

FOCUS: SMALL BUSINESS



ERIK UNGER

Catherine Lee, a former French professor, now instructs executives at large U.S. corporations on how to avoid Ugly American Syndrome. *Non*, it's not easy.

John Wayne is dead and other lessons

A Barrington coach teaches clients not to shoot from the hip

BY EMILY STONE

Catherine Lee wanted to title her new book on international negotiations "John Wayne is Dead." Her publisher didn't like it, so they used it as a chapter heading instead.

But that message remains at the heart of her work training executives to navigate business overseas. U.S. companies will be left behind if they don't realize the aggressive, shoot-from-the-hip style of deal-

making is not effective, says Ms. Lee, founder of CDL & Associates in Barrington.

"Some say, 'This is an American company,'" she says of executives who insist that foreigners adopt an American attitude. "I know, but you're trying to work with China. So wise up."

To help them grow wiser, Ms. Lee, a former French professor, teaches seminars on negotiating across cultures to executives at companies such as General Motors Corp. and Navistar International Corp. and sits at the negotiating table with clients to counsel them on ways to improve their delivery.

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[Catherine Lee, founder, CDL & Associates]

During the negotiations of an American-Chinese joint venture to build a chemical plant in China, she reminded the American executives not to dismiss demands for dorms because Chinese employers often provide living quarters for workers. The Americans agreed to the demands, along with additional amenities like TVs and cell phones.

"It comes back to not being aware of the priorities and values of the other side," she says.

Ms. Lee's career is a reflection of the rapid growth of the global economy. American companies are setting up shop and doing joint ventures in countries from China to Brazil to India. American exports to China, for example, increased to \$55.2 billion from \$19.2 billion between 2001 and 2006, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Coaches have been helping business leaders adapt to global work for decades. But the field has taken off in the past five to 10 years, says Hannah Wilder, a global executive coach in Somerset, England, and a facilitator for the 400-member group of global executive coaches within the International Coach Federation. The trade boom with China, the growth of the European Union and Sept. 11 have all spurred the realization that the world is getting smaller and executives need help navigating it.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Ms. Lee got her first assignment in coaching 20 years ago, when a contact at Motorola Inc., who knew her work running the Barrington School Board, asked her to counsel three engineers who were preparing a talk with Motorola employees on restructuring. That led to assignments at Motorola teaching global executives about leadership skills in places like St. Petersburg, Russia; Bogotá, Colombia; Budapest, Hungary; Beijing, and Hong Kong.

By 1994, Ms. Lee had learned enough working and traveling overseas for Motorola and another client, Amoco, to design classes and found her own company. She also started doing individual and small-group coaching, which accounts for 20% of her work. (She won't disclose her rates or revenue, but says the business is profitable.)

Paul Trautwein, a former operations manager for Motorola, hired Ms. Lee five years ago to

train 200 people in his cellular infrastructure division in Arlington Heights. The division was moving some of its engineering work from the United States to China and was suffering through painful conference calls because the Chinese were often unresponsive to questions about whether they saw problems with the plans. They would answer "no," even if they did see problems, or worse, sit silently, Mr. Trautwein says.

Ms. Lee taught the Americans to rephrase questions because the Chinese wouldn't give answers that made their counterparts look bad. Instead, Ms. Lee told them to ask, "Do you foresee any obstacles for your team in implementing this?" or "Have you tried something like this before?" which allowed the Chinese to discuss potential roadblocks without criticizing the overall plan. These subtle changes kept them on schedule, says Mr. Trautwein, who now works for HSBC Bank USA N.A.

TURNING THE TABLES

In her seminars on international negotiations, which can run several days, Ms. Lee often reminds clients that, in Colombia, they must be punctual even though Colombians may be late for meetings. Or that opening a gift immediately in India looks greedy. In China, they should never interrupt someone, even with a burst of enthusiasm. And she encourages people to read up on the other country's history, art or music before they go and discuss the subjects with their hosts.

Participants then role-play case studies and get feedback from observers about how well they're incorporating what they've learned.

Because these lessons apply to more than just Americans going overseas, Ms. Lee has started attracting foreign clients, including executives at Korea Telecom Corp. and Infosys Technologies Ltd. in India, who want to work with Americans. Asian executives doing business with Americans, for example, need to learn to interrupt to get their point across so they don't appear passive. Latin Americans often come across as too social in business meetings, so she'll coach them on structuring their exchanges more formally. She's guiding an Indian company on working in China, but the principles—learning about the other's culture, listening well, staying patient—remain the same.

You don't need to be a jet-setting executive to use these strategies, says Ms. Lee, who jokes that the same tools can save a marriage. And with today's diverse American workforce, "it works even if you never leave your cubicle in Naperville."