

## **Chapter 11**

### **Japan: The Case for Expatriate Training**

Denise Chapman, a native of Long Island, New York, heaved a sigh of relief as she sat down on the wooden chair in her tiny apartment in Tokyo, Japan. She has survived the 13-hour flight from New York in relatively good shape and is about to start her new job: Marketing Manager of Akuta Corporation in Japan. Akuta Corporation, a high technology company specializing in semiconductors, produces memory chips for cell phones, electronics, and cars. It is a joint venture between Akuta North American and Akuta Japan. Denise has spent the last twelve years working her way up the career ladder in New York and has finally been rewarded for her consistently outstanding contributions to Akuta by being given this promotion. To say she is elated is an understatement. Tomorrow will be her first day on the job, and she is supposed to report to her boss, Vice President for Business Development Junichiro Yasuda, at 9 am.

Denise is slightly apprehensive at the thought of meeting Mr. Yasuda, who is known for his personal integrity and extremely high standards. But she is prepared and ready for the challenge. There is only one problem: Denise is hoping that she can find some polite way to express to Mr. Yasuda her dissatisfaction with the apartment she has been given: it is much too small and has only one closet. Surely the company can give her a larger apartment. After all, she will be living in Tokyo for the next two years.

The next morning Denise overslept because of the time change and had to rush to get ready for work, so she called and left a message for Mr. Yasuda, saying that she would be a bit late. She dressed carefully for her first day on the job, choosing her black Ralph Lauren suit and black heels. While she was dressing, she discovered that her blouse was badly wrinkled. She managed to find her iron, ironed the blouse, and left the apartment at 10:30 am, catching a cab to Akuta Corporation.

When Denise walked into Mr. Yasuda's office at 11 am that morning, she smiled and extended her hand for a handshake. Mr. Yasuda bowed slightly, shook her hand energetically, and asked her to sit down and make herself comfortable. Before Denise could apologize for being late, he immediately apologized for not providing her with coffee or tea and inquired about her long plane ride. In fluent English, he said, "Please call me Junichiro, and may I call you Denise?" Then he got down to business, explaining the budget constraints the company was facing, and asking what Denise's long-term priorities were and how she planned to accomplish them. Denise had not been expecting such intense questioning, but she attempted to answer the questions with clarity and honesty.

One hour went by, with Denise and Mr. Yasuda chatting informally yet seriously about the goals of the company. Denise had been waiting for just the right moment to mention her desire for a better apartment. Finally, she said, "Mr. Yasuda, I was wondering, would it be possible for me to find a larger apartment? My present one is not big enough. After all, I'll be living here for two years, and I am an executive."

Mr. Yasuda's eyes shifted to the view out of his window, he breathed in through his teeth, and he remained silent for several minutes. Denise found the silence uncomfortable. At last he replied, "Yes, yes, indeed, but difficult, you know." Denise was confused by his response but added, "I would really appreciate your help with this, Junichiro."

"That's right, yes, yes, I'll look into it," Mr. Yasuda said, picking up his business card from a small box on his desk and handing it to Denise with both hands. Denise quickly put it in her purse without looking at it and then glanced through her brief case for her cards, before she remembered that they had not been printed yet. She mentioned this to Mr. Yasuda, who attempted a smile, and then changed the conversation back to the topic of the budget.

Finally, Mr. Yasuda stood up and said that he had enjoyed meeting Denise and looked forward to their future business endeavors. At that point, he took a thin, beautifully wrapped rectangular package from the top drawer of his desk and handed it to Denise.

"Please accept this small token of my esteem for your willingness to travel across the ocean to become a member of our company, and I am sure we will have success in our future cooperation."

Somewhat taken aback, Denise slowly unwrapped the package. Inside were four intricately carved ivory figurines. Denise realized that this was a lovely and expensive gift, and what's more, she had no gift to give to Mr. Yasuda in return. Although she had been briefed on the importance of gift giving in the Japanese business world, she had assumed that gifts were given after people had worked together for some time and not at the beginning of a work relationship. She was embarrassed and couldn't think of what to say, beyond "thank you," so she turned to Mr. Yasuda and bowed deeply, as she had remembered his bow to her at the start of their meeting.

Mr. Yasuda did not bow in return. He merely stuck out his hand and shook Denise's hand again, while studying a calligraphy print hanging on the wall. Nor did he say another word. "Well, uh, thanks again," Denise said, and she left the office, worrying about whether she had gotten off on the wrong foot with Mr. Yasuda.

Something did not seem right about this first encounter. Denise decided to call the New York office and speak with the training officers who had given her the two-day orientation session on working in Japan. She was not at all sure that she had learned enough in that short session to adapt to her new work environment, which seemed full of ambiguity and tension. Maybe she would try to read the books that had been recommended to her on cross-cultural communication and doing business in Japan. She wasn't exactly an expert on these issues, considering that this was her first assignment abroad. In spite of her jet lag, she was probably going to have to stay up late and get some reading done before returning to work tomorrow.

## **Discussion**

1. How can expatriate employees best prepare themselves for working abroad?
2. What type of training did Denise get from Akuta in New York?
3. What problems did Denise encounter on her first day of work in Japan?
4. What errors in business etiquette did Denise make with Mr. Yasuda?
5. What factors led to the problems in communication between Denise and Mr. Yasuda?
6. How can Denise repair the damage she has caused to her relationship with Mr. Yasuda?
7. What would you do if you were in Denise's situation?

## **Case Study Report**

### I. Statement of the problem

A. Definition

B. Analysis

### II. Suggestions of possible solutions

A.

B.

C.

D.

### III. Evaluation of possible solutions

A. Advantages

B. Disadvantages

### IV. Selection of a solution

A. Choice

B. Justification