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Expert on developing business relationships with Japan & China

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A few helpful hints will unlock opportunities that most U.S. entrepreneurs lose, simply because they do not take the time to learn Japanese business etiquette. The U.S. and Japan are leaders in the world economy. But culturally, they could not be more different. Too often, relationships are ruined, or never even cultivated simply because of misunderstanding.

Consider this: Japanese tend to be homogeneous, while Americans tend to be individualistic. Japanese prefer group consensus when making important decisions, while American's rely on a key decision-maker. In Japan, workers are promoted based on seniority, while in America they are promoted based on performance. Japanese workers' main priority is loyalty, but in America the main priority is productivity. These are some key differences that must be taken into account in order to build a

Learn the top 5 secrets for successful business dealings with Japanese that most Americans don' know

lasting relationship between U.S. and Japanese companies. Here are the core tips to get you started.

1.) Make sure all key players meet face-to-face. In Japan, trust is essential and in their eyes that can only be established through personal interaction.

Quite frankly, trust may be one of the single most important factors in winning a business partnership with the Japanese. In America, we think of productivity and economic vitality as sure things in the business world. In Japan, the only sure thing is trust.

Relationships there are built for a lifetime. The only way to form such a pact is to go to great lengths to make the Japanese feel comfortable, secure and relaxed. Don't rely on the phone, e-mail, faxes or video conferences.

Either invite key members to visit the U.S. or plan on sending your own team over there for better results. If you are not willing to invest in a relationship, it will be evident.

2.) Do not use your spare time sightseeing. Instead, go for drinks or dinner with your potential Japanese partners. Do not turn down an invitation.

In Japan, businessmen are all work, little play. Statistics prove it. Estimates released this year by the Japanese government found that nowadays, Japanese take just 49.5% of their 18-day vacation allowance. On average, there are 400 million vacation days each year the Japanese are not enjoying. This contrasts with the French and Germans, who take all of the 6 weeks vacation time they are allowed. Americans usually take an average of three-quarters of the vacation days they are allowed.

Although government advisory groups and mental health experts have urged Japanese workers to relax, they don't seem to be listening. Most Japanese still won't leave the office before their bosses do.

Given these facts, can you imagine how an American businessman who wants to spend his free time visiting tourist spots will come off in the eyes of the Japanese? As much as you may want to sightsee in Japan, a business trip is not the time for it. You must present yourself as hardworking, diligent and focused. It may seem tiresome and stressful, but if you really

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want to win over your client, work, work, and work — every minute you have. Often, this simply means spending extra hours wining and dining.

3.) Don't assume that just because the Japanese businessmen nodded and said "yes" to every power point in your presentation, that you were effective.

In Japan, culture is steeped in unspoken customs. One example of this is the practice of saying "yes" when what they really want to say is "no." Japanese hate to say no, according to experts who run "finishing schools" in Japan, schools that teach manners, respect and cultural values. Japanese fear that saying "no" will hurt somebody's feelings.

It is customary for Japanese to show politeness by saying "hai, hai" when listening. This is to show to the speaker that he is listening. The direct English translation of "hai, hai" is "yes, yes" But, beware, it doesn't mean the listener is agreeing with your view points.

4.) Don't assume that conversations should always occur in English, even though most Japanese are taught the language from a young age. Make attempts to speak Japanese, however awkward it is. Several years ago, an American exchange student walked into a MacDonald's fast food restaurant in Kobe, Japan. He wanted to order his entire meal using

English (Really, why not? MacDonald's is an American establishment, right?) Wrong. When the young female Japanese clerk behind the cash register could not understand the American's questions, he began to yell and curse. The manager had to come out and handle the situation, but neither the boss nor the clerk could fully understand what the American was complaining about.

This is a perfect example of foreigners' ignorance and arrogance when they visit Japan. Americans, for example, often think that U.S. culture and the English language are so widespread that everyone acts and thinks like an American. That is the wrong approach if you want to develop a good relationship with a Japanese professional. Learn their language, don't expect them to learn English. Make attempts to speak simple Japanese, even if your attempts are laughable. In the end, you can only earn their respect.

5.) Smoke, or at least tolerate it. Japan is not California, and smoking is a part of the business culture. To complain about it would be disrespectful.

The U.S. is moving closer and closer to outlawing smoking in public places nationwide. We no longer smoke on airplanes, in airports, in office buildings, newsrooms, on campuses and in California, for example, smoking is even prohibited inside any

public premises, including restaurants and bars. In Japan, however, this is not the case.

Smoking is ingrained in male culture in Japan. It is a way that stressed out businessmen relax after long work days, by gathering at a local pub or sushi bar, drinking a beer and having a smoke. It is a sign of camaraderie between men (rarely do you see women smoking). It is simply a part of their culture and as much as Americans tend to loathe smokers, if you want to be respectful keep your intolerance of smoking to yourself while in Japan.

For more details on Japanese business culture check out these sites:

A monthly column from the Asia Pacific Management Forum at www.apmforum.com/columns/boye55.htm

More on business etiquette <http://www.executiveplanet.com/business-etiquette/Japan.html>