

Getting to the Heart of Global Leadership

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Carole Hammett was looking forward to her first overseas assignment. Her consumer products company had just sent her to Singapore, where she managed a multicultural team with members from throughout Asia. Her new boss, Mansour, seemed to embody the profile of a successful global leader. Carole felt fortunate to be able to add global experience to her résumé and to work for him.

The first day on the job, Carole introduced herself to her team; her intention was to establish her credentials and share her vision. She cited examples of her solid track record in the company, such as award-winning sales numbers and successful product launches. She emphasized her in-depth knowledge of the global markets, one of the reasons she was offered this assignment. She chose to not mention much about her private life. The most urgent task was motivating her team to be more innovative and less risk-averse, objectives imposed by the home office.

After her introduction, she asked for comments or questions – and was met with unnerving silence. Finally, one member spoke words of welcome, followed by similar greetings from others. She noted that some of them struggled with English. “That has to change,” she thought to herself; “I’ll arrange for language training.”

Fast forward six weeks later: Carole was frustrated. The team complied with everything she delegated, but their energy was flagging and their performance was going in the wrong direction. She observed less risk-taking and creativity than before. She was disappointed that some of her team seemed to waste time discussing mundane events over the ubiquitous cups of tea. She was impatient with how they seemed to avoid straightforward answers, often agreed with her viewpoints, and rarely challenged ideas, systems, or processes – as good team members were expected to do back in the United States.

One morning, as Mansour was leading a meeting, Carole noticed his extraordinary patience with the team. He encouraged the poorest speakers to contribute, while exuding respect. He never once singled out a team member. He would pose a question or ask for updates, then remain silent until someone spoke. He also allowed them to drone on about their various relationships outside and within the organization. Most of these reports seemed irrelevant to their work, Carole thought. One might assume that Mansour had too much time on his hands – and yet he was highly effective and well respected. How did he do it?

Soon after, Mansour invited Carole for a drink after work. She was anticipating a discussion about her team and their downward-sliding performance, but the conversation went in another direction. He asked how she was adapting to life in Singapore. Was her apartment adequate? Had she made some friends? Had she planned any leisure trips?

With his calm demeanor and characteristic special attention to her every word, Carole felt comfortable sharing her disappointments with him. He then asked, “Would you say that you are one of those rare leaders who has a global mindset?”

Carole stammered “yes,” backing her claim by citing her track record: she knew global markets and trends, and had mastered budgets in global operations. She even knew the history of her Singapore team, including their backgrounds and performance numbers. Yes, she answered, hers was a global mindset.

Mansour agreed only partially. He gently noted that a global mindset was more complex and expansive than what she had described. As he explained it, one’s mindset is one’s predisposed ways of thinking and acting. The characteristics of a *global* mindset include curiosity, a capacity for both active listening and quiet reflection, knowledge of other cultures, and analysis supported by “nonjudgmentalness.”

He then dug a bit deeper, asking, “What have you done to establish trust with your team?” She reported that she had set forth her credentials, and the team seemed to be impressed. “How did you know they were impressed?” he queried. He explained the Asian concept of “*face*,” which can mask judgements in order to avoid embarrassing the other party or oneself. Carole started to reflect on her introduction and the silence that first day on the job.

His next question left her perplexed, “Do you think you possess a global *heartset*?”

With a wry smile, Mansour elaborated. “Many people talk about global mindset as necessary for international success, but that’s only half of the equation. Effective global leaders use more than their minds. A global ‘heartset’ allows them to be aware of their own and others’ emotions, enabling them to make meaningful connections across differences. When team members experience their leader’s ‘heartset,’ they feel understood and valued. Feeling trusted, they bestow trust in return. This is the kind of safe, supportive climate that encourages people to take risks.”

When Carole sought more insight into the meaning of global heartset, Mansour explained that heartset is one’s experience of feelings and emotions, the consistent emotional landscape of one’s life. The characteristics of a *global* heartset include warm openness to others, humility, desire to connect across differences, respect, and compassion.

Reflective but eager, Carole responded that she would begin by embellishing her global mindset. Mansour suggested that it would be better to begin with global heartset. “**Connect and build trust first**, he said; “then the global managing part will unfold more easily.”

Carole was impressed with Mansour's lived examples of heartset. She asked whether he would help her set a few goals to strive towards. Of course! Together they came up with three:

- Carole will focus her attention and curiosity on *her team*, and she'll stop worrying about her own performance. She will get to know team members personally, not just professionally.
- She will work on adopting an attitude of service, support, and caring: "How are they doing? What do they need to succeed? How can I show them my respect and encouragement?"
- She will learn to "read" her team's emotions by listening with patience and sensitivity, observing the nuances of their behavior. She'll endeavor to become more responsive to their feelings.

