



# BUILDING BUSINESS IN FOREIGN MARKETS

WITHIN BOARDROOMS AND MANAGEMENT MEETINGS, FISO (FIT IN, STAND OUT) LEADERS QUESTION HOW WELL THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS WILL ADAPT TO THE GLOBAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT.

BY BLYTHE J. MCGARVIE

The poet Robert Frost wrote “Fences make good neighbors.” Today, fences no longer establish firm boundaries because of the increasing inter-connectivity of people, places and processes. Whether we endorse or reject globalization no longer matters. We no longer have a choice. Globalization and inter-connectivity of business is happening as a result of competitive pressures.

To succeed in business you must be able to understand and work with many people and processes – both inside and outside your own company, and inside and outside your own country. In other words, you must think in terms of bridges, not fences, when you are building business.

To fit in and stand out in this new environment, leaders must develop the ability to transcend national boundaries. They do not necessarily have to abandon their national perspective, but they must not be bound by it and have a “center of the earth” orientation. That is, they attempt to understand their own national biases, assumptions and cultural constraints, comparing them to other nations’ biases, assumptions and cultural constraints. They strive to become global citizens with a global perspective.

Americans must work harder to become global citizens to compete in the business environment of the twenty-first century. The National Geographic Roper Geographic Literacy Survey of young adults (18 to 24 years old) is alarming. The results show: “Six in ten (63%) cannot find Iraq on a map of the Middle East; Three-quarters cannot find Indonesia on a map – even after images of the tsunami and the damage it caused; Three-quarters (75%) of young men and women do not know that a majority of Indonesia’s population is Muslim, despite the prominence of this religion in global news today; Three-quarters (74%) believe English is the most commonly spoken native language in the world, rather than Mandarin Chinese. Although 73% know the US is the world’s largest consumer of oil, nearly as many (71%) do not know the US is the

world’s largest exporter of goods and services – half think it’s China.”

Each of us must address this crisis in understanding if we want to be successful doing business in other countries and want a team who can make us proud. John F. Kennedy recognized the pros and cons of such a crisis when he said: When written in Chinese, the word “crisis” is composed of two characters – one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity.

Today’s young adults do not have enough global awareness to succeed in tomorrow’s business world. I am often asked how to develop better global citizens, and I have come up with two simple lists that will help aspiring leaders use the FISO Factor to become better global citizens. In the side bars, I offer 10 specific suggestions for “fitting in” AND for “standing out” as a global citizen.



## GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: STANDING OUT

- Be flexible in conversations and surroundings. Consider the speaker’s point of view before your own.
- Cultivate an excitement and an interest in others’ backgrounds. If your energy is fed by your love of listening to how an individual grew from his birth to his current state, this will be obvious to the native in the foreign land. Every story is different and not always bounded by a nationalistic view.
- More than travel, stay open to absorb what you observe and experience. This is how you become a person of the world. Culture should be subject to dialogue allowing for mutual understanding and dignity of the individuals involved.
- Seek good mentors to share different perspectives and to have confidence in your development.
- Intelligence and good judgment reigns. People will seek you out as you share your global stories and insights as applicable to their situation.



## GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: FITTING IN

- Learn and survey the economic, culture, history, philosophy and literature of a country in which you do business.
- Travel out of your home country at least once per year, even if only for a vacation. Meet people from the country to get a sense of the place. If you hear words that are used differently, learn to understand their subtle meaning. For example, French business people will say “to take a decision” which means that the subject has been fully vetted, but may not mean that the group is ready for action.
- Learn the facts and figures of the country. For example, with the Internet, you can quickly learn about the population, the GDP, the literacy rate, the income per capita, etc, and think about the implications for the country’s individuals and as a group.
- How can you better understand a foreigner’s perspective? Read stories that reveal the habits and manners of the country’s people. For Europe, Luigi Barzini wrote *The Italians* and the classic *The Europeans*; two books as relevant today as they were when first published. For France, Theodore Zeldin wrote *The French*, another classic that helps give you a sense of the “je ne sais quoi” of the people, the culture and the way business succeeds.
- Even if you do not learn the language of the country, learn some key phrases. Just as everyone likes to hear his or her name, people appreciate it when you learn their language.

*Blythe McGarvie is President of Leadership for International Finance (www.LIFgroup.com), a unique firm offering a global perspective for clients to achieve profitable growth. She is author of “Fit in Stand Out”.*

*As a speaker and moderator, she is represented by Monitor Talent, based in Boston*