

About the Author/MIA DOUCET

Mia Doucet, author of the award-winning book, "China in Motion," facilitates executive retreats and mentors leaders who want to increase their revenues in the Asia Pacific. If you would like to schedule a complimentary, 15-minute, no-nonsense consultation, contact her assistant at joe@miacoucet.com. He will provide you with a pre-consultation questionnaire to assure maximum value in the shortest amount of time.



Interview With The Author of "China in Motion"

Leo Coar, editor of *Distributor's Link*, spent time interviewing Mia Doucet, author of the award-winning book, "China in Motion," and a regular contributor to the magazine. Mia facilitates executive retreats and works with companies to blueprint their Asia strategy.

DL: With 85% of the product coming from the Far East, and now most of it from China, how to deal with Asians is always uppermost in our readers' minds. In a nutshell, what would you say is the most important thing for our readers to keep in mind?

MD: Most important, I think, is that we develop a willingness to modify how we do things. It's natural for us to want to do business the way we always have. We're good at it and we've been successful. That success prepared us to venture into China. But what I would like your readers to know is that, unless they are willing to modify their business practices, they will never do as well financially as they would otherwise.

DL: What do you mean, exactly?

MD: We approach business from diametrically opposite directions. The Asian way has served them well for millennia. Where we focus on the deal, they focus on the relationship, for one example. The American wants to fly into Shanghai, have lunch, sign the contract and be home for his son's baseball game the next day. But the Asian needs to know and trust the other person first. And that takes time. The most basic building block is trust, and they define trust totally differently than we do. They're more interested in knowing and liking you than they are in the deal. In fact, I would tell your readers to be very cautious if an Asian appears more focused on the transaction than on connecting with you as a person.

If the relationship isn't solid, and if trust hasn't been established, your business will always be precarious. This is not a good long-term strategy. One of the difficult things for us to grasp is that Asians define trust entirely differently than we do.

DL: Would you elaborate?

MD: As a rule, we tend to trust others until they give us a reason to do otherwise. With Asians, trust builds over time. They trust from the heart. Once you are a friend, you're like a member of the family. You must admit, that's pretty intense.

DL: Yes, that is intense.

MD: It's huge. So there's a major disconnect here, right at the heart of the business relationship. We can help or hinder that trust by our words and actions. Distrust arises from our perceived lack of respect and sense of urgency. Then there's miscommunication due to language and cultural barriers.

DL: Would you give me an example?

MD: Let's take the terms and conditions at the back of the contract, which we typically don't concern ourselves with. Whether it's a major or minor topic, most

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Asians will want to read every word of a document. They want to translate every word in order to fully understand the contents. It's a language issue. So when they ask about the details and we dismiss their concern with a comment like, "Oh, that's just boilerplate. We don't need to bother with that," it raises suspicion. We can't expect that just because it's standard in our culture, it will be understood by Asians.

One of my Chinese contacts said, "Where there is a lack of trust, Chinese will question everything. The root of most of the distrust is when Westerners avoid answering in a straightforward way."

Trust is a huge issue on both sides. We feel that they are evasive and anything but straightforward. Most often, that's due to the Asian emphasis on face and surface harmony, nothing more.

DL: How did you get to know so much about Chinese business culture?

MD: Through over 2,000 hours of original research...one-on-one interviews, really.

DL: So talk to me for a moment about your research process.

MD: I started with a set of questions and no preconceived notions. Asians call it my "scientific method." But

what I really did was go into every interview without prior expectations and with nothing to prove. I have a colleague who calls this the *naive new person interview style*.

I would talk with Westerners who felt they were doing well with their Asia Pacific clients. Then I would talk with their Asian customers and suppliers and learn, from their perspective, what their Western counterparts were doing wrong, what they could be doing better, what they could do differently to save time, increase productivity, make them more money, or seal the decision.

Asians trusted me enough to reveal the errors that were being made. They often confided that they never told anyone what they were telling me. In fact, they said their Western colleagues, clients and suppliers had never asked. There was such a willingness to disclose and build bridges.

DL: How did you get started in this line of work?

MD: I suppose to answer your question, I have to go back to the mid-90s. I was working with a manufacturing technology firm. Their global sales force consisted of just three people. So I suggested they include three engineers in their sales training program. I have a lot of respect for engineers. But, as you know, their schooling doesn't include communication and relationship skills, which to me, is what selling is all about. And yet, anything they say and do can have a massive impact on negotiations. I had a hunch that if we could add another layer of skill to their professional repertoire, we might be astounded by the results. And we were.

One year later, my client's sales revenues had nearly doubled, even though two of the three salespeople had left the company and not been replaced.

So then I decided to focus on engineering firms. And that led to automotive. I just like working in high stress, high-strung, high testosterone industries. And do you know of anything more high stress, high-strung and high testosterone than Tier I and Tier II automotive?

DL: Nothing! So how did you get from there to writing a book on doing business in Asia?

MD: This is going to be a very long answer. I'm sure you know that the North American automotive industry has been losing market share to Asian imports for some time. We see that Ford is in real trouble, even though they own 35% of Mazda.

So a top priority for many of my Tier I and Tier II clients is growing their business with Asian OEMS — Toyota, Nissan, Honda and Hyundai.

One of the services I provide for clients is interviewing their customers and suppliers to see how they are perceived. That gives us real-time information to weave through the training. Once, I interviewed the purchaser of a Japanese firm that my client had never done business with. In fact, they had been wooing them without success for over two years. My client was anxious to find out what they were doing wrong. Within three months they had their first contract.

That purchaser later told my client his company was so impressed that they cared enough about the business relationship to send a third party to ask what they could be doing differently, that's why they made the decision to give them a try. That was three years ago and they're still going strong.

DL: What was your main finding?

MD: We came to see that nothing in my client's background prepared them to deal with such a relationship-oriented culture. As I mentioned earlier, in America, we're much more focused on the transaction itself. So that interview was the start of over two thousand hours of research on the topic and my decision to focus on China, Japan and South Korea.

DL: What has been your biggest disappointment or frustration?

MD: The sense that our way of doing business is the only way. The unwillingness on the part of many people to adapt to a business culture where deep personal connection is the way the game is played. The fact that we don't know what we don't know.

We are missing out on huge opportunities in the Asia Pacific. Westerners who feel that their way to do business is the only way are in for a rude awakening, as economic power shifts to the East. That approach

has already proven very costly for a lot of firms.

DL: How about the rewards?

MD: Far greater than the disappointments. I'm working right now on a global contract that has already saved my clients tens of mil-

lions of dollars.

There has been an unexpected spin-off, too. Recently, the President and General Manager of a major Chinese automotive plastics firm in China asked me to form a partnership with his nephew and a friend to distribute his product in North America. He present clients include Audi, BMW and Volkswagen, and they have a joint venture with Toyota and Hyundai. This work relationship has evolved over 18 months like a poster child for what I teach about how to do business with Asians. It's fascinating, really.


DL: You'll have to let me know how that goes. Tell me a bit about your book, "China in Motion," and how that's going.

MD: "China in Motion" is now off the market to the general public. In case your readers are interested, I have about one hundred copies left. I am replacing the book with a collection of skill-building CDs. Few people develop skills from reading a book.

DL: How can our readers contact you?

MD: Thanks for asking. They are welcome to contact me directly at 800-240-8734 (North America), 519-679-8734 or mia@miadoucet.com. My website address is www.miadoucet.com.

DL: Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

MD: Thank you Leo. It's been my pleasure. 

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