Understanding American Business Culture
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November 2011

Overview
- Who am I?
- What is an American?
- American Business Culture
- Putting These Insights to Work for You
- Conclusion

Who Am I?
- American
  - Work at the HCMC Consulate General
  - Previous work in DC, Egypt, Iraq and Korea
  - Stockbroker and business advisor
  - MBA from Johns Hopkins University
  - Adjunct lecturer at Vietnam National University

Who Am I?
- Asian
  - Born in Korea
  - Wife from District 3
  - MA Asian Studies, George Washington University
  - Lived and worked in Asia for years

What Is an American?
- Can’t tell by face

What Is an American?
- Not based on
  - Race
  - Religion
  - Birthplace

First, understand American society
- Meritocratic
- Egalitarian
- Individual
- Underdog Mentality

What Is an American?
- Meritocracy
  - Education
  - Family
  - Connections
What Is an American?

- Meritocracy
- Education
  - Ivy can hurt!
  - Often first question asked in Asia, last question asked in America
  - Make sure your counterpart has a competent skills/experience set
  - Don't worry if you are not a VNU graduate

What Is an American?

- Meritocracy
- Family
  - Counts for a lot in many countries, such as Vietnam, Korea, UK, France
  - Counts for little in finding business partners in US

What Is an American?

- Meritocracy
- Connections
  - Important at business level
  - Less important at government level

What Is an American?

- Meritocracy
- Personal and professional achievements
  - What really counts
  - President Obama as an example

What Is an American?

- Egalitarian Society
- Gender
- Age
- Race
- Religion

What Is an American?

- Egalitarian Society
- Gender
  - Women supervisors, directors and CEOs
    - Virginia Rometty -- IBM
    - Secretary Clinton
    - Meg Whitman -- HP

What Is an American?

- Egalitarian Society
- Age
  - Youth-oriented
  - Directors in their 20s and 30s
  - CEOs in their 40s
What Is an American?
- Egalitarian Society
  - Race
    - Minorities in management
- Religion
  - Not an issue in the workplace

What Is an American?
- Individual
  - More important than family
  - More important than social groups

What Is an American?
- Nicholas Cage – negatives
  - Withholding information
  - No accountability
  - Less accomplished

What Is an American?
- Self-reliant – positives
  - Learns good judgment
  - Decisiveness
  - Less process, more progress

What Is an American?
- Underdog Mentality
  - Rich, powerful country—yes
  - But Americans root for the underdog and do not realize their power or status

What Is an American?
- Must understand that Americans are meritocratic, egalitarian, individual
  - THEN you can have success in your business relationships

American Business Culture
- Attitude
- Approach
- Access

American Business Culture
- Attitude
  - Cool
  - Time focused
  - Egalitarian
American Business Culture
- Attitude
  - Cool
    - Cool versus warm cultures
    - Topic-focused rather than personality-focused

American Business Culture
- Attitude
  - Time focused
    - Time as a precious resource
    - Time as an indicator of character

American Business Culture
- Attitude
  - Egalitarian
    - Prefers informality
    - Wills equality even if it is not there

American Business Culture
- Approach
  - Direct
    - Few formalities
    - Substance-oriented
    - Law and contract-based

American Business Culture
- Approach
  - Direct
    - Little discussion of person, family
    - Business-focused

American Business Culture
- Approach
  - Few formalities
    - Often not hierarchical (small to mid-size firms esp.)
    - Can seem impolite or inhospitable in ‘warmer’ cultures

American Business Culture
- Approach
  - Substance-oriented
  - Results
American Business Culture

- Approach
  - Law and contract-based
  - Limits of verbal agreements
  - Limits of personal relationships

Making These Insights Work for You

- Adjust your approach
- Do not be overly ‘American’
- The contract rules
- Seek advice
- Useful for other countries

Making These Insights Work for You

- Adjust your approach

Making These Insights Work for You

- Do not be overly ‘American’

Making These Insights Work for You

- The contract rules

Making These Insights Work for You

- Seek advice
  - Talk to FCS!
  - Watch CNN, CNBC
  - Read wsj.com (Wall Street Journal)
  - Hire a lawyer
  - Hire a business consultant
  - Attend AmCham events

Making These Insights Work for You

- Useful for other countries
  - Australia, New Zealand, Canada
  - UK, England, Germany more formal and hierarchical

Conclusions

- Business highly personal in America as well as Vietnam
- Put your people skills to work with international business
- Have a sense of adventure
- Start with a small commitment