

WORKING WITH ASIAN: THE GOLDEN RULES

The golden rules are the little music that you must have continually in mind. These are the basic rules that will help you find the way out in the most delicate situations, a sort of survival kit when you interact with Asians.

The four golden rules are:

- Be humble
- Be a good listener
- Identify and use your network
- Be a good teacher

Be humble

We prove strength in not showing it. If you want to look powerful, you have to be humble. Conversely, if you show excessive force, you will look weak! In addition, you should never make yourself angry; it would be a great sign of weakness on your part. Those of you who went to Asia will argue they have already seen Asians get angry. Sure, but then they showed their weakness or lose face and you probably do not want to find yourself in the same position!

When the discussion starts to come alive, you raise your voice spontaneously, you lean your interlocutor, and sometimes you type fist on the table. If you do this with an Asian, he would assume that you are demonstrating your weakness. It will be for him an evidence that you are about to give in when you want to show the opposite! To appear strong and unwavering, you must remain calm and endlessly repeat your point of view.

Flattery is of course the converse of humility. So do not hesitate to flatter your interlocutors. Moreover, when you compliment in turn, of course reply that you do not deserve such attention!

Be a good listener

In unfamiliar surroundings, and in a culture sensitive to details, you must create yourself landmarks. The permanent listening position will allow you to recognize the signals and understand the messages.

It is indeed to listen with all senses, not just with ears! Pay attention to details, whether it relates to the form or substance. A change in attitude among your interviewer may have great significance. Note any changes: if significant, you would quickly know the hidden reason, but if you do not notice the details, sometimes you will miss the most essential information! One day an old Chinese man told me, "A wrong detail would be for you a bell ringing!"

We can compare the waking state in which you should be in Asia with the state in which you would be if you were lost at night in an unfamiliar forest. You would be extremely attentive to the slightest noise, to the slightest light, or to the slightest sign of hope or danger...

Identify and use your network

The network is indispensable in most Asian cultures. It is related sometimes to the concept of face, but also to the concept of harmony. Thus, the need for an intermediary to convey messages is often linked to notions of loss of face or preservation of harmony.

It is not about knowing as many people as possible but to have the reflex to use an intermediary to pass an issue or information. It is sometimes better to have a profound network (you know few people who you can ask for much) than a wide area network (you know many people you cannot ask for much). Remember that your network begins with the colleague who shares your office, your assistant, your housekeeper..

A practical example? In Asia, the yes does not always means approval. To be sure of the answer of your interviewee, try to find an intermediary who go ask him. Him being not directly involved; he will most likely get a clear answer!

Be a good teacher

It is essential to show who you are and what the context in which you operate is. It should be known clearly that you are sent for a specific reason ("I get paid to show you how ...") and thus avoid spending hours trying to explain why you are right. Then you escape the image of the arrogant teacher!

You should also know how to find ways to tell your context and your reality. For example, rather than seeking to show that, despite your young age you occupy an important position (thing that the person who introduced you will of course specify it beforehand), show that your CEO or manager are also very young ...

Or if you have changed three times your business, and your partners, Japanese for example, say that you are totally versatile and thus untrustworthy, remember to tell them how in your country, you have sometimes to make difficult decisions and abandon your friends to find a better job.

One day, a participant from one of our intercultural management seminars in Indonesia submitted to us the following problem: "I'm dyslexic and often confuse my right and my left. This is the source of an extreme embarrassment in Indonesia where I go regularly for my work. "Indeed, in Indonesia, the first Muslim country in the world, it is important to give things, such as his business card, with right hand, left hand being soiled hand. We just advised him to tell his interlocutors his problem before presenting himself. This person called us a few weeks later to thank us, "You have changed my life, which was a very bad start in the relationship is now the subject of discovering and exchanging. My Indonesian interlocutors, once informed of my situation, always manage to turn what was a moment of embarrassment for everyone in a moment of relaxed laugh! "

And the Golden Rule bonus: have a relational action plan

The personal relationship is critical in Asia. It is probably same in all countries of the world but the scale is not the same. To understand this, try to understand our mental schema.

This one comes from our education. The first thing we learn from our parents, it is the law, the rules, "Say hello to the lady," "Say thank you," "Behave yourself," etc. In addition, especially the first rule of all is to know how to be clean!

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Then, when we grow up, our parents begin to explain us things: "Do not put your hands on the hot plate, because you could burn yourself." This age of the explanations is called the age of reason. Our western education system is mainly based on reason, explanation, demonstration, and logic.

Finally, life teaches us to conduct our relationships. It is not at school that we teach how to find a partner, or to educate our children or accompany our parents in later life...

This sequence creates our mental schema (mindset), and when we are exposed to a new situation, especially in terms of urgency and stress, we will first appeal to the law (what rule should I apply to get out of this difficult situation?). If we have more time, we will analyze and try to understand to solve the problem. Finally, very rarely, we will use our relationships to resolve a dispute or problem.

The mental pattern of Asians is almost reversed: the relationship first, then the reason and finally, only the law. Indeed, in Asia, the priority of education is the relationship: how to behave against a particular person (parents, teacher, etc.). It is also giving priority to the group and its internal or external relations rather than the rights and duties of the individual.

You must therefore try to reverse your mental pattern. This means constantly asking yourself how you could use your relationship to achieve your goals.

Let us take an example. In Europe, if you have a neighborhood problem that becomes very bad, without hope of negotiating with your neighbor, you will complain or attempt to enforce your rights. The Asian will ask at first how he can call through to play the role of mediator. Alternatively, more realistically, he will surely be looking in relations that will put pressure on the neighbor!

One day a seminar participant asked us: "What can I do? I changed position eight months ago and my interlocutor continues to call me whenever I explained to him that he have to call my replacement. "We tried to show to our participant that his interlocutor was surely in a relation schema and network and that he used to appeal the person he knew the best: that is our interlocutor in this case. This one was in the law (the organization has changed, it is not him that he must call) or reason (why this will be more effective to call the other person).

So now, practice... and enjoy!

Be well and be happy,

Bruno.