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MASTERED Java, C++ and Visual Basic? Confident you can take on the world? Hold your horses, buddy, today's changing times demand that you see eye-to-eye with the pros in Texas, Chicago and New York and be as much at home there as in good old Pune.

What we are trying to tell you is that as important as your computer skills is your ability to understand that in US-speak a pay-phone means a public phone, bucks means dollars, a cab means a taxi and that an apartment is our good old *desi* flat. And no, they cannot download this info from their computer screens!

No wonder then that a new breed of management trainers here are being hired to equip young recruits with a combination of customer interface skills, foreign catchphrases and personal grooming.

Shashank Patkar, president of the Software Exporters Association of Pune (SEAP), says that maximum importance is being given in providing customer interface skills, what with the rapid increase in transcontinental

Your computer skills abroad are fine, but can you...

Walk that walk, talk that talk



Hemant Patil

Management trainer Minocher Patel teaching business etiquette to young recruits

business. Says Patkar, "Young professionals might be either too cryptic or too verbose while communicating the status of a project report. The customer has limited time and the communication has to be brief, yet clear."

Emmanuel Braggs, human resources development manager at Indus Software, gives equal importance to both customer interface skills and technology skills. Says Braggs, "Our foreign-bound workforce is given an exposure to the everything foreign, from environment to table manners to eating habits and communication skills."

According to Alan Doulton, city-based consultant trainer, people are different all around the world. While the Americans are direct and precise in their communication, the Japanese prefer to hide their emotions and we Indians

tend to beat around the bush. Doulton makes young pros aware of this.

The other problem that Doulton is trying to rectify is the case of Indians speaking too fast. According to him, while the Americans speak just 60 words per minute, we zoom along at 80 to 100 wpm. Therefore, when teleconferencing skills are taught, Doulton takes pains to make his students speak slowly and in short sentences. "I train them to say the same thing in three different ways, so that the Americans can understand easily," he adds.

Doulton also attaches importance to non-verbal skills and gives instances of how a vigorous shake of the head from side to side, which to us Indians is a confirmatory nod, could easily be construed as the opposite by the

Americans, leading to numerous communication problems.

Another city-based trainer Minocher Patel feels it is important for travelling software pros to understand the body language of the Americans. "The Americans may appear loud in their gestures and we tend to get overawed by this. It is important to assert ourselves in a quiet and confident manner."

Minocher films his students and shows them what is right and wrong with audio-visual aids. He also encourages his students to watch American and British films and serials before embarking on their first overseas trip.

Stressing the importance of grooming, Minocher cites examples of how young software executives could make basic mistakes: like the case of one Pune youngster who went for a meeting in the US, straight from the airport, without shaving, and in a crumpled shirt.

Minocher feels that we Indians also have problems interacting with women in the western world. He cites the case of a young Pune software executive was sent back from the US for allegedly misbehaving with an American woman. Keeping such incidents in mind, Minocher says that he warns his students not to misinterpret a greeting from a woman as anything more than a greeting.

The teachings seem to be soaking in, what with two young programmer analysts, Jyotsna Chauhan and Himanshu Deshpande of Cognizant Technology Solutions, presently undergoing one such session singing praises of the same. Says Jyotsna, "Most of us are technology savvy but deficient in social skills. Workshops like these help us absorb the culture shock of visiting the US for the first time." Himanshu agrees: "The grooming sessions prepare us to handle a western business environment effectively, without making fools of ourselves."

As can be seen, there is lot more than bits, bytes and black-outs that software pros need to contend with.

by Morparia

