

Companies start to see value in cultural training

■ Tero's classes have gained popularity; Pioneer has developed its own program

BY SARAH BZDEGA

At a meeting with top Honda Motor Co. executives in Japan, John Lowe watched in shock as his counterpart at the Salt Lake City HondaJet dealership crossed his legs in front of the Honda chairman. After four hours of intense training on Japanese business culture before the trip, the president of Des Moines Flying Service Inc. (one of five North American HondaJet dealers) knew that the custom was to keep both feet flat on the ground. Business cards were presented with elbows at the sides, both hands on the card, thumbs up. You didn't refuse any food that was presented to you, and you never out-dressed your Japanese counterpart.

"We're a dealer, and they are the mother ship, so to speak," Lowe said. "We wanted them to see us in our best light."

More companies are realizing the need for cross-cultural training as they conduct more business internationally, open offices in other countries and hire managers from abroad.

"The need has definitely grown," said Deborah Rinner, director of international protocol and corporate etiquette programs at Tero International Inc. "And I must say, it's growing quite rapidly right now. I think there is awareness now in the marketplace of how important this is."

Most of Rinner's clients are large to mid-



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From left, Jack Peter and John G. Lowe, sales representatives of Des Moines Flying Service Inc., meet with Takeo Fukui, president and CEO of Honda Motor Co., with John M. Lowe, DMFS president, and Chris Siberz, sales representative.

sized companies, but as the work force becomes more diverse, she is also seeing a need from smaller companies that recognize the communication problems cultural differences can create and how these problems can cut into productivity and profits.

"It's increasingly and very rapidly hitting the forefront even in Iowa," she said. "I think the need was always there; I don't think it was al-

ways realized. But it's becoming more and more realized by organizations that it's another set of *continued on following page »*

Tero began creating program six years ago

« continued from previous page skills that people need to apply in order to be effective."

About six years ago, Tero recognized the growing need for intercultural communication training and began to research and design a program. The biggest finding from its studies, Rinner said, was that "people needed to be able to understand how they managed differences personally, because we know as humans, we develop frameworks in terms of how we see the world and those frameworks work for us until we're faced with differences and then we have to either adjust or understand."

Tero gives its clients an Intercultural Developmental Inventory Assessment, which helps them understand where they are on the spectrum of cultural understanding. This spectrum ranges from cultural denial (recognizing only your own culture) to full cultural acceptance and adaptation. The goal, Rinner said, is to "help clients move into further stages to acceptance and adaptation, where I can see similarities, but I can discriminate the differences and I can appreciate those differences. I am able to hold another framework as clearly as I hold my own and understand it."

Tero's training includes workshops, such as World Class, a day-long program on five key tenets of culture that influence people's interactions with one another: time values, communication styles, task versus relationship (how people complete work), equal power versus hierarchy and individual versus group orientation. It also offers individual coaching and group training on a specific culture.

Rinner doesn't see a lot of resistance to this kind of training, but rather people becoming excited as they realize why certain things are happening in the workplace. The biggest discovery, she said, tends to be that people perceive themselves as further along in managing cultural difference than they really are. They also tend to perceive culture as visible things like manners, diet and dress, and do not take into account the attitudes, values and beliefs that lead to those modes of behavior.

Another problem that can arise is when a company brings some-

one in from abroad, and although that person was a high performer in his or her previous environment, they may struggle as they deal with culture shock. Without understanding and help, this can lead the newcomer to frustration, loss of self-esteem and even a decision to return home early, costing the company the money it spent in bringing him or her to the United States.

"It's really important organizationally to be able to uncover not only the values of the culture I'm working with but what are my own cultural values that may determine how I'm going to react to something that's different than my own framework," Rinner said.

Des Moines Flying Service brought Tero in for a four-hour class with 10 of its managers before its trip in August. Although the session cost about \$2,000, Lowe said, "I'll tell you, I would never give it back. It was invaluable."



Deb Rinner

"It was really important to understand how the Japanese businessman thinks and operates and responds. And let me tell you, at least in Japan, it is so easy to insult them with body language, conversation and mannerisms without realizing it."

For instance, Lowe said, his company wanted to give the head of Honda a pen, but learned that the ink could not be red, because that means love. When shaking hands, the Japanese never look each other in the eyes, and in a meeting, Japanese businessmen never say no, but rather will say something like, "Have you thought about this option?"

Pioneer's approach

When Jennifer Gribble joined Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc. as its inclusion and diversity manager 14 months ago, the Pioneer Asian American Network (PAAN) presented her with the idea of creating a training program on Chinese culture. PAAN developed an educational session in time for the Asian Heritage Festival in May of this year — after three months of intense work and input from local Asian groups — and since then, its two programs on Chinese culture have been "tremendously popular," Gribble said.

A quarterly two-hour session *TRAINING continued on page 26 »*