
How to Prepare Our Youth to Succeed in the Emerging Single Global Middle Class

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According to Kishore Mahbubani, author of *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West and the Logic of One World* and *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, it's quite likely that, in the next 37 years, America and the rest of the West will take a real backseat to Asia. So, what are we going to do about it?

Having lost the global lead economically, in human rights, climate control, employment, technology and more according to the [U.S. Task Force on Global Standing](#), we are still strong in higher education, though we hold the No. 1 position in small arms imports and exports and deaths by violence -- not particularly admirable places to dominate.

We must face the fact that the perceived No. 1 global position no longer belongs to us; we haven't been the best in the world, in global standing, for some time. On the plus side, though, is that in the 21st century, we are part of an exciting new converging global middle class -- and that's a whole new ballgame.

So, how do we adjust our Western focus from striving to be No. 1, to this changing world order? We can choose to accept it and live cooperatively for global productivity, or reject it and live angrily and fearfully. I heartily opt for the former. How do we prepare the next generations to navigate the shifting paradigm successfully, both professionally and socially?

I leave the myriad political and economic details of this change to experts in those fields, such as Mahbubani and others. Economically, Nick Vitalari and Hayden Shaughnessy offer their suggestions in [The Elastic Enterprise: The New Manifesto for Business Revolution](#). "Our objective is to help create the conversation around their new enterprise models and how leaders in the developed economies are responding to a new phase of globalization... where emerged-economy companies are beneficiaries of a rapidly growing, new global middle class," reads the Manifesto for Vitalari and Shaughnessy's book.

Our American culture of domination in the Western Hemisphere probably began in 1865 with the Monroe Doctrine, but our concept of global dominance emerged after World War II, so we have been at the business of proudly asserting ourselves as No. 1 for some time.

Shifting our paradigm from domination to cooperation is a huge undertaking. It can be painful and disheartening, but we can't stop it and, although it may take place in full measure, in succeeding generations, we can begin to groom our young people in the required skills for success in the new world order.

Although the legacy we wish to leave of wealth and wealth-building tools are certainly helpful, they can be transitory. Perhaps of equal or greater importance are the tools of leadership and cooperation which can have a more lasting effect during adverse changes.

As a number of elementary, middle and high schools already teach communication and relationship skills, as do such other programs as the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts of America, it would be comparatively easy to include components for successfully navigating global interpersonal relationships.

A good many of these tools apply in business as well as social experiences. The challenge here lies in maintaining our own cultural identity while gaining acceptance in nearly opposite cultures.

Dr. Phil McGraw has a saying, "Find their currency and buy into it." In other words, know what is most important to the other person, and adapt to that. This may require thoughtful practice to maintain our own identity while doing so, but I believe we can accomplish it.

Craig Runde, Director of the [Center for Conflict Dynamics](#) at Eckerd College, puts it another way, "Try to see things through the eyes of other people. Reading more about people from other places and other cultures can take some of the mystery and fear out of the change. This is because we have much more in common - everyone cries in sorrow when they lose loved ones and laughs in joy when good things happen."

China, at the moment, is the up-and-coming dominant society, with Japan getting stronger. While some of the Asian communication values are nearly opposite to ours, others are easily adaptable, and we must find ways of adapting to all of them; of course, it is possible that Asians will be working equally to communicate effectively with us, also.

In order to thoroughly explain all the following techniques, a book could be written on each; the following is intended as a brief overview to get the ball rolling.

In her book [Chinese Leadership](#), Barbara Wang lists five primary communication styles important in Chinese culture, and I follow, in italics with our Western style and suggestions for accommodating both; of course, some points will apply on more than one level:

Saving face. Showing respect by preserving the other person's dignity. Refusing an invitation or a gift for a flimsy reason causes the other person to lose dignity ('face'). Saving face is more profound than just preserving their feelings.

Heightened awareness to the way our reactions and responses will be perceived by others.

Building trust by developing guanxi. "The notion of guanxi is a much more complex idea than the Western concept of networking," says Barbara Wang author of *Chinese Leadership*. She continues, "It is the platform for social and business activities in China, and consists of connections defined by reciprocity, trust and mutual obligations."

Networking, with strong emphasis on integrity and honesty in order to build trust. If we say we'll be there, or do it then do it well, without excuses.

Harmony; blending in.

Don't jump in with a new idea or suggestion, trying to push it through; wait and offer it in a mild style, listening carefully to others' opinions. Take the balance of all parties, not just ourselves, into account.

Chinese take longer to make decisions.

Allow the situation to take what may seem an inordinate time to deliberate before deciding.

Indirect communication.

Although we Westerners often see value in making quicker decisions than Asians, we should graciously give them the space they need. Build relationships through indirect communication.

Be patient, and draw the other person out gradually, rather than jumping in to push our ideas forcefully. Listen carefully and completely, noting areas of agreement, and build on them later. For the most efficient direct communication with Asian people, Ms. Wang suggests, it may be best to do so privately.

A big part of American non-verbal communication skills involve direct eye contact and, sometimes, touching -- patting someone on the shoulder, arm or back -- but these acts are better avoided with Asians, as they would be seen as aggressive.

What will work is measured conflict resolution and negotiation skills modified to fit Asian style. Adaptability, problem-solving and team-building skills in any interpersonal relationships are also invaluable. Adjusting our communication skills does not demean us; it enhances us by broadening our scope of successful interaction.

The bottom line for all this is that we will probably not be around when this shift in world order is in full bloom; but maybe our children, and almost definitely our grandchildren will be, so the best legacy we can leave them is the tools and skills for successfully navigating the world in which they find themselves because, no matter their changing fortunes, these skills will remain constantly in their service.

RESOURCES

Chinese Leadership (Barbara Wang and Harold Chee. Palgrave MacMillan UK, 2011)

Negotiate Like a Phoenician (Dr. Habib Chamoun-Nicolas with Randy Doyle Hazlett, Ph.D. KeyNegotiations, 2008)

Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader (Craig E. Runde and Tim A. Flanagan. John Wiley & Sons, 2nd ed. 2012)

The Five Percent (Peter T. Coleman. Perseus Book Group, 2011)

The Black Swan: Impact of the Highly Improbable (Nassim Nicholas Taleb. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010)

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