

Behaviours to increase international business success

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The New Zealand Institute research on innovation concluded that some features of New Zealand culture are limiting our international business success. But highlighting deficiencies in our enterprise culture does not improve the situation so we have identified three behaviours that will increase the success of our international entrepreneurs, marketers, and salespeople. Our intention is that educators and others who are developing and preparing our international businesspeople will ensure that these behaviours are taught in courses and encouraged more broadly.

The first behaviour is to **be customer oriented**. To think of that from another angle, it is essential that we do not 'think for our customers'. Kiwis are very good at inventing and making things, but many too easily assume they understand what customers want and need. Being located far from markets, it is tempting to develop the product or service based on our own Kiwi perspective and to overlook the wants and needs of customers. Rather than seeing the world through customer eyes, Kiwis sometimes 'think for them' and design what we want and value, rather than what they want and value.

Too often we miss out on achieving the best possible returns and building long term relationships because we do not match our products and services exactly with what the customer wants and values. The result is that when the product or service is taken to market overseas it needs redesign because it does not fit the market requirement. Kiwi firms that are customer oriented take the trouble to develop a deep understanding of the product or service from the customer's point of view and aim to maintain the resulting relationship for long periods of time. That approach reduces the focus on price and shifts it to value.

The second behaviour is to **be prepared**. The Kiwi 'she'll be right' or 'let's make-do' approach can undermine successful relationship development overseas. Competitors from other countries are very good at presenting their offers. Messages must be developed, customised, and conveyed in an appropriate format. Rehearsing the elevator pitch is insufficient. Talking about New Zealand's beautiful landscape is not enough. Demonstrating a product in everyday casual work clothes may be completely inappropriate. Ensuring marketing and sales people have good product knowledge is obvious, but it is just as important to adopt the appearance, language, and behaviours that will fit with the expectations, values, and conventions of customers. It is equally important to understand when our famous understatement and self deprecation is appropriate and when it just devalues our sales proposition.

The third behaviour is to **be collaborative**. Kiwis like to be self-reliant and independent, which is one reason why we have so many small businesses. But growing successful international businesses requires collaboration to form teams and build connections among many parties; directors, specialist managers, international partners, investors, advisors, and others. Too many business founders want to do it all themselves, and collectively we do not

do enough to overcome the barriers of distance to form connections and relationships with partners. While we are quite capable of collaborating, in our impatience to 'get the deal done' we do not always take the time needed to build the trust and understanding with potential partners that collaboration depends upon.

Some readers will no doubt respond that these three behaviours are so obviously important to business success that there should be no need to highlight them or take steps to ensure they are included in business training. Many others with experience of international business development efforts will agree that these behaviours are often overlooked and are the most important behaviours to encourage.

The next step is to widely communicate this proposal to educational institutions and others who are developing our international business men and women. Promoting and encouraging behaviours that build a more effective culture among those involved in creating, leading, managing, and marketing new ventures will help lift New Zealand's prosperity.

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The full ***Behaviours To Ensure Business Success*** presentation is available from www.institute.org