Parental Control: A Challenge For American Marketers

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No matter how early in the morning they arrive in their offices, Americans working for foreign cosmetics firms can expect email boxes filled with messages from headquarters located in time zones hours ahead of the U.S.

In the U.S., marketers working for foreign-based firms must juggle the demands of the local market and the home office.

Chances are that most cosmetics marketers will at some time during their career work for a firm whose corporate headquarters is overseas. Conversely, the expansion of foreign cosmetics firms into the U.S. market continues unabated, with giants including **L'Oréal**, **Unilever**, **Beiersdorf**, **Benckiser**, **LVMH**, **Chanel**, **Clarins**, **Shiseido** and **Kao** increasing their U.S. market share . . . as well as their share of American employees.

As a recruiter, I am continually challenged by cosmetics and luxury accessories clients seeking candidates with the special competencies required to succeed in companies whose cultures differ from those of American firms. Following is a description of key personality traits and abilities that mark executives who are successful in foreign-owned firms.

I. Cross-Cultural Sensitivity

European and Asian cultures tend to be formal, conservative and hierarchical. Executives working in these corporations have a high regard for colleagues who uphold tradition, possess solid educational credentials and have a sense of foreign culture. Managers who are sensitive to the culture, language, history, art, music, architecture, and food of their company's homeland gain respect quickly. And despite the prevalence of English at most foreign headquarters, fluency, or at least the ability to conduct a brief conversation in the company's foreign language is a major advantage.

Since respect for title is standard, communication moves quickly downward through the hierarchy, but communication upward can be slow. In some corporate headquarters "speaking only when spoken to" and only after one's boss, is the accepted practice.

While foreign executives typically have more job tenure in their companies than Americans, their compensation and titles are often lower than those of their U.S. counterparts. Americans working in foreign companies gain greater respect as their tenure in the firm increases.

II. Patience

Decisions coming from the head office are typically slow to arrive. Most organizations in foreign firms are hierarchical and multi-layered, making for slow decisions. In Asian firms, decisions require the consensus of many departments and individuals—a time consuming process. Understanding a company's organization and process is vital. While the home office may move slowly in its decision making, managers in U.S. subsidiaries—often driven by an innate "sense of urgency"—must learn to move very rapidly to offset home office induced delays.

III. Strong Analytical and Presentation Skills

Due to language differences and "lost in translation" communications, numbers become the common denominator of decision making. Global managers require complete analyses and a clear explanation of figures. Net and retail sales, market share, expenditures, budget shortfalls or overages all require detailed and thorough explanation.

Americans working abroad must adjust to the prevailing processes and strategies.

The most successful executives have well developed verbal and written analytical, presentation and communications skills. Speaking slowly and clearly are imperative.

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