their abilities and talents, such as determination, sense of humor, or patience into their everyday interactions with people in their host country.
- *Renegotiating roles and responsibilities.* Accepting an expatriate assignment often requires an expatriate couple to re-negotiate their roles and responsibilities in the arenas of the parenting, household responsibilities, managing the finances, and managing all the logistics around the international move, which may require selling home and cars, closing bank accounts, contacting schools, etc. An expatriate and his or her spouse may use a coach to help them to sort out who is going to do what, to have an alignment of their roles and to create a partnership in attending to all the responsibilities involved in successfully relocating abroad.
- *Designing a project supporting their family's transition.* A coach can work with an expatriate couple in creating a project that involves not only the logistics of the relocation, but also the transition issues for each member of the family. A coach can help an expatriate couple include their children in preparing for their move to a new country. The couple can get support in keeping focused on short-term goals, identifying roadblocks and obstacles, and taking action together to solve problems.
- *Focusing on workability.* Handling all the logistical matters that must be attended to in an international move can be quite overwhelming for an expatriate and their family. Rather than focusing on “What is wrong?” at any given moment, a coach can assist an expatriate in focusing on “What is missing?” or “What is wanted and needed to get the job done?” Another effective area of focus for the expatriate is “What is working” and “What is not working,” rather than “What’s wrong?” or “Who is to blame?” when something goes awry.
- *Adopting a stance of curiosity.* When being curious about their new culture, an expatriate can find greater pleasure and enjoyment in their daily life. A posture of curiosity must be consciously chosen and practiced, however; it is not necessarily a way of being that one wakes up with in the morning (Kashdan, 2009). A coach can assist expatriates in adopting ways of being that foster curiosity, inquiry, discovery and exploration. Such ways of being can enhance adaptability, continuous learning, and personal satisfaction for expatriates and their families as they confront risk and challenge in their new life circumstances.
- *Reflecting on the process of cultural adaptation.* At any time in the process of cultural adaptation, a coach can assist an expatriate and their family to be aware of their issues and concerns. Just being aware of “where one is” in the adaptation process can be enormously freeing as it can normalize what the expatriate is experiencing. While still feeling discomfort and even pain at times, the expatriate has a way of understanding or re-contextualizing what is going on in his or her life. Knowing that one is in a process of cultural adjustment can assist the expatriate in understanding that whatever he or she may be experiencing “won’t last forever” and is a “normal” part of learning to live in a foreign country.

- *Building the capacity for resilience.* Being resilient can be thought of as the capacity to be flexible in the face of life's obstacles, to navigate successfully through difficult times, to bounce back from loss or failure, or to find new meaning and purpose in life (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). A cross-cultural coach can assist expatriates and their families in changing the ways they think about adversity and, thereby, helping them to be in charge of their emotional reactions to stressful circumstances and to become more resilient in the face of expatriate challenges. Expatriates can benefit from very practical tools to help them to identify those situations that "push their buttons," to become aware of those beliefs that trigger disempowering feelings and actions, and to notice potential undesired consequences. As expatriates are supported in taking on empowering beliefs, they can be in greater control of their own happiness and peace of mind.
- *Articulating the impact of common expatriate dilemmas.* While the expatriate may have learned about such common expatriate dilemmas during their cross-cultural training session months before, it can be empowering to be able to talk about what it is like to actually be in the midst of these dilemmas when they are occurring and have tools to effectively deal with them. A coaching relationship is an ideal arena where expatriate can sort out what they are coping with on a day to day basis, recognize that, when they are feeling disempowered, they can request the support they need to put their hands back directly on the steering wheel of their life.
- *Designing empowering perspectives.* In order to have power and freedom in areas of life that are unsatisfying and not working as well as they would like, expatriates can use a coaching relationship to become aware of unwitting and disempowering perspectives they may have adopted. Such perspectives, or ways of seeing, can have a great impact on the quality of one's life. Expatriates and the spouses can learn ways to notice disempowering viewpoints or perspectives they may have adopted about the people or the customs of their host country. They can also be supported in creating perspectives and viewpoints that help them to be more accepting, open and empowered in their life abroad.
- *Fostering optimism and self-efficacy.* Being optimistic is associated with the belief that one can achieve one's dreams and what one is committed to in life. Expatriates who approach their international assignment with high self-efficacy expectancies believe that their choice to move abroad will be successful and bring personal fulfillment. A cross-cultural coach can assist expatriates in building and sustaining such self-efficacy and optimism in dealing with the challenges of international living. Such positive beliefs in one's future outcomes can lead to greater health, effectiveness, and success.
- *Creating a vision for the future.* A cross-cultural coach can assist an expatriate couple in creating an aligned vision of their life and their future in their host country. What kind of a lifestyle and home life do they want to create for themselves? What do they want to do with their family? Where do they want to travel? How do they want to contribute or what projects do they want to create with others or at their children's schools? How long do they want to stay on assignment abroad and what kind of life are they creating over the long term?
- *Designing projects supporting their family's vision of the future.* A coach can work with an expatriate and his or her spouse in creating a host of projects to fulfill on the vision of the life they want to create abroad. Such projects might involve traveling, sightseeing, volunteering, working, recreation, home decoration, career planning, business development, social

planning, or personal hobbies. Personal projects are organized around specific accomplishments, actions to be taken, project goals or objectives, and structures of support. A coach can assist expatriate families in fulfilling on the personal projects by having family discussions that involve planning and problem solving.

- *Focusing on meaning and engagement.* Living a purposeful and engaged life has been found to be key to a path to happiness and fulfillment (Kauffman, 2006). Finding personal meaning in their lives and being fully engaged in their new culture can enhance expatriates' daily feelings of satisfaction about their international assignment. A coach can assist an expatriate to be in control that their own inner experience, which includes their bodily experiences, their feelings, and their thoughts which can affect how they construct the meaning they give life's circumstances. Expatriates who foster positive meanings and interpretations for daily situations can have greater choice and control over their level of engagement in their host culture.
- *Reflecting on and learning from the expatriate experience.* In a coaching relationship, an expatriate and their families can gain insight and awareness of themselves through inquiry, self-reflection and shared learning. A coach is trained to ask powerful questions to help their expatriate clients in integrating the lessons they are learn while living in their host country. Each member of the family can have the opportunity to reflect on what they learned about themselves and life during their expatriation experience as well as how they are developing emotionally, socially, and culturally during their expatriate assignment.
- *Practicing gratitude.* Being appreciative of what one has in life and practicing being thankful expands a person sense of sufficiency and wholeness (Kauffman, 2006). Being grateful, however, requires a conscious commitment. In other words, being grateful is a choice. A cross-cultural coach can help expatriates "mine" the gifts and the benefits of living an expatriate life. Being grateful for all the challenges as well as the successes of their international experience can help expatriates in integrating this important time in their lives into the fabric of their entire life narrative.

## Summary

This paper has presented some of the common cross-cultural dilemmas that expatriates and their families face when they move to a new country. These dilemmas, such as a lack of understanding of social norms, a challenge to one's cultural values, the inability to communicate, a disruption in family functioning and a loss of identity can leave the expatriate in a state of disempowerment or lacking a sense of influence, personal power and significance in important matters in their lives. This paper has discussed the unique role of professional coaching can have in assisting expatriates over the life cycle of their expatriate assignment in moving from a state of disempowerment to a state of empowerment in any given cross-cultural dilemma. The state of empowerment is conceptualized as the ability to influence, to exert personal power and to feel important in the face of life's circumstances. Specifically, cross-cultural coaching, or professional coaching in a cross-cultural context, has been proposed as being a valuable service in a package of expatriate services that can help to empower expatriates in transforming themselves from being disconnected, judgmental, not responsible, ineffective, off balance and reactive to being in relationship with others, accepting, responsible, effective, resilient and creative. Finally, a host of coaching tools were presented that can empower expatriates to adapt powerfully and live creative and satisfying lives in their new country.

## References

- Copeland, A. (2009). *Crossing cultures with competence: Trainer Guide*. Brookline, Massachusetts: The Intercultural Institute
- Kashdan, T. (2009). *Curious? Discover the missing ingredient to a fulfilling life*. New York, N.Y.: William Morrow.
- Kauffman, C. (2006). Positive psychology: The science at the heart of coaching. In D.R. Stober, & A.M. Grant (Eds.), *Evidence Based Coaching Handbook: Putting best practices to work for your clients* (pp 219-253). Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Miser, A. (2010). Cross-cultural coaching: Ensuring success over the life cycle of an expatriate assignment. Unpublished paper
- Miser, A. & Miser, M. (2009). Couples coaching for expatriate couples: A sound investment for international businesses. In M.C. Moral & G. Abbott (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to International Business Coaching* (pp. 203-217). New York, N.Y.: Routledge.
- Reivich, K. and Shatte, A. (2003). *The resilience factor: Seven keys to finding your inner strength and overcoming life's hurdles*. New York, N.Y.: Broadway.
- Rosinski, P. (2003). *Coaching across cultures: New tools for leveraging national, corporate, and professional differences*. London: Nicholas Brealey
- Seligman, M. (2004). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, N.Y.: Free Press.
- Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H, & Sandahl, P. (1998). *Co-active coaching: New skills for coaching people towards success in work and in life*. Palo Alto, California: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Williams, P. & Davis, D. (2002). *Therapist as life coach: Transforming your practice*. New York, New York: W. W. Norton and Company.