

Leading from the Heart Through Language

By Bruce Alan Johnson

His enthusiasm came across with a wonderful roar, putting to mind the old days of the Concorde. For Spain-born Señor Arturo Cardelus—Executive Vice President Worldwide – Ferrero Integrative Channels of the Italy-based Ferrero confection empire and maker of delectable Ferrero Rocher chocolates, Nutella, Tic Tac, among others—there are few things more important to success in international business today than proficiency in foreign languages. “If you have a sales meeting and you speak the language, you are going to get a multiplier effect in the results immediately! You don’t need simultaneous translation—no sensations or direct personal contact and intonation can be properly conveyed by an interpreter—nothing that rhymes with your heart and your words can be conveyed by a third party.”

Those words are powerfully true. “The interpreter definitely can’t use the same intonation and rhyme that you can effect by using the language of the meeting attendees. Motivation is a major weapon, and hearing you speak to them in their own language is the motivator! If they are motivated, they can do things they never thought they could do. And mastery of a foreign language is a major tool in achieving these kinds of results!”

Years ago Cardelus was in charge of Middle East operations for another corporation. He tackled several lessons in Arabic. “Oh, but Arabic is a difficult language!” lamented the senior executive, who is proficient in Spanish, English, French, Italian, and Russian. “So hard! But I did my best, and even that limited use of Arabic opened so many doors for me! I was greeted in such a different way, with just a few words and phrases. Again, it’s all about respect. You are saying to the residents and citizens of that country, ‘Look, I have taken the effort and time to try your language. I respect you...’”

Señor Cardelus was asked if it was true that he “always speaks to the heart of the people.” His response was emphatic: “People know when you’re addressing their hearts. They sense a lack of coldness and barriers. Don’t act cool and detached—people resent it. It is very important to always talk to the heart of the people below you. The lower the person in the organization, the more you’re going to get done if you honor this principle. From the cleaning staff to the chairman, every single one of us has written on his forehead: ‘Please make me feel important!’” This brings to mind what Albert Einstein said, “I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university.”

There are few ways more effective in making an employee feel important than to address one in his or her native language. Yes, even if your proficiency in that particular language is limited. This writer speaks several languages but was perplexed to find that Finnish was one of the most baffling, difficult



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languages ever encountered. But by just digging in and mastering a few phrases, this writer saw faces light up in meetings with one of Finland's largest, most successful companies. And what a wonderful difference it made in the negotiations that followed. As Cardelus says, it's all about sincerity—and respect.

There's that word again. Respect. It's plain to most of us that the mere effort to speak another's language when we are working in her country conveys respect. Respect is a reflexive quality: when we offer it to others, we tend to get it reflected back to us. Impart that respect to people in their own language and you have connected instantly with their hearts.

Señor Cardelus expanded on this important point. "If you go to a country and you don't speak their language, you are colonizing. Because you are there as a manager or director, and you are demanding they speak your language! This is never the right way to approach a group. You are a guest, not a colonizer! You are there in a completely new environment and you know nothing about what is going on. You must first show care and a desire to be a part of the environment. And the only way to do that is by learning the language and customs and culture of the place you are assigned to live."

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We discussed how too many Americans tend to ignore the primacy of language today, wondering what role insecurity might play in fostering this failure to buckle down and tackle a foreign language. "This is so important—especially for Americans," he said. "Insecurity breeds contempt and arrogance. It is compensatory behavior, and it is deadly to behave this way. The only country in which I arrived on

assignment without already speaking the language was Russia. It took a few months before I uttered phrases." He studied Russian formally every single day, and even covered the daily news during lunch—always with the door open. "Complete transparency is so important because it shows respect!"

It was not at all surprising to hear Señor Cardelus praise business language-training provider Rosetta Stone. He even requires many of his employees to use Rosetta Stone®

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products to master a foreign language. "I use Rosetta Stone products," he said enthusiastically. "And I have never found a better method to learn languages!" We pursued that point a bit further together, agreeing that their solutions offer the best methods of language-learning available to any organization today. Competent linguists know that there is simply no substitute for immersion in learning a language, including proper pronunciation, syntax (how a language fits together), and vocabulary building. While some people are innately good at tearing apart a language's grammar and structure, most of us are not. Experts at Rosetta Stone understand this well, and have thus developed an approach to language learning that has no peer. In many encounters with Rosetta Stone 'graduates' around the world, it is clear to this writer that their feel for the language they've studied is impressive and comfortable. And their confidence in actually using the language in their daily lives is impressive.

We went on to discuss a very common but very false belief: that English is a universal language understood by everybody on the planet. "There are few beliefs more wrong than this one!" Cardelus remarked, adding that this one belief might be the most prevalent error of thought he routinely encountered with American companies entering the international arena.

It's quite interesting to watch very young Swiss children. Often they speak a sentence in two or three of the four official Swiss languages, but in a jumbled mix. "We just notice which language seems to prevail in that sentence and respond to the child in that language," one Swiss parent explained. "They sort it out on their own, and usually everything works out just fine!" If Swiss children can tackle languages this way,

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it certainly suggests that American adults can do it, too—especially if aided by the unique way Rosetta Stone makes learning languages simple and clear.

A primary consideration when selecting a staffer for an overseas posting is this: is he eager to learn the language of the country that will be hosting him? International success requires a diverse range of communication skills and abilities. The ability to learn a foreign language—even if not fluently—stands high over all of them. English may be the most-studied language worldwide, but it is also quite complex. This writer has spent a career sorting out critical misunderstandings spawned by well-meaning and highly intelligent people for whom English is a second language. Those who believe that "everyone speaks English" overseas will pay a dear price for such an unfounded belief.

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Fluency is not essential, though it often comes naturally when one is immersed in a foreign language every day. If the candidate you're considering posting overseas has no linguistic aptitude—or desire to learn—you're likely to experience dismally poor results from that person's work overseas. Federico Fellini wrote, "A different language is a different vision of life." The overseas employees who understand this will perform much better than those who do not.

"I constantly emphasize the supreme importance of foreign languages to staff," Cardelus added. "It's just part of their development as people who can contribute to the company." Professor Peter F. Drucker, the man globally recognized as the father of management, emphasized that effective executives should always concentrate their thoughts and efforts on one idea: contribution. What am I contributing to this enterprise? What can I contribute that will advance the organization's objectives? When we start thinking in that way, we suddenly realize that foreign language mastery in business is a significant contribution we all are capable of making to our organizations.

I told Arturo Cardelus of an experience I had one day in a small, steamy West African nation that stunned me. It wasn't that my company didn't deserve being awarded a lucrative contract we had been pursuing for nearly a year, but we knew that we were point-for-point the same as another foreign competitor. Yet in a brief meeting that day, the government of that country awarded the contract to us. After everything had been properly signed and sealed, I mustered the temerity to ask one of the senior officials why they had decided to award it to us. "Look," he said, smiling politely at me, "your French is not perfect..." (Imagine!) "But you took the trouble to speak with us in our language, and that conveyed to us a respect and a goodwill that you could not have conveyed any other way. And nobody else made that effort."

"Today, with the competition being worldwide," said Arturo Cardelus in closing, "mastering a language is not only a fundamental requirement to succeed—it is absolutely imperative!"

About Rosetta Stone

Rosetta Stone is a global leader in technology-driven language and learning solutions for individuals, classrooms, and entire organizations.

Our scalable, interactive solutions have been used by over 12,000 businesses, 9,000 public sector organizations, and 22,000 education institutions worldwide, and by millions of learners in over 150 countries.

