

“Never Take Yes for an Answer” and Other Secrets of Successful International Project Leaders

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There are a number of leadership and communication strategies that work well in one culture, but do not translate in international project work. Accepting a “yes” as an answer is one of those. “Yes” has very different meaning in different cultures and contexts. It can mean “yes, I agree with everything you said and I am able and committed to delivering the outcome you just described, on time and on budget. It can also mean: “I recognize that you are attempting to communicate and I want you to know that I am attempting to understand you.” These and other innocent assumptions on communication and leadership cause delays, frustration, and all too often failure in international projects.

This paper and presentation will summarize the critical strategies or “lessons learned” from international project managers who members are separated by distance, language and culture. These are strategies that show up again and again from those managers extensive experience in international projects.

Sue Freedman, Ph.D. and Lothar Katz are the creators and primary instructors of Managing Projects Across Borders™, a series of three workshops on Leading International Projects and International Project Organizations. *Managing International Projects* and *Negotiating and Working with International Customers, Suppliers and Other Partners* are offered as public workshops through the University of Texas at Dallas’ Project Management Program. *Leading International Project Organizations* is currently taught only as an in-house offering. For information on these workshops, visit ManagingProjectsAcrossBorders.com. Sue and Lothar also teach in the Executive Education Project Management MBA Program at the University of Texas at Dallas.



Sue specializes in the people and organizational aspects of projects and project based organizations. She spent 12 years with Texas Instruments, serving as Manager of Organizational Effectiveness at the Division and Corporate level and 2 years as Vice-President of Organizational Development and Human Resources in a large real estate investment trust. She is a co-author of *Beyond Teams: Building the Collaboration Organization* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) and author of “*Managing Virtual Teams that Cross Borders*” in *The Handbook on Virtual Teams* (Jossey Bass, 2008). Sue is a frequent presenter/trainer at professional conferences, and through Webinars and in house training programs.



Lothar specializes in several aspects of international business. He is a former Vice President and General Manager with Texas Instruments. During his 18-year corporate career, Lothar managed large distributed product development organizations across the U.S., Germany, India, China, Japan, and Australia. His extensive interactions with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world included many parts of Asia. Originally from Germany, he has lived and worked both in the United States and in Europe. Lothar also serves as a Business Leadership Center instructor at Southern Methodist University’s Cox School of Business and is the author of *Negotiating International Business – The Negotiator’s Reference Guide to 50 Countries around the World* (BookSurge, 2nd edition 2007).

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