

Wrong executive overseas is costly

By Ruth Walker
Christian Science Monitor News Service

American companies doing business abroad continue to waste millions of dollars and perpetuate the "ugly American" image — all because they don't screen the people they send overseas carefully enough.

So charges Barry Kozloff of Selection Research International, a St. Louis firm consulting in what he calls "international human-resource management." Through intensive personal interviews and reference checks, he and his associates help major companies screen out people whose personal or family problems could prevent them from completing an overseas assignment successfully.

"I don't try to dig up dirt, but I do try to get objective information on people," says Kozloff, who is a trained counselor and cultural anthropologist. "I try to provide an objective assessment that will be a reliable predictor of someone's success in an overseas assignment."

If an employee has to bail out of an overseas assignment, it can cost the company big bucks — even for someone well down the corporate ladder. One aerospace company calculates that if a \$20,000-a-year technician working on a fighter plane project fails to complete a two-year job assignment, it costs the company \$100,000. A major chemical company finds it costs three to five times the employee's annual salary to maintain him overseas.

Although cost-plus contracting lets U.S. companies working for foreign governments pass along extra expenses like the cost of replacing an employee, these personnel mistakes obviously work against the firms' ability to maintain good long-term relations in the foreign countries where they operate.

Asked how U.S. companies screen their overseas employees, an official at one aerospace company, who asked not to be identified because of current contracts, responds, "Poorly." He adds, "There's too much 'body shopping.'" Corporate officials "just want to fill the job," usually under pressure of time.

Bruce Adaire, a marketing expert in St. Louis and adviser to the University College program at Washington University, concurs: "I suspect most companies aren't doing well" at screening employees for foreign assignments.

Particularly in third-world countries, where Americans have to cope with language and cultural barriers and what Adaire calls "non-cosmopolitan locals," the problem of attrition leading to inefficient job performance "is bigger than anyone is willing to concede," he says.

The aerospace official says his own company's attrition rate has been very low, but adds that the problem of job failure is "extremely serious, and it's very expensive if it occurs." His company wants to send people overseas who are "strong, flexible, without personal problems — people who have

managed their lives well," as he puts it.

That would seem a pretty basic set of qualifications, but Kozloff has a trunkful of horror stories of poorly qualified people sent abroad with disastrous results.

One major defense contractor, he recounts, went outside the company to hire a man to head its Tehran operation toward the end of the Shah's rule. A huge villa was rented for him and his wife; the understanding was that they would do considerable official entertaining there. "But the wife kept backing out of hostess duty, making excuses about not having the right kind of crystal centerpiece or something." The company ended up holding its receptions in the cramped apartments of contract administrators who lacked prestige but at least were experienced in dealing with Iranians day to day.

"Both the man and his wife turned out to be alcoholics, and they had other problems, too. And besides, the husband simply didn't fit into the company's 'corporate culture.' He was hired for his technical expertise, but was more an authoritarian than a team player, as the others in the company were."

The company finally had to replace the man in Tehran, at a cost of "hundreds of thousands of dollars," says Kozloff, and was unable to find him a new position within the company.

"A good company will allow people to back out gracefully. These decisions (to accept an overseas assignment) must be family decisions. The stresses are real." On the other hand, he notes, "working abroad affords great opportunities for personal growth, for more money, and for foreign travel."

'Where's the bread?'

Cook has a beef with Wendy's

By Bruce Buursma
Chicago Tribune

MILWAUKEE — A meaty dispute is brewing here over the popular "Where's the beef?" advertising campaign conducted by the Wendy's hamburger empire.

William Drilias, owner of a modest chain of submarine sandwich shops here, says he has a large beef with Wendy's, charging that the sizzling successful hamburger commercial is a direct descendant of an award-winning TV ad created in 1979 for his Suburpia Submarine Shoppes.

That ad features a man dourly studying a petite patty on a fast-food cheeseburger and demanding "Where's the meat?" The Wendy's commercial, which hit the airways in January, stars Chicago's Clara Peller, who asks "Where's the beef?" when presented with a nickel-size burger on a pillowy bun.

The thematic and stylistic simi-

larities of the ads, both of which were directed by Joe Sedelmaier of Chicago, have led Drilias, 37, to ask Wendy's officials, "Where's the bread?"

In an interview Tuesday at his corporate headquarters here, Drilias said he will file a lawsuit charging copyright infringement against Wendy's unless the Ohio-based hamburger company agrees to out-of-court compensation.

"A letter of apology will not do it," Drilias said. He declined to specify the amount of money he is seeking, but said, "You can't imagine how rampant our imagination runs."

He did point out, however, that advertising trade publications have reported that Wendy's is spending \$16 million on its "Where's the beef?" campaign, a tiny percentage of the company's \$1.6 billion in gross sales for 1983.

The fast-food feud between Suburpia and Wendy's first reached the broiling point last month when Drilias wrote a letter to the burger chain alleging that their "usurpation of our creative effort, our idea and our finished commercial is both unethical and illegal."

highly acclaimed fast-talking commercials for Federal Express, could not be reached for comment, but he was quoted in the Milwaukee Sentinel Tuesday as saying the Wendy's and Suburpia ads "are two entirely different commercials. I would say you are dealing with a situation as different as 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' is from 'North by Northwest.'" Both those motion pictures were directed by Alfred Hitchcock and have similar plots.

Wendy's officials are directing all inquiries on the dispute to their New York advertising agency, Dancer Fitzgerald Sample Inc. That firm's vice president for business and legal affairs, Francis Mooney, told Drilias earlier this month that his complaint is groundless and promised to "respond with a thorough and complete legal defense."

Drilias said he would not be cowed in his battle with the burger giant. He pledged to continue the fight, perhaps until Wendy's takes seriously the slogan Suburpia has adopted in its advertising campaigns: "We put our money where your mouth is."

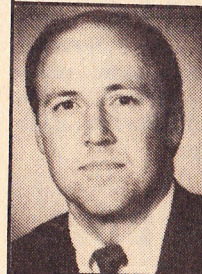
SAINT LOUISANS



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DENNIS R. McDONOUGH has joined Central Hardware Co. as vice president-finance, ALAN R. PURVIS has been named vice president, director of advertising, LARRY M. TYLER has been named vice president, director of sales promotion, and DONALD L. NIGH SWONGER has been named treasurer. V. RAO PATIBANDLA has been named assistant secretary and assistant treasurer. Central Hardware is a subsidiary of Interco Inc.

CHRIS F. BREEZE has been promoted to assistant director of taxes, research and planning at Emerson Electric Co. He joined Emerson in 1981 as manager, U.S. tax planning.

FANNIE D. BOHLEN, vice president and general manager of Famous-Barr, Crestwood Plaza, has been elected president of the Crestwood Plaza Merchants Association, succeeding ARNOLD STEIN of Sears, Roebuck & Co. Other officers are ERWIN STENZEL, vice president; WILMA ALLEN, treasurer, and ROXANNE WEIGEL, secretary.

SUE E. LARSON has been promoted to manager of...