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How Multicultural Business Relationships Can Make You A Better Professional



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In the modern world, it is a given that you'll work with people from all around the globe in your professional career. Currently, the system of relatively open borders and immigration channels that fuels this paradigm is being called into question. Around the world, there is a debate about how open countries should be to immigrants and doing business across borders.

I won't comment on the merits of those arguments, but what I can offer is unique insight into how these multicultural business relationships have helped me and other top entrepreneurs become better professionals. As someone who grew up in both the U.S. and Israel and now works with startups from the U.S., Israel and many other countries, I understand the profound differences that can exist in cultural communication and businesses styles. I have learned that professionals from Europe or the U.S., for instance, need information delivered in a more formal style while Israelis are far more informal and direct.

I'm certainly not the only one encountering these challenges, so here are some key insights from a few top entrepreneurs that have broad experience in working with people from across borders, languages and cultures.

Understand The Value Of Communicating To Different Cultures

Whether it's speaking to someone in their own language or speaking to someone in the cultural style they are used to, there is a unique value in crafting your message to suit the needs of your audience. I spoke with Vasco Pedro of Unbabel and Dr. Torsten Oelke of CUBE, both of whom explained the value they see in multicultural and multilingual communication.

"Fundamentally, we all want to understand and be understood. It's a pretty dangerous assumption to think, 'Everyone speaks English.' Even the U.K. admits that deficient language skills cost their economy 3.5% of GDP per year, and countries that share a common language have twice as much bilateral trade," Pedro said. "If we want to vastly increase our knowledge, wealth and prosperity, removing language barriers is a good place to start."

"More than a half of our team has a different cultural background," Oelke said. "Therefore we have the opportunity to gain insights about each culture, how they use new technologies and new ways of communication. Global businesses must understand how to communicate with different

cultures, languages and geographic markets in order to fulfill the company's mission and build value for stakeholders. Our global network is a very valuable asset; we inspire and learn from each other. Diversity is a high-performance fuel – and our strength."

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Tailor Your Message And Style for Different Contexts

When dealing with multiple cultures, you have to master different patterns of communication that go beyond language. Yoav Oz of Spotad, Hadas Amir of Amimon, and Dan Zakai of Mindspace discussed the ways you need to adapt communication, messaging, and strategy styles to different contexts.

"Working with different cultures is a real challenge. The time difference alone between countries forces you to wear different masks," Oz said. "At 4 a.m. you could be talking with the Chinese in a very direct and 'cut to the chase' meeting, in the middle of the day with Europeans, who are very polite, and then in the evening, you could be speaking with the U.S. where it's all about the bonding around American culture and things that are common."

"As a growing startup company, we faced many issues in working in multicultural environments. A good example is the challenges we had integrating new team members from East Asia," Amir said. "The main difference in our cultures is the pace of work. At Amimon we invest too little time in planning and a lot in doing. The new employees from Asia taught us to increase the planning time, in order to shorten the execution time."

Zakai said, "One of the key lessons I've learned from launching Mindspace in multiple cities is that when introducing a product in a new city, one must understand the culture he's going into. Some markets are international and will quickly adopt to you while other markets are more

traditional and you will have to make adjustments to fit in. Be attentive to these details [and] do your market research.”

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Find Unique Ways To Overcome Challenges

No matter what task you’re trying to accomplish, you’re going to hit obstacles and challenges along the way. This is especially true when you’re working with multiple cultures and languages. Sachin Dev Duggal of SD Squared, Moritz Kothe of Kununu, and Shlomi Ben Haim of JFrog have all found unique ways to overcome these challenges.

"Teams with different cultures, especially across time zones, warrant a greater level of understanding as the opportunity to be misunderstood is so much more. The key to managing this is to ultimately overcommunicate," Duggal said. "I often tell our teams that you must communicate following two philosophies: Always give the benefit of the doubt and always assume you'll be misunderstood."

Kothe elaborated on that idea: "This may be a no-brainer, but I’ve found that the simple, most powerful way to deal with differences (culture, geography, language, etc.) is to hire smart, curious and nice people that believe in what we are trying to achieve as a company. This usually emphasizes our many, many commonalities and allows us to take time to address cultural roadblocks with the patience and focus they deserve. It's also been impactful to jointly dig deep into our corporate values and discuss, argue, discuss some more and then align on what the 'right' behaviors and actions are associated with these."

Ben Haim's industry has "a culture that emphasizes collaboration and communication between teams," he said. "We strongly believe this kind of

culture is the secret sauce of success in a global environment with diverse teams.”

Whether you're crafting a message for your business or simply trying to sit down and have a conversation with a colleague, it's important to find a way to communicate with them that resonates and inspires them. The entrepreneurs and innovators featured here have all found ways to cross boundaries in their communication styles and in the way they conduct their businesses.



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