

Cross-Cultural Business Tips



Author Daniel Tschudy

Winning on the Cross Cultural Battlefields.

Crossing the old Iron Curtain

During the last couple of months, I was given the opportunity to visit fascinating countries in the East: Ukraine, Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Many meetings, talks and social events with politicians, teachers, entrepreneurs and common people have shown me once again, how much we still think within tightly structured patterns about other people, and other countries. And, in the case of the above mentioned countries, how little we actually know about their story, and their destiny.

When meeting people, my questions were usually short and simple; about parents, job, lifestyle, and maybe faith. The answers though were always lengthily and compact. My "black-and-white" understanding of what's happening deep beyond the (old) Iron Curtain turned out to be colourful, diversified, and, yes, very complicated pictures.



My number one problem was, and is, my substantial lack of knowledge about life and history in Central Asia. Not in terms of what happened one-thousand years ago, but concerning the last one-hundred. As an example, I was made aware again how much the Russian Revolution and the foundation of the Soviet Union (1917 / 1922) formed and twisted those countries. Not only in political terms, but also from a societal and intercultural perspective.

There were countless zigzag-migration-flows and people shifted their cultural behaviour, intelligence, language and religion: millions of families and people in search of a better life; or simply avoiding war and persecution.

Fruitful Diversity

In the West, we are well aware of those who ventured to new land, emigrating for example to the US, Canada or 'DownUnder' to Australia.

And we can comprehend how immigration was implemented in Western capitals, in London for example, the multi-cultural hub par excellence. We see advantages and disadvantages and, yes, how diversity became a value, which some people cannot endorse, unfortunately.

During my recent travels to the East, I was made aware of the fact that History and Diversity are equally relevant issues there; with similar impact to just about everybody.

For example, little did I know that more Azerbaijanis, a Turkic people and mostly Shiite Muslims, live in the north-western parts of Iran than in Azerbaijan itself. And little did I know as well, how much the Crimean Peninsula, which occupies a strategically important location on the Black Sea, has been fought over by various outside forces for centuries.

And, another example, my knowledge about Iran was based on recent wars, political agendas and religious power-games, rather than the identity of the fascinating Persian people and, for example, their love for arts or Farsi poetry. And lastly, how much the Kazakhs, who mainly inhabit the southern part of Eastern Europe, are also found in Uzbekistan and Mongolia, and even, with a population of 1.5 million, in China.



All these folks have been on the move for many hundreds of years and their emigration trails are strongly reflected today in their faces, their languages, and their cultural behaviour.

Doing Business across Cultures

During those many chats en-route, I realised that these people want to tell their story, that they want to exchange, and they want me to know more about them. In fact, they want me to ask the right questions, and they want me to listen to their answers.

I am not naive about the 21st century and its mechanism and rules. But for when doing business across borders, I understand even better now, how much these people possess in terms of cultural heritage and personal experiences and how much discussions about *their* story enable us doing business in a long-lasting and successful fashion.

It's not only about respect and positive attitude; one must engulf in such personal conversations. And that is, of course, only possible if there is a basic interest to learn about other countries and cultures.

About the Author



Daniel Tschudy is speaker, coach and consultant about cross-cultural issues and cross-border competences in the global business environment.

He focuses mainly on the emerging markets in Africa, Arabia and Asia; and often features Japan and China.

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