

Hongkie talks Chinese

Although Stanley Chow from Hong Kong hasn't come from far, China is still an eye-opener for him. Two years ago he got invited to China by CCG (Communication Central Group) to help amalgamate five smaller companies. He discovers a thousand and one differences between people, cultures, skillsets, experiences, work atmosphere, and lifestyles. His assignment? To establish a harmonious collaboration. How he manages to do that? "Being honest is the key."

As a real 'Hongkie' (people born and raised in Hong Kong) Chow is brought up in the knowledge that his future is rosy. "There is a very well-respected writer in Hong Kong who wrote an article named 'I am a Hongkie'. He explained that Hong Kong has had very good prosperity over the last twenty years, and that chances are highly favourable for all Hongkies. Therefore we may have come to think that we are a little bit better than the mainland Chinese. But of course, we're not. The most important thing that I learned about myself when I came to China, is that I still have a lot to learn. Just be truthful to yourself about this."

Open up

Chow has no doubt Westerners can learn from the Chinese. "Chinese know the Chinese culture. It would be a great sin not to use their knowledge. What you have to win over is the Chinese reticence. When you ask a Chinese man for his opinion, he will think about the consequences of his answer too much. It takes time for him to 'open up'. It's a matter of trust."

Western discipline

And the other way round? Can China learn from the West? One of the biggest cultural differences Stanley Chow noticed in China is discipline. "For example, when you go to a bus station in Hong Kong, you automatically queue. In China, you can put up a big sign at the bus stop, saying 'Please form a queue here', but they will make sure that they're the first to get on that bus. Foreigners frown upon this kind of behaviour. The necessary discipline, along with experience in communicating with Western people, is something useful the Chinese can learn."

Keep asking

How do you become a role model for your Chinese colleague? According to Chow the earlier mentioned honesty, as well as transparency and integrity are the key to success. "What you want to do is to make them feel that, even though you are their manager, you are also learning from them. Show them you care about their opinion. A very convenient way to do this is to keep asking questions. Obviously out of real interest, never as a 'trick'. Ask about their home town, their culture, their habits, education, wishes, experiences, and ask about their profession. Doing so, you will explore skillsets in your company, you will start to build on trust and encourage them to speak out more freely. All at the same time."

Hybrid business motor

Another tip that Chow would give everyone who comes to China, is to cherish your own values. Why? "People who enter the Chinese market sometimes tend to be personally altered by the Chinese culture too much. They over-adapt. My advice: "Just live the way you are living". China is internationalizing very

rapidly, which means that your Western way of thinking is welcome. The Chinese are eager to learn from you. If you want to make your business an all-Chinese thing, why not let the Chinese take care of it themselves? We need to do this together. With a lot of interaction and integration. At the end of the day the business motor will become a hybrid of the different cultures. Exactly what the Chinese are looking for."

Communication Central Group

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