

**ENTENTE CORDIALE? Leadership experiences in French and Anglo Saxon organisations** – Interview with Nicolas Bouvé: Managing Director at Godiva Chocolatier Europe

***What would you say is distinctive about leading in organisations with French versus Anglo Saxon cultures?***

“Firstly you need to observe the formal hierarchy more clearly in France than in the UK and US. Position power counts for more in French organisations. Bosses expect to be treated respectfully whether they are senior managers or middle managers. (Beware of the “little chefs” at this level!) There is an educational elite, the E.N.A., which also counts for a lot in exercising power and influence. If you are not a member of this elite it helps to know people who are.

Typically French people prefer a more direct style of communication than in the UK. That classic British response “*Interesting ....*” would not play well in France! They like leaders who get to the point and say what they think.

The work environment for French leaders differs from that in the UK. Formal employee power (unions, etc.) is greater and cannot be ignored. It can also make it harder to develop the type of informal relationship which British and American managers often have with their staff. Against stereotypes I believe French people work longer hours on average than workers in the UK (though maybe not in the States). In France though they do like to have a proper lunch!

***What advice would you give to a French manager working for the first time in a British or American business?***

- Be yourself. People will not expect you to “act like the boss”
- You don’t need to have all the answers! Admit when you don’t know something: people will actually warm to you as a result.

Be prepared to spend a bit more social time with colleagues than you may be used to in France. (Accept the occasional invitation to “go down to the pub”)

**DON’T:**

- Be too direct or forceful early on in your relationships. They may see you as rude.

And how about an Anglo Saxon going to manage in France?

My advice is **DO:**

- Be gently persistent in developing the social side or relationships with colleagues. It will come in time.

**DON’T:**

- Try to go over your boss’s head. You should work through the management structure as much as you can.

Finally, to both groups making the transition between these or any two cultures remember nobody likes to be told “how we do it at home is so much better”.