LEADERS COME PREPARED

Stand out from your competition

Winning in the Work World

Contents

Chapter 1: Asian leaders needed to lead abroad.....1

Chapter 2: Asians need 'the swagger' on international stage.....3

Chapter 3: The unspoken corporate cost of poor individual communication skills.....5

Chapter 4: Verbal arts separate the lions from the lambs.....7

Chapter 5: Where is your pipeline of leaders?.....9

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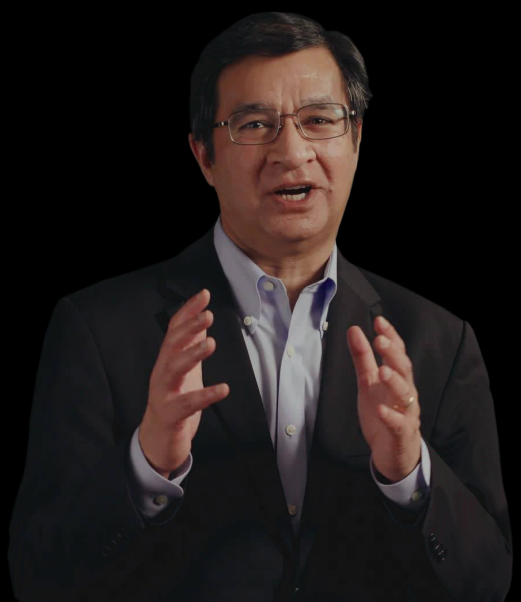

Stephen's professional career spans over **25 years in Fortune 500** companies, such as **PepsiCo** Restaurants International and **Motorola**. He also played pivotal roles as the Chief Learning Officer of **Starbucks Coffee Company**, and the Vice President of YUM University and Global Learning. He is also the author of five insightful and inspirational books, including his latest "You're Hired – Now What Do You Do?", the ultimate playbook to learning the rules and winning in any organization.

STEPHEN KREMPL
Fortune 500

prior Chief Learning Officer

HAVE YOU BEEN ASKING YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS?

Will my colleagues and managers take me seriously?

Will I be able to land a promotion?

Do I have what it takes to become a valuable asset to my organization?

IF YOUR ANSWER IS 'YES', YOU ARE IN TROUBLE.

Please answer the next three questions honestly.

Does the smartest person always get noticed or promoted?
Yes or No?

Does the hardest working person always get noticed or promoted?
Yes or No?

Does the most loyal person always get noticed or promoted?
Yes or No?

If your answer to each question is 'NO', then you understand what tens of thousands of others who have listened to our conference presentations, participated in our workshops globally or taken our online programs understand.

If you answered 'yes' to any of them - you may need a rethink.

So, what gets a person noticed or promoted in your organization?

Hear it from our participants.

"Winning in the Work World is a powerful, practical program that is loaded with great ideas to help you achieve better results, faster, in any organization that you are joining."

Caroline Palmstedt
Talent Management Lead, Monsanto Asia-Pacific

"This is the most significant accomplishment in my extracurricular activities because I learned the foundational skills and mindset competencies that will give a competitive edge before I enter the labor market, understand the expectations of my future workplace/company, and how to retain my position."

Lester L.
Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas

"The Content gives students an "Insider" view of the corporate world. Through these techniques, students can excel in the workplace. It also provides opportunites to apply best practices and put business theories to use."

John L. Osiri PhD
Washington State University, College of Business

Chapter 1: Asian leaders needed to lead abroad

Lack of confidence, entrenched humility, cultural reservations pose as main barriers

At a recent leadership development training conducted with a large Malaysian plantation group having global operations, the CEO posed this question: How best to prepare local general managers to run its overseas operations?

As Asian and global multinationals (MNCs) race to open up new markets, their challenge is not just staying ahead of the competition in terms of product or service quality but also finding and developing leaders who can succeed in a foreign environment. Failure to groom a cadre of leaders who can thrive in different cultures may crimp any aspiring global MNC's growth strategy.

In recent decades a number of Malaysian and Asian corporations have developed sufficient scale and maturity to expand abroad significantly to other parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. AirAsia is a leader in low-cost air travel and has pioneered long haul budget travel to Europe. Petronas, Sime Darby, Felda and YTL Corporation all have substantial overseas operations, competing with leading global names.

The success rate of Asian brands and corporations is patchy. Apart from having less mature management cultures and practices than global MNCs, many Asian CEOs lament privately that they cannot find the right people to lead expansion in new geographies. This capability crunch is more acute as competition for talent heats up.

Hiring expatriate managers is an option but this may disrupt the management hierarchy while posing cultural challenges.The long-term solution for global corporations is to grow their own timber build up talent from within. This ensures that the "kampong culture" - the corporate culture, character and values remains intact and can be "exported" to overseas operations. Managing this delicate balance will increase Asian MNCs' chances of overseas expansion.

Often, the home-grown talent is not lacking in Technical or management abilities. The selection and training processes of global and Asian MNCs are quite rigorous. But having worked over 25 years with global MNCs 14 of them based in the United States I have found that the issue often lies in softer aspects such as self-confidence, the ability to adapt in different cultures without being offensive or too withdrawn, and being able to lead a team in a foreign environment.

These "X" factor attributes are what global and Asian MNCs look for. Indeed, many Western MNC bases say that a major barrier to further growth in the region despite the economic potential is the lack of senior ethnic Asian leaders with potential for the high office in corporate headquarters back home.

Asians have been brought up to be more self-effacing, hardworking and humble. "Keep quiet and listen to the boss" (since he knows best) and, well, he is the boss.

These cultural traits celebrate quiet achievement and have worked well for centuries. Until now.

Globalisation requires self-confident Asian managers who score high on emotional quotient. Beyond technical expertise in running a plantation or an oil rig, these leaders must be able to articulate clearly and build successful teams in line with the culture of corporate HQ.

Having worked with many Asian managers, I believe that developing that emotional quotient is not difficult.

Here are seven basic attributes which have helped many Asians bridge the gap and succeed at senior positions in MNCs:

Instinctively leading and taking ownership of projects and teams (instead of just waiting for instructions from head office)

Taking a position and articulating decisions effectively (bosses don't just want a yes man or yes-woman. All cultures will respect a point of view held firmly even if they may disagree with it)

Building trust and influence at all levels (be genuine and reach out even to the janitor word gets around that the new manager is sincere)

Communicating clearly, spontaneously and confidently (have something meaningful to say and say it don't hold back because you are shy)

Delivering direct feedback; the ability to disagree with appropriate assertiveness (give your opinion if you feel something is wrong or inappropriate. People will respect you more for your beliefs)

Connecting personally at all levels knowing how to develop relationship at formal and informal meetings (don't just stay at home on weekends and eat nasi lemak with fellow-Malaysians. Participate in local cultural or sporting activities)

Willing to develop teams sharing knowledge, growing teams, recognising and rewarding team efforts openly (be genuine in helping to groom junior staff and give them the due credit)

Many Asians have a mind-set that being Asian is a disadvantage. In my opinion, Asians have an unfair advantage.

If an Asian manager speaks as clearly and confidently as his Western counterparts, the effect will be more pronounced. That executive will be a refreshing change, standing out as a leader because he broke the norm.

With seven simple steps, Asians can move up the leadership ranks and improve their career paths while fulfilling the goals of their corporations without compromising their values in the process.

This is the century for Asia and Asians. It is time that Asian management talent stand up and be counted.

“You can stand on top of a rock or hide under it - it’s your choice.”

Stephen Krempl

Chapter 2: Asians need 'the swagger' on international stage

A curious remark over the phone recently by a retired top executive who had ended the bulk of his career in international operations of Pepsico and YUM Brands jolted me: "Why can't Asians behave with a little more swagger?"

After reflecting on my own career with and leadership with US multinational corporations (MNCs), I realised that the question was significant. The Asian market is where the action is, with the United States and European economies on decline. Asians top the best universities and have an exceptional work ethic. By all counts, they should be at the top of the corporate ladder. The fact is that only a few do too few.

"I can't understand it. They have most of the attributes I looked for. They are respectful, hard-working, and very smart," he continued. "They just don't have the confidence to stand out from the crowd and be visible enough." Unfortunately, the complaint has been echoed by Western leadership bosses I have worked on projects with. The same issue probably affects emerging Asian multinationals.

This gap, ironically, appears to have arisen from cultural aspects which have contributed much to Asian culture and Asia's success.

Growing up, we were taught to be humble. Didn't your parents say always listen to the teacher, who told us to sit and stay quiet? Guess what, a decade of such a schooling environment subconsciously ingrained most Asians to be naturally self-effacing without you knowing it. The child who displayed even a bit of "swagger" was often chastised by parents, teachers or peers.

Asians are taught to think carefully before speaking up, and only when spoken to. Have something worthwhile to say. If not, shut up. Ask a difficult question or challenge the norm and you are disrespectful or "not giving face" to the teacher or elder.

This upbringing made Asians respectful, but left many tongue-tied in an international setting. They are not able to make a presentation to the board of directors at short notice without a high chance of choking over the Power Point. They can't handle questions on the fly. They are afraid of flying to meet a major prospect to be the final clincher of a big tender. Where are the Asians who can field such an interaction at the frontlines of the upper echelons of the corporate world?

I should state here that Asians should not lose their values of respect for elders and certainly should not sound like someone they are not.

Right, you say, "I get the drift" and want to know what exactly is this swagger. I will let you in on a secret: you only need to do this 5% of the time.

Anyone can develop at least three elements of "swagger" to allow you to stand out with relative ease.

First, don't just sit quietly and hope no one asks you a question. Open a conversation, by either defining the problems or raising a topic which has top of-mind recall and link your message to that topic.

For example, ask the audience a question like "Market share has fallen in Malaysia. How many of you want to know the real reason why?" Or, say upfront to an English audience: "There are three reasons why England will never win the Rugby World Cup again. Here's why..." They may groan but you got them hooked.

Remember, you want to get the audience to sit up and listen. Once you have captured their attention, it is a matter of keeping the conversation engaging.

Second, do something unexpected to draw attention. For example, after opening a file to start to read a speech, abruptly close it and say, "Can I just speak frankly?" Your speech was never there in the first place!

Deliver your main points as summaries right up front and then engage your audience in a conversation.

Third, prepare sound bites or anecdotes which are punchy. Weave them in during the presentation or conversation. People remember key phrases or an interesting argument presented confidently. And everyone loves an interesting story.

At a conference some years ago, I used some of these methods to a new audience in South Africa.

I began by asking how many of them loved rugby? (hands were raised); how many loved the Springboks, the national team? (cheers broke out); and who hate the archrival Australian Wallabies? (loud boos).

After getting their attention it was then easy to compare building a great rugby team and building a great business. I then continued to use rugby analogies throughout the presentation.

Use other metaphors, "hooks" and anecdotes and have these ready when meeting senior executives. Spend more time thinking how to be interesting than adding more data to your presentation.

Your audience already suffers from information overload. But they will be thrilled you show interest in their culture and can banter and swagger comfortably.

“Think like a champion. Achieve like one.”

Stephen Krempl

Chapter 3: The unspoken corporate cost of poor individual communication skills

An investment banker elping an Asian company to list on a European exchange recently recounted the story of a delay caused in part by a senior finance manager, a Malaysian. Technically competent but soft-spoken, he struggled with handling questions on the fly from advisers and lawyers. The bankers feared he would fumble during investor roadshows, leaving the deal dead-in-the-water.

A few weeks ago, the manager resigned as he could not handle questions confidently on conference calls with the advisers. Because of the resignation at the eleventh hour the company had to scramble to find a replacement another Asian, with more self-confidence.

This delayed the IPO and the missed opportunity to raise funds is one of numerous stories of the heavy cost to corporations because of technically competent executives who lack basic communication and rapport skills with a wider range of audiences, usually beyond their office and comfort zone.

Because of the rapid economic growth in the region, many Asian corporations and MNCs have been promoting people quickly to C-level positions, with the usual pre-requisite of work experience and track record. But often, these executives lack self confidence and the ability to articulate with partners, customers and investors at a time when the higher position often demands it.

The costs to an organisation of a poor communicator in a high position are difficult to quantify. Failure to acquire new customers in new geographies; a crisis which was allowed to escalate because no one had the guts to bring up problems or warning signals; or business partnerships which floundered because the relationships broke down due to issues not being addressed early on? Think of the many stories of counter-suits months or years after the initial celebration and ribbon-cutting among joint venture partners.

Having worked with many MNCs with decades of international experience, a good number of CEOs have fed back that they could have grown a lot faster if they had addressed some basic communication issues.

To remove or reduce organisational paralysis attributable to communications and team dynamics, seven major issues need to be addressed.

First, Asians often lack the ability to articulate points of view succinctly or clearly. A new partner or a prospect simply does not get what the executive is trying to say and the relationship or business is lost.

Second, beyond a point of view, lack of confidence often prevents the Asian manager from speaking up or communicating sufficiently to build a relationship or win a deal.

Third, because of these aspects of reticence, there is no trust built up with new stakeholders, or even their own staff. Surveys have shown that the trust level in many Asian MNCs trails that of mature MNCs where different points of view are encouraged.

In fact, some organisations deliberately set one team against another in an internal battle of wits. In Asia, this would be taboo and a huge loss of face for the "losing" team.

Fourth, Asians lack the ability to connect at all levels within an organisation. They tend to spend time with superiors and peers. They neglect junior staff who are expected to respect and obey you. Western corporations do not work this way hence, raising problems with such customers or business partners, or Westerners hired to join an Asian team.

Fifth, a fatal issue for many Asian corporations is that no one wants to convey bad news. Feedback is poor because problems could embarrass the boss or partners. This leads to a state of denial, with problems being swept under the rug until they blow up into crises.

Sixth, Asian managers have a greater tendency to shun responsibility, leaving decisions to the bosses. Hence, major issues are sat on for months and bottlenecks build up.

Finally, recognition and mentoring are lacking. Asian bosses need to encourage young managers regularly instead of waiting for the annual dinner awards. Young leaders want instant recognition and gratification. When the bosses give that and mentor them, they will groom a cadre of leaders who can chart the next wave of growth.

Asian bosses may want these skill sets, but how often do they assess these facets among their staff? In a recent talk to a group of leaders at an American Business Chamber I handed out a checklist of the seven facets and had the senior group rate their top three Asian staff on a scale of 1 (ineffective) to 10 (outstanding). They frowned and shook their heads before feeding back that scores among Asians were low and insufficient attention had been paid to address the problem.

Shortage of staff with these seven "Globally Effective Mindset" skills can lead to paralysis at different levels, costing corporations directly and indirectly, with problems surfacing only much later. Equipping and empowering your key staff with the confidence to share the good, the bad and the ugly internally or externally will help you secure opportunities, build lasting partnerships and develop a great team to lead future growth.

“It’s not where you start; it is where you want to finish that sets you apart.”

Stephen Krempl

Chapter 4: Verbal arts separate the lions from the lambs

The CEO of a major US semiconductor firm, on a recent visit to India to be briefed by an executive already identified for senior management, was totally stumped by the response to a simple question he posed: "What do you think of our China strategy?"

Poor Ram a high-potential performer was so focused on his PowerPoint on the Indian semiconductor market that he was dumbstruck for a full ten seconds before he blurted out, "Er... Sir, let me come back to you in two weeks."

His supervisor a senior vice-president who sat in on the presentation confided to me that he wanted to slide under the table out of embarrassment. Ram was so focused on producing "correct" answers that he could not react to questions which were not part of the script.

This unfortunate episode highlights a major "X" factor missing in candidates seeking high office in multinational corporations. Ram's promotion prospects now seem somewhat set back. But it should not be this way, if only corporate leaders focused a little more on getting their executives to think on their feet, and to learn to speak anywhere, anytime.

In leadership training across Asia, I hear the usual refrain that Asians are not skilled at striking up conversations, engaging in debates or arguing a point of view, especially on topics outside their area of expertise. Focus on palm oil refining or 3G connectivity and all will be fine. But please don't discuss World Cup rugby or the significance of Occupy Wall Street.

Businesses do not run that way. Leaders who are being sent overseas, to win new markets or to solve critical problems, need to be equipped with the skills to win friends and influence a broad range of people especially those not from their culture or country. To do this, one has to be interested and be interesting.

Ram's CEO was trying to get a feel of how the former felt about issues beyond his responsibility, whether he could be engaging in conversations and had viewpoints of his own. And, more importantly, how he reacted in a situation which was unexpected; and if he was interesting and engaging, maybe have an evening drink together to discuss a career move.

For corporations seeking to impart or develop such skills among their high-potential managers, especially in Asia where there is general shyness and cultural self-effacement, two important factors have to be considered.

Soft skills

First, there needs to be a conscious effort to develop soft skills such as "verbal sparring" among top talent. While most management trainees or mid career entrants are recruited for their academic background of work experience, few are selected because of their personal verbal engagement skills.

What is often lacking is a curriculum or even an emphasis on the ability to hold an engaging conversation, or speak off-the-cuff. At the simplest levels, leaders should send the message that those with top management potential must demonstrate the ability to present and be articulate enough to engage in conversations and handle questions on the fly. It should be an unwritten criterion for promotion.

Second, there is a need to consciously train these executives formally and informally in the verbal arts. There are numerous courses on developing self confidence or presentation skills. Send your
managers there. And, back in the office, make it a routine at meetings for each manager to speak about some unusual topics for a few minutes without notes and be ready to respond to questions from peers or even the bosses.

Now, some of you may wonder if this is some one-off clever suggestion by yet another leadership consultant trying to be different. It isn't, trust me.

Recently, I was helping participants from across the region prepare their final presentations on how their corporate solutions were going to help grow the business within their countries. Almost all concurred that getting the project implemented and obtaining initial results were actually quite easy. Even the presentation, for which they each spent a lot of time preparing, was smooth sailing.

However, it was the ensuing discussions after the presentations where the lambs were separated from the lions. It was not how well they prepared the slides and statistics, but how confidently they were able to respond to tough comments, divergent opinions and pointed questions from the senior executives that made the difference.

It was immediately clear who would make it to high office or can be sent on the next challenging assignment the executive who can take the heat and parry tough questions with poise, confidence and even humour always gets the nod.

This skill is not dependent on talent. It can be taught. Before a presentation, executives can practise and rehearse innovative ways to answer tough questions confidently. With a little drill and practice, a mediocre executive can be trained to sound and look good and confident. Instead of the stage being dominated by Caucasian peers, the Asians can also stand out at the next global leadership meeting.

“But outside of Rome, Romans are looking for other Romans.”

Stephen Krempl

Chapter 5: Where is your pipeline of leaders?

Developing a leadership curriculum in Asia for a global fast-food chain, my regional boss gave me a simple mandate: "Help me groom 50 Herbert's".

Herbert (name changed to protect his identity) is the Asian leader all MNCs hope to groom, but few succeed. A non-graduate local hired from South-East Asia, he was promoted rapidly. Unlike his peers, he had business flair, decision-making abilities and could inspire staff loyalty at home and during his first foreign posting, running a fast-food chain in another country.

My boss figured that if I could help him identify 50 Hebert's, they would then drive business growth with little supervision. (By the way, Herbert eventually left the company and is now a wealthy and successful co-owner of a large franchised fast-food chain in the region).

So, to the Asian CEOs out there, where is your pipeline of five or fifty "Herberts" who can lead and run any division or geography independently? Without this pool, your growth strategies are only good on paper. Identifying, nurturing and retaining them are critical as your competitors also want to poach them. And, the best leaders may have entrepreneurial instincts to start their own businesses. Hence, it is important to develop that pipeline in case some leave.

From my experience with MNCs, I would suggest three basic principles:

First, the CEO must make leadership development a priority and be personally involved. He or she must genuinely want to groom and inspire the next generation. Quite often, the demands of running a cross-border business leave the CEO hard-pressed for time and focused only on his immediate subordinates. These "direct reports" are usually those in sales and marketing, finance, technology, HR and legal.

CEOs who succeed in developing the pipeline are involved in selecting and grooming leaders, right from management trainee level. Successful CEOs I know make it a point to cut down on some client meetings just so that they can have "face time" with young managers. Only when your whole team believes that the CEO is committed to leadership development will other senior managers follow suit.

Second, routinely weed out the weaker managers and promote the high-flyers. This is harder than it sounds. Because most leadership pipelines in Asia are weak to begin with, the CEOs often shy away from culling the weaker ones simply because there is no second and third-liner. Hence, they compromise.

This in turn demoralises the high-flyers who aspire to be in the inner circle of chosen ones. Quite often, the top talent whom you spent so much time grooming simply leave the company.

Remember, stars are special and they expect to be treated that way. Asian culture often inhibits the bosses from this renewal, and many corporations are actually stifled because they dare not mark out the top performers early.

Third, rotate these young leaders opportunities to shuffle their responsibilities regularly and even get them to practice leadership skills outside the company.

When they are responsible for a social cause, you will quickly gauge if they can lead people outside their work environment. Volunteer them for a local charity, community project or even a global cause and see how they respond.

Beyond these three principles, here are several practical suggestions to help polish well rounded executives with potential:-

Ensure they have cross-country exposure early; even if they have contributed significantly back home, at some point, you need to send them overseas to test them out. Only then are the men and women separated from the boys and girls.

Apart from the usual performance indicators (usually emphasising bottom line or technical competence), ensure they have good communicative skills to engage colleagues, partners and customers at home and overseas. Encourage them to be confident about articulating different viewpoints. Such talent in Asia, in the first place, is generally hardworking and technically competent. Combined with good communicative skills, one or two of them could well be a future CEO.

Ensure these executives deliver results while reinforcing the company culture and standards. They must achieve results "the right way" and not trample over colleagues while getting to the top. If not, the whole organisation will think that the top brass only cares about results and not the people or the culture.

Get each high-flyer to take one or two people under their wings. They will learn to pass that on to the next generation.

Asian companies tend to have only a handful of trusted leaders in the second line and are often weak in building the third tier and beyond. Only with a strong pipeline can you be confident of long term growth. And remember, even if you have a relatively wide talent pool, only one or two of them can truly be groomed to be a CEO, your next Herbert.