

The Interchange

September 2003

I-70/75 co-sponsors professional development program - The complete story referenced in the e-newsletter

"How to Succeed in the International Arena," was the focus of professional development program co-sponsored by the I-70/75 and the West Central Ohio Port Authority, Oct. 1 at the Bushnell Building in Springfield. Pamela Eyring, executive development program manager with the Air Force's Materiel Command at Wright-Patterson AFB, offered in four areas of international business etiquette: conducting the first meeting successfully, projecting cross-cultural awareness, gaining the edge in international negotiations and presenting an international image. A native Daytonian, Eyring said she wants business leaders in the Dayton region to have finesse and savvy to conduct international business effectively. Unfortunately, in today's business environment, she said soft skills such as those dealing with etiquette are often neglected.

Eyring presented her program in four parts.

The first meeting

One of the keys is extending a firm handshake, which Eyring demonstrated and contrasted to the limp fish, bone crusher and the politician styles. A hand should be extended "straight up," she said and two to three pumps are normally sufficient. She also recommended:

- When making introductions, the individual with a "higher rank" should be introduced to those of lower rank.
- When applying name tags, use the right side of a lapel so it's easier for others to see when shaking hands.
- When trying to "break the circle" of a small group, smile, establish eye contact with one of them, and confidently ease into the circle. "Then you've got them," she said.
- Don't keep business cards in your wallet, they tend to bend or even become frayed and lose appeal. Cards are also good to reserve one's place at a table, rather than tipping a chair or placing a napkin on a chair.

Project cross-cultural awareness

It's often useful to learn something about your prospect's culture, Eyring said. For example, when bowing in Japan she recommended taking the initiative. It shows respect. When bowing to a man, make about a 45-degree dip, keep your hands at your side and make no eye contact. However, when bowing to a woman, keep your hands on your front thighs. She also suggested:

- Be aware that some common American gestures are often obscene in foreign cultures.
- An excellent resource that summarizes dos and don'ts of most foreign cultures is available at: <http://www.culturegrams.com> , and costs less than \$100.
- Carefully select gifts that are appropriate to a specific culture. For example, in Japan gifts with company logos, such as denim shirts, are highly prized, as are almost anything to do with golf.

Gain the edge in international negotiations

The key is to be aware of differences in body language, Eyring said. For example, Arabs and Latinos prefer close proximity when conversing and are offended when Americans back away.

- It's good to adapt to a foreign culture, even if it feels uncomfortable. She recalls her husband was once uncomfortable using chop sticks while dining at a Japanese home. However, once he confessed his inability, his hosts were appreciative that he had made the effort.
- One other strategy is to use neutral conversation topics to develop rapport with a stranger. For example, questions about a prospect's family, organization and motivation are often helpful.

Present an international image

In presenting an international image, wearing clothes and accessories that are conservative are key, Eyring said.

- Women can select from at least seven styles of shoes.
- As men have only two basic styles, there is no excuse for their shoes to be shined. Heels should also be replaced if worn.
- After completing an international flight, get some fresh air and sunshine, and do not sleep right away.

I-70/75 President Erik Collins said the organization plans to co-host a continuing series of programs with Eyring. The Miami Valley Communications Council has also expressed an interest in taping future programs.

The West Central Port Authority, a private-public organization that was established to promote rail transportation for businesses in Clark and two adjacent counties, now works with 13 companies.