



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Business for Diplomatic Action

by Maureen Wild

This month I would like to pass along the name of a Web site that can be of invaluable use to business travelers. It is not meant to offer you discounts on your airfare or bump you into first-class hotel suites. Actually, if the truth be told, I believe it may even trump those perks. I am referring to www.businessfordiplomaticaction.com, the brainchild of Keith Reinhard who founded this nonprofit to work to improve America's image abroad.

Intensive research by Business for Diplomatic Action reveals that "the alarming rise in anti-American sentiment represents a looming crisis not only for U.S. businesses and brands marketed abroad but for future generations of Americans as well. Even though much resentment of our country currently centers on our foreign policy, *much does not*. Other root causes include the perception that we are arrogant and insensitive as a people, that our culture has become all-pervasive, and that the global business expansion on the part of U.S. companies has been exploitive." The mission of the folks at BDA is "to enlist the U.S. business community in actions to improve the standing of Americans in the world with the goal of once again seeing America as admired as global leader and respected as a courier of progress and prosperity for all people."

Reinhard asserts that Americans are disliked partly because of our collective personality which survey respondents around the world described as "arrogant, loud, ignorant and totally self-absorbed." Business for Diplomatic Action has published a short pamphlet with 16 tips on relating better to colleagues overseas. More than 600 companies have already ordered the information and have distributed it to their employees.

Some of "our" worst faux pas? It will hardly surprise you to discover that Americans are not good listeners. Not only do we seem to strike

foreigners as "know it alls," we tend to pontificate at the top of our lungs. There is a serious problem with American volume control.

Another pet peeve of our international colleagues is our lack of propriety and respect for common courtesy. While foul language and crass behavior may be tolerated, or even extolled in American films and television, it certainly doesn't resonate in other cultures. This disconnect affects the bottom line. *Forbes* magazine reported that, "... when teens in 13 countries were recently surveyed on which brands they most recognized, not a single American brand finished in the top three. No CEO is willing to admit that anti-Americanism has directly affected the bottom line. But, we know in marketing that when the affinity drops and the brand rankings drop—as they are doing around the world—buying behavior will surely follow."

This is an alarming trend, but it is a trend that CAN be reversed. A little common sense, diplomacy and civility go a long way in repairing strained relationships. American business people, particularly those who do a lot of international travel, would do well to click onto Reinhard's site.

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