

THE THRIVING ABROAD PODCAST

Thriving Abroad Podcast.



**EPIISODE 83:
SUPPORTING
INTERNATIONAL CAREER
COUPLES**

**Dr Paul Vanderbroeck
Jannie Aasted Skov
Hansen**

**Louise Wiles, Jannie Aasted Skov Hansen
and Dr Paul Vanderboeck**

TRANSCRIPT

Welcome

Thanks for downloading the transcript from Episode 83 with **HERE WE ARE GLOBAL** and **Jannie Aasted Skov Hansen** and **Dr Paul Vanderbroeck**. If you would like to learn more about us, have some questions or would simply like to start a conversation with us our website/contact details are given below.

The questions we ask ourselves, shape our lives. Here are some questions prompted by today's podcast:

- What is your secure space for conversations about your strategic road map and goals?
- What are your non-negotiables when negotiating an international move and the support provided?
- What do you believe an international experience will provide for you?
- How will you demonstrate your support for each partner's career in a way that offers meaningful collaboration?
- Who will you be as an international career couple? What will your identity be?

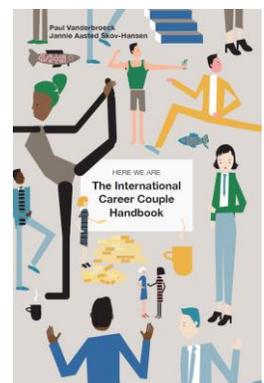
About Dr Paul Vanderbroeck and Jannie Aasted Skov Hansen

Jannie (Danish) is a seasoned Human Resource professional specialized in global people mobility and leadership development. She is Founder of a community and start-up consultancy aimed at supporting International Career Couples in their global careers.

Paul (Dutch/Swiss) has a background of managing talent in multinational organisations. He is an Executive Coach, an accomplished researcher and sought-after speaker on gender balance and leadership development.

Both authors are themselves each a partner in an International Career Couple as well as parents. Therefore, they have first-hand experience of the challenges and opportunities that mark the life of an ICC. They met through a network connection, which underscores one of the book's main messages: Opportunities arise when you commit to pursuing long-term vision and short-term goals on a global development path – while remaining open for unexpected turns. They firmly believe that a growth mindset and a supportive network are key for ICC success.

- You can download the Handbook Flyer [HERE](#)
- You can buy the book from [Amazon](#) or from the [Expat Bookstore](#)
- Website: [Here We Are Global](#)
- LinkedIn: [Dr Paul Vanderbroeck](#)
- LinkedIn: [Jannie Aasted Skov Hansen](#)



About Podcast Host: Louise Wiles

As well as the podcast host, Louise is a professional coach and supports people through the challenges and opportunities that come with change and transition, including international relocation. Louise uses a strengths-based and wellbeing framework as the foundation for creating positive change based on an inspiring vision of the future.

Louise has lived and worked across Europe moving seven times in the past twenty years and recently published ***Thriving Abroad: The definitive guide to professional and personal relocation success.*** You can buy a copy [HERE](#) and use the code THRIVING20 to access a 20% discount. There is an associated workbook which you can download for free [HERE](#)

Enjoy the Podcast?

Deciding, planning and making an international move can be an exciting but also complicated and stressful experience. This podcast provides a wealth of advice on each stage of the process helping you to create a smooth relocation and transition experience.

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Connect with podcast host Louise Wiles. You can connect with me via my email Louise@Louisewiles.com, I reply to all emails personally. You can also find me on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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Louise Wiles 00:08

So hello, Jannie and Paul, lovely to have you joining the Thriving Abroad conversation today. Great to see you both.

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 00:31

Thank you for having us. Again Louise. This is our second time joining.

Paul Vanderbroeck 00:35

Yeah, it's wonderful to be here. Thank you, Louise.

Louise Wiles 00:37

Yeah, I think it was, I think it's about exactly a year ago, almost that I last spoke to you just before the pandemic kind of broke. So yes, quite a year! But in that year, you have written your book, the International Career Couple Handbook. And so, that's what we're going to focus on and talk about in this conversation. So, really just to start and to kick us off - I'd love to know what the inspiration for the book was. And perhaps you could both explain what your personal inspiration was for it. That will give us a little bit of background about your international experience, too. Just to set the scene. Who would like to go first

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 01:26

Yeah, So, first of all, Paul and I both have the experience as an international career couple. And just to make it clear we are not a couple together we are both happily married. And we have both the experience to take the decision to go abroad, and return, and go abroad again, because of our partner's job. So, this experience is of course, natural for us to reflect upon like, what makes an international career couple successful? And how can we help other couples make sure that they take informed decisions? At the same time, we have a background in HR in the corporate sector, and other sectors as well. And we believe that it's time for organisations to also rethink how they care for a global workforce. So, this is part of the motivation, right Paul?

Paul Vanderbroeck 02:33

Yes, so absolutely. And from my side, I can add to that. And that, that applies to Jannie as well. So, when you go abroad, as an expatriate or as a following partner, you meet other people in the same situation, it's often the first people you connect with, in a different country. And so that also we, both of us have met several people, couples, colleagues, friends, parents at the schools, who are in similar situations. So we've seen the phenomenon and also seen it grow. As far as myself is concerned, after my HR career, I went into leadership development coaching, with a particular emphasis, and specialisation in helping women leaders develop. And while working with individual women leaders, the phenomenon of dual careers, as well as international dual careers, has become very apparent to me. And I've seen also through that work, this phenomenon grow and the challenges that these individuals as a couple are faced with.

Louise Wiles 03:51

And that definitely so that's the kind of the theme of the first bit of the book, and I can see the links from all of that experience of being brought into those chapters. And I'm really interested to understand, you

know, this kind of conversation around dual career couples, you know, that's been the theme for the last five years or so, you know in international mobility, talking about the challenge of recruiting employees who are part of a dual career couple. I'm interested to understand or for you to explain what you see as a difference between, you know, the dual career couples that in companies are talking about and the way in which they aim to support dual career couples, and how you see international career couples, as you call them in your book, differing or requiring different types of support from what's been offered so far.

Paul Vanderbroeck 04:47

So, the main difference is really the level of complexity. So, an international career couple is a dual career couple with an additional dimension attached to it, which makes it even more complex and that's having a dual career and a couple across borders. And that requires a different approach and additional approach, which is currently not fully being filled by employers and also not always recognised by the couples themselves. And one of the things, for example, which makes it more complex is the need for an international career couple to construct their own identity, which they take with them as they go to different environments, whereas a dual career couple is local, that identity is much more connected to the context, where you are and sort of is a given, you don't need to do much for that yourself. Whereas, if you move around, you need to have that identity as a couple as a family to be attached, to have some kind of roots, but portable roots. And that's a piece of work that an international career companies to do in order to be successful.

Louise Wiles 06:03

Yeah. And so you said there, you know, it's the work for international career couple need to do for themselves, but also, for organisations to be thinking about supporting them perhaps in a different way. So, where do you see the companies not supporting in the appropriate way, at the moment?

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 06:24

Well, in my view, a lot of companies do a lot of things to support their employees. This thing of caring for the whole family is something that a lot of people advocate for, and a lot of companies really do a lot. What we see is that sometimes this notion is a bit traditional in the sense that the support we see is the cultural training, the support to network the outplacement support, which somehow puts the partner in a position where his or her career is considered, if not less important, then it puts them in this box where one part of the couple is considered the earner, the breadwinner, and the other one will have to find meaningful engagement. What we are advocating for is that a lot of couples these days, want to have meaningful, impactful careers disregarded, where they are living, disregarded the assignment package and posting, and we are advocating for companies to see that we need long term support for employees nowadays. So again, there are a lot of support packages out there, what we are suggesting is that as a minimum, companies that send employees abroad can create the space for this discussion to happen. So, it could be from simply just offering, giving awareness about the decisions you need to take in order for you know, you to have a successful time abroad, but also to more extensive support in the form of workshops or coaching. There are a lot of boxes to be ticked right before you say yes to an assignment. And we argue that that here employees and their partners need to tick their joint box, not just tick the box for the employee or for the accompanying partner, but for them to take a joint decision on what is this next assignment going to give you? What is it going to give me? What is it going to give

us? So, you can comfortably look back at your career down the line and say yes, this was something we did together. And nobody is sub-optimising anyone's career.

Louise Wiles 08:59

Right. So, it's kind of making a proactive decision together as a couple, rather than being pulled by one person's career and the other following, which is often the model that is discussed.

Paul Vanderbroeck 09:13

And to make that proactive career, it's helpful if as a couple you have the opportunity to think these things through beforehand, and to get a feeling for what it is that you want, what it is that you find important. So that you can also bring that in when the opportunity comes and decide on the right things and not only based on whatever the concrete things you have a bit put in front of you by the opportunity for one partner, this country, that salary, that job and that's it.

Louise Wiles 09:50

And I guess it's an ongoing conversation as well isn't it because I suppose - just as you said that I kind of thought, we're often pulled by, or attracted by the job role and the opportunity of moving to a new country. And that can be attractive to both partners. But obviously, you know, one, one job is attracting one partner. Perhaps it's not so easy to see beyond that first stage, because you don't know how life is going to play out in that new location in terms of potential opportunities. So, I'm not saying it's a reason for not thinking this all through. But I am thinking that perhaps it's something that also evolves. So, you need a process that you're going to return to regularly and build on, it's a starting point, is that a fair comment to make?

Paul Vanderbroeck 10:44

Absolutely, and things happen over time. All of a sudden there are children, for example or their children grow older, and have certain needs, and all these things which are part of the equation. One of the things therefore, with this dynamic evolvement, I should say, is that what we've discovered that one of the key success factors of these couples is, is that they have a secure space, which may mean that they have a, it can be a real space, or virtual space, but it's a moment, an opportunity, with some regularity, where the couple takes these important decisions, or exchanges what's going on, and which feed into that evolving dynamic of knowing where you want to go and how you how you want to get there. And that's a confidential space, of course, it's for the couple. A ritual can be part of that, that also reminds you of now we are doing this. And it's not talking about who brings the children to school tomorrow, but it's something important to the couple in the long term.

Louise Wiles 11:55

So setting those kinds of rituals in place that enable you to continue to have the conversations. I suppose when times might also get a bit challenging. You know, because relocation comes with its highs and lows. So, at times, it can be quite emotionally charged. So, I can see why it would be really important to create those spaces where you both recognise that, yeah, you need to talk and calm things down sometimes. I feel kind of at this point in the conversation, we should sort of explain to people who are listening, how the Career Hand-Book kind of plays out, because there's a definite process to it. So,

would you like to explain your thoughts behind it and why it's structured as it is and what it's aiming to achieve?

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 12:46

Well, first of all, our book is based on research. So, we did some desktop research into what has already been done in terms of dual career couples, and in terms of Yeah, the whole expat scene. And we thought, Why don't we talk with the people who have experienced it themselves? So, we did a quantitative survey of about 30 respond respondents and deducted insights from those questions, right? Then we did in depth research with four couples, and these couples are selected in terms of us wanting a diverse group, both in terms of age, national background, a current location, also, whether it's same sex partnerships, or the opposite. Also, in terms of their career paths or some entrepreneurial paths as well, and also some self-movers in here in those four couples. And then we are zooming in on one of these couples and taking them through a strategic tool that we think is valuable. And here it is important that we are not suggesting to make a career plan from A to Z. We are suggesting that to inform future decisions, and also to look back and create a sense of meaning in former career choices, that there is this strategic map we suggest that can be a roadmap for the future and there are various components in this roadmap, such as the secure space that Paul just mentioned. Also, the values and key non negotiables like what's really important for us, what are we not going to look away from, also what is our joint identity, so what are we always looking for when we are faced with a choice. An example for myself and my husband, we have realised during these exercises of course along the way, that creating impact is important for us. In every job opportunity we have, we want to make impact. And this can be, in a foreign country or at home, as I am now in Denmark. But having this thoughtful discussion, not discussion, talk together, makes it so much easier when you are faced with a choice of saying yes or no to an opportunity. So that's one example. You may want to share other examples from the strategy map Paul?

Paul Vanderbroeck 15:33

Yeah, so it's, and it ought to be seen, again, based on the success stories we analyse is, what it takes to be successful. And it's what we started out from and our research has, has given evidence for that, that an international career couple is an organisation a small one, but a very complex one. And that means in order to make that that complex organisation successful, you need to lead it. And that means applying also methods and tools that makes organisation successful to that organisation. So, the book is not a couple therapy, it's about how you lead this organisation to success. And therefore, we've adapted a number of methods and tools, which on one on three, we've constructed ourselves, or which we have seen working organisations, to this mini but complex organisation, which is meant to be successful and sustainable over a long term. And part of that is indeed yes, as with any organisation, you set out a vision, which is either somewhere you want to be in the long term, but it can also be the way you want to live as a couple, and then a strategy with everything that it includes: analysing state goals, getting support, working on your competencies, your motivation as well, in order to realise a strategy, which brings you to that to that vision.

Louise Wiles 17:12

Yeah, yeah. And what, Just going back to the research you did, because I know you interviewed, or did the quantitative research with 30 couples. What were the key findings you found from that? Because I

know you identify those those findings in the book. And I just think people might be interested to hear you know, what, what you found, did you call them success factors?

Paul Vanderbroeck 17:36

Yes, so there's a number of findings right, but three factors appear to be particularly important for success. One is a secure space, which I talked about earlier. The other one is the vision, which assessment to have indeed something you want to work towards either something later in time, a place you want to be or something you want to achieve or a lifestyle you want to have over that period of time. And the third one is, is mutual career development. And that means not just helping each other, get a new job, that's also part of it, but actually also helping each other, supporting each other while in the job. So you see couples taking out dual career couples two separate careers where both do their own thing and allow each other to do that, but there's no connection, no help no support, from each other and that in the long term certainly internationally, doesn't work out. What does work out is if you actually are each other's help and supporter at work, as well as in developing careers.

Louise Wiles 18:48

And that certainly came through to me quite clearly from reading it, that it was that kind of mutual collaboration that was really what separated,

Paul Vanderbroeck 18:58

Its really a team, it's really a team

Louise Wiles 18:58

And it was interesting, because you also talked about the couple being an entity, you know, in relation to organisations in the way that organisations think about international career couples, rather than thinking about it being an employee plus one, you know, this is an entity that needs to be supported, which I thought was a really refreshing way for companies to look at the concept because then that obviously informs the way in which they support as well, doesn't it? And rather than, you know, support the employee plus a little something tagged on to help the spouse or the partner out. Yeah.

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 19:41

And just a little comment to that, we gave a work workshop this week, and one of the attendees named this challenge of split postings, like if you are in two separate countries although you are a couple. And this proved to show that an entity means that you are in this together, right? But it doesn't necessarily mean that you are in the same country for the same amount of years, we have seen successful international career couples who also live separately for periods of time. But that is because they have consciously taken a choice to do so, that is because they tick their joint box, right? Yeah. And when we say successful, it's not to say that you both reach your, you know, maximum career potential at the same time. It means that you are content that you're happy, that you are sustainable, and that you feel supported. And I think that's important, like, what is success that that can, that is always individual? But having, like I said a conversation of what is success to us? What is the vision we have together? That's important.

Louise Wiles 20:53

Yeah. And I guess, what's successful depends on different stages of life, as well, I suppose for couples, you know, kids, perhaps, different stages and ages of children, and the impact that has, coupled with relocation and all of that, and I know in the book, you encourage people to think about the roles that they're undertaking and where they overlap and where they can support. Would you like to explain a bit about that, because I thought that was a really interesting exercise to get or encourage couples to do.

Paul Vanderbroeck 21:22

Yeah, it's, it's something that's one of the tools we specially developed. And it's called role mapping. And it's to, to look at, to analyse, first of all the different roles, each of the partners has at work at home, but also as part of your family. I, myself, am a husband, I'm a father, I'm brother. When my parents still lived, I was also a son. And apart from that, I mean, I'm an executive coach, and an author. And then, I may also have some activities on the side of being, you know, being involved in running a sports club or something like that. And all these roles, they, on the one hand, they're happening in parallel, but sometimes overlap, and they create tensions. And sometimes also, they can be mutually reinforcing. And then the other partner has the same, and it's important to put those two together to know a bit better what everybody is doing, really. And then to see, where is the tension between their roles? How much can you do to optimise that situation? Where do you want to do something a bit less or bit more, or do it in a different way? In order to make this complexity of this international career couple run better.

Louise Wiles 23:00

Yeah. And just articulating, I think, sometimes those responsibilities helps you know, there's always something isn't there? Well, I don't know, perhaps it's just me. But, you know, not always. But you know, in busy times, there can be the chuntering in your head, or I'm doing everything. But if you're articulating this specifically, you know, and regularly having a conversation around it, you know, then that's articulated, it's out there. It's not something that's chuntering, you know, inside our heads and chipping away, perhaps, in a negative way. So, I really. And that, to me, linked to, you talked about different stakeholders. And I thought that was a really important point, as well to emphasise because, you know, my experience, you can sometimes think that it's just the two of you, you know, when you're, you're moving to a new location, it's easy to forget that there are others who can support if you actually look for them and ask for that help, you can become quite self-sufficient, I think that's one, one characteristic that quite a lot of international couples will say about themselves or their families, you know, that they're quite self-sufficient, and they support each other. But the thing you emphasise and I think made really clearly to me is that we can consciously think about where that support can come where else that support can come from us. For us, but also where relationships might drain slightly. Would you like to just explain a little bit about that?

Paul Vanderbroeck 24:38

Well, that's the comparison with running an organisation where you can't run an organisation without taking into account who supports you, where you need to deliver something to, who needs your support and that kind of thing. Those are the stakeholders which also you map out and plan for an influence in an organisation. And in a couple, it's no different, that people can support you, the people who need your support. And in order to realise your goal to strategy you need to take into account how can I maximise the support I get from others? And if they're not giving me, where can I get it from? And those who need my support? How can I give them what they need, without necessarily that frustrating what

we are doing as a couple? And how can you create those Win:Win solution and that's not necessarily rocket science, but it takes being conscious of what's going on and analysing that, and then taking decisions.

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 25:46

And again, that's another example of the complexity, the added complexity, when you move internationally. You may come from separate home countries, right? Then you have third culture kids who belong to a lot of cultures, right? So that there are quite many perspectives to consider, and what we offer are the tools to to have these conversations again. And one can say that's maybe, you know, daunting to spend, I don't know how many hours you could spend on this, but we are offering to just honour this organisation you are and take these conversations from time to time. So, some would say that they felt like booking a whole weekend away with their loved one to take these conversations. That's perfectly fine. But it can also be sometimes just to check in with each other, like, how are we faring? Because there are moving parts in everything we do, and especially when we have a global path together, right?

Paul Vanderbroeck 26:53

Yeah, just on that weekend, it's actually also what we recommend to do, there's no question it takes energy, it takes work. To go through that it's important there is some complexity to it and yeah, leading an organisation is difficult. So that in a couple is the same. Now at the same time, it's also, because we're sure that once you do that, you see the progress, and that's very stimulating and motivating. For, again, the organisation of the couple, and two partners that are a part of it, and in such a weekend away just the two of you to do that important work, that can be very valuable. And a fun part should be part of it too to give you the opportunity to be happy with each other and to be inspired by what you do and to compliment you and celebrate the success that you achieved in the course of such a weekend.

Louise Wiles 27:52

Yes. And to look at it in that way, because I suppose I when I, as I look through some of these and imagined myself sitting down, I suppose I had in my mind, I, it's been lovely to have this kind of structure, when I first set out 20 years ago, and said, Yeah, to have had this way or this idea of thinking about the whole experience and talking about it, because I think that's what it gives, it gives a language to a couple to then have the conversation, language structure for the conversation.

Paul Vanderbroeck 28:21

Oh, but also a language? Absolutely,

Louise Wiles 28:25

And what also struck me is, it's developmental, because you have the competencies that you've outlined, the Here We Are Global competencies am I right in calling them that? And so that's part of the framework. And of course, that's something that's developmental over time, you're looking at each of those do I mean, I recommend people listening, go and buy the book and have a look at those because those in themselves provide real richness in terms of thinking about what you're sort of interacting with, in your environment, wherever you are in the world, but also how you're developing your own skills and strengths through the experience, which is a really valuable way of looking at it. One other thought as

you just, that just occurred to me as you were talking about us as a couple as an organisation, but you know, some of these exercises as well are perhaps exercises you could almost talk about with your organisation in terms of vision, for example, it just suddenly struck me that, you know, if an employee's being moved internationally, and it's a company move then you know, a longer term vision about career and what that means to the individual, but also the organisation, so there's an understanding there. And I guess it links, all of the things into the competencies and the strengths that perhaps organisations are looking to develop in their international employees.

Paul Vanderbroeck 29:48

You raise an interesting point because I think one of the things we also want to achieve with his book is that once couples have this planned strategy and know what they want, and they know what they're not want, and what's important to them. It makes it much easier to find an agreement with the employer about 'Okay, what does the next move looks like? And what do we need to make it successful?' And having said that, based on what you just said, to us the strategy map we have, and I think we'll also make it easier to make that clear to the organisation because you're speaking to them in the same terms, you know, talking about whether you feel happy or not, you're talking about we as a couple have this strategy, and this is what are our objectives, and these are competencies, which, yeah, which sorry to say, it's company speak, but to speak the same language makes it easier to convince someone?

Louise Wiles 30:43

Yes,

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 30:43

Yeah. And what we're offering, again, is a structure. So, this is a framework that you can use in your own individual way, then we know life happens to us, right? We can never plan ahead three years, but having the, the sound foundation as a couple and have the expectation management with yourself, within your couple, then with your organisation, then we have the foundation for success. We hope 'oh we see you right', because we can never, you know, guard ourselves 100% for a failed assignment or for a partnership breaking up. But we can take preventive measures and kind of fuel the journey, so people are better prepared and more energised and ready to take on everything that international careers has to offer. And in these pandemic times, you can also argue like how much mobility will there be in the future? Well, to us, we are global professionals, nevertheless. I have been in Denmark for four years, but the opportunity to go abroad, that's always there as an option. Right. So, that's imperative for us that we are talking about global careers. And that can last a lifetime, with various setups.

Louise Wiles 32:04

yeah, and you talked about split postings earlier and perhaps that's going to become more of a reality, that perhaps one partner goes for a short time. And you know, the longer-term assignments some people predicting won't be as numerous, but people are working either remotely or doing shorter term trips or assignments. So, then perhaps they're going to be more split international career couples, but still, this all applies to them, doesn't it?

Jannie Aasted Skov-Hansen 32:40

But what we will always have is the repatriation challenge, right? Learning to go back to either the one home country, or both home country of both parties in a couple. That will always pose challenges, right, in terms of how to sustain the income, how to sustain professional identities of two persons. And this is where our strategies, and the tools that we provide can also be of help in terms of calibrating where are we now? And what's our next step together?

Louise Wiles 33:12

Yes, yeah, no, absolutely. Right. Is there anything else I haven't asked you that you think I should have asked you about the book, or anything else you want to share that we haven't covered?

Paul Vanderbroeck 33:24

Yeah. So, the book is, as we say, it's a handbook. It's very much constructed. And you use you've seen it yourself, Louise, to a number of instruments and tools to work with. And that works fine. For couples, or employees who want to have a bit more ease in working with it, or perhaps a bit more structured way. We have also, in addition to the book developed a series of worksheets, which makes it easier to work with the various exercises and tools in the book, both with pen and paper, if you prefer, but also for those who prefer working on a computer, on a tablet, to make it easy to work with.

Louise Wiles 34:13

And where are those available from?

Paul Vanderbroeck 34:15

Those are on the [Here We Are Global](#) Website.

Louise Wiles 34:19

Okay. So I will put links to the book and those then in the blog, blog posts that's associated with this episode. At Thriving Abroad. Okay. So, thank you very much for sharing the news about your book, and I think it really is a valuable, it's not to read. Well, it is a read, obviously, but it's more than a read. So, it's a valuable tool. And framework, as you say, for any international career couple, and I really highly recommend people go and take a look at it. So, thank you for sharing the story of your book and wish you all the very best with it.

Paul Vanderbroeck 35:04

Thank you Louise. Great to be with you. Thanks for your questions.

Louise Wiles 35:08

Thank you

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