



We Aren't in Kansas Anymore



I picked up my first international client in 2021. It was a SaaS company in Bucharest, Romania with 60% of its revenue coming

from the U.S. I'll never forget my first meeting with their only AE.

After a few minutes of chatting, I asked if we could review his pipeline. He had around 20 deals, so I asked him to walk me through each deal. Quickly a theme appeared. NONE of his deals had a firm follow-up meeting set. So, I asked him, "Why don't any of these deals have a firm next

step?" He replied, "They said they'd reach out when they were ready to meet again." WTH? "How's that working for you?", I asked.

We aren't in Kansas anymore Toto.

This is when I first started to understand the kind of impact a country and culture have on how sales processes and sales cycles are handled. I was afraid the founder was either going to ask for a refund or think I was some sort of sales fairy when I told him I'd figured out in the first two hours of my consulting gig why they were struggling to close deals. As I explained what I'd uncovered, he explained that it was a cultural issue. Eastern Europeans aren't comfortable being assertive or asking for next steps. I told him that Americans expect you to ask for the sale so we're going to have to address this resistance to controlling the sales cycle.

Over the next few weeks, I worked with the sales rep to help him understand how Americans buy. We tried to find a way, that would be comfortable for him, to stay in control of the sales cycle. Not only was he worried about his English, but he was also concerned about coming off as rude or pushy. He started off with phrases such as, "I'd like to meet again in the next few days" and over time he was able to say, "I think our next step would be to get the other two people in your department together so I can demo the solution for them." As he had success with setting next steps, he became more comfortable.

Within two months of beginning to work with the Romanians (as I call them) I picked up an executive coaching client who was the VP of Sales for a SaaS EdTech company out of Tel Aviv, exclusively selling into the U.S. Now, these were my people: straight shooters and direct communicators. I was telling a friend about my newest international client, and she suggested I read the book, "Start-Up Nation". This was great advice! After I read the book about the Israeli startup scene, I had a much better understanding of why the culture was the way it was and why everyone there spoke their minds in a way that usually gets me the side eye.

Since 2021, I've had two more Romanian clients, a French-speaking Canadian client, and one in London. With each of those international clients I've not only had to learn a new culture and a few new words, but I've also had to adjust my consulting and coaching style to fit their culture and selling style. I want to share with you a few tips I've picked up along the way to make your international selling journey a little easier.

1. **Learn the culture:** If you are unfamiliar with the country and culture, you're selling into, do some research. Work to understand their history, traditions, holidays, and how they communicate verbally and non-verbally.
2. **Understand Their Buying Practices:** Different cultures will prefer to do business differently.

Make sure you don't put your deal in jeopardy because you didn't understand how your international prospect does business.

3. **Learn by observing:** If you're unsure of what the cultural norm is, be attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues and then adapt your communication and selling style to theirs to increase trust.
4. **Learn the language:** You don't need to speak their language fluently but learning a few key words and phrases will let them know that you are trying and will show that you're trying to live in their world a bit. Duolingo is a free app that can teach you some conversational words and phrases.
5. **Understand how to negotiate:** If you've gotten this far you don't want to blow your deal by not understanding how your prospect negotiates deals. Just like you would if you were selling to a prospect in your own country, ask before you get to the late stages of the process how and who would need to be involved in any negotiation if that were to happen.
6. **Seek out a mentor:** This would be a great time to find a mentor who has experience selling into the region you're selling into and ask them if they would coach you as you begin to navigate the nuances of the country you're selling into.

I got an opportunity to visit Bucharest in 2021 and my time there gained me a deeper understanding of the country and its people. I call it the tale of two cities: the old country (they are only 34 years post-communism) and the new entrepreneurial culture that's being built. Not only did I gain a better understanding of the culture, but I also made friends for life. ■

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