

**ETIQUETTE? DIVERSITY?
CROSS CULTURAL COACHING:
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS LIFE CAN BE A BEACH**

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Picture this; conditions are good for a nice day at an ocean-side beach (or as they say in New Jersey, a day at the *shore*...) complete with blazing sun, nice breeze, etc. As you quickstep your way across the scorching sand to the water's edge, you noticed but didn't read the two signs with posted rip-current information. You are focused on jumping into the water and cleansing this past, intense workweek from you. Look, everyone knows rip-currents happen, but no one you know has ever been in one. Besides, you are a good swimmer. Most importantly, you are here to make the best of this gorgeous beach weather and after spreading out your towels and positioning your cooler, you run for the water and in you jump.

After spending ten minutes just beyond the breaking surf swimming, floating, etc., you begin a leisurely swim back to the beach and notice you are not getting closer; you are actually moving *backwards* -- despite swimming directly for the beach. You begin swimming stronger and faster but you can feel the current now; strongly pulling you further away from the beach -- out to sea. You can feel the panic racing through your body; you begin to swim furiously now; struggling against the grip of this unrelenting rip-current.

It is at this precise moment where experience and training -- or inexperience and no knowledge -- can make the difference between life and death.

This is not an overly dramatic description. Flight 1549's Hudson River splashdown showed the world what can happen when a sudden unexpected event meets with experience and training. Sadly, according to news reports, in February '09 a commuter aircraft with a very junior crew, on a standard approach to Buffalo with a standard winter icing condition, came face-to-face with an event for which they were unprepared. The 49 passengers expected -- needed -- a crew with experience with and/or training on flying in icing conditions. Regrettably, we saw the catastrophic result of real world conditions meeting inexperience and insufficient training.

BACK TO THE WATER:

For our struggling swimmer, with not even *minimal* orientation on rip currents and no experience with the phenomena, his fate is left to luck -- which has no translation in science or nature. The heartbreaking statistics show that in most of these rip-current

situations, panic overwhelms the struggling swimmer, quickly followed by exhaustion, then death by drowning.

BUT: Having even a basic knowledge of rip-currents allows you to respond competently to this unexpected event – even if you have never been caught in one. Knowledge tells you to fight your instincts; stop swimming *for* the beach. Knowledge tells you to swim *parallel* to the beach – and out of the powerful, but narrow, rip-current previously dragging you out to sea. In mere moments, you are out of the fight for your life. You needed the knowledge. You had the knowledge. You didn't think much about it; you engaged it. That's training.

CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCY – NOT SENSITIVITY

Training or experience says that when flying in upstate New York in the winter, one can reasonably expect icing conditions. So, you get smart on procedures and rehearse them in order to incorporate them when/if conditions demand. It is no different in the international business world. Training for and knowledge of prevailing *cultural* conditions prepares your representatives for not only the unexpected but also the expected.

For example, let's suppose you want to do business with the Japanese. The Japanese culture generally places hi-value/more status on older employees (that entire 'with age comes wisdom' thing). Younger, junior executives are there to observe, learn, and "work the trenches" in order to become more valuable to the company across the years. Since this is *an expected cultural condition*, you would send an older, more respected member of your company -- not some kid -- to represent your company! Where's the grey hair? There is nothing wrong with including your young, organizational superstar as a team member, but he/she needs to also be trained in Japanese Cross Cultural Conditions; and learn "proper flying skills" for the prevailing cultural conditions.

Cross Cultural Competency (CCC) is not a Do's and Don'ts list for each different country/region. CCC comes from practical, useable training producing organizational dividends; various levels of capabilities for viewing the cultural conditions and then engaging training to meet the unfolding business relationship conditions. From contract negotiations to Karaoke, your cross-cultural competency training provides insight into the behavior of your international counterpart. More importantly, understanding the prevailing cultural conditions within which all of this occurs puts you in a very strong position – it will not be unnoticed by your international colleagues.

To see more of Dr. C's articles, go to www.drclture.com or www.interlinkconsulting.com.

If you have any cultural or travel security questions, just call 561-792-0453 or email thepros@interlinkconsulting.com.