



## Reading between the lines



Learning the rules is the first rule for doing business in Japan:

An Israeli executive negotiating with a Japanese colleague received an especially long answer to his question. The answer was punctuated with motions and gestures. The Japanese interpreter surprised the Israeli by translating the flood of words to a simple “no”.

“If the Israeli had been familiar with Japanese business culture, he would have known that the Japanese avoid answering in the negative,” says Vered Farber, president of

Japan Knowledge. “Instead, they’ll make inferences. That’s why a professional is essential. A good interpreter translates meaning and culture, not just language.

Japan Knowledge was founded six years ago as a one stop shop for firms doing business with Japan. Farber, who earned her B.A. in Business and her M.A. in Japanese, lived in Tokyo for seven years, studied Japanese in depth and held a number of business positions, including assistant manager in a Japanese advertising agency. She utilizes everything she learned to advise Israeli companies: “Knowing the rules is vital,” she explains.

In her opinion, issues of culture play a considerable role: “In Japan, there is no second chance to make a first impression. It is very important to avoid mistakes from the start, rather than correct them as you go along. The Japanese won’t forget your mistakes. It may not sabotage a good deal, but it will hurt your long-term relationship. Japanese businesspeople set great store in reliability, commitment, politeness and respect. A Japanese businessperson will never be late, interrupt or dodge a question. Breaches of etiquette are simply insulting.”

Farber stresses the value of proper instruction, including consistent guidance through the business process. Signing the contract was just the beginning for an Israeli software company: “It was clear that if the development people didn’t understand the Japanese, they wouldn’t be able to adapt the product for Japanese end users.”

Among the subjects of instruction covered by Japan Knowledge: Japan do’s and don’ts; your first 72 hours in Tokyo; how to negotiate; and business codes and



ethics. Farber notes that these topics are also appropriate for companies already working in Japan.

The company’s broad range of services include:

- Business consulting – including identifying business partners and accompanying the process
- Understanding Japanese business culture: workshops, seminars, lectures and training
- Translations and interpreters for both languages
- Japanese language school – for businesspeople, adults and children (“they want to understand the tv cartoons”)
- Enrichment and leisure – staff events from sushi preparation to Japanese calligraphy and trivia.
- Guidance for families relocating to Japan

Farber notes, “Over 50% of relocations fail due to personal or family problems. Adjusting to a new country is especially difficult for spouses and children. My own experience has made me familiar with the problems—and enabled me to develop the tools to resolve them. Japan Knowledge offers a ‘soft landing’ family preparation program. Guidance includes ‘survival’ level Japanese language instruction, important customs and various tips. We do our best to help the spouses feel excited about the move.”