



MANAGING YOUR GLOBAL TALENT

JAMES VEALL

SVP GLOBAL BUSINESS OPERATIONS AT VIACOM

Increasingly, the ability to build and maintain relationships with teams, peers and suppliers across the globe, covering multiple timezones, cultures and languages is becoming a vital skill. Regardless of whichever function and sector of business you are involved with, this presents major challenges and huge potential advantages. Rather than list the commercial benefits

of working in a connected global environment, here are a few tips that help me on a daily/weekly basis.

I am by no means an expert, but having made a lot of mistakes in the past 15 years of working across global teams, these tips may help you.

LISTEN – NO, REALLY LISTEN

It's hard to pick up non-verbal cues when trying to communicate with remote staff. The best way around this is to ask a lot of questions and really listen to the content and tone of the answer. Try asking directly about how they feel about a subject or decision. Cultures do not all have the same way of relating to authority figures, which can lead to missing, vital information (check out Malcolm Gladwell's books – Outliers and Ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes).

If you need to run multi-site audio conference calls, a good tip is to make sure everyone dials in from their individual office or desk phone. This puts everyone on a level playing field and stops a lot of the conference room conversations while the phone is on mute and no one is listening.

READ A 'LOCAL' PAPER

No matter where in the world your team, business partner or manager is based there will be a local newspaper online and available for you to read, even if it's just the front page. A quick look can provide you with key conversation topics and connection over points of interest. Although you may not make time to pick up all the details, just being able to ask about Singapore's new integrated resorts, for example, can build a closer connection and show you care.

REMEMBER TIMEZONES AND RESPECT STRUCTURE

It's not just about phone calls and waking people up, consider when emails will be read; this is especially relevant given the 24x7 access to email. Have respect for your teams on the other side of the world when sending a terse email or one that will cause concern when read at the end of a working day. Consider whether the email will be productive or merely generate stress and ruin a family dinner for no reason.

Remember that timezones can allow you to pass work across a team and keep momentum going against a tight deadline. However, if you do need to schedule meetings in employees' personal time, respect that by ensuring they are organised and professional as possible. Punctuality, agendas and structure are not only good practice but culturally vital in some countries.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE DATE & NUMBER FORMATS

It's a small point, but try to persuade the organisation to use dd/mm/yy (e.g. 14/Jan/11) in email and written communications. Keep in mind the difference in using . vs , in number formatting (e.g. US number structure - 1,234.67 and European formats like 1.234,56 and 1 234,56). These changes can make a huge difference in clarifying tasks, deadlines and budgets. It's also a quick fix as most applications let you change them easily.

Also, enter numbers in your mobile phone with + (country code) so they work anywhere in the world, another small point but does reduce frustration when you travel.

GET ON A PLANE...WHEN APPROPRIATE

Culturally and politically there are times when nothing will replace being there in person, initial meetings for critical relationships; difficult conversations, large scale project kick-offs. High quality video conferencing is great for maintaining relationships, formal meetings and staffing conversations such as appraisals; phone, email, IM, text is great for information sharing and keeping in touch.



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TECHNOLOGY

USE ADVOCATES TO BUILD CONNECTIONS

If you can find someone in the office/team based in an overseas location that you feel especially aligned to and find it easy to communicate with, ask their advice in communication with that location, and ask them to help support your efforts and 'translate' for you.

TECHNOLOGY

Most smartphones/tablets etc. provide great travel applications, from translators to restaurant guides, timezone management to sports updates etc. Find the ones that appeal to you and your interests, and remember to use them.

DEEPER CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

For areas where deeper connections are needed e.g. management of large teams, difficult clients that are critical to your personal and business success, etc., it may be worth investing more time in knowing the culture. Learn the basics of the language, e.g. 'Hello'/'thank you', as well as customary traditions, e.g. how to accept and give a business card. Consider reading about the history of the people or location, remember that sports, food and travel are all good universal connection points and handle politics and religion with care, as they tend to be universal debating topics.

Finally... given my years in media, the first thing I do when I land is turn on the TV and watch local entertainment programming and adverts. It's worth remembering the media companies spend a lot of money on appealing to local people and creating local markets for international products; there is no reason why you can't learn from it too. It's amazing how much of a local you can feel in a few hours.

JAMES VEALL BIOGRAPHY

James oversees strategic planning, project management, financial and vendor management, customer relationship management, ITIL transformation and departmental communications for the technology team. The aim of the role is to ensure the global technology team is effective and efficient in execution, and that it is commercially and strategically aligned with its business partners across the globe.

Prior to joining Viacom, James spent 11 years in a number of senior posts at Discovery Communications (including leading technology for their international business), ending his tenure there as head of the office of the CIO, which included defining a global service portfolio, developing strategies and policies, ensuring service alignment, maximising efficiency and execution of performance – reporting to business stakeholders. Earlier in James's career he held senior technology positions in the Walt Disney Television Group and Deloitte.

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James was talking to Stuart Packham, director at Michael Page Technology.

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