

An International Shepherdess

By Linda Parker Horowitz

I work for a venture start-up, a micro-multinational. The sun set several hours ago here on this Tuesday night in Southern California, and I'd like to relax in my jammies, watch something humorous on the blessed TIVO and head into dreamland by 11:00 PM. However, this is not to be since it is early morning in beautiful, bustling Bangalore, India, and my Managing Director is editing the copy I sent to him yesterday morning, my time, evening his time. Confused yet? Don't worry -- it takes a while getting used to, if ever. It is Wednesday morning in India, and he's back for the day, vigorous as ever, "knocking" me via Skype, asking questions, seeking clarification.

Blee-URP sounds Skype. Now my CFO in Oregon knocks. Thankfully, my time zone. He tells me my MD is on and I reply, "Yes, I'm chatting with him." Onward with India he writes; his thoughts can wait. Unfortunately, the CEO's cannot. I'm outranked and upstaged; the MD bails on me.

Back to the CFO. "Any questions?" I Skype. "You can call me on my land line," grateful for a manager in my time zone. "No. Just respond to the MD." I'd love to, but he's virtually disappeared.

And so the evening goes until midnight, when the Chief Technology Officer, also our resident PowerPoint artist, chimes in, assuring me that he will develop not an elegant new technology similar to the one he created as his PhD. thesis, but a slide (strangely called a "foil" in India) by morning for our brochure. His communication is via BlackBerry and e-mail. Hard to know where he is at this point, though he is supposed to be in my time zone. He's definitely out of my intellectual sphere.

Moving projects forward with this team is like herding chickens, but my broom must cross the International Date Line.

I've decided that globalization in theory is spectacular -- leverage assets, human and otherwise, to extract the most value at the lowest cost. This concept is not immaterial for a new venture when the necessities of continuing business eat away at working capital, and the money to pay for those assets, fixed or breathing, must be acquired via lunches, dinners, golf games, and presentations, then negotiated and contractually finalized. When money finally arrives, one hopes in dollars, everyone breathes a sigh of relief heard across the Pacific, past China to India.

And as a marketer, I'm a cost center. To accomplish anything, I must spend money. My CFO is my monetary paramedic. Overhearing my conversation with him, my youngest son learned that there are 40 rupies per dollar here in mom's international home school. They don't teach F/X to fourth graders, even in fancy private schools.

Thursday night. It's 9:45 PM. The phone rings, and I hear the unmistakable voice of my Managing Director in India. "Linda," he pronounces as he does most everything, sounding like Sean Connery as a slightly Indian King Lear. "Are you joining us? The agency is here." I look at the clock and realize I've scheduled the meeting for Friday night, forgetting that Friday night here is Saturday morning there. "Yes, yes!" I reply, excited that I'll be sitting in on this tutorial. "My apologies; I scheduled the meeting on the wrong day. I'll get the hang of international time zones soon." I'm mortified, and off he goes, recounting the history of "the third screen." My MD is not only brilliant, he's very entertaining, but I miss having visuals. Even rested I have the attention span of a gnat over a warm puddle, but I haven't

gotten much sleep all week AND it is pushing 10:00 PM -- a WebX with a colorful PowerPoint would help me focus.

Avidly listening, phone in hand, I head for the 12 ounce Hershey's dark chocolate. With chocolate, my drug of choice after 7:00 PM, I'm not brand loyal and any will suffice. With hours to go until I'm free to collapse, all childrens' candy buckets are in danger, though they needn't fear for their Nerds, Jolly Ranchers, Laffy Taffy, or any item whose flavor does not start with the letters c-h-o-c, except for some recently acquired chocolate pop rocks, which I never knew existed and must have been created by some truly sick scientist who wanted to fool exhausted working mothers and torture young children. The bucket raid happens nightly, and I have been busted regularly by my 10 year old. "Hey! Where'd all my candy go? Maaaaaaaaahmm!"

Blee-urp, goes Skype. It's my CFO flashing. I mute the Bangalore meeting. "How are you?" I see on my screen, a welcome visual stimulus. I've learned the art of text messaging, but it took direct coaching -- I'm verbose in all media. "Better after a Hershey break. What's up? On with India."

Usually, he'll defer, but this time he launches. "Should we be an exhibitor?" he's referencing a major conference happening in a little over 2 weeks. "Our competitors are there." It doesn't take many words to realize he's shifted into Winning Gear, competitive overdrive running on 625 horses. "Can we?" "How much are you willing to spend?" I type, not meaning to be Jewish, answering a question with a question, when actually, I'm thinking like a marketer, considering the expense of a booth, collateral material, signage and other incidentals that are not so incidental, particularly for a start-up.

Over my muted speaker phone, I hear another phone ring 19,000 or so miles away. "Hello?" answers the MD melodically, a baritone projecting to the cheap seats. It's the president of the largest loyalty company in India. The Managing Director conducts the entire call without muting the conference line. I take notes -- Negotiations 404 has begun.

It's now late Friday afternoon. I get a call from the new SVP of Sales. Since the management teams are in Portland, Oregon, and Bangalore, India, and travel frequently, I feel like an international shepherdess, trying to reach one senior manager for a decision. I hear an odd din through his mobile phone. Thinking he was in an airport who-knows-where, I emphatically ask, "Where ARE you??" "On the farm in Tennessee," he replies over the noise. "What? You live on a farm?" I say incredulously. "Yes," he replies in a cheery voice. "Listen. The cows are hungry." And over the airways via cellular tower and satellite technology, I hear a deep, resonant moo from a nearby cow. "Ya hear that?" "Yea," I laugh realizing I've just gotten a transcontinental moo. "And I thought the peacocks here in Arcadia were loud!" "I don't know what a peacock sounds like," he states blandly. "Trust me," I countered, "they're loud and the boys are shrieking. They think it's spring already." Though tempted, I refrain from doing my imitation of a peacock, the one that caused a very roly-poly kindergartener to literally fall over like a human Humpty-Dumpty in peals of laughter upon hearing it. I'm a business professional. I show restraint.

And so the communications go. Day in and night in. In reality, I'd rather get a decent night's sleep. It might not be so difficult traveling virtually across our newly flat world, if I was in my 20's or even 30's. Yes, I do have a family, a career, and wisdom. But age sucks, particularly in the *age* of globalization.