

**SABINE EHLERS**  
**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ATTACHÉ**  
**EMBASSY OF SWEDEN, TOKYO**



*Since you have followed ETP, you now have a few years of experience. What would you consider to be your main experience that proves that ETP was important for your professional career?*

I think that participating in ETP gives you an ability to get inside the Japanese business culture that you cannot gain in any other way. It gives you the ability to identify with the customers, with the people that you meet in the Japanese business environment. The language gives you the ability to communicate and this makes you a participant and not just an observer. You can actively participate and interact instead of merely watching and observing.

The experience that you get from ETP by working inside a Japanese company as one of the Japanese employees, gives you the ability to understand the situation of your customers in a unique way.

From my personal experience, it becomes very clear and very obvious that people who have not had the opportunity to be on the inside of a Japanese company, experience negotiations in Japan as a very confusing, overwhelming experience, since they participate in meetings where they have no idea of what is being discussed, and when they leave the meeting room they do not know if there was any conclusion from this meeting.

This way you notice that ETP really makes the difference, because you can step in the discussion and help the people from the home office, you can bridge the gap so that they can actually understand the Japanese side and come to a real conversation or negotiation. That is when you realise that the ETP experience was something that is really unique and invaluable for doing business in Japan.

*Would you say that ETP is also an interesting and valuable experience outside Japan, if you would translate it to the Asian market, for example?*

The ETP training is focused on Japan, it teaches you the Japanese language, it teaches you Japanese business cultures, it gives you experience in working inside a Japanese company. However, depending on your personality, the experience of understanding a different culture, of adapting to new situations and to meet people that have different points of view, actually permits you to put yourself



in their spot, to see things the way they see it and to understand their point of view even if you do not agree with it. This is an experience that, I think, is applicable to any culture.

*If you think about your experience in ETP, if you think about the Kenshu training, what was the most interesting part of it?*

The kenshu for me personally, was the most valuable part. It is the part that I could not have got in any other way that I know. The language training, I could have gone to any language school and as far as the seminars are concerned, there is a vast choice of lectures and books to read. But the kenshu, the opportunity to go on the inside of the Japanese company, to sit on the Japanese side of the negotiation table, to walk alongside a Japanese sales person, to actually meet my own company from the other side of the negotiation table, was an absolutely unique and invaluable experience, and I do not know any other way that I could have got that and, for every year I stay in Japan, I appreciate more how unique and how special it really was that I was given that chance.

*In what perspective? What could you do with it later on?*

I went personally to two different kenshu companies and I asked specifically to be given the same type of introduction as the personnel working in these companies. So I had the opportunity to see many different departments and, since both companies were potential clients, it was very interesting to see from the inside how the decision process works, how the hierarchy works, how the managers on all levels think. It is important to know what they are excited about, what they have nightmares about, what they are worried about, what they want to achieve, what they talk about after they leave the negotiation room, how they discuss...

This is a unique insight that I brought with me when I, representing my company, met the same people from the opposite side of the negotiation table. I go to them as a supplier, but I am still one of them, because I've done the same things they have. I can share the jokes, I have shared their experience, I know all the boring things they had to do during the introduction training, I know the horrible long meetings that they had to go through, I know the 3 o'clock exercises that they have to do, I know about the 2 minutes speech that everybody has to do in the morning. I know the motto of the company, I know the company song and all this gives me an absolutely unique ability to identify with my customer, to understand his needs. They know that I am one of them in that respect and that I can speak for them in my company, which gives me a very clear advantage, both in terms of competitive advantage but also in terms of my ability to give them a better services.

*What do you think about the seminars during the ETP programme?*

The seminars were very varied, which I think is very good. There were both Japanese speakers and there were Western speakers and at different levels of the company. There were many different



functions and also different types of industries and sectors. There were speeches that were very interesting and very lively and of course there were speeches that were less interesting and less lively and got less attention from us in the audience.

I would like to have the opportunity to hear some of them again because I think that, with the experience I had through ETP, it would be much easier for me today to relate to the contents of the seminars. I would very much like to have an opportunity to go back again - at that time it seemed very theoretical because we had not been out there yet, we did not have a clue what it would be like to work in Japan. Now we have. I would like a second chance.

