



# GlobalExchange

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September/October 2009

## From the Desk of the President: Training Across Cultures

By Neal Goodman



**Pop quiz:** An American instructor is sent to Japan to teach course in marketing skills. He begins the course by asking the attendees to identify the main skills and competencies a marketing executive must have to success in their organization. No one raises their hands. In fact most people seem puzzled.

*Why did this seemingly sensible icebreaker flop?*

In Japan, the trainer is supposed to be *the* expert, and, to the Japanese, it would be insulting for the trainees to provide the answers.

This is an innocent – and common – mistake. But, had the trainer done even cursory research on Japanese culture prior to his trip, his error could have been easily avoided. Instructional personnel who are responsible for the design, revision, and delivery of courseware in international settings, or for international trainees in the corporate headquarters, need to understand how cultural differences in instructional and learning styles and in social customs and business practices can, and do, impact individual and group performance.

Rather than taking the risk of trial and error, there are a few important skills that can be applied to ensure success when training people of diverse backgrounds. Trainers first must ask themselves "What are unique challenges we face when instructing across cultures?" To answer this, they must do the following:

**Recognize** how their own implicit cultural assumptions impact their performance and effectiveness as instructors, instructional designers, and business associates. For example, do they begin with a formal presentation or with a simulation?

**Identify** specific situations where misunderstandings are likely to occur in the design and delivery of courses across cultures or other working situations. For example, do they want participants of different ranks within an organization to take the program together?

**Practice** culturally appropriate learning and instructional styles and business protocols. Do they call on people directly or have people respond in groups? Do they go to lunch or dinner with the students? Should they invite students to join them?

**Learn** how to adapt existing materials and methods to the culture of the participants—including multicultural audiences. Are the students more familiar with an inductive or deductive learning style? Are they more comfortable with rote memory or interactive exercises?

Differences in cultural values of the instructors and students on dimensions such as hierarchy, individual vs. group orientation, and comfort with risk taking play a major role on the eventual success or failure of a program. Other major factors include linguistic competencies, familiarity with the use of new technologies, and the preferred communication styles of students and instructors.

*Neal Goodman is the president of Global Dynamics Inc.*

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## **Case Study: When Corporate Cultures and Ethnic Cultures Collide**

As reported by the *Financial Times*, when Nomura acquired Lehman Brothers they envisioned it as an opportunity to change its historically domestic Japanese corporate culture to become more global in perspective. However, they are quickly losing their newly acquired employees, and they have encountered a great deal of resentment among their original staff. A Nomura banker is quoted in the article saying “there is a lack of communication between the top foreign people and the Japanese staff.”

While Nomura’s management had good intentions, more attention to cultural differences may have helped.

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## **Tip: Understand Political Climate of All Areas Relevant to your Organization**

When employees of Australian coal mining company, Tinto Rio, were held China on espionage allegations, *Financial Times* quoted Jake Stratton of the business security consultancy, Control Risks, wisely warning that “...companies need to be able to read political situations and make a good assessment of how changing political environments will have an impact on business.”

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## **News from Global Dynamics Inc.**

### **Neal Goodman to Speak at Training 2010 Conference & Expo**

Neal Goodman will deliver a 60 minute headliner session called “The Impact of Values on Training Success: Cross-Cultural and Generational Challenges” at *Training Magazine’s* [Training 2010 Conference & Expo](#) Feb. 1-3 in San Diego, CA. This session will explore the skills necessary to adapt one’s design and delivery styles to be most responsive to the trainees’ culture(s). Participants will learn how to adapt existing materials and methods to their audiences and will explore responsive strategies and an action plan for improved performance while working across value differences.

### Neal Goodman Quoted in SHRM's Global HR

Neal Goodman was quoted in Society for Human Resource Management's *Global HR* on the importance of sufficient expatriate training in the article "[Study: Cultural Training Key Element for Global Assignments.](#)"

### SIETAR New York Features Neal Goodman on Website

SIETAR New York selected Neal Goodman to feature on the homepage of its [website](#).

### Neal Goodman's Article on Global Diversity Published in ASTD Links

Neal Goodman's article, "The Hidden Challenges in Taking Diversity Training Global" on ways to effectively promote diversity and inclusion on a global basis, was published in [ASTD Links](#) in September.

### Neal Goodman's Article on Training Across Cultures Published in Training Magazine

Neal Goodman's article, [Going Global: Skills to Train Across Cultures](#), was published in *Training Magazine* in August.

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## Cross-Cultural Cuisine Quiz

Test your knowledge of the foods from around the world.

Match each item from the left column to the country in which it is eaten (from the right column)...



- |                       |                |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1. Bee Larvae         | A. France      |
| 2. Boiled Duck Embryo | B. Sudan       |
| 3. Boar               | C. Philippines |
| 4. Grasshoppers       | D. China       |
| 5. Sheep Eye          | E. Mexico      |
| 6. Horse              | F. Malaysia    |
| 7. Rooster Testicles  | G. Cameroon    |
| 8. Cossid Moth Larvae | H. Australia   |
| 9. Agave Worms        | I. Hungary     |



1=D; 2=C; 3=F; 4=G; 5=B; 6=A; 7=I; 8=H; 9=E

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