



Interview with Jörg Peltzer, MD, Head of the Department of Surgery, Hopital du Jura, Délémont, Switzerland.

“Understanding the perspective of others”

FF: Mr Peltzer, you have traveled a great deal. When was the first time you were confronted with a cultural conflict?

Jörg Peltzer: That was in 1985 during my training when I spent an entire year in Ghana, West Africa. I traveled through the country to explain new concepts to the local population, such as the use of condoms. They watched me and smiled. For illustration purposes I used a banana. Afterwards, they took the condom, cut off the tip and said the semen had to go in after all, which from a cultural standpoint is in fact true.

Where do you see the differences in communication between the self-image of Europeans/Americans compared to other countries?

There are certain differences, which can be illustrated by the example of humor. In our cultures, primarily the Anglo-American culture, a presentation is often preceded by humor to generate a positive mood right away. Also, we see nothing wrong with jokes about ethnic minorities, religion, love, sex and death. However, this is frowned upon by other cultures, for example in Arab countries or in Asia. Concepts, such as sarcasm, irony, satire, “black humor”, as we see them are not understood there.

> continued on page 4

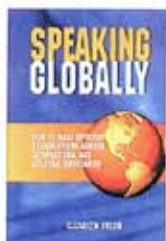
Culture clash

In France, India and Iran history is particularly valued. So one successful surgeon captured the audience’s attention by talking about past operational successes. In contrast, when in the United States, the same presenter had to emphasize the prospects and future potential of his new technique.

Recommended reading

Elizabeth Urech

Speaking Globally



This is vital, lively, engaging reading for anyone that addresses audiences around the world. Learn to adapt your language and gestures to suit your audience and avoid pitfalls and faux pas.

Paperback: 216 pages; Publisher: Book Network International (2002); Language: English
ISBN: 0971761507

Philip R Harris, Robert T Moran

Managing Cultural Differences



Easy-to-read mini case histories, illustrations, exhibits, and country profiles supply guidelines to improve leadership skills for globalization, communications, negotiations and diversity in the workplace.

Hardcover: 474 pages; Publisher: Gulf Professional Publishing (5 edition, 2000); Language: English
ISBN: 0877193452