



Quick E-Tips



INTERNATIONAL
ADVANTAGE

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Happy New Year! Bonne Année! ¡Feliz Año Nuevo!

Enjoy these 2 tips on *business culture and language learning*...

Culture/Communication Tip: Quality Control / Calidad

When I was in Mexico in December, I overheard a discussion on the topic of quality and quality control. It is, in fact, one of the themes that surfaces repeatedly among my clients. That said, this month's topic is a commentary on the familiar question: "What can I do to improve adherence to our quality control standards among my Mexican employees/contractors?"

Unlike the Japanese, who have literally been obsessed with striving for the ultimate in quality for at least a thousand years, the Mexican culture evolved quite differently. Quality in Mexico has very much remained a personal standard, and therefore, has varied enormously. A key reason why neither "calidad", nor quality standards became a factor in Mexican culture was because of the contradictory system of interpersonal relationships that developed in Mexico. Because of hierarchy, the norm was for supervisors above to give orders to employees and leave the results up to them. They used middlemen to deliver their orders and that was that.

Now that foreign ownership of manufacturing is prevalent in Mexico, the concept is now understood, if not practiced.

The solution is not simple, but the first step is to educate Mexican managers and foremen in the concept of "el control de calidad" and then work with them to develop ways to incorporate it into their systems. The next steps include developing the concept of teamwork and mutual responsibility among the workforce, from the ground up, and thereafter working closely with both managers and employees. Of course, it is how you present the new concepts – with an understanding of Mexican cultural predispositions -- that will make a big difference in your success.

Language Tip: What to ask a Language Company?

Now, everybody, how are your new year resolutions coming along? I have an ambitious list...One of which is working harder on my Russian language skills. Does your new year's resolution include you finally learning another language? If you are, and you decide to hire a language professional for you or your staff, be sure to ask these qualifying questions:

1. What training does the instructor have in teaching methodology? (Oftentimes, instructors have very little knowledge on effective teaching strategies and therefore, you learn very slowly.)
2. How will you customize our program to our needs?
3. What skills will you focus on during our language lessons? How? (Make sure they respond by asking YOU what you want to learn.)
4. What will I be able to communicate after I am finished with your program? (There should be a list of topics or skills that participants will master, by the end of the class.)
5. Will you customize the program relative to our learning styles? (Ask them to provide examples.)
6. Besides the class itself, what else will you put in place to help us be successful in our language learning? (Practical, customized vocabulary & materials, follow-up support after the class and

ongoing, motivational surprises during the weeks of the class are three ways we differentiate ourselves at International Advantage.)

7. How many people will be in our group? (Our favorite size is eight, and we recommend keeping it to twelve or less.)

NEW WEBSITE!

We are so excited to unroll our new website! Take a look at www.intladvantage.com! There is an "Ask Lisa" page, where you can submit questions, as well as the prior editions of Quick E-tips. We hope you like it! We plan to have the French and Spanish versions up within Q1, 2004.

International Advantage Mission:

At International Advantage, we are committed to helping business people lead and communicate effectively across corporate or national cultures.

Can we help you with an *opportunity or challenge* at your place of business?

Submit a question or see past issues of Quick E-tips online at our new website – now with Flash!
<http://www.intladvantage.com>

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To your continued success around the globe,
Lisa

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