

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: STEPS TO SUCCESS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

BY BONNIE KOENIG



MORE AND MORE ASSOCIATIONS ARE FINDING THEIR BUSINESS DOES NOT END AT THE U.S. BORDERS. DOING BUSINESS WITH ANOTHER COUNTRY CAN BE A VERY SUCCESSFUL VENTURE, AS LONG AS AN ORGANIZATION FOLLOWS A FEW GUIDELINES FOR INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT. THIS ARTICLE SHOWCASES TWO SUCCESS STORIES, THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS AND THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR QUALITY. BOTH ARE ENGAGING WITH CHINA, ALTHOUGH THE LESSONS CAN BE APPLIED TO OTHER COUNTRIES AS WELL.

THE FIRST STEPS

Set Goals: As with any new program, you will first want to be clear about your goals and what you are trying to accomplish by increasing your engagement with another country. Is it to increase and better serve members there? Enhance the profile of your profession and association? Provide an opportunity for members to train or network with their colleagues in the country? Sell products or services? Each of these goals will call for different ways of proceeding, so to effectively use the association's resources, it is important that you clarify what it is you are trying to accomplish.

Do Your Research: Learn about the country (culture, legal environment, etc.), and the professional field or potential market for your products prior to setting any specific goals. There are many ways to do this initial research, especially on the Internet. One place to start is www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/

Develop your network: When beginning to engage with a new country/culture, especially a culture like China that thrives on personal relationships, it is important to develop your network of contacts who can help you to navigate your way.

Identifying challenges as well as opportunities: Given the organizational effort and time commitment needed to engage with China (see case studies beginning in the next column), you should assess your internal commitment and possible challenges, as well as the external challenges of finding your way in the Chinese environment.

Start slowly and build on your success: When developing a new program as complex as engaging with a country like China, you will be best served by phasing your engagement in over a period of years. Reaching your goal often will come after your association has already had some



preliminary exposure to China, such as attendance at a seminar (for example, the Association Forum's International SIG meeting that focused on China in April 2007) or working with a board, staff or other member who has contacts in the country. Before proceeding to project phases, you should understand the opportunities and challenges of the country that you are entering.

CASE STUDY I: THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

The American Academy of Pediatrics runs a program called Pediatric First Aid for Caregivers and Teachers (PedFACTs). The program is designed to provide basic first aid and CPR information to day care providers, school nurses and teachers.

In December 2006, while in Beijing, China, for another program's event, staff from the AAP met with a pediatrician from Shanghai who was very interested in developing a first-aid program there. Fortuitously, an AAP attendee had a PedFACTs student manual to share. They then discussed the possibility of the AAP helping to bring this program to China.

"One of the AAP's biggest concerns in initiating new efforts is always funding, but the Johnson and Johnson Family Health Initiative was more than willing to fund the proposed program," says Thad Anderson, AAP's life support programs manager. "After the funding was resolved, the quick timeline was of some concern, as the Chinese were moving very fast. However, it was a great opportunity for the AAP and for PedFACTs, a relatively small program in the U.S., to get international exposure."

The goal was to help the Chinese develop a train-the-trainer program to train 30,000 teachers who provide care for more than 280,000 children in Shanghai. AAP physician volunteers and staff helped during the translation of the U.S. curriculum into Chinese. At the initial meeting, roles and responsibilities were established, with AAP providing content and the Chinese providing the general structure of how the training would be implemented.

AAP physician volunteers and staff traveled to Shanghai to train the first-tier trainers. AAP staff advised during the



development of the evaluation plan. The U.S. and Chinese teams worked very well together and the first-tier train-the-trainer was successful and well-received. Skeptics were converted and stronger ties were developed among the Chinese physician team. There were two major pieces to this that made the initial phase so successful: the translated materials and the way the initial train-the-trainer was planned.

“From the U.S. side, the language barrier is, at times, challenging,” Anderson says. “Also, the time difference can be challenging. Being in the United States, I always felt a day behind. For the Chinese, putting this large training plan into action has been a challenge. The implementation model has been modified to accommodate the large number of trainees involved.”

CASE STUDY II: THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR QUALITY

As part of its international outreach, the American Society for Quality developed strategic alliances with counterpart organizations in eight countries, including with five organizations in China.

After working within China for a number of years, ASQ opened an office in Beijing, and two years later obtained official sanction as a Wholly Owned Foreign Enterprise (WOFE) in November 2005. In January 2008, ASQ also opened an office in Shanghai. It currently has five full-time staff in China, all of whom are native Chinese, not Americans living there.


Greg Weiler, general manager of ASQ China and based at ASQ's headquarters in Milwaukee, established the organization's offices there. He says the motivation came from a number of factors: (1) Many ASQ member organizations had already established themselves in China; (2) The need for quality improvement, particularly in the manufacturing and service industries, is evident in China and ASQ is trying to respond to that need with its body of knowledge and technology.

Weiler describes the process of setting up offices in China: “In China, we spent a great deal of time trying to understand all the legal implications attendant to opening such an office. “Initially, we were advised by the government that we needed to enter into a

joint venture. When we moved along that path and were ready to consummate the joint venture, the rules changed and we were now allowed to establish a WOFE. During this entire process, we worked closely with representatives of both Chinese quality organizations and Chinese government agencies involved with quality. We spent much time trying to identify the right partners, either NGO or government.

"We were very fortunate to have leaders in various government agencies sup-

port our effort. This made it much easier in the long run. But Chinese bureaucrats come and go, change jobs frequently and become unavailable. We had to continually be alert to what was happening in that environment and adjust accordingly. Continually look for good people to hire who can understand your business and adapt to it."

Finally, he notes, "Experience is the best teacher — learn from it and don't ignore it!" 

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TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS IN CHINA

China is a complex country. Relationships are critical there, so rely heavily on the experiences of others and partners you can trust and who will be open with you. Here are a few things author Bonnie Koenig learned after living and working in China for a year, and that Greg Weiler of ASQ learned in opening an office there:

- Do as much research as possible before making any decisions.
- If it appears moderately difficult at first, multiply that many times over! Allow significant amounts of planning time.
- Be flexible — you may have to go in different directions as your initial plan progresses.
- Look for government and other partners.
- It takes significant time to build trust with Chinese partners. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Chinese who have worked with Westerners can be valuable "cultural interpreters." Identify people who will give you accurate information.
- Chinese is a complex language with words that have meanings imbedded in the culture. Where there may be no exact translation, an interpreter or translator may need to choose from several available options. Work with your translators/interpreters to clarify your meanings so they will be better equipped to help you.
- Hire a good lawyer and a good Chinese accountant to understand and navigate the intricacies of the legal and banking systems.