





secrets of  
working across  
five continents

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# **Secrets of Working Across Five Continents: Thriving Through the Power of Cultural Diversity**

BY

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WITH

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# Why this Book Matters

There are (at least) three reasons for writing this book:

- In today’s world, more and more people travel, work and live in countries other than their own.
- In today’s world, collaboration is ever more important as no one individual, organisation, nation alone can find solutions to the challenges (and opportunities) facing humanity.
- In today’s world, innovation is more important than ever before. Diversity is a key driver of innovation yet at the same time often a challenge.

Cultural insights and awareness are key to all the above, and the foundation for enjoyable and successful working in cultures other than our own.

## ‘Our Vision of Cultural Diversity’

- Cultural Diversity is about meeting, dialoguing and sharing with people, being curious, and to go beyond to create something better and sustainable for all
- Cultural Diversity thrives under inspired, authentic and visionary leadership that empowers all
- Cultural Diversity is personal liberty that enriches one’s life and facilitates personal growth
- Cultural Diversity is the foundation for innovation, where creative tension leads to the creation of something meaningful and novel
- Cultural Diversity creates unusual relationships built on mutual trust and appreciation of that which is different
- Cultural Diversity is within ourselves as long as we are sincere, authentic, free from judgement and need for approval
- Cultural Diversity intertwines with time, both ending and never ending, timeless and precious, enchanting, requiring care and wisdom

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## **Preface**

*Wolfgang G. Sonnenburg*



When I was asked by Chris Igwe, author of one of the chapters of this book, if I would be willing to write the Foreword for this project, I was immediately ready to give my support. But then I hesitated. A ‘secret’? What does this mean? Do we not wish for an open society? A secret is something you normally keep to yourself and are not allowed to share. It could even be associated with conspiracy.

With this thought in my mind I talked with Meltem Etcheberry, the initiator of this book, who explained how the authors found the way to creating successful trusting relationships while working across five continents and wanted to share these experiences, from their hearts. Meltem answered my question with this answer: ‘Peace’.

This brought back memories of my own experiences with different cultures and war and peace. I grew up in the 1950s during the Cold War, a young boy in Berlin when the Wall was built. The very night before the wall was built I was staying with my grandparents and was due to spend the weekend with my aunt in the eastern part of Berlin. However, my granddad didn’t allow his daughter to take me with her. At the time, we didn’t understand why, but the next day, when we heard the news that the wall had been built, we realised he had foreseen that this would happen. That day in Berlin, American and Russian tanks were facing each

other at Checkpoint Charlie, and from then on, the Russians were considered to be the enemy. As I was a young boy, I simply accepted that.

Years later, in the 1980s, I travelled to Miami – my first time in the United States. To me it was the land of the ‘good guys’ and freedom. Sitting in a restaurant, I overheard someone behind me speaking in Russian. I was totally shocked, and my first thought was: ‘Oh no, the enemies are here now!’ Of course, this was just an initial reaction, but I realised that I had been programmed to think that Russia was the enemy.

Times are changing. Since then I have travelled to Russia and other eastern countries, have met a lot of wonderful people there, and count Russians among my friends.

For a more recent experience, the tables were turned. A while ago, I held a workshop for an international company in Paris when a 70-year-old lady came to me and said: ‘I want to apologise’. I was astonished and had no clue what she was talking about. She explained, ‘You were here two years ago, and I hated you’. I was shocked and asked her why she felt that way. She said, ‘It was just because you are German, and I put you in the enemy box’. I was grateful then that my work across borders had changed my views and also those of other people.

If we haven’t travelled or have met people from other cultures, we may not be open to seeing people for who they truly are. Instead, we rely on old paradigms and wrong beliefs, which are often encouraged and reinforced by the news, which are no longer interested in bringing us facts so we can form our own views. They often present a very biased ‘truth’, one that is not helping with reconciliation and bringing peace.

A while ago I was in Jerusalem and had contact with different interfaith organisations; one simply brings together people of different faith: Jews, Muslim, Christians, and Druze. Beautiful things are happening there. Where once the fasting periods for the different religions ended at various times, things have changed. At Ramadan, the Muslims said: ‘Friends, let us wait one more hour and break the fast together with our Jewish friends’. When I heard this, I had tears in my eyes. Experiencing something like this may not make global news but it can help to return faith in humanity. One can only experience things like this through travel, being present on such occasions. While modern technologies certainly also helps us to connect with people from other countries and cultures, being in the same space enables a much deeper experience.

Most of us grew up with the idea that we are separate from others. And we are educated to think that if one wins the other has to lose. We experience racism, judgement, competition, and a society with millions of misinformed and ignorant people as a result. Some of us may have heard of [Marshall B. Rosenberg \(2003\)](#) who created the concept of *Nonviolent Communication* in the early 1960s. This is a process for supporting partnership and resolving conflict within people, in relationships, and in society. It is amazing what is possible if we are truly interested in understanding, not judging, and are not driven simply by our inherited paradigms and fearful emotions.

By studying Professor Don Edward Beck's 'Spiral Dynamics' theory – an evolutionary human development model (Beck & Cowan, 2005), and Kenneth Wilber's (2000) *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*, we find a pathway to more integral work across the continents. The world will be a better place if more and more people reach the integral level of consciousness, a view where we consider our internal and external world, where we consider ourselves as individuals and the systems of which we are part. We no longer see ourselves as being separate and hence show greater consideration for the implications of our own actions on others.

Once we raise our consciousness, we will be able to create a different dialogue for business leaders. History shows that as business structures started to grow into large organisations, the only people experienced enough to run such large entities were military personnel. Much of business language borrows from the military: we have chief officers fighting for market shares and talk about a war for talent. It is about winning and profit, not about protecting or nurturing people. In this world, there are indeed winners and losers. To change that we have to change how we create our wealth and how we nurture and educate our people, we have to change the language we use. We need to focus on health and peace and make that our first priority.

I had the privilege to interview Professor Muhammad Yunus, who influenced my view of the world immensely. He is often seen as the father of microcredit. But his real success is based on the intention to give people back their dignity. He realised that a loan given to one person does work well, but when that loan is given to a group which then is responsible for each single loan, it starts to work. The result of this realisation, and auctioning it: more than seven million women who formerly suffered because of poverty are now the owners of the Grameen Bank.

Where are we now?

While we still have distribution problems, in principle, and for the first time in history, we have enough food to feed everybody, all 10 billion. Artificial Intelligence is gradually taking over all the work we humans don't really want to do. Shouldn't we be excited about the future? In his book, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Professor Yuval Noah Harari (2017) explains that for the first time in the history of mankind, we are able to approach near mastery of our environment. Yet perhaps exactly that is the problem, we should not seek mastery but a way to understand our role in the systems we are part of; nurture these systems instead of 'mastering' and destroying them. What do we need to create an extraordinarily good future for all of humanity, and the planet? We have never been there so it feels like a mystery. It truly is new territory.

If we understand that we are not separate and that we are all as one, responsible for one another and for our world, then we can create a beautiful way of living on this planet. One that we cannot even imagine yet.

*Secrets of Working Across Five Continents* is not just a new book. It is a project. It is not just written by six authors. It has become possible through the generosity

and openness of 145 people. It is a project which illustrates the beauty and enormous benefits of a world that values the 'We' over the 'Me'.

Four areas are important and covered in this book. First, we need a vision which inspires people and wise trustworthy leaders. Second, we should nurture the people, create trust, and respect their cultures. Third, it is about innovation and a new way of living together, in a 'We' world. Fourth and finally, it is about creating relationships and inspiring communication between all the humans. We do not want competition; creation is key. Innovation needs to be positively disruptive that benefits all, otherwise it is not really innovation and doesn't bring us a new quality of life.

I found the vision for this in this book.

The lead authors Meltem Etcheberry and Bettina von Stamm have this vision. And the four chapter authors cover the four important areas: Chris Igwe – Visionary and Authentic Leadership; Hande Karabatak Binns – Nurturing People and Culture; Triana Navarro de Chollet – Innovative Design and Creation; and Maria Goulina Rabany – Inspiring Communication and Relationship.

One hundred and forty-five people across the globe opened their hearts and shared their ideas, their experiences, and their world views. They have helped us to realise that which Meltem Etcheberry wants to achieve for us all: Peace and collaboration are possible.

Thanks to all these pioneers who worked together for global understanding and who worked together so that thousands or even millions of people can follow their example and benefit. This work, this project, is an inspiration to us all and helps us to believe that an extraordinary good future for all of us IS possible and that it IS on its way.

I would like to leave you with one final thought: what if we had one day a year where we celebrated such vision? Celebrated the potential of humanity and proclaimed our desire to preserve the beautiful planet we live on?

As actions speak louder than words, a start has already been made: Winspiration Day. Celebrated every year on the 7th May, it is meant as a transformation companion that supports people and organisations in shaking off their dependencies on well-established beliefs and patterns. The goal is to encourage everybody to dare to be seen, to believe in the power of working together, to share their gifts and talents, so that, together, we can create powerful change. Winspiration Day is an umbrella that invites all movements that work for a better, more sustainable world to come together, and to support all those who do not yet see the beauty, power, and potential that lies in collaboration and diversity.

If we all, nourished by the insights and the wisdom of this book, believe that 'The Best is Yet to Come', together we can make it happen.

Be inspired and pay it forward.

Wolfgang G. Sonnenburg



Luzern, Switzerland, 20 January 2020.

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# Acknowledgements

*Not all of us can do great things.  
But we can do small things with great love  
Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

During her Nobel Peace Prize speech in 1979, Mother Teresa of Calcutta explained her story as a ‘Daughter of Charity of Calcutta’: One spring evening, she saw a very weak old man on a path in a street in Calcutta, unable to do anything against the rats eating his ear. At once, she thought that every man should die with dignity ... whatever his life, whether rich or poor. And she created her first clinic for these people. Very quickly, these dispensaries multiplied, and her charity became well known throughout the world. She said that the night she met this old man and decided to open her first dispensary, if someone had told her how important her work would become (700 missions in more than 130 countries), how many people would get involved (4,500 daughters) and that thousands would benefit from it, she would have been afraid to start and not have had the courage to take the first step.

Of course, we can’t compare her experience with mine, but I often think of this extraordinary story. After more than a year with more than a hundred people who were kind enough to participate in our book, I humbly had the same feeling: when I had the idea for this book, I wouldn’t have dared to start it if I had realised where it would take me. I admit that they all gave me courage, desire, and passion! I would like to thank all contributors and friends for sharing their secrets from working and living across five continents.

*Gathering is a beginning,  
being together is progress,  
working together is success.  
Henry Ford*

Maria, Hande, Chris, Bettina, Triana: Special thanks to a special team ... for your trust, dedication, patience, and generosity.





Thank you for the lovely thoughts of my sister Özlem Lausser, for valuable insights of Saime and Eda Yapanar, as well as for unfailing support of Bikem İbrahimoğlu de Montebello, Deniz Taner Gökçe, İnci Somuncu Botsalı, and Sezim Sezer Darnault.

*If you want to build a ship,  
don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work.  
But rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.  
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

And a deep thought to my father in law, Jean-Pierre, who passed away before being able to contribute to this book. Basque and globe trotter in the soul, he transmitted us his incredibly rich experience in terms of cultural diversity, all his stories in the merchant navy (Far East, Middle East, Latin America) and when he was a shepherd in Wyoming, Colorado, and California – United States, in the 1950s. Today, the experience of this legendary family figure is rooted in our hearts.



From bottom of my heart, a great thanks to my husband, Norbert, for his benevolence and to my son, Jean-Emre, for his curiosity.



I would like to dedicate my part in the memory of my father, Dündar, for his wisdom, in the memory of my mother, Sema, for her elegance.



*We all participate in creation.  
We all are kings, poets, musicians ...  
It is only to open up like a Lotus to discover what is in us.  
Henry Miller*

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