

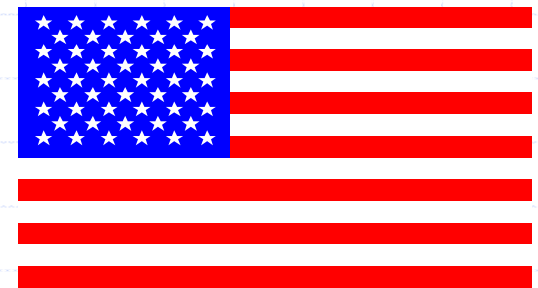
# Communicating with North Americans:

A look at  
American and Canadian business  
culture and communication styles

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Manager, Business Development  
Business in Jyväskylä Programme  
Jyväskylä Innovation

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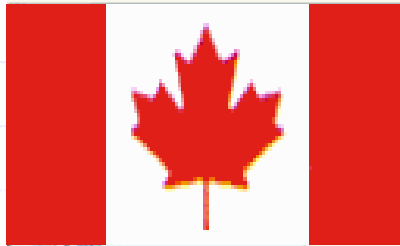
# My background

- ◆ Native of Michigan, USA (actually north of Toronto)
- ◆ Manager, Business Development, Business in Jyväskylä Programme at Jyväskylä Innovation since August 2008
- ◆ Lecturer in the International Business Program at Jyväskylä Polytechnic since 1995
- ◆ Coach Finnish and Russian business people in the areas of international marketing, strategic planning, cross-cultural business, presentation skills and customer service

# Succeeding in the North American Marketplace

- ◆ Find your market niche
- ◆ Understand the way business is done in the USA and Canada
- ◆ Understand business culture and practices





## Population:

33,390,141 (July 2007 est.)

## Ethnic groups:

British Isles origin 28%, French origin 23%, other European 15%, Amerindian 2%, other, mostly Asian, African, Arab 6%, mixed background 26%

**Nearly 90% of population lives within 100 miles (160km) of the US Border**



# The Canadian Market



- ◆ An ethnic “mosaic” vs. the American “melting pot”
- ◆ Strong roots in British and French culture
  - British spelling: *-re vs. -er endings, -our vs -or endings*
  - Use of the metric system
- ◆ Influence of American culture
  - i.e. Vancouver much closer to Seattle than Toronto*
- ◆ Quebec – French speaking
  - Roughly 25% of the Canadian market including cities of Montreal and Quebec (city)
  - French and English are official languages throughout Canada
  - Bilingual packaging, signs, etc. required
  - Differences between Canadian French and European French

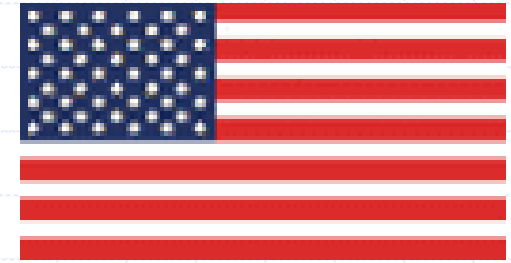


# Doing Business with Canadians: Cultural Characteristics



- ◆ Canadian business people are generally highly educated, well-informed and open-minded
- ◆ Facts and objectivity are the basis for conversations and negotiations
- ◆ As in the US, understand that there are differences
  - between the provinces
  - between urban and rural regions
- ◆ Although culturally there are very many cultural similarities between Canadians and Americans, respect the fact that is a separate country with it's own culture, institutions and way of life.

# The United States of America



## **Population:**

303,824,640 (July 2008 est.)

## **Population growth rate:**

0.883% (2008 est.)

## **Ethnic groups:**

white 79.96%, black 12.85%, Asian 4.43%, Amerindian and Alaska native 0.97%, native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander 0.18%, two or more races 1.61% (July 2007 estimate)

*note:* a separate listing for Hispanic is not included because the US Census Bureau considers Hispanic to mean a person of Latin American descent (including persons of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican origin) living in the US who may be of any race or ethnic group (white, black, Asian, etc.); about 15.1% of the total US population is Hispanic

## **Languages:**

English 82.1%, Spanish 10.7%, other Indo-European 3.8%, Asian and Pacific island 2.7%, other 0.7% (2000 census)

# Throw away misconceptions about the USA and Americans

The dangers of stereotypes:

*"Learning American manners from American films is like learning how to drive from watching car chases in the movies"*

*- Miss Manners*












Olympia

Canada

Ottawa

United States

-  National capital
-  State capital
-  Secondary city
-  Primary road
-  Railroad
-  State border
-  International border



Hollywood

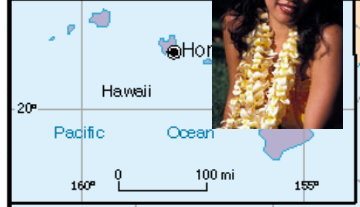
Pacific Ocean

Mexico

Gulf of Mexico

Havana Cuba

0 800 km  
0 500 mi



# The seven cultural forces that define Americans

1. An insistence on choice
2. The pursuit of impossible dreams
3. An obsession with big and more
4. Impatience with time
5. Acceptance of mistakes
6. The urge to improvise
7. Fixation on "whatsnew"

# 1. An insistence on choice



- ◆ Choice is the formidable force in the United States and is everywhere in everyday life
- ◆ Consumers demand choice
- ◆ Taking things to extremes
- ◆ Either/or thinking still persists
- ◆ Companies must make choice a fundamental and conscientious part of doing business
- ◆ Lack of choice in an organization can have a negative impact on both customers and employees

## 2. The pursuit of impossible dreams

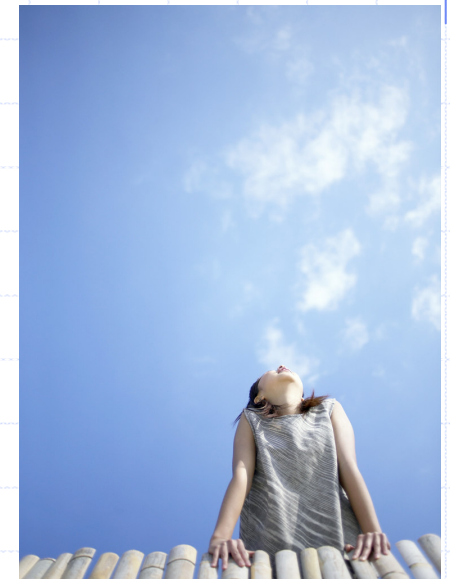
Dreams are the lifeblood of  
America

“I have a dream” – *Martin Luther King*

“If you build castles in the air, your work need not be lost, that is where they should be” –  
*Henry David Thoreau*

“We will put a man on the moon by the end of this decade”

-*John Fitzgerald Kennedy*



# The pursuit of impossible dreams

- ◆ The link between dreams, creativity and technology
- ◆ The pursuit of dreams (USA?) versus the pursuit of perfection (Germany, Finland, Japan?)
- ◆ Importance of vision in American business and management

# 3. An obsession with big and more

- ◆ The connection with history
  - The frontier mentality
  - Today's technological and product frontier
- ◆ The importance of being #1
  - Nobody remembers who was second
- ◆ Big is seen as an advantage in business
  - Strategies focus on growth
  - Allows for risk taking and creativity



# 4 . An impatience with time

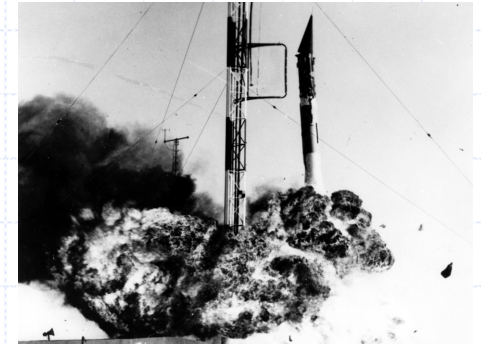


- ◆ Future orientation
- ◆ Act now, plan later
- ◆ Time is money philosophy
- ◆ Advantages and disadvantages of American's orientation to time
- ◆ Many American companies base their competitive advantage on being the quickest
- ◆ Problems in doing business internationally caused by this philosophy

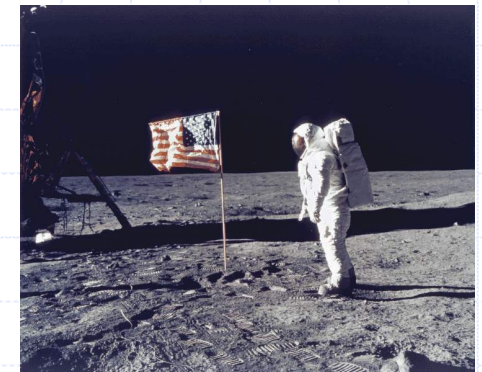


# 5. Acceptance of mistakes

- ◆ American history is full of examples of failures followed by success
  - The revolutionary war (and most other of America's wars)
  - America's space program
  - Responding to Japan's business challenge in the 1970s and 1980s
- ◆ "If at first you don't succeed, try and try again"
- ◆ Mistakes are valued as learning opportunities
- ◆ Other cultures are more perfectionist



Dec. 6, 1957. The U.S. Navy test of a Vanguard rocket fails.  
Photo: U.S. Navy



July 20, 1969  
Photo. NASA



# The American Oops! Script\*

1. Take on the impossible
2. Begin before being prepared
3. Fail on the first attempt
4. Blame someone
5. Regroup
6. Try again
7. Success!
8. Move on to something else

\* Source: Hammond J. and Morrison J., The Stuff Americans are Made of, Macmillan 1996

## 6. The urge to improvise

- ◆ America is a culture of improvisation
- ◆ Closely related to innovation – improvisation leads to innovation
- ◆ Often based on individual initiative
- ◆ The Jazz music analogy:
  - Classical music – controlled, perfection (European)
  - Jazz – improvised. Each band member is able to express individuality



## 7. Fixation on “whatsnew”

- ◆ “New and improved” is highly valued
- ◆ Related to future-orientation of American culture
- ◆ Fads are one result
- ◆ Fueled by individual freedom



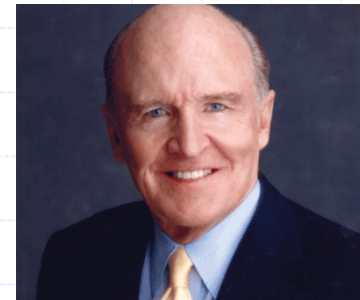
# American Business Culture: Basic Attributes

- ◆ Individualism
- ◆ Competitiveness
- ◆ Results orientation
- ◆ Customer Service Orientation



# American Management

- ◆ The ideal manager:  
*a democrat who can  
make the tough decision  
when necessary*
- ◆ A communicator
- ◆ A leader - not a manager!



**Jack Welch**  
Former CEO of General Electric

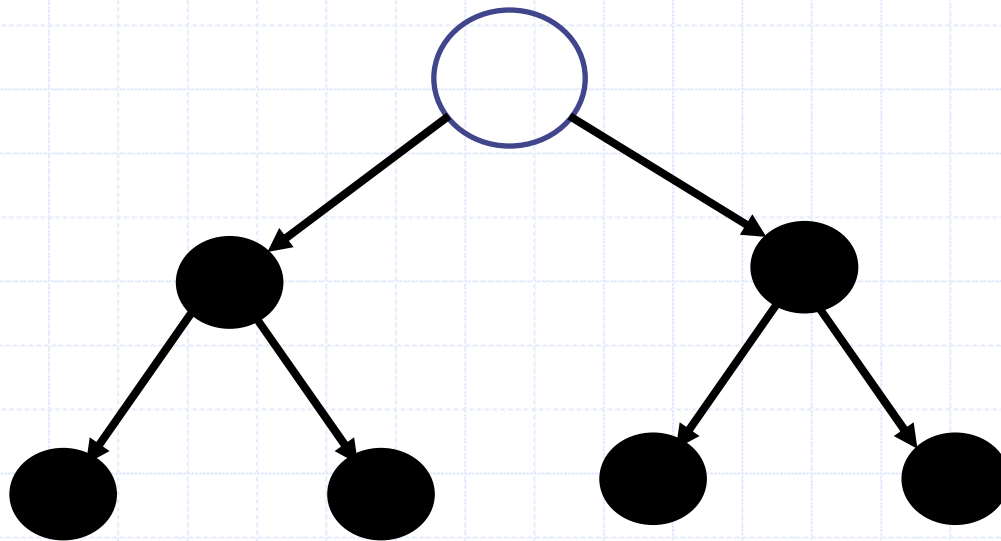


**Meg Whitman**  
CEO of eBay

# American Management

- ◆ Low power-distance organizations now the trend – high power-distance was once common
- ◆ Results-oriented – “What have you done for me lately?”
- ◆ Dynamic workplace requiring influx of new management ideas

# American Leadership style

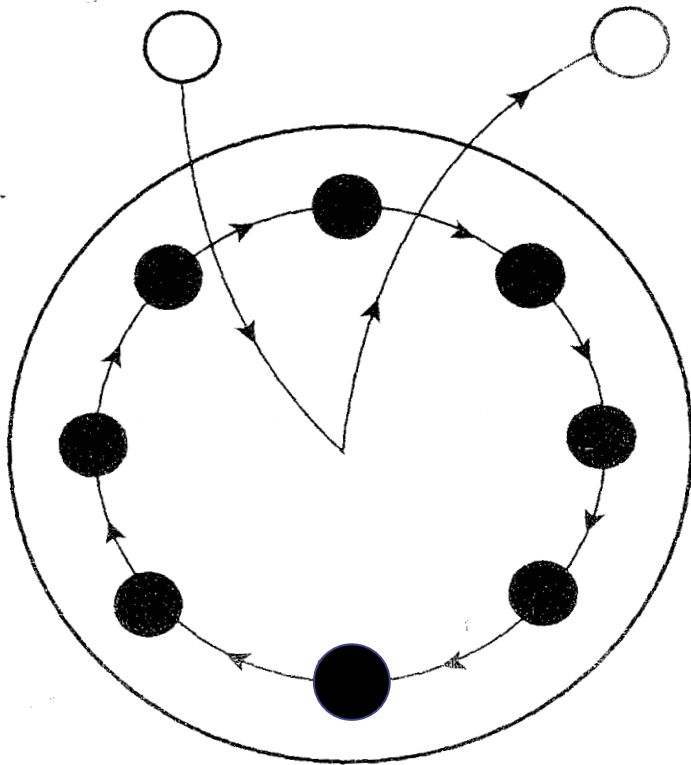


Structured individualism,  
Speed, Drive

American leadership symbolises the vitality and audacity of the land of free enterprise. Management structure is pyramidal, with seniors driving and inspiring people under them.

Americans are allowed to make individual decisions, but usually within the framework of corporate spirit, but value individual freedom more than company welfare. They are very mobile.

# Finnish Leadership Style



officer helps out in crisis

Finnish leaders, exercise control from a position just outside and above the ring of middle managers, who are allowed to make day-to-day decisions. Finnish top executives have the reputation of being decisive at crunch time and do not hesitate to stand shoulder to shoulder with staff and help out during crises.

Americans working under Finnish managers may see them as competent, but too distant and lacking charismatic leadership.



# Giving presentations to Americans

- ◆ Conclusions up front – let them know where you are heading
- ◆ Bullet points and short presentations- **relevant information**
- ◆ Show optimism (don't overdo it!) and a belief in what you are selling or presenting

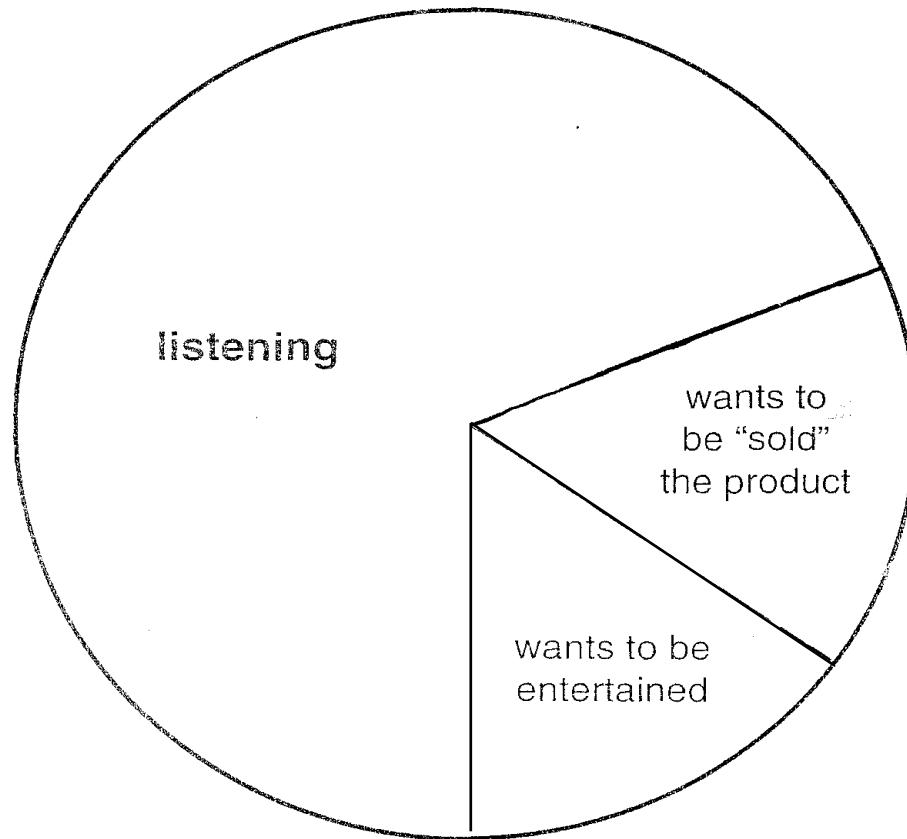


# Presenting yourself, your company and products to Americans (continued)

- ◆ Directly comment on known problems and suggest solutions
- ◆ Expect active listeners who will ask questions
  - answer honestly
- ◆ Be professional
  - Appearances count



# Americans as an audience



Americans are keen on acquiring technical details, but, **their attention wanders if speakers are boring.** They expect and appreciate a hard sell.

Frequent questions and comments are possible – be ready to answer them honestly

# American negotiations and business meetings

In a meeting or negotiation you may encounter the following:

- ◆ Meetings generally start on time
- ◆ Americans like to show their individualism
- ◆ They like to be informal as soon as they can
- ◆ They like to get down to business as soon as possible
- ◆ Humor can be a way to relax and to release tension



# How to deal with Americans

- ◆ Americans often reveal their final bargaining position early on
- ◆ They take risks, but they understand the risk/benefit tradeoff
- ◆ They consider business proposals based on the cost/benefit tradeoff
- ◆ The first objective is to make the deal. The details will be worked out later.

# How to deal with Americans

- ◆ They can be direct. Open debate and arguing out the points of disagreement is common
- ◆ They are persistent and believe there is a solution to every problem
- ◆ Time is money philosophy can result in impatience
- ◆ They may assume their way of doing business is best
- ◆ Although informal, they will "want it in writing"

# Sports and Business in America

- ◆ Background in the competitive culture
- ◆ Importance of sports in American business English:
  - I struck out (baseball)
  - He dropped the ball (football)
  - Time to hit `em with the full court press (basketball)
  - Time out! (football, basketball)
  - We scored a knockout! (boxing)
- ◆ The special importance of golf (and other recreational sports) in business



# Major differences between Finnish and American business culture:

- ◆ Masculine vs. Feminine values
- ◆ Low face-saving culture: confrontational style is more acceptable in USA than in Finland
- ◆ American “boastful” behavior is often used to build credibility
- ◆ American desire for feedback vs. the lack of feedback from the Finnish side





## **Major differences between Finnish and American business culture: Areas of potential conflict**

- ◆ Criticism often not meant to be taken personally
- ◆ American optimism vs. Finnish pragmatism
- ◆ "Small Talk" is important: silence is often viewed negatively
- ◆ Ignorance or misconceptions about each other's countries

# Other differences between American and Finnish Business Culture

## ◆ Internal meetings

- Finland: for communicating information
- USA: for discussing and working out issues

## ◆ Coffee culture and Lunch

## ◆ Workplace parties

“Sorry honey you’re not invited”



# Business Etiquette and Customs

- ◆ Business cards are less important than elsewhere
- ◆ Gift-giving is not essential-*but it can't hurt*
- ◆ Smoking is socially unacceptable in many places
- ◆ Being invited to one's home a distinct possibility

# Business Etiquette and Customs

## ◆ Conversation topics:

*American sports, family and one's job*

## ◆ Conversation topics to avoid:

*politics (risky until you know the person better), religion, certain historical topics, any conversation which is meant to be confrontational – THESE ARE TRUE FOR ANY CROSS-CULTURAL SITUATION*

# Summarization: Successfully doing business with Americans

- ◆ Don't let misconceptions about the USA replace sound judgment
- ◆ Remember the similarities of the two business cultures are much greater than the differences
- ◆ Learn to make up your mind about people more slowly than in Finland
- ◆ Learn to get along with the "selling style" of Americans



# Successfully doing business with Americans (cont.)

- ◆ Take the time to get to know your American counterpart
  - Avoid dishonest people
- ◆ Network
  - Use networking opportunities to build relationships and get to know your American counterparts better
  - A lot of business happens through networking and networking events
- ◆ There is no need to “become American.” Instead create a common understanding and a win-win situation for both sides

# In conclusion remember...

- ◆ The United States is a nation of 280 million people and consists of many regional cultures and subcultures. Understand the culture of the region you are dealing with
- ◆ American and many European cultures share more similarities than differences: take advantage of this fact



Thank you!

Are there any  
Questions

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