



## Working Abroad? Don't Leave Home Without Jon Gornstein

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By Jon Gornstein, President of **Persona** GLOBAL®

Published by New York Times Bestselling Author Michael Levin

<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/working-abroad-dont-leave-home-without-jon-gornstein/>

December 19, 2018

When Jon Gornstein was at university, he majored in European History and American Studies, and then while in graduate school received a John Marshall fellowship from the American-Scandinavian Foundation to study in Denmark. As a result, he spent 10 years in Denmark, where he developed a lifelong fascination with how individuals relate based on the culture in which they live...especially through their interpersonal communication

That fascination led to the founding of Persona Global, a firm now four decades old and operating in more than 65 countries worldwide, providing training and consulting services to half of the companies on the Fortune 1000 list.

Persona Global pioneered the idea of consulting on team leadership, organizational alignment, emotional capability, and above all, interpersonal communication skills. To put it simply, the firm teaches people how to get along with people who think and act differently from themselves — people we need to work with, so we can get the results we desire at work or in our personal lives.

"I was in Denmark on my fellowship during the Vietnam War," Gornstein recalls. "About half the people in Denmark liked Americans, and the other half didn't. I learned a lot about cultural differences, and I thought a lot about how cultural divides can be bridged."

For two years, he worked freelance for the Danish Foreign Ministry, giving culturalization training to various professions before leaving on two-year assignments to some 32 countries. Denmark offered assistance such as doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, and even boat builders.

Gornstein started his business with a \$5,000 loan from his father in 1980. His initial clients were located Europe. Things quickly took off, and almost all of the success the company has enjoyed over its almost four decades of existence has taken place outside of the United

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States, most recently in Latin America and Asia. Now Persona Global is making a bigger push to share its hard won knowledge of bridging business culture. Its clients range from ambitious startups with ambitions to major corporations here in the United States.

"People call communication a 'soft skill,'" Gornstein notes. "But it's really challenging to master the soft skill of communicating! If you do, the rewards are amazing. Above all, you learn how to build trust with your customers and team members. When your relationship is based on trust Clients and team members share information and ideas with you more readily. They keep you in the loop. By contrast, when there is no trust, it is nearly impossible to build long-term quality business relationships, and your personal career can plateau or dead-end."

Gornstein's company advises business people around the world how to identify their blind spots when it comes to getting along with others—how they communicate, how they listen, and how they relate to others generally.

Persona Global also provides insights and methods to improve communication skills through a process that invites the subject to identify five people in his or her business life. Those five individuals receive questionnaires, in any of 38 languages, containing 60 questions revealing your communication style, trust building skills, interpersonal flexibility, and empathy projection (how you are perceived by others) and what you can do to be more effective in communicating with people that have a different communication style than yourself.

The individuals then attend a workshop where they learn the results of those questionnaires and are given guidance as to how to improve in any areas where improvement is indicated. They are also trained how to observe behaviors and how build trust in response to the behavior of others.

"Not everyone behaves the way we do," Gornstein says, "and this is especially clear in the international sphere. The cultural differences abound. People learn how others experience their behavior, so they can modify that behavior, if need be, and get better results. We focus on practical application of skills learned down to the point of what you actually need to talk about to build trust and be influential."

Persona Global offers an app that allows participants to in a minute or less to log in descriptions of the behavior of others and then learn how best to interpret those behaviors and how to work with those people. This "personal assistant" increases fluency in applying skills learned during the workshop for the people important to each attendees.

"Communication effectively is like any other skill," Gornstein notes. "You have to practice it. You can't just walk out of a workshop and be 100 percent effective at it. That's one of the reasons we have the course work and the app — it allows you to be refreshed at any time in dealing with people who are not like you, people who might find you difficult because you are difficult from them.

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"We tend to label as difficult anyone who has a different communication style. But when we understand how to bridge those differences by addressing the other person's interpersonal needs through communication, it's much easier to get along."

Personal Global has certified more than 1,700 facilitators around the world, most of whom are not American.

"We believe in having local trainers and local consultants," Gornstein says, "because that allows them to adapt what we are offering to the local business culture. All our programs are available not just in the local language but also culturalized to that country's way of life and business."

For example, Persona Global's programs have different names tailored to the locations where they operate. The basic program, "the Persuasive Communicator," is called "Heart To Heart Communication" in China. In Italy, the same program started out with the name called "Communicate and Win," but Gornstein says it wasn't understood. So they changed not the content but the name to "How To Reach Consensus," and the sales tripled.

Gornstein says that although 500 of the Fortune 1000 have been clients or users of Persona Global programs, there has never been a major marketing push in the United States. The company is now focusing a social media campaign on businesses here in the United States.

"Everybody says, 'I'm going to take my act on the road,'" Gornstein says. "Well, our 'act' has been on the road for 38 years. It's time we took it home and offered businesses here the guidance and insights from decades of experience that we developed in 65 countries over 38 years."

"It will be a very gratifying homecoming, and it's very exciting to share what we've learned around the world with businesses and individuals interested building profitable business relationships both inside and outside the USA."

— *Published on December 19, 2018*

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