

Book Reviews/Features

Guide for Foreign Corporations

THE COMPLETE HANDBOOK OF U.S. PERSONNEL AND LABOR RELATIONS PRACTICES FOR JAPANESE CORPORATIONS (in English and Japanese,) by Thomas J. Nevins. Published by JETRO, Tokyo, 1980. Pp. 394 (of which 169 in English). Price: ¥9,800. (Available from JETRO, tel. 582-5511.)

Reviewed by
TETSUO YOKOYAMA

This is the first practical handbook written for Japanese companies planning on entering the U.S. market. The author is the managing director of Technics in Management Transfer Inc. (TMT), a firm in Tokyo specializing in labor and human resource consulting and executive search. His book can also be most helpful to Japanese managers of foreign companies and joint ventures already doing business in Japan. As director of employee relations (Mobil Sekiyu K.K.), I would like to elaborate on the handbook's value to foreign companies and joint ventures operating in Japan.

Personnel and labor administration in foreign, particularly American, companies operating in Japan is both stimulating because we can challenge old Japanese conventional practices in the somewhat Western business environment provided here. We can experiment with blending

varieties of two or more cultures, value systems or customs to make cross-cultural business operations viable and prosperous.

Personnel and labor administration in foreign companies operating in Japan is exhausting because we face an almost endless flow of challenges from two or more cultural directions. There are constant conflicts or gaps between these value systems. Hence, frustration remains with both parties even after compromises are made.

This frustration, however, can be minimized and productivity maximized when more non-Japanese managers take a receptive attitude toward learning from Japanese methods and practices, and Japanese managers take a step forward to experiment with the blending.

Effective blending is only possible when, as a start, similarities and differences between the two (or more) systems are clearly identified in the minds of the concerned managers. It is only when the Japanese managers of foreign corporations in Japan thoroughly understand U.S. policies and practices, that they can convincingly argue for the adoption of Japanese ways with American and other foreign managers.

Regarding problems of Japanese managers in foreign capital companies or joint ven-

tures here, generally speaking, Japanese managers here tend to insist on, among other things, old conventional practices of personnel and labor management policies without thoroughly knowing and comparing the differences between Japanese and American or Western policies and practices and their backgrounds.

Some of them even take advantage of the recent contrast in economic development between the U.S. and Japan by concluding that this is because the latter's employment/labor policies are better and, therefore, these conventional methods should not be changed. This, to me, is a self-indulging, one-sided argument, and I feel positive that Japan surely has a lot to learn from the U.S. about concepts and techniques of personnel administration. Typical examples are those of Organizational Improvement, Career Development, Management Training and Quality of Work Life.

What I would like to emphasize most is that Japanese managers should first recognize these facts and factual differences and should not feel that they are being forced to adopt or to compromise with non-Japanese methods simply because they are in non-Japanese companies.

However, I cannot blame these Japanese managers because there have been so few references available to give

them precise examples and cases of real business situations. This is true even though many books have been written by Japanese and foreign experts dealing with inter-cultural problems in general.

Thanks to Thomas Nevins, and his new book, Japanese managers are now provided with many working models of typical American policies which can be readily contrasted and blended with Japanese practices. His book covers almost all problem areas such as management/labor relationships, collective bargaining, discipline, recruiting/hiring, education/training, employee benefits, transfers/promotions, vacation, etc.

It will help Japanese managers to better understand their American management or counterparts and what their primary concerns are, both at home and abroad.

This book is useful to lessen the communication gap between Japanese managers and American managers or partners. In one volume the full text appears in both Japanese and English.

Mr. Tetsuo Yokoyama, director of employee relations, Mobile Sekiyu K.K., has written several books on personnel management in Japanese. His latest work is a full Japanese translation of Personnel Administration by Paul Pigors and Charles A. Myers which he jointly translated with Prof. Shinichi Takezawa of Rikkyo University, a well-known labor and industrial relations expert.