

The Culture of Business - In Perspective

Don't you get it – it is the politics
of the thing boy, the politics!

By: Stephen G. Wright

A few weeks ago while in Tashkent I had the opportunity to meet with someone to discuss the current state of affairs in Tashkent and the state of affairs of his organization there. The organization is rooted in the States. It was suggested by another colleague of mine that I should speak with this person. I warned my colleague that this person will not be willing to listen to anything I say as, being a stranger, he will tell me that everything is great, and they love us here! No matter, off I went to speak about the expatriates in Uzbekistan. My prediction was extraordinarily on target.

In as soft a tone and in an even handed a way as I could I endeavored to point out that it is critical to assess the influence of relationship and culture to the current situation that is developing in Uzbekistan. The man thought I was absolutely cobbler; my trolley bus had gone around the corner, as it were. He firmly pointed out that “culture has nothing to do with the problems we are having, it has to do with the politics”. He further stated that “we have no problem with the local population we work with, we get along great, they love us, and the problem is with the government”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, first would you be as kind as to define “Culture” for me? Please, I am very serious. I am most willing to wager that if someone had the internal fortitude to sit down and write a response for me that the majority of those responding would be off the mark as to a reasonable definition.

I note that Americans have a cultural tendency to encapsulate life. This observation that I have first came to my attention while reading a book “American Ways”, by Gary Althen, his work indicated the same thing, that Americans feel a need to view life as being compartmentalized, in other words **not** seeing the big picture of life. My conversation with this person in Tashkent could be said to be an example of this concept. He saw his problem as being one particular unit, without any correlation to another unit of the human existence. His justification being that culture and relationship do not connect within the same sphere of interaction.

Yes, and did you know that pigs wear pajamas??!!

This person stated to me, in an angry and flustered voice, that he has twenty years of experience in Washington politics. Allow me to remind all of you politicians and diplomats in the expat community that hail from the States that one of the many factors for the formation of the United States was the fact that the culture within the Colonies had evolved in a different direction than that of the English culture. Shall we all go back to our 8th grade history class and read once more the works of Mr. Franklin???? From a personal bias I highly recommend the writings of Mr. Adams. I suggest perhaps we can all benefit because there seems to be a disconnect going on here that is having

a palpable impact upon the relationship between the expat community and the local residents. Politics is a function of culture!!!!!! Politics reflects the current and past cultural elements in a society. They are not separate functions, but interrelated elements that must not be viewed separately. To do so will give you just what you are seeing around you now. “Who needs the foreigner?”

If you are not a Social Scientist by education and training, with field experience in cross-cultural relations, I would very much appreciate it if you remain silent (I’m being polite). Everyone has an opinion, and I know that everyone has a right to express an opinion. Somehow I need you to get the clue that International Relationship Management and Cultural Due Diligence are not matters of opinion. I have never been so arrogant as to tell you how to be an engineer, a lawyer, a computer specialist, as I was never trained in any of these fields. So stop trying to tell me what my job is – Okay?! We all – you know, us humans, all have something to offer each other. Please stop trying to tell the local residents that you are here to help make their lives, business, and government better – it is not your place. They may surprise you as they may just be able to make your life, your business, your government a little better – you just need to shut-up (I stopped being polite) and look in directions you have not looked before. Try to realize the benefit of the dynamic value of relationship, the broadest application of the definition of culture, within the context of your involvement in the lives of the people of this region.

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| <p>Mr. Wright has 12 years of field experience in 5 nations of the F.S.U. Some of his clients for seminars in cross-cultural relations, business communication strategies and “Understanding the U.S. Culture for Strategic Advantage” include, Gazprom, The Ministry of Transportation and Defense of Saudi Arabia, Bechtel, USDA Graduate School, and Georgetown University. Between 1996 and 2002 Mr. Wright was a member of the Associate Faculty in the MBA Program at Johns Hopkins University, School of Professional Studies in Business and Education. In the 1979 Mr. Wright received his undergraduate degree in Political Science from The American University and in 1990 he completed graduate studies in Management at Cambridge College. He is now doing research for a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of South Australia.</p> |
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