



Doing Business **the Chinese Way**

By Robert Parkinson



HAVING FUN: Chinese employees dress up at a costume party

five countries, I had never seen people who were so passionate and diligent. The office hour starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 6:00 p.m., but I didn't really find Chinese staff watching the clock to strike six. It was quite different from Europe where people practically queued outside the door as soon as their contract permitted.

I love working with people who are passionate at work. That was actually one of the reasons why I decided to stay. After working for my previous company for 11 years, I believed very strongly in what I had learned about the international way of doing business; but I did also feel strongly that if you don't listen to the local market, respect the local people, and give the local ways some "face," you're not going to get very far. However, although I am running my own company in China, I want to make it a British and Chinese "fusion" company. With my past experiences in China, I would like to give some tips about how to do business in the Chinese way.

First, trust means a lot in China. In the UK, it's all about the rule book. But in China, although paradoxically it is seen as a country of pointless procedures and hoops to jump through, in fact, Chinese business is actually based on very solid relationships. What I mean here is not merely the Chinese *guanxi*. This kind of relationship is trust based; and trust means trust. It beats the "rules" every time.

The next thing I would recommend doing is keeping in touch with your connections via modern communication methods. The Chinese are fanatical Microbloggers, and it helps breakdown barriers between the working "person" and the life and family of people you work with. I know in Chinese culture, family is quite important. So sometimes

it's good (and also interesting) to show care for them by asking about their families and life.

Additionally, our company places lots of emphasis on teamwork through combined leisure activities. Where I am from, people hang out in bars and clubs after work. However, people here prefer to go to karaoke bars, or KTV, and restaurants together. So we try to combine the approach, and for example in April, we had a Hollywood Night at a KTV. Everyone was asked to dress up as a Hollywood star. I could see that everyone enjoyed that evening. They like singing. They also like the theme party.

The last tip is about the language. Honestly, I think my biggest regret having worked and lived here a long time is not learning Chinese well. We have a weekly meeting every Monday, for instance. Although there are foreign employees in the company, I encourage everyone to speak Chinese in the meeting. Using the same language to communicate within the company can bring the relationship of colleagues much closer. Besides encouraging foreign employees to study Chinese, I also have an app on my phone so that I can study some words and phrases. Every morning when I come to the office, I try to say *zao* (morning) to everyone! (However I am fluent in Chinglish, which comes in very handy).

My company is now in its fourth year of operations and already has businesses in Tianjin, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Our next plan is to expand the business in the mainland of China and open an overseas office—however, it's confidential at this stage! ■

Nine years ago, the Amsterdam branch of my previous company asked me to come to China and develop the business here. So I got the chance to experience working and living in Beijing. Although my pre-arrival expectations were of courtyards, temples, and men in slanting straw hats I didn't really expect a lot before I came here, and I have to say that staying here for just five days had indeed given me such a strong impression, especially of the people, and in a very short time, my mind was made up. Working across three continents in

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