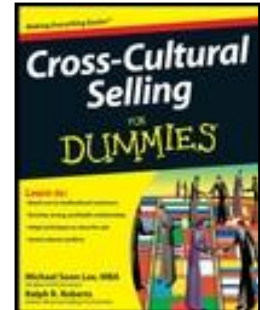


Soon Lee, Michael and Ralph R. Roberts, *Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies*

2008. www.dummies.com. ISBN: 978-0-470-37701-7. 384 pages, Kindle edition available via amazon.com.

Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at www.diversophy.com

Why pay a consultant or trainer mucho money to teach folks in the management and on the front line of retail sales how to deal with multicultural clientele when you can find it all here? One of the features of the *Dummies* series of books is that it appears to give you what you need to know and do to reach your learning and behavioral objectives in a relatively quick and painless way. Currently I am also reading *L'Histoire de France pour les nuls* to refresh my perspectives on where Sarkozy fits in the flow of events—again a few hundred pages in the same series (French version) that would easily put my college history professor out of a job in terms of holding my interest and encouraging retention.



These folks are on to something that is a wake-up call to refine how we define professionalism and conduct transfer of technology in the intercultural field. The fact, however, that so much cultural information can be presented in a digestible way is tribute to the research and professional practice that has been performed by interculturalists. It also raised the question, "After a brief snooze on our laurels, where do we go from here?" But let's move on to the book itself.

Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies opens with a double-sided tear-out cheat sheet and an extensive table of contents, which is the next best thing a paperback can do to compete with the kinder Kindle version. The layout is extremely well organized and references to what you need from other parts of the book are regularly found in the text, making a book that says, "Use me!" rather than "Sit down and read me from cover to cover." Icons in the margins signal key points to remember, useful tips and warnings about cultural minefields.

In this sense, the book is a good model for the dissemination of cross-cultural awareness, understanding and practice on the end-user level. Certainly there are those who will complain of over simplification here as in the numerous tip sheets, quizzes and self-help guides that have long been staples of airport shops and online come-ons to intercultural services. But, the abundance of information digested here is impressive, and, after all, we need to start somewhere and trust the ingenuity of motivated learners to refine what they know and can do as practice it in daily life and commerce.

Essentially *Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies* is a marketing and sales course adapted to a multicultural context. Whether you are a front line entrepreneur starting your own shop, or a manager of a large staff that needs to interface with a multicultural public, the lessons are much the same. They are: be aware of the market, study it, assess your own readiness as well as the resources you need to serve it, survey specifics about the customer groups in your target environment, adjust your product line to what they want to buy, and adapt your behavior to meet their expectations of what makes for trust and good customer relations and services.

The book stretches from the macro of creating an overall market research tool and marketing plan to the micro of building rapport with the individuals browsing your aisles. It tells how to meet, greet, relate and close the sale, offering copious notes about how to avoid the cultural spoilers, those behaviors that signal insensitivity to difference or are just downright off-putting or insulting to your culturally different customer.

Make no mistake about it, however. Given all these perspectives, *Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies* is still a book is specifically written for the US market, though I dare say it is being promoted internationally where it willy-nilly could contribute to more of the rogue globalization that we are becoming used to. Much, of course, may be useful in other cultural contexts, but not without a great deal of circumspection and adaptation. The book is specifically USian in terms of:

- **Those retail organizations which will most benefit by it.** It addresses the US retail climate in detail. This stretches from entrepreneurial start up and the neighborhood mom and pop shops to Wall-Mart and Costco. The authors admit that greater challenges face the big multi-outlet chains and their franchises, whose client diversity is likely to be broader and more difficult to predict and manage than that faced by the neighborhood grocer, but both situations are well addressed.
- **The cultural groups found in the US market.** While the general principles of the boilerplate of cross-cultural awareness and practice undergird the book and can be useful to many readers wherever, focus is on those cultural groups, which are most likely to walk into US stores, viz., African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Middle Easterners and “Anglos.” All are repeatedly discussed to in the various contexts of awareness, marketing and sales, and brief synopses found at the end of the book sum up the cultural values and behaviors relevant to them in selling. Nor do the authors avoid dealing with the stereotypes and quirks of the dominant Anglo culture. This means the book can be useful if you are a Korean corner grocer in Santa Monica or a Piggly Wiggly floor manager in Memphis.
- **The language** of the book is simple and direct with a good touch of mirth. However, there is a considerable amount of tongue-in-cheek humor, which along with the numerous slang expressions, part of everyday US banter, may puzzle both speakers of Oxford and ESL.
- **Diversity**, is recognized and discussed as it is configured in US government legislation and US business diversity policy, i.e., it reaches beyond ethnic and national origin to note and address gender, sexual orientation, generational differences.
- **Economic theory.** As you might expect in a practical handbook, neither underlying economic theory nor social values are explicitly in much detail in these pages. The book is simply about doing good business, about competition and the bottom line, assuming that one is “doing good by doing well.” In a world of satisfied customers everybody is better off—all the presumed benefits of well-oiled capitalistic thinking to the American Dream and the mission of the Yankee trader.

Returning to my opening remarks, how does this affect the intercultural professional? Beyond the challenge to go ever deeper into cultural anthropology, raising the bar, so to speak, it invites further exploration both the dynamics and interplay of intercultural systems beyond the cultural specifics involved in them. On the teaching learning level, it is a call to really efficient, hands-on pedagogy, whether delivered person-to-person, in coaching sessions or online. A book such as this can comprehensively tell you a lot of what you need to know, but it cannot tell and debrief the first-hand stories that help learners better understand the cross-cultural dynamics nor help them drill the behaviors and learn to pick up the cues they need to become good at responding appropriately in the moment.