

## What is the issue?

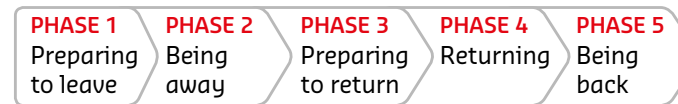
- many people travel away from home and family in more or less challenging environments, for different lengths of time and with varying levels of connectivity
- being away from home can involve a range of experiences and emotions e.g. excitement, fulfilment, learning, a sense of opportunity or novelty, also apprehension, loneliness or uncertainty
- what can individuals do to help maintain their psychological wellbeing away from home and family?

## What research did the Sodexo Institute for Quality of Life do?

In April 2014 the Institute held a round-table 'Dialogue' in London with experts with off-shore oil & gas, military and university perspectives to understand better what individuals can do to maintain their psychological wellbeing while away from home and family. Following the publication of its report on the Dialogue, the Institute commissioned research from Professor Andrew Smith (psychology) of Cardiff University to test the report's hypothesis.

## What did we learn?

It is useful to think about the experience of being away in five phases:



There are ways to support psychological wellbeing in each phase and therefore to maintain it throughout the experience of being away, for example:

- agree on a main point of contact for communication and acknowledge that contact may be intermittent
- while away, the use of technology to stay in contact may be counter-productive. In some circumstances, less frequent, more deliberative contact e.g. by letter, is better
- to unwind from work while away, doing an activity that is different to the work activity is helpful, e.g. if work is mainly screen based, unwind with exercise away from a screen

- preparing to return home can involve less intense final tasks, acknowledging that you and those at home may have changed and things will appear different in light of your experience
- returning in stages or with a 'transition' can help
- being back can require time for readjustment, a 'welcome home' party a few weeks after return instead of the day after can help to maintain wellbeing. Our bodies sometimes travel much faster than our psyche.

The model set out above has been tested through a survey of 400 international students at UK universities. The survey found that international students who were proactive in their studying abroad strategies experienced greater wellbeing and quality of life.

**Find out more by reading the full report: 'Wellbeing away'.**

## About the Institute

As an in-house 'think-tank', the Sodexo Institute for Quality of Life is inspired by Sodexo's deeply held conviction that improving Quality of Life leads to the progress of individuals and contributes to the performance of organisations. Its role is to gather and develop insight to help Sodexo understand better what are the levers of Quality of Life.

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