

Cultural Awareness Underlies Success in Global Markets

A Korean company was starting up a major new business in the USA. One of the Korean expatriates that they assigned to the business was a human resource specialist. He was paired with an American counterpart to interview employee candidates. The American was shocked at the kind of questions that the Korean asked the first few candidates. “You just can’t ask these questions in this country”, she said to him. He replied “I know what kind of people it takes to be successful in our company, and I need the information”.

We all have heard about cross cultural blunders—or maybe have been a part of them. Words and nonverbal gestures accepted as proper and respectful in one country can sometimes be offensive in another. Companies that are well-established in their homeland who decide to expand globally without effort of cross-cultural awareness often pay the price for not doing their homework.

Helping clients understand cultural differences is a common challenge for Tucker International, LLC, a full service international human resource development firm based in Boulder, Colorado. “Whether it’s a Korean company coming to the U.S., or an American company setting up in Mexico, many company leaders have this assumption that they can do things the way they did in their home country—and that just doesn’t work,” said Michael Tucker, PhD, CMC, president of the firm.

Tucker has lived or worked in 44 countries around the world, so when he’s coaching executives on global leadership, he draws from personal experience, but his other credentials also come in handy. He is an industrial-organizational psychologist, a Certified Management Consultant (less than

one percent of all consultants achieve this certification), and author of the Overseas Assignment Inventory and the Tucker Assessment Profile which are validated instruments used to assess, select, and develop personnel for international assignment. In what Tucker calls a depressing statistic, the most recent survey by the Employee Relocation Council reported that only 19% of the 1,500 major global companies participating in the study administer structured assessments before sending people on international assignments. “If a company invests in our assessment and coaching for their international assignees, they can get over a 500 percent return based on our measurements of how well they do their jobs abroad,” said Tucker. It’s a compelling argument, but a tough sell. “Globalization is clearly upon us and has been for a long time, but the idea that understanding national cultures underlies global success is still a message that

needs to get out there,” he said.

Tucker International, LLC, recently completed a major study in conjunction with Right Management. After studying 1,900 global leaders in 13 nations, one of the key competencies found to predict successful cross-cultural leadership was the ability to instill trust within the company and externally with stakeholders. This isn’t a big surprise to most, trust is important in any leadership role. “But,” said Tucker, “you have to think about the cultural difference of what trust means in these countries.”

Tucker is a sought after speaker at conferences for companies such as KPMG and Deloitte explaining the challenges of achieving success across cultures, and he is a faculty member for the NASA International Project Management Program.

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