



Timely Information for Personal Success

Succeeding in Asian Business Cultures

By Sharon Schweitzer

To succeed in the global economy, business leaders must be culturally smart about their Asian counterparts. Why? For four decades, Asia has been the primary engine of global economic growth. This signifies a call to action to executives, entrepreneurs, and emerging leaders everywhere: whether you presently do business in Asia or not, you'd be well served to appreciate Asian business cultures.

In fact, the most successful global leaders are culturally aware and know how to build trust, inspire respect, and create long-lasting business relationships in an economically powerful Asia. These are some must-know fundamentals.

1. Know how people prefer to act – individually or as a group.

Fast fact: In **Myanmar**, people in senior-level positions are not as consensus seeking as leaders in other Southeast Asian cultures.

2. Know how power and authority are viewed.

Fast fact: In **Japan**, companies are hierarchical, yet decision-making, even within large corporations, is a bottom-up, consensus-building process conducted in steps.

3. Know how people compare rules and relationships.

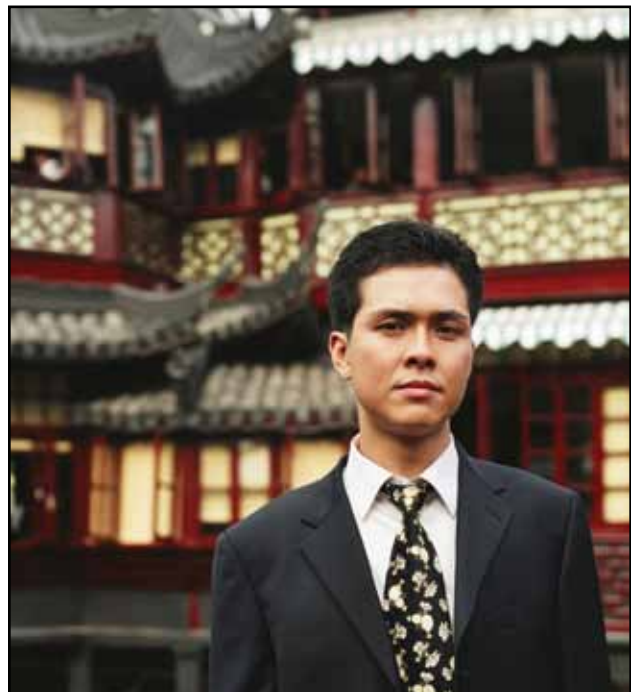
Fast fact: In **China**, where business agreements may be regarded as merely guidelines, the Chinese

tend to be surprised by a Westerner's refusal to renegotiate a price or contract.

4. Know how people regard time.

Fast fact: In **Taiwan**, people work an average of 2,200 hours a year -- a full 20% more than employees in Japan and the United States. Accordingly, at the noon hour, some Taiwanese companies offer workers "nap time," including dimmed lights and soothing music.

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Healthy Recipe: Summer Fruit Punch

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups diced “stone” fruit (apricots, plums, peaches, nectarines)
- 2 cups apricot juice
- 2 cups sparkling wine
- 1 cup seltzer

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 203
- Carbohydrates: 29 g.
- Protein: 2 g.
- Sodium: 5 mg.
- Fat: 1 g.
- Saturated fat: 0 g.
- Fiber: 2 g.

DIRECTIONS:

① Combine diced fruit, apricot juice, sparkling wine and seltzer.

② Divide among four ice-filled glasses.

Non-alcoholic version: Substitute sparkling cider for the wine.

Makes four servings.

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Questions and Answers

More on Workplace Culture

Q: I was pleased to see the topic of Jennifer Sumiec’s cover story in this month’s “Employee Assistance Report,” but I was curious if you could provide me with an example or two of a situation in which a workplace culture was good – or bad?

A: I believe the key lies in managers who value employees, versus those who just view them as “bodies” to get the work done. I used to work at a newspaper in which the culture was very negative. People did not hide that they weren’t happy with the way they were treated by management. People who initially enjoyed working there eventually succumbed to the negativity and left for greener pastures.

I left there for a publishing firm in which employees were treated with respect by managers; people worked hard, but they went about their duties cheerfully. There was little turnover there.

- Mike Jacquart, EAR Editor

Succeeding...

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5. Know how people communicate – directly or indirectly.

Fast fact: In **Singapore**, when local businesspeople preface a statement with, “In my humble opinion,” they are actually giving a firm directive.

6. Know how formal or informal people tend to act.

Fast fact: In **South Korea**, where hierarchy is highly valued, it is important to match the formality, rank, and status of a Korean counterpart in business negotiations.

7. Know how people’s social and business lives are aligned.

Fast fact: In **Malaysia**, business guests are expected to recognize and respect the country’s diverse cultures, and to accommodate each one when celebrating, dining, or socializing.

8. Know how the concept of women in business is handled.

Fast fact: The **Filipino** culture may value machismo, but in business, women are considered as equals to men. On the Global Gender Gap Index, for instance, the Philippines ranks second only to Norway in women’s ability to rise to leadership positions in enterprise. ■

Sharon Schweitzer is a leading expert in intercultural communication and international etiquette. As president of Austin, Texas-based Protocol & Etiquette Worldwide, she advises and trains leaders in Global 2000 companies, and speaks at corporate and industry conferences. Her new book “Access to Asia” (Wiley) is a cultural guide to business relationship building in 10 Asian countries: China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.