

Concept

a powerful, intriguing, inspiring, or perhaps odd idea distilled to its essential elements

In the Louisiana Purchase, Thomas Jefferson relieved Napoleon of a potential hornets' nest and gave him needed funds, while doubling the size of the United States. The art of diplomacy lies in the ability to extract mutually beneficial—or at least mutually consented to—agreement between two or more parties of conflicting interests.

Fast-forward: Regardless of viewpoint, the war on Iraq began without support of the UN and others. Does that represent a failure in diplomacy? Will it usher in a new era for international business? For an MBA student hoping to work abroad again, I've begun to realize the world of international business will be on a new playing field.

Here are two truths which I hold to be self-evident:

Cowboy days are over. Lack of global awareness and frustration with other nations' policies will play out in one's ability to work outside of borders, whether living abroad or conducting multinational business transactions.

Time to learn diplomacy. The failure of political diplomacy drives urgency for business leaders to learn the art of diplomacy. If you're not convinced of that, call a business colleague in Europe and broach the subject of the war.

Study and learn about the other country—its history, people, and culture, and how business is done there.

Speak the local language, at least a few words. That demonstrates a willingness to step outside of your comfort zone. A few words can be useful in business negotiations, particularly when seeking to understand the other party's perspective.

Don't express your opinions too early or too loudly. Such behavior may prevent your counterparts from speaking at all or inspire opposition at a premature stage.

Appreciate whatever is revealed through speech, behavior, or scheduling. It's all in the nuances. As a budding diplomat, your job is to recognize and enjoy every distinction. The meanings can run deep, making your experience greater.

Those are a mere starting point. Take them to heart and you might find that a little diplomacy goes further than "carrying a big stick."

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The Art of Diplomacy

It's a balancing act.



By David Beadles