



“Communicating the American Way” Book Excerpt

A Guide to U.S. Business Communications

**By Elisabetta Ghisini and
Angelika Blendstrup, Ph.D.**

foreword by Henry Wong, Founder and
Managing Director of Diamond
TechVentures

**Subset of the book brought
to you by Happy About**



20660 Stevens Creek Blvd.
Suite 210
Cupertino, CA 95014

WHITE PAPER Table of Contents (included here)

- Foreword by Henry Wong, Foundation and Managing Director of Diamond TechVentures
- Chapter 1: Why Should You Read this Book?
- Appendix A: Cultural Inventory
- About the Authors, Elisabetta Ghisini and Angelika Blendstrup
- Getting the book and other books from Happy About

Getting “Happy About Communicating the American Way”

(<http://happyabout.info/communicating-american-way.php>)

“Happy About Communicating the American Way” can be purchased as an eBook for \$11.95 or tradebook for \$19.95 at <http://happyabout.info/communicating-american-way.php> or at other online and physical book stores.

Please contact us for quantity discounts sales@happyabout.info or to be informed about upcoming titles bookupdate@happyabout.info

Contents

NOTE: This is the Table of Contents (TOC) from the book for your reference. The eBook TOC (below) differs in page count from the tradebook TOC.

Foreword	Foreword by Henry Wong, Founder and Managing Director of Diamond TechVentures	xi
Chapter 1	Why Should You Read this Book?	1
	How Should You Use this Book?	4
Chapter 2	Culture and the U.S. Business World.	5
	A Snapshot	6
	A Day in the Life...	8
	Key Cultural Differences.	9
	A Day in the Life...continued.	16
	Feedback and Praise	17
	Directness vs. Diplomacy	18
	Exercise: Comparing Values	19
Chapter 3	How to Run a Meeting in the U.S.	23
	Do You Really Need a Meeting?	25
	Scheduling	25
	Logistics	26
	Agenda	27
	Conducting the Meeting	29
	Following Up.	34
	Let's Meet for Lunch!	34
Chapter 4	How to Give a U.S.-Style Presentation	37
	An American Style?	38
	Speech or Presentation?	39
	Presentations	40
	Content.	41
	Visual Aids	48
	Delivery.	50

	Questions and Answers	54
	Speeches	55
Chapter 5	How to Hold Productive Phone and Conference Calls	61
	Phone Calls	63
	Voice Mail	64
	Conference Calls	65
Chapter 6	How to Use E-Mail Effectively	73
	Corporate E-Mail Policies	74
	U.S. E-Mail Habits	75
	Deciding on the Content of Your E-Mail	76
	Style	78
	Don'ts	79
	Exercise	80
Chapter 7	How to Conduct Successful Job Interviews in the U.S.	83
	The Right Mindset	85
	Promoting Yourself with Honesty and Integrity	86
	Offering Meaningful Examples and Anecdotes	86
	Honing Your Pitch	88
	Speaking English Like a Native (or Almost)	89
	Exercise: Analyze Your Style	90
	Doing Your Research	91
	Looking Good	92
	Body Language	93
	Good Listening Skills	94
	Handling the Mechanics of the Actual Interview: Opening, Closing, and Next Steps	95
	Preparing Your References	97
	Fielding Hostile Questions	97
	Handling Illegal Questions	98
Chapter 8	How to Hold Your Own with the U.S. Media	101
	A Snapshot of the U.S. Media Landscape	102

	Media: Friend or Foe?	103
	Choose Your Approach	104
	Preparing for the Interview	106
	Common Mistakes when being Interviewed	111
	The “Media” Risk	113
Chapter 9	Speaking English Like a Leader	115
	Two Approaches.	116
	Convergence toward the Middle of the Language Spectrum	118
	A Menu of Techniques to Speak Like a Leader	119
	How Do You Give and Receive Feedback in the U.S. Business Culture?	126
	Reducing Your Accent	127
	Techniques to Increase Your Vocabulary.	130
	Action Steps to Sound More Confident	134
Chapter 10	Why and How to Network	137
	What is Networking and Why is it Important?	138
	Where to Network.	139
	How to Network Effectively (and Have Fun, Too)	140
	Tips for Effective Conversations.	142
	Exercise	143
	Body Language	147
	Tools of the Trade	148
	How to Network Effectively with Colleagues or Coworkers in the Workplace	149
Appendix A	Cultural Inventory.	153
	Bibliography	157
	Other Resources	161
Authors	About the Authors.	163
Books	Other Happy About® Books	165

Foreword by Henry Wong

Henry is the Founder and Managing Director of Diamond TechVentures.

Being able to decipher all the intricacies of a foreign business code makes all the difference in being successful.

The authors of this book, both from a foreign background, have clearly cracked this code and give the newcomers to the U.S., as well as the seasoned business executives, the key to interpreting it.

In my experience, it is clear that good communication skills can make or break a career. I came to the United States as a foreign student, and after graduation I started working in the Bay Area. I had absolutely no working experience in America. If at that time I had a book like this, it would have helped me tremendously. I wouldn't have to go through such a steep learning curve, which could easily have blocked my upward promotion path.

Many of the young foreign professionals I work with have plenty of business acumen; but when it comes to presenting their start-ups to American (or international) VCs, they miss a step or hit the wrong tone in their communication style.

This book explains the obvious and not so obvious misunderstandings that can occur when foreign professionals are unaware of U.S. business practices. It fills a void in the market-

place as it is the first book in English to offer practical advice and guidance to foreign professionals who—upon moving to the U.S.—feel as disoriented as they would, had they landed on Mars. With this book to guide them, many foreign-born entrepreneurs will save themselves a lot of headaches.

I wish I had this book when I started out doing business in the U.S.

1

Why Should You Read this Book?

This book stems from our professional experience.

Over the last ten years, we have coached dozens of foreign-born professionals working in the United States. Many of them were seasoned executives who were considered accomplished communicators in their own countries. They had, for the most part, traveled extensively to the U.S. on business before moving here. In essence, they were cosmopolitan and well educated. Some of them moved within the same company, while others accepted new jobs. But once they moved to the U.S., most of them encountered more challenges than they had expected. While they previously had often been given the benefit of the doubt, as non-native executives operating on foreign ground, once they took up residence here, they were held to the same expectations and standards as anybody else.

The problem is that cultural standards are learned in the cradle, and what seems normal in one part of the world can be considered unacceptable elsewhere.

Each executive came to us with a different professional issue, but there was a common thread. They were all surprised at the misunderstandings that ensued during meetings, presentations, interviews, even during phone calls or e-mail exchanges. Despite their best efforts, they would sometimes break an unspoken rule or step on someone's toes [offend someone].

Take Jacques, a French executive in Palo Alto, who would sit impatiently through meeting after meeting, fuming and visibly frustrated about having to give everybody a turn to speak his/her mind. At times, he would storm out of the meeting, commenting loudly on the waste of time “given that we already know who is really going to make a decision here.” Despite the fact that his coworkers didn't say anything, he left every meeting with a sinking feeling. He was up for promotion but knew something was wrong. Only, he didn't quite understand what to do differently.

Good managers know they have to be, first and foremost, good communicators. Good communication can propel your career forward, while mediocre communication will only hold you back despite your considerable talents. This book is intended to help professionals coming from outside the U.S. become more competent communicators in the U.S. business environment. While recent professional immigrants quickly realize they need to adapt their communication style, those who have been living here longer tend to think they have already adapted well to the local business culture. They no longer even notice their ingrained communication habits, yet their American colleagues do and are annoyed by them.

Regardless of how long you have lived in the U.S., this book will help you overcome being seen as a foreigner in the U.S. You will fit in more smoothly into the American workplace. Whether you are a seasoned executive relocating to the United States or a young graduate just starting out here, you know that international professionals face a specific set of challenges, as culture does play a role in how you interact with your colleagues in the U.S.

No book on business communication proved useful to the group of international professionals we work with. Indeed there are, of course, many books about business communication on the market—from general business communication topics to books specifically targeting

one topic, such as meetings, or writing business English. But none of the books on the market is specifically designed just for foreign-born professionals.

While we believe that most of the principles discussed in this book apply anywhere in the U.S., we have to recognize that most of our work experience comes from Silicon Valley, and most of our clients are working on the West Coast, mainly in California. Therefore, we readily acknowledge that this book may have a strong San Francisco Bay Area bias; it is in fact very Silicon Valley-centric in terms of the conventions and mannerisms it describes. However, we believe our points are still valid in other parts of the U.S.

San Francisco Bay Area professionals like to think that “the Valley” [Silicon Valley] is the epicenter of the world, where innovation takes place. Yet, despite the strong influx of educated immigration in recent years, and despite the presence of a skilled and successful foreign workforce, the rules of the game haven't changed much here when it comes to business communication. To be sure, the Bay Area is a very welcoming environment for foreign professionals, but for all the talk of inclusiveness and respect for cultural diversity, the reality is that everybody is still expected to adhere to a certain code of conduct, a code that has been shaped by the white Anglo-Saxon majority over decades.

This book will help you decipher that code. It is based on real-life corporate and professional situations. After an initial, short description of U.S. culture which draws from leading cross-cultural experts, the book discusses a number of communication challenges foreigners typically face in the U.S. workplace: running successful meetings, using e-mail productively, talking on the phone effectively, standing out in job interviews, giving a speech or presentation to an American audience, dealing with the U.S. media, and speaking English like a leader.

Invariably, any book about cultural issues will contain a certain degree of generalizations. When we use terms such as “American,” “Asian,” “European,” we are referring to typical behaviors or cultural norms; we realize that there are many exceptions to these behaviors, and that cultures are changing even as we are writing this book. Some expressions in the book could be misinterpreted as stereotypical, i.e., “typical

U.S. business behaviors” or “European ways of operating;” however, we use these terms simply to make certain points easier to relate to for our foreign-born readers. We hope that none of our comments and observations is seen as judgmental in any way. A final point of clarification: the terms “America” or “American” are used only in reference to the United States and do not represent Canada or Latin America.

How Should You Use this Book?

Each chapter stands on its own, and you can refer to each one individually depending on what you need. However, you will get the most benefit if you start by reading the overview of U.S. culture offered in Chapter 2. Together with a description of real-life anecdotes, each chapter offers several techniques that have proven effective in the situations described; all names have been changed and examples adapted to preserve the anonymity of our clients. In addition, the book contains a lot of idiomatic expressions, slang, and U.S. business jargon, followed by explanations in parentheses. The intent is to use words you will hear frequently, and give you a leg up [an advantage] in understanding and learning them.

The focus is practical and empirical, and the intent is to offer really actionable, usable advice.

This book does not address a number of common cross-cultural topics, such as international negotiations and English business writing. They are not included partly because there are already several insightful publications available on the market, and partly because we feel these topics deserve a separate discussion.

Finally, this book does not offer any new theory in cross-cultural communication; it is focused on helping international professionals become more competent communicators in the United States in today's business environment.

We hope this book will help you fulfill your potential.

A

Cultural Inventory

Check how close your values are to American ones on the following scale.

The more high scores (6) you circle, the closer your values are to American values.

If you have more low numbers, you need to be aware of the areas of difference and adjust accordingly in your business transactions.

Table 1. CULTURAL INVENTORY*

U.S. Values	Your values					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Speak to sell/persuade	1	2	3	4	5	6
Say no clearly	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prefer explicit messages	1	2	3	4	5	6
Task oriented	1	2	3	4	5	6
Silence is difficult to handle	1	2	3	4	5	6
Rarely interrupt	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prefer direct eye contact	1	2	3	4	5	6
Short hugs, back thumpings are OK	1	2	3	4	5	6
Clear body language	1	2	3	4	5	6
Show feelings openly	1	2	3	4	5	6
Individual's work important	1	2	3	4	5	6
Self esteem is central	1	2	3	4	5	6
Focus mostly on work	1	2	3	4	5	6
Rules apply to everyone	1	2	3	4	5	6
What's right is right	1	2	3	4	5	6
Honor a contract	1	2	3	4	5	6
A deal is a deal	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prefer to use first names	1	2	3	4	5	6
We're all equal	1	2	3	4	5	6
Need space	1	2	3	4	5	6
Guard inner core from most people	1	2	3	4	5	6
Present and future are important	1	2	3	4	5	6
Time is money	1	2	3	4	5	6
Quick answers, quick solutions	1	2	3	4	5	6

Table 1. CULTURAL INVENTORY* (continued)

U.S. Values	Your values					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Punctuality essential	1	2	3	4	5	6
One thing at a time	1	2	3	4	5	6
Many short term relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6
U.S. business culture is international	1	2	3	4	5	6
Everyone speaks business English	1	2	3	4	5	6
My way or the highway—it always works	1	2	3	4	5	6
Short term profits/fast growth emphasis	1	2	3	4	5	6
Action-oriented decision making	1	2	3	4	5	6
Negotiation based on competence	1	2	3	4	5	6
Table manners are not very important	1	2	3	4	5	6
Informality is a way of life	1	2	3	4	5	6

* Copyright © 2007 Angelika Blendstrup, Ph.D.

About the Authors

Elisabetta Ghisini

Elisabetta Ghisini is a communications consultant with over 15 years of experience in the U.S. and in Europe. She specializes in international business communications and coaches senior executives on keynote speeches, corporate presentations, and media interviews. She is an instructor at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University, where she teaches media, interviewing, and public speaking workshops.

Previously, Elisabetta was a public relations director with Burson-Marsteller, where she orchestrated the worldwide media launch of Agilent Technologies. Prior to that, she was a communications manager with the international consulting firm McKinsey & Co., where she crafted high-impact employee communications programs for multinational clients (including HP, Bank of America, Sun Microsystems).

A native of Italy, Elisabetta holds an advanced degree in German Literature from the Università Statale di Milano (Dottore in Lingue e Letterature Straniere Moderne). She speaks four languages and has taught business communications skills in executive training programs around the world.

Elisabetta is Co-Executive Editor of the Happy About® International Business Communications series.

Angelika Blendstrup, Ph.D.

Angelika Blendstrup, Ph.D., is the founder and principal of Blendstrup & Associates.¹ She specializes in individualized, intercultural business communications training, accent reduction, and presentation skill coaching. She works with international as well as U.S. executives to assist them in improving their written and oral communications skills, and prepares them how to write and give effective presentations.

Angelika holds a Ph.D. in Bilingual, Bicultural Education from Stanford University. She speaks five languages and has taught U.S. business communications skills to international executives both privately as well as in companies in the Silicon Valley such as DreamWorks, Sun Microsystems, Microsoft, Oracle and Cisco.

Angelika teaches classes at Stanford University on topics such as cross cultural communication, managing virtual teams and the art of interviewing successfully.

Angelika is the Co-President of *InterFrench Silicon Valley (Silicon-French)* whose goal is to merge the best features of the French and American cultures.

She is also a Co-Executive Editor of the *Happy About International Business Communications* series. Angelika can be reached at angelika.blendstrup@gmail.com.

1. <http://www.professional-business-communications.com>

A Message from Happy About®

Thank you for your purchase of this Happy About book. It is available online at <http://happyabout.info/communicating-american-way.php> or at other online and physical bookstores.

- Please contact us for quantity discounts at sales@happyabout.info
- If you want to be informed by e-mail of upcoming Happy About® books, please e-mail bookupdate@happyabout.info

Happy About is interested in you if you are an author who would like to submit a non-fiction book proposal or a corporation that would like to have a book written for you. Please contact us by e-mail editorial@happyabout.info or phone (1-408-257-3000).

Other Happy About books available include:

- They Made It
<http://happyabout.info/theymadeit.php>
- Happy About Online Networking:
<http://happyabout.info/onlinenetworking.php>
- I'm on LinkedIn -- Now What???
<http://happyabout.info/linkedinhelp.php>
- Tales From the Networking Community:
<http://happyabout.info/networking-community.php>
- Scrappy Project Management:
<http://happyabout.info/scrappyabout/project-management.php>
- 42 Rules of Marketing:
<http://happyabout.info/42rules/marketing.php>
- Foolosophy:
<http://happyabout.info/foolosophy.php>
- The Home Run Hitter's Guide to Fundraising:
<http://happyabout.info/homerun-fundraising.php>
- Confessions of a Resilient Entrepreneur:
<http://happyabout.info/confessions-entrepreneur.php>
- Memoirs of the Money Lady:
<http://happyabout.info/memoirs-money-lady.php>
- 30-Day Bootcamp: Your Ultimate Life Makeover:
<http://happyabout.info/30daybootcamp/life-makeover.php>
- The Business Rule Revolution:
<http://happyabout.info/business-rule-revolution.php>
- Happy About Joint Venturing:
<http://happyabout.info/jointventuring.php>