

WEPAN CONVENTION  
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INFORMAL REMARKS BY  
F. SUZANNE JENNICHES  
VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER,  
NORTHROP GRUMMAN AUTOMATION & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

#### WOMEN ENGINEERS IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

Good morning. I am honored to be on the same plenary with Dr. Kirwan to talk about such an important subject as women engineers in the global marketplace. When Dr. Marilyn Berman asked me to speak, I jumped at the opportunity because I feel that so many of us enter the business world with outstanding technical credentials, but not a clue as to how the industrial world really operates. Although many schools encourage or even offer as part of their curriculum, a summer or semester workstudy job in industry, it is almost exclusively a domestic assignment.

In France, many of the major engineering universities require that each summer the students take a paid engineering job outside of France where they must work and live in a non-French speaking environment and accomplish increasingly more realistic engineering tasks. I am sure that you all have heard the generalization that the French are very nationalistic about the language and culture, yet clearly they recognize the need for working effectively in many diverse cultures. The Peoples Republic of China is now requiring all children to take eight years of English as part of their basic education. There is no doubt that we in the United States lag far behind the rest of the industrial world in preparing our workforce for the global marketplace.

Ideally, when you enter the marketplace, you should be able to think in at least one other language. Many times this is most easily accomplished by immersion - living overseas, outside of an American compound - for a year or more. Very few of us have had that opportunity. But hopefully the majority of the audience today is better prepared than I am; my second language is two years of high school Latin - and we all know that that hasn't been spoken in the marketplace for nearly 2000 years!

The lessons that I want to share today are very personal experiences of an ex-high school teacher, ex-practicing engineer, now - still learning general manager in a very tough competitive business world. They do not necessarily represent the practices and policies of Westinghouse where I have worked for 22 years or Northrop Grumman who recently acquired the Westinghouse Electronic Systems Group and who I have worked for for three months. But they represent the school of hard knocks and I hope that they can begin to inform you about what it is like to be a woman engineer in a global marketplace.

The first time that I travelled abroad on business was February 1980 for three weeks in Japan. I learned 16 Japanese phrases from an English to phonetic Japanese paperback on the way over on the plane. I had also bought a Fodor's Guide to Japan to get a thumb nail sketch of Japanese culture. Fortunately someone had told us that we needed "Presentos" for the various managers we would meet, so we purchased 20+ bottles of scotch for middle managers and cognac for executives at the duty free shop in JFK and set off to conquer the world. Despite our lack of preparation, the Japanese were incredibly cordial and the business trip was very informative. Later I learned that the Japanese are always cordial, but that doesn't mean that they are pleased with the encounter.

## LESSON #1 - LEARN SOME BASIC PHRASES

As it turns out, the rest of the world has come to tolerate our functional language illiteracy, but they really do expect that we at least take some time to learn the simple courtesy of life. I suggest you learn at least 12 basic words or phrases:

- Hello
  - Goodbye
  - Good morning
  - Good evening
  - Please
  - Thank you
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not speak \_\_\_\_\_; do you speak English?
  - I am lost; where is the \_\_\_\_\_ hotel?
  - Where is the restroom (toilet)? Otherwise people sometimes think you mean a room to rest in like a bedroom.
  - Or the ever popular generic - I need help.
- And for me I have found another two phrases are very useful.
- How much is this?
  - Oh, it is very nice, but that is more than I want to spend. Thank you very much anyway.

## LESSON #2 - ENGLISH IS SPOKEN WORLDWIDE AS THE TECHNICAL BUSINESS LANGUAGE.

But your business partners still want you to try and observe their culture as they have ours and not assume that because they speak English so well that we do not have to make an effort.

I recently visited with the world's largest material handling equipment company which is located in Dusseldorf, Germany. Their president told me that they had just established a company wide policy that all business meetings held within the company would be conducted in English - even if there were only Germans present. He wants them to only think in English when in the business environment because whether they are in the US, Korea, Finland, or Brazil the common language has become English. In a way I regret this because it somehow legitimizes our laziness. But it shows how serious a market leader, who could probably sell in any language because their technology is that good, realizes that they must adapt to the world and not the other way around.

## LESSON #3 - HAVE CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

The Germans are a perfect example. I work closely with four different German companies and they all go out of their way to work within our cultural comfort zone. When we are first introduced, they immediately adopt greeting us on a first name basis. This is a huge concession on their part. They have worked closely with German colleagues for 20 years and the most familiar they become is to drop the Herr or Doctor from in front of their co-workers last name. Yet routinely I see Americans read the business card and begin calling their German acquaintance "Thomas" instead of "Doctor Prasser". We find that people in our own organization have fallen into this trap. I ask them, "did Dr. Prasser ask you to call him Thomas?". Invariably they say "no, but they just wanted to make him feel comfortable". In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. So I tell them to switch to "Dr. Prasser" and see if he corrects them and says "Oh, no, please call me Thomas". They never do and they really appreciate that we understand their practices.

Cross cultural training is really important to pick up these sensitivities. Whether or not to give "presentos", whether to tip or pick up the tab, how close to stand (believe it or not, we friendly Americans need more space between us when we are conducting a conversation than many cultures - so when our international guest stands too close to talk, we back up and they pick up on this



unconscious cultural insensitivity. Whether to shake hands or pat someone on the back in congratulations, all of these innocuous behaviors are indicators that you are not really a cosmopolitan business person.

#### LESSON #4 - HAVE A RESPECT FOR HISTORY - DO NOT BE "NATIONALISTICALLY" ARROGANT

Each culture has something of which they are inherently proud. Be aware and considerate of this. We Americans are young (only 200+ years) and brash; we pride ourselves on our technical achievements and candidly discuss our accomplishments - sometimes only measured in a domestic vacuum. We tend to concentrate on the last quarter or year or decade. Most of the rest of the world operates on a much longer timeline and the geopolitical history of their culture greatly influences their business process. We are really culturally naive about anything that can not be reduced into dollars and cents.

The Germans are particularly proud of their technology and in my industry of mail processing automation and material handling, they are number 1 in the world. The US may buy the most, but the Germans make it possible for us to buy. They expect that we show the proper respect for their accomplishments and not rush in to recommend new technology upgrades; very often they have considered similar features and have discarded them years ago because of technical subtleties that we have not yet come at appreciate.

The French are very adept at social graces and can make a business meeting a very cordial and comforting experience. The Danes exhibit rugged simplicity and they are uncomfortable in aggressive business negotiations. The Japanese have a pride in their thoroughness of planning and thoughtful execution - they are not impressed with our willingness to jump to conclusions. The Brits are prudent risk takers. I have worked closely with these cultures over the last five years and I am only just beginning to appreciate the cadence and special nuances that each culture has. I can say that realizing these "generalizations" and taking them into consideration has greatly reduced my frustration with the path that business discussions take. Once I figured out their work ethic and process, I incorporated their needs into my planning and the whole business deal moved along more smoothly than I ever imagined.

#### LESSON #5 - SHOW ADVANCED PREPARATION

Business cards with your title and other information printed in the appropriate language is a very special touch. It shows that you have thought about the other culture in advance, but in a subtle, caring way. Having your business literature printed in the appropriate language is not only culturally sensitive, but very smart technically as well. Even though your international contacts are very conversant in English, they may only be picking up the "gist" of what you are saying, having the details written in metric and the appropriate language can clearly represent your products and it will certainly be passed on to their colleagues back in the factory who may not be as English literate as the marketing or executive personnel.

#### SUMMARY - COURTESY IS A TOOL THAT WORKS EQUALLY WELL DOMESTICALLY.

Always follow verbal communications with written confirmation. Establish agendas in advance and follow-up the business meeting with a memo highlighting the significant technical points discussed as well as the efforts that your colleague took to make the meeting special such as a factory tour, introduction to his superiors, or a lunch in a restaurant with local cuisine. Obviously, offer a reciprocal visit. Over the last five years of dealing in the international marketplace extensively, I have come to respect their investment in the total business person. They will research the history of the company, be aware of prior meetings even if they are a number of years ago, be aware of your current business portfolio, and will take the time to get to know something about you personally. Most international businesses are built upon broad relationships and not just your specific technical



capabilities this year. They come well prepared and many times we show up prepared to deal only with the opportunity at hand.

The courtesy of understanding the total company and person can serve us all very well domestically. Doing your homework, taking time to make to meeting as informative and specific for your guest as possible, and thorough follow-up which indicates that the time spent in the meeting will have a lasting impact are important lessons regardless in which time zone the meeting is held. It will set you apart as worldly, cosmopolitan, and a person worth building a relationship with - both today and for the long term.

Thank you.

