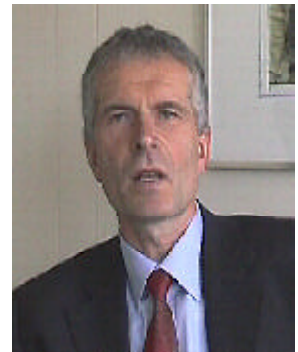


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You are one of the ETP graduates who are still active in the Japanese and Asian market. Your knowledge of the language has probably been very important. Could you illustrate this?

Japan is very difficult to understand and I found that learning the language was a very efficient tool to understand the Japanese way of thinking and doing business.

Could you say that the language influenced your efficiency on the market? One could argue that you could use an interpreter who speaks English.

The experience is that very often, the Japanese company will bring in somebody who knows how to communicate with the foreigner in a direct way and who gives the impression that there is progress. After all, foreigners expect that in a meeting things move on - they do not have much patience and so the meeting will be conducted according to the expectations of the Western interlocutor, but this does not mean that your business case is making progress. You can be sure that your messages will always be translated in a very Japanese way. So in the end, you will be faced with this miss-match between this communication in English, which is focused on progress and the way in which the messages are translated and processed by the Japanese management.

What would you consider the advantage of ETP if you compare to your competitors doing business in Japan?

My advantage is that I will probably not have unrealistic expectations. When a foreigner visits Japan, he wants immediate results and the Japanese counterpart is also aware that the foreign visitor is expecting smooth and immediate progress. But very often this will not be delivered instantly. My advantage is that I know what to expect and I also understand to some extent how their process of decision-making is managed. This helps me to adjust my own expectations.

You are Senior Regional Manager for Asia. To what extent would you say that ETP in Japan is also an advantage or an value-added for doing business all over the Asian continent?

People who have done business in Japan know that there is a lot of culture to it; there is a sort of etiquette, a way of behaving in Japanese business contacts, which is also applicable to the rest of Asia. Japanese people are very set in their ways and communication is more formal. That is not



natural behaviour to the Westerner, yet it is required manners in Japan and very useful in the rest of Asia. This is definitely true for Korea and China, maybe to a lesser extent for South-East Asia. But I can say very confidently that what I learned in Japan gave me a lot of insight and helped me to behave correctly in the rest of Asia.

As the Senior Regional Manager in Asia for the ING Group, to what extent would you say that it is important to have an ETP graduate in your team or organisation to do business over there?

Over the 20 years since my participation in ETP, the bank has had the policy to send people regularly to the programme. We found it very useful and we wanted continuity in approaching the Japanese market. Thanks to our ETP experience in Brussels, we have been designated in the ING Group as the prime location to develop the business with Japanese corporations and banks. So Brussels has got the mandate to develop this business and this is thanks to the fact that we have several people who have followed ETP and know how to handle this market.

What would be the value-added of somebody who has done ETP over any expatriate going to Japan or Asia?

First of all it is extremely boring if you do not understand the language. Japan is so alien to our mind and our way of doing business, that if you do not speak the language, there is so much that you lose and you are really handicapped in doing business with Japan. So I feel that for any institution, it is definitely a great plus if you have people that can express themselves in the native language and that understand the way the Japanese think and go about their business.

This seems mainly an advantage for the individual working in Japan. What would be the value-added for the organisation?

Having the people in Japan that are immediately employable, you do not waste a lot of time as a company. There will be less risk that they make wrong judgements because they know the market, they know the local manners and psychology, and they will not make many mistakes in their approach to the Japanese market.

Also on the Asian market?

To a certain extent. I covered Korea out of Japan and I found lots of similarities while Japanese etiquette was a big help in Korea too.

So it is a matter of understanding the cultural difference that makes it worthwhile joining ETP?

I think the cultural element is very important. Not only for practical reasons, in terms of knowing how to conduct business meetings, or how to act in daily life, but also in terms of understanding the essence of the Japanese or Korean way of doing business. Look at the current Japanese economic crisis for example. The way they are handling their problems is very hard to understand for the



average Westerner. You just have to look at the Western media, how they are full of criticism and basically showing that they do not understand the way Japan is taking charge of its problems. I think if you have followed ETP you would have obtained some understanding about how they deal with their problems. You would probably have some insight that your competitor does not have. And that is a very big help for your business.

You are responsible for the Asian region for the ING Group. Would you send somebody to ETP?

Definitely. Every big company who has a business in Asia or Japan should send people regularly. As ING we have interests in diverse areas in Japan, so we have a lot of business to develop and this is a continuous assignment. And as I said, we have been mandated to develop the business thanks to the ETP experience and the experience we have built up with Japan here in the Brussels office. So it is indeed our intention to keep on sending people regularly to the ETP programme (if possible).

Even today, when people tend to say "there is a big crisis in Japan, so let us wait a little bit"?

Japan is changing, it is opening up to foreigners and there are a lot of opportunities. Now is the time to go there. Now they are having a difficult time, but if you go now, if you catch them now, you can build up relationships that will last for a very long time.

