

The human factor of life can sometimes be forgotten in the hurry of the digitally ruled system of international business. Well, how do we even manage to be successful in this climate without letting go of our social relations?

This summary explains how the aged idea of "saving face" might give us some necessary guidance. The concept explains how to develop and sustain healthy and genuine relationships no matter the cultural differences, age differences, time zones, or any other factor that separates us from each other.

These chapters, stemming from Maya Hu-Chan's long years of expertise on international management, give us applicable guidance to be able to make connections with other people either in your work life or your day-to-day life.

## Chapter 1 - "Face" is the currency of our social relations and it dictates the way we connect with each other.

Imagine this terrible situation: You are responsible for your business' cash flow operations. While you're working, a person embezzles a large amount of money. And the worst part is, you detected the crime after the fact. Do you think your co-workers will ever respect you again?

Maybe, maybe not. If your manager gives you a hard time and insults you with an email sent to the whole company, probably not. Though, if she speaks with you one-on-one and shares with everyone that she believes that you can set-up a system where you can do things more securely, you may be able to move on as nothing happened.

What was the distinction between the two scenarios? Well, in the latter your manager assisted you to save face.

The notion of "face", from the expression "saving face", is a hard thing to explain. Since in this setting, the word "face" is not used in a way to talk about your actual face. In this context, the word face comes from a rough translation of the word *miàn zi*, a Chinese word. There is no synonym for it in English. Though, it is similar to notions like reliability, honor, and respect.

So the word "face" is used here to correspond to your degree of self-respect and the respect you receive in your community as well as your social position. A beloved and respected elder, who would have lots of faces, will stand confidently and be prideful, they will most likely be approached with dignity and regard by people around them. On the other hand, someone who has a little face, a discredited politician, for example, will get the opposite treatment; they will be belittled and teased.

An essential thing to keep in mind is that the face does not have a constant state. In fact, it is similar to money. You can gain it or lose it with the decisions you make. A strong mutual connection established on compassion and dignity will boost the face for each partner. On

the contrary, if you act dishonestly or rudely, you will be regarded as having a little face by others.

Even though "saving face" might seem rather abstract, it truly is a practical method of making sense of the social environment. Think about your life. People who have succeeded in business or people who are beloved in your community probably develop face for themselves and other people. You also most likely thought about the rank of your own face either at home or at work - though you may have not utilized the exact terminology.

In the following chapter, we will examine how the face operates more deeply. And, importantly, we will learn about how to not lose it.

## Chapter 2 - To avoid losing face, to begin with, is the easiest means to save face.

It is 7 AM, you haven't gotten enough sleep. You trip and your cup of coffee falls slips from your hand, the newly made coffee spills everywhere. It empties all over the table, then onto the floor, and it splashes on your white shirt.

Such an inconvenience, right? Well, you could wipe it down from the table and the floor and wash your shirt. But, imagine that you wanted to rewind the time and make sure the mess never happened. Would you be able to put all that coffee back into your mug? Probably not. Well, even if you could, you probably shouldn't drink that.

Well, face operates just like that. Exactly like a poured out the drink, it is much easier to lose face than get it back to its original stage.

To start off, we shall first examine what are the reasons a person might lose face. Basically, every time a person is forced to experience any negative feelings like embarrassment, anxiety, etc., they lose face. Whenever you cause an error while working, whenever you unknowingly offend a friend, whenever you stumble and drop your coffee, you lose face.

It is normal and acceptable to lose a bit of face every now and then. A small mistake is not going to ruin your whole relationship if you have a healthy connection with a close friend. Though, if your friendship is a bit shaky, then a slight error might become a big issue. Well, consider how difficult it is to go back from a bad first impression.

You want to keep the face you possess as much as possible for the people in your circle, considering how important face is for making sure you have stable social interactions. You don't want to lose face and you also don't want any other person to lose it as well. Having empathy in certain situations is the most reliable method to ensure not losing face. This means that you have to be considerate of other people's perspectives and act respectfully.

The significance of having empathy is the most prevalent while having intercultural interactions. For example, while CEOs in the US may welcome a relaxed chat or have a

friendly gesture but in Japan having a casual conversation would not be as welcomed and would cause your boss and you to lose face as their business culture values authority.

Through learning about the culture and the assumptions of the people you intend to meet, you can avoid these sorts of shame. Which would enable you to save face that otherwise would be very hard to get back.

## Chapter 3 - To dignify face, you have to have a genuine concern for others.

To make up a scenario, let's say you are an expert engineer from China. You receive an invitation to join a distinguished workshop and take a plane for a long time to fly to Arizona. In the beginning, you think that this is a high honor. But when you get there, there is a big issue. Everyone is speaking English and they are not slowing down for you to understand them.

Well, English not being your mother tongue, you lag behind during the conversations even though your expertise is on this exact topic. You feel ashamed and overlooked. All of a sudden, this distinguished workshop does not seem like such an honor.

Of course, the event organizers wanted to make sure you felt comfortable and welcome but it just was not enough. While their plans might have been pure, their actions were not.

Most of the time, we tend to think about-face as a thing that is just to be saved. Since face does not come up on our minds when there are no errors to be fixed or no issues to avoid. But this is a superficial way of thinking about the dignity, honor, and status of others. It makes it seem like other people's face is unimportant, like they are just in the way for us to reach an end goal.

Since us humans are exceptionally good at knowing whether some is sincere or not, this is a big issue. Remember all those times when that bored and overworked shop clerk told you to "have a nice day"? Did those words suddenly make you happy and appreciate your day? Of course not, because you are well aware that the clerk doesn't really care whether you have a nice day or not in a personal way. They are just working.

If your efforts of handling face are just like the clerk, in a shallow manner, they will surely be useless at best and condescending at worst. What you should do is not just focus on trying to save face but dignify face as well. Have a genuine interest in acknowledging the value of people around you as an objective in itself.

To dignify face in a professional setting, one must treat employees like the real, complicated humans that they are. For example, avoid giving out jobs with a robotic carrots and sticks system. Slowly but surely, learn about the motivators of each of your employees and dole out the tasks accordingly. Who knows, maybe you will discover that for some of your employees giving them credit publicly or giving them more responsibility or more autonomy is more motivating than a monetary bonus they receive.

Having a genuine interest in the face is not simple but over time people around you will start to notice the change. The efforts you put out may even increase your face as time passes.

## Chapter 4 - To save face is not to dodge conflict.

Let's imagine that you are a manager at a big marketing company and a worker of yours has been constantly successful at accomplishing their tasks- well until recently. The number they gave for their sales forecast has been unmistakably wrong, to say the least. It looks like they are making crucial mistakes.

How will you act to save face?

To intervene and to give them other tasks would be the easiest approach. But this wouldn't actually solve the problem. Your employer would not finally manage to make forecasts in the correct way, the other workers would have more tasks to handle and this approach could make you look insecure and weak.

To be straightforward would be more helpful. If you tell the worker that they are making mistakes, this gives them an opportunity to fix it and improve themselves, and it preserves their honor.

There are endless ways of approaching an issue in the work environment. On one end of the spectrum is to not even mention it at all. Just forget about it and sweep it under the carpet. On the other end of the spectrum is the straightforward and firm confrontation. With this strategy, you call out and condemn the errors of someone in a ruthlessly honest way.

And of course, both of these spectrum ends are terrible ways of saving face. On one hand, the soft end does not allow the people to have the opportunity for demonstrating their worth. On the other hand, the aggressive end is sure to offend people and belittle them. The best way is to act somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, where your contribution is both collaborative and helpful.

The thing is, accepting conflict is an essential component of saving face, of course only if every person is treated respectfully. Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, has also supported this approach. While he was managing the company, Apple had loud and exciting meetings where everyone would fiercely have arguments on the designs of the products and the tactics the company was applying. Since there were detailed feedback and input on the company and its products, the outcome would often be a more quality one.

Additionally, these events made the employees feel appreciated and important. While their ideas were torn apart and denied, they at the very least had the opportunity to speak their minds. It is clear to see that making an environment open for discussion, disagreement and even literal conflict is not contrarian to saving face, it is actually an essential component of it.

## Chapter 5 - Dignify face by making your work environment a psychologically safe one.

How do you achieve success as a team in the business? This is the million-dollar question, and every business wants to figure out the enigma. Fortunately, just like with so many other inquiries, Google can aid us to look for some explanations.

Google gave the task of figuring out how successful teams achieved their success to its People Operations Department. To get to the answer, the department asked around and surveyed over 200 employees from around the world.

The answer they found was shocking. It was understood that a team's total years of practice, the resources they have or their composition were not really of importance. It was actually the ambiance and the character within the team that provided them success.

Teams that had positive and approachable atmospheres almost always bested other teams that had negative and unfriendly environments.

Well, what does psychologically safe even mean? The term is coined by Amy Edmonson, a professor from Harvard. She explains that it is a form of safety that is a comforting feeling people feel when they think that they can freely speak their minds without being shamed or judged.

Every worker feels free to give feedback, participate, and share information without facing any consequences. Basically, this is a workplace where people do not need to focus on losing face and wasting their energy thinking about it. With this type of environment, people's energy can be put into something productive like creating new ideas or overcoming major obstacles.

To create a psychologically safe work environment, there is a huge need for collaboration. Through the employees acting in a way that is empathetic and encouraging to each other, the proper tone can be set in the workplace. Make sure to establish useful habits, for example, every now and then ask everyone how they are feeling, give a platform during meetings to those who are more quiet members of the team, and inspire the people around you to try to not have negative actions like making too many sarcastic remarks.

The animation studio Pixar is a big successful company that has been applying the psychological safety model. While having think tanks, the writers of the company use a rule called "plussing". If a person puts out a fresh idea, no one refuses it. Alternately, they add on to it by accepting and using the expression "Yes, and..." Through this constructive, nonjudgemental approach, everyone gets inspiration to think crazier, more original ideas.

In this following chapter, we will talk about some of the more solid tactics for creating a work environment where the face is dignified and saved.

## Chapter 6 - The greatest connections are made from scratch.

Imagine your ideal house. How does it look? Does it have a specific number of rooms? Does it have a specific style? Or maybe it has a different characteristic like a greenhouse on top of its roof. All of us imagine a different house.

But regardless of what came to your mind, one thing is true for everyone: it would be impossible to find your exact ideal house that was already built, waiting for you to come and buy it from the realtors. To make this unique dream true, you will have to pay an architect and construct it yourself.

Company relationships work the exact way. Having a one-size-fits-all method will for sure make at least a few people unsatisfied. You get a much more rewarding relationship if you build it on each person's needs.

In each business connection, you make, there are different requirements and goals. Thus, the tone and the attitude of every connection should mirror those individual features. Creating such a personalized relationship doesn't have to be a hard task. You just need to BUILD it.

BUILD is a useful acronym for this instance. Every letter of the word is for an essential component to reflect on while creating the basis of a relationship. Let's examine each letter.

The B stands for benevolence and liability. This marks the reciprocation that is inside every company hierarchy. For example, a worker should be held responsible to their boss by accomplishing the tasks given to them. But on the other hand, the boss should be benevolent to the employee by giving support and guiding them. It is essential to keep a good balance of these obligations each party has in each partnership.

The next letter, U, stands for understanding. It is more than necessary to comprehend the partners involved receive the relationship. This is applicable to every stage. A manager should know how every worker perceives their jobs, and similarly, every worker should know how their customers see the services they provide.

The letter I stands for interaction. There is a type of interaction that is most suitable for every other relationship. There are ones where irregular emails are acceptable and there are also ones that thrive with face-to-face talks and informal communication.

L stands for learning. There are no static partnerships. It is essential to constantly be susceptible to new knowledge. For instance, if a relationship requires change, you should be willing to know more about those new requests.

And last but not least, D is for delivery. This final component is about mixing in all of the other four. When you have tested out what is most suitable for you, it is on you to transfer that special mix of qualities to people around you. Delivering on the commitment of a healthy and personalized partnership is the most essential part of BUILD.

## Chapter 7 - Save face by increasing your cultural dexterity.

If you ride your car on your commute to work, you presumably remember the road completely. Well, you have taken the same car to work passing through the same streets and roads every day, seeing the same traffic regulations. In fact, you can even feel like you could drive on autopilot.

Imagine if you were riding a different car to a new place in a whole other country? Not so simple. The mechanics of the car would be odd, the regulations would be unknown and there is a possibility that you might now even be driving on the side of the road you've driven your whole life. Trying to ride autopilot on this route would be a terrible mistake.

Similarly, working interculturally may be just as troubling. If you did the things you always did, you would have awkward disasters in your hands.

In each culture, there are different standards, practices, and laws. In the context of international business, this implies that you can not apply the same exact type of business in different places and expect the same successful outcome. Even McDonalds, a huge company, makes adjustments accordingly in various parts of the world. A Big Mac may be a favorite in the US but the people in India are mostly vegetarian, so a vegetarian menu would be the choice for most.

Though not all cultural differences are so visible. The biggest part of cultural variety is down beneath the surface level just like an iceberg. You have to pay double the attention to understand these complex characteristics. For instance, if a person comes to you with an unachievable plan in the US, you can just say "That wouldn't really be possible". Well, if you did the exact thing in Japan, your straightforward refusal of the plan would be considered rude and would cost you to lose face. A co-worker in Tokyo would probably say "I'm not so sure" and assume the other person would take the hint.

To avoid losing face, practice cultural dexterity, learn to gracefully navigate in different cultural contexts. A method for this is to use the AAA model. Each A is another step to reach a more agile order.

To start with, be aware of cultural diversity and be ready for it when they come up in a situation. Second, Acquire information on various cultures. Take your time to read on the local traditions and manners if you have a business trip coming up. Be inquisitive and ask questions. And lastly, Adapt new attitudes if needed. Try to combine various approaches, even if you fail, your effort will be welcomed.

Memorize the three A's: Aware, Acquire, and Adapt.

## Chapter 8 - Sexism in the work environment can put women in a position where they particularly value saving face.

Dr. Darleen Solomon saw a harsh competition from the other internal candidates when she applied to become the VP of Agilent, a technology company. Yes, she had all the expertise and the background, but so did all the other candidates. Furthermore, all the others were men.

Yet, in the end, Solomon earned the distinguished promotion. But now she had new hurdles to jump over: managing a team where she is the only woman working there that might not like working under a woman. Well, she began to establish a bond of trust between them.

Solomon met with each and every co-worker personally. She talked with them and listened to their ideas and anxieties and requested their assistance in this new shift they would all be experiencing. Everyone was fascinated by her abilities and her sincerity. Her extra efforts worked out and in a year, Solomon became one of the most valued managers of Agilent.

In the past years, women have gained great achievements in the business world. Nowadays the number of women that work in high-profile roles, whether it is being the CEO of a company or the prime minister of a state, is getting higher and higher. But notwithstanding these amazing achievements, women unfortunately still come across cultural obstacles whether it is in the form of stereotypes, oblivious prejudices, and worse yet obvious sexism.

The business realm becomes specifically complicated to navigate through for women because of this unjust extra layer of social pressure. Think about the story of Susan who was a high-ranking worker in a big tech brand. She came to realize that her ideas were frequently brushed-off during meetings. Still, when a man put out the same exact idea, he was praised and credited. This is what is called "micro-inequality", it is an unjust dynamic.

Talking about these kinds of inequality is hard. Even if her co-workers were actually sexist, calling them that in the public would cause them to lose face. There might be a need for having a more proactive approach when trying to follow a more intricate way. For example, Susan could keep pushing her own work and ideas from the start. While this may be a bit awkward at first, boasting yourself a little bit can be helpful.

A better idea could be a collaboration between her and the other female co-workers in the workplace. Each of them could take the extra step of praising and crediting each other's works and ideas. This is called "amplifying", a form of solidarity among marginalized people to get their voices heard more frequently.

It is essential for women to rise up and get the credit and dignity they earned either way. Letting uninformed men knowingly or unknowingly push prejudicial gender dynamics damages every person in the workplace. Everyone loses face if we let negative stereotypes roam freely.

## Chapter 9 - Providing adequate feedback means saving everyone's face.

Picture this, one of your best salespeople, Joel, has just made an enormous deal. But while in the process, he made some commitments to the client that might be hard to implement. You give him a small note, criticizing him on this precarious act. Well, now you have a big issue on your hands, Joel wants to quit.

What was the problem? Well, Joel is from the Philippines. Being reprimanded for a dangerous error is a huge issue in his culture. In his culture, people take to this in a personal way, he believed that you gave a note on his entire character not just on his work mistake. It is almost impossible to return from this big loss of face.

Well, you can apologize and talk to him personally to make sure he doesn't leave. Still, next time, you should prevent such a thing by having a more nuanced method of handling the problem.

Leading is more than just giving people tasks to do. A perfect leader should aid the team to constantly grow and improve by evaluating their performance. Though giving people feedback can be more harmful than beneficial if it is done the wrong way. Diana Rowland, who is a cultural expert, claims that rude criticism may be received as very intimidating. Small negative comments have the power to arouse our mind's primal fight-or-flight response.

A way to make the whole process not as individually uncomfortable is to be well-rounded and anonymous by using the method called 360-degree-feedback. In this method, you collect performance reports from every colleague, the people who work below you, the people who work on the same level as you, and the people who work above you. Collect all the data into a comprehensive and anonymous report.

When you display what you've found, make sure the situation is as comfortable and stress-free as possible. Make sure you have a personal space and plenty of time. While delivering the reports in a nice and direct way, make sure you point out the good and the bad news. Do not try to make the bad stuff look better, yet you still have to try to not be rude and too straightforward. The objective is to be genuine and create space for your coworker to reply.

A different strategy is to concentrate on "feedforward" rather than focusing on feedback. Which is to say that, rather than thinking about past faults and errors, you should focus the conversation on how things can be improved in the future. This would make sure the discussion is way more optimistic. Since a feedback's job is to encourage employers to strive for working at their full capability.

## Saving Face: How to Preserve Dignity and Build Trust by Maya Hu-Chan Book Review

The notion of "face", a mix of dignity, honor, and status, practically outlines the mechanism of business relationships. It is almost like the currency we have for our social connections,

we gain it by accomplishing our duties, and by being compassionate, and we can lose it if we embarrass ourselves or fail at something. All participants will eagerly try to make sure they themselves and the people around them don't lose face in a healthy and strong business relationship.

Speak genuinely during intercultural communications.

When used appropriately, sarcasm and irony can be practical in conversations. Though the two of them depend on a very indirect understanding of language. Playing down the sarcasm and picking the words you will use in a direct fashion will help you prevent embarrassing mistakes while working in an international environment with people who use English as a second or third language.

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