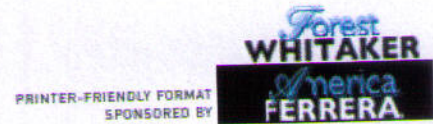


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## Going Global, Stateside

By TANYA MOHN

Training to communicate across cultures has long been part of the preparation for executives moving overseas to work. But now, the training is increasingly for employees who may never leave the country, yet will work closely with companies and people around the world.

"Whether a multinational or a start-up business out of a garage, everybody is global these days," said Dean Foster, president of Dean Foster Associates, an intercultural consultancy in New York. "In today's economy, there is no room for failure. Companies have to understand the culture they are working in from Day 1."

Mr. Foster recounted how an American businessman recently gave four antique clocks wrapped in white paper to a prospective client in China. What the man did not realize, he said, was that the words in Mandarin for clock and the number four are similar to the word for death, and white is a funeral color in many Asian countries. "The symbolism was so powerful," Mr. Foster said, that the man lost the deal.

Cross-cultural training has steadily grown since its start about 35 years ago when large numbers of Americans returned from the Peace Corps with increased awareness of cultural differences and a new understanding of the importance of intercultural communication.

The military and foreign service have a tradition of preparing personnel and their families, but corporations "are really the newcomers," said Anne P. Copeland, executive director of the Interchange Institute, a research and consulting organization in Brookline, Mass.

Jill Kristal, a psychologist in Larchmont, N.Y., said inadequate preparation "puts undue stress on the family." She saw so much need when she was an expatriate in London in the 1990s that she began incorporating cross-cultural training into her practice. She also started a company, Transitional Learning Curves, which creates products — interactive books, calendars and card games — to help families communicate during their time abroad. "Very

often stuff goes unspoken. That's when problems begin," Dr. Kristal said.

The adjustment when Americans move to other Western countries may be the most challenging because people do not anticipate differences and there is often less preparation, said Geoffrey W. Latta, executive vice president of ORC Worldwide, a human resources consulting firm.

Sometimes smaller companies, new to the global workplace, are unaware that training exists or how it can help. And when companies do offer the training, employees, particularly business travelers who may have worked or lived internationally before, often do not feel they need it, Mr. Latta said.

On a recent afternoon, a group of American employees of Hollister Inc., a medical device company, prepared for a business trip to Japan. In a five-hour session that included a traditional Japanese meal, a trainer from Dean Foster Associates briefed them on cultural dining etiquette, business customs, socializing and developing a "global mind-set" when working with colleagues abroad and after returning home.

Mary Lucas, who oversees global human resources for the health benefits company Aetna, said teams at service centers in Ireland and Dubai had similar training that helped identify major differences, like a sense of urgency, that were impeding cooperation between the two centers. Supervisors in Ireland would ask staff members in Dubai to pay claims, but unless directions were explicitly prioritized, claims were not necessarily paid right away, Ms. Lucas said. Training "immediately raised awareness, which helped the teams be much more successful," she said.

Mr. Foster recently introduced a series of online tools for employees who might not have time for formal cross-cultural training. "Culture Guides-to-Go" offer strategies for running successful meetings, conducting negotiations or brushing up on dining protocol in more than 120 countries.

Andrew P. Walker, vice president of global mobility for Thomson Reuters, said online training was easier, quicker and cheaper than in-person training. Thomson Reuters uses CultureWizard, a Web-based tool created by the company RW 3, for its employees in 93 countries for what he said was "a fraction of the cost" of formal training.

Mr. Walker said he also used it himself. "Without the course, I think I would have made a lot of mistakes," said Mr. Walker, who moved back to the United States in July after five years in London. He said his low-key, light-hearted manner was fine on business trips, but when he was working there full time, "I wouldn't be able to get away with it forever." He said the program helped speed the transition.

Michael S. Schell, chief executive of RW 3, recounted how a mining and exploration

company in Britain contacted his firm because the mining company was unsuccessful in winning business from an American company. "During the training, we pointed out that the proposal turned off the Americans," Mr. Schell said, because it began with 10 pages detailing all the risks of the venture and how much failure would cost.

Americans tend to view failure as a learning experience that inspires creativity, Mr. Schell said, so the American company considered the proposal negative and unenthusiastic. The British tend to be risk-averse culturally, he said, and perceived the Americans as unrealistic. When the British company redid the proposal with a positive spin, they got the deal the next day, he said.

"Differences got overlooked because we speak English," Mr. Schell said. "They look like us, wear the same jeans and use the same cellphones.

"The assumption is that we're all the same, but we're not all the same."

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