

Negotiating Cultural Crossroads

By HARRIET JOHNSON BRACKEY Miami Herald Business Writer

There's a crisis on the Caribbean island of Mantique.

Developers want to make it the next Disney-style resort, with high-rise hotels and theme-park attractions.

Environmentalists want to preserve its natural beauty and beaches dotted with small native huts.

The island can't stay as it is. The two groups must work together to create whatever it will become.

The island isn't real. But the cultural clash is close enough to reality to make Crisis in Mantique a simulation exercise used to train executives how to negotiate in foreign lands, says management consultant Dr. Donna L. Goldstein.

She does cross-cultural training. Goldstein uses problems that have no right answer to get executives thinking about how they'd cope when the ground rules are strange and the situation is unfamiliar.

Goldstein says anyone can become more adaptable to different cultures if they have the right preparation. Plus, the training saves face for

the company and the executive. At \$1,200 a day and up, it's also cheaper than blowing a big deal.

"There's a very, very high percentage of failed international business transactions that result from a lack of understanding of the culture," she says.

Goldstein is the managing partner of Development Associates International, a 9-year-old management consulting firm based in Hollywood that specializes in cross-cultural and diversity training.

Diverse company

The eight-consultant firm includes Asian community activist and educator Loretta Zhou Tong as well as Professor Howard Housen of the

Behavioral Science Department at Broward Community College.

Goldstein says she has trained more than 100,000 individuals at more than 200 organizations, including the South Florida Manufacturers Association, Motorola and Broward Community College.

With a Ph.D. in Adult Education and Human Resource Development from Florida International University and a Dissertation on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training, Goldstein calls herself an interculturalist.

Hers is one of only a handful of South Florida-based firms that are listed as cross-cultural trainers with the Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

What works and what doesn't? Cross-cultural trainer Edward Retta, who works with Development Associates International as its Latin American expert, says these are common mistakes U.S. companies make when they do business in Central and South America:

- Spend only two or three days on a trade mission. "In Latin America, the relationship comes before the deal," he says. Without a bigger investment of time and energy, Rails says, even the best product at the best price won't sell.
- Send a person of lesser rank to meet an executive. "It's equals to meet equals," Retta says. If you send a lower-level manager to meet a vice president, it's an insult.
- Expect that because your representative is Hispanic, all will go smoothly.

Goldstein and Housen designed a program called "The Cultural Journey" to help BCC handle the growing diversity of its students. Another program they developed was designed to attract and retain students by giving college employees a customer-service focus.

"She's gotten rave reviews on the things she's done for us," says Pat Senior, BCC's director of staff development.

More demand for diversity

Cross-cultural training, which is about a third of her business, is growing, Goldstein says, because more companies are operating globally. And, workforces are becoming increasingly diverse and bringing the world to the office.

The most culturally adaptable executives, Goldstein says, are:

- Autonomous and don't need much reinforcement from their environment;
- Emotionally resilient and able to handle changing environments;
- Open to new experiences;
- Good at picking up verbal and nonverbal clues to communication.

A typical cross-cultural training session includes

films and lectures on background, history, geography and cultural basics. The sessions can last an hour or a couple of days.

Effective method

But it's the simulations that hit home, she says. Besides Crisis in Mantique, there is Baja Bafa, in which the strictly business group of Alphas interacts with the warm and emotional Betas. Participants experience cultural confusion, miscues and the feeling of being disoriented.

Some of the simulations can get quite realistic.

To train executives trying to do business in China, one cross-cultural training firm hires Chinese actors to play roles. The participants are forced to simulate jet lag. They're kept awake all night on a mythical trip across the Pacific. When morning comes, they have to eat unfamiliar Chinese food for breakfast. Then it's into tough, make-or-break negotiating sessions.

"All the research on adult learning says adults learn best by experience," Goldstein says. "The more real to life it is, the more effective that the learning's going to be." □

All FOR ONE : Development Associates employs simulations to train workers for cross-cultural interaction.



Some of the company's consultants, clockwise from left: Prof. Howard Housen, Prof. Winston Thompson, Dr. Denise Munoz, Dr. Donna Goldstein, Dr. Loretta Zhou Tong