

YOU COME HERE; YOU LEAVE HERE – WHO CARES?

By; Stephen G. Wright
For the Almaty Herald

The function of this column, as stated before, is to raise critical questions and generate thought and discussion on topics relevant to us all now. We must always be willing to wonder if what we do, say and how we act is striking the right cord for our lives and the lives of those around us. No one person is always correct in their assumptions simply because they believe themselves to be right.

When any group of humans takes up residence within the national boundaries of another group of humans something happens. Expatriate workers bring with them, both consciously and unconsciously, elements of the culture they come from. Your cultural norms and values in turn have an impact on the host nation. The local culture conversely has an impact on you. This is why expats experience “reverse culture shock” when they get home. Due to the fact that you are within a culture that is in transition you more easily affect them. Logic would indicate then that you hold a degree of responsibility for the impact you have on the local society.

My question has always been – to what degree has the expatriate community investigated the impact it has here? If it is positive, then how is that defined? Who is doing the defining? Is there any bias involved? If your impact here is negative what are you doing about it? How shall you turn your impact around from a negative to positive influence? Oh, by the way, if you are looking for residents here to walk up and tell you that you are making a cultural mistake they won't. Point one: One does not insult a guest / Point two: You are the meal ticket; one does not bite the hand that feeds them.

What you are responsible for doing is to go to other countries having instituted a program of “Cultural Due Diligence (C.D.D.)” ahead of time. This is applied in a marketing context, a public affairs context, and a corporate responsibility context. Most importantly this needs to be viewed within the context of your expat workers and their families. Sometimes it is the family of the expat that has the greatest degree of negative OR positive impact upon the local social structure. Ah, but you have not done that!

Okay, then you need to evaluate your current cause and effect relationship with your host nationals and begin creating a positive relationship model based upon the criteria for a optimum C.D.D. return on investment – just that simple! Losing face with the local community costs you opportunity and money; losing employees causes a high turnover to retention ratio and that means money out the door also.

If you do not know what I am speaking about then you need to find out. I raise critical questions – I do not give away answers. Sometimes learning is best done as a process of self-discovery. Be sure to let me know if you need any help.

Responsible comments, issues for discussion, questions and observations are always welcome and may be sent to:

CRALMATYHERALD@YAHOO.COM

All reader submissions will be published and responded to as soon as is possible. No names will be used unless specifically requested by the sender.