

## The Culture of Business - In Perspective

Ethics – Yours, Mine, Theirs?

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For the Kazakhstan Monitor

For many years now I have believed in the idea that people are never wrong, rather they are occasionally misinformed. As an observer of cultural interaction it is rather hard for me to live what I preach in the following instance. Until very recently, expatriates have been long on the “how” based training programmes and educational enhancement opportunities for business. You have been rather short on answering the “why” and the reasoning for your various approaches to business. As a short form let us say that ethics training and critical thinking should have come first followed by an introduction to a comparative Western and global business methods programme! You put the cart before the horse and now you are saying, in a post damage context, that WOW we need to have some conferences on ethics and start some courses on critical thinking.

Think again – after the fact solution building may well fall upon deaf ears here. It only serves to reinforce perceptions of you as being weak and using these conferences or programmes to now control the local ability to succeed on their own terms. One can hear it stated as the following:

Now that we are making money and challenging the foreigners in business they are scared and tell us we do not understand how business really works and so they want to make sure we are kept in our place! The foreigner takes everything from us and when we are in a position to stand on our feet they try to say we are the ones that are wrong!

I submit to you that what you define as unethical may not be seen the same way by all parties here. Some are actively seeking input on the establishment of ethical practice, but not all. An article by Andrei Chebotaryov, “Survey suggests that many businessmen see bribes as an essential part of their day-to-day activities”<sup>1</sup>, should be read as it defines the current realities here.

Complaining about the stupidity of teaching business without doing a cultural due diligence assessment of how business and relationships are historically (pre-soviet, soviet, and post-soviet) viewed in this region will gain nothing at this point. I am being, as those from the States would say, a “Monday morning quarterback”. The horse is out of the barn, as it were, and that cannot be changed.

I propose that the answer shall NOT be found in ethics as a function of German, U.S., British, French, or Canadian business. This is due to the fact that most ethical precepts are based upon ethnic and national norms and values endemic to the place they originate from. However, we can very effectively form a base of reasoning that stems from the “human common denominators” we all share. By focusing on what are shared elements of right, wrong or good and bad, then extrapolating these for the purpose of establishing best practices we create something that is more widely accepted to a broader audience.

YOUR ethical standards do not belong here and should not be imposed here. Working with the local population towards creating a human standard of ethical practice and then permitting local and regional variants allows Kazakhstan to initiate an honor code that it can live with and that you can work with. More tutorage for ethical prosperity by the expatriate guests will only generate a heightened sense antipathy and ill-will in the long-run. Give those here that seek it the facts of what you

do, define what works and for heaven's sake be transparent (which you are so fond of asking them to be). You must illustrate your failures in ethics with the same breath as you speak of your ethical values. You do not have all the answers where ethics are concerned; do not try to tell people here you can show them a better way! Give Kazakhstan the right tools, and then back off. This is their country – they have a right to make some choices of their own and accept the consequences.

(1) Kazakhstan: Corruption “Boosts Economy” / Kazakhstan's Democratic Forces Forum

Responsible comments, issues for discussion, questions and observations on doing business in Kazakhstan are always welcome and may be sent to Mr. Wright at:

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