

Hongkie talks Chinese

Hoewel Stanley Chow uit Hong Kong hemelsbreed niet van heel ver komt, is China ook voor hem een eye-opener. Het is nu zo'n twee jaar geleden dat hij door CCG (Central Media Group) in China uitgenodigd wordt om te helpen bij het aaneensmeden van vijf kleinere bedrijfjes. Hij krijgt te maken met duizend en één verschillen tussen mensen, culturen, skillsets, ervaringen, werksferen, stijlen en leefgewoonte. Zijn opdracht? Een harmonieuze samenwerking tot stand zien te brengen. How he manages to do that? "Being honest is the key."

Als echte 'Hongkie' is Chow groot geworden in de wetenschap dat zijn vooruitzichten rooskleurig waren. "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 prosperities 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 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." Juist hierover kan je beter zo eerlijk mogelijk tegenover jezelf zijn, aldus Chow.

Open up

Dat Westerlingen van de Chinezen kunnen leren leidt volgens Chow geen twijfel. "Chinezen kennen de Chinese cultuur. Het zou eeuwig zonde zijn om hun kennis niet te gebruiken. Wat je daarbij wel moet overwinnen, is het feit dat Chinezen vaak nogal terughoudend zijn. Whether this has something to do with the Cultural Revolution I cannot say, but when you ask a Chinese man for his opinion, he will think too much about the consequences of his answer. It takes time for him to 'open up'. It's a matter of trust."

Western discipline

En andersom? Wat heeft China nog van het Westen te leren? Een van de grootste culturele verschillen die Stanley Chow opviel in China zit in discipline. "For example, when you go to a bus station in Hong Kong, you automatically queue up. In Beijing, you can put up a big sign at the bus stop, saying 'Please form a queue here', and nobody will pay any attention to it. They are going to make sure that they're the first to get on that bus. Foreigners frown upon this kind of behaviour. The needed discipline, along with experience in communicating with Western people, is something useful the Chinese can learn from us."

Keep asking

Hoe creëer je vertrouwen bij je Chinese collega? Volgens Chow is de eerder genoemde eerlijkheid als ook transparantie en integriteit de sleutel tot succes. "What you want to do, is to make them feel that you, even though you are their manager, are also learning from them. Show them you care for their opinion. A very convenient way to do this is to keep asking questions. Uiteraard wel vanuit een oprechte interesse, nooit als 'trucje'. 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

Een andere tip die Chow wil meegeven aan iedereen die naar China komt, is om toch vooral je eigen value propositions niet op te geven. Waarom? "People who enter the Chinese market sometimes tend to be personally altered by the Chinese culture too much. They overadapt. My advice: don't. 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 have become a hybrid of the different cultures. Exactly what the Chinese are looking for."

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