**JAN 29, 2016 @ 02:00 AM 30,660**[**The Little Black Book of Billionaire Secrets**](http://bit.ly/2fTiz7H)

How Studying Abroad Makes You a Better Leader



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*I cover leadership - people, politics & policy - from a European view.* Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

Once upon a time, doing [business](http://www.forbes.com/business/) abroad was unique: Berlitz and others published books on business etiquette for those venturing across the ocean, language books enabling you to order in a restaurant or to get you through a social encounter. And once upon a time, that was enough.



*Students in CIEE's study abroad program have cultural experiences too.*

Today, thanks to technology and the internet, the world is global. Business is global. Nearly three-fourths of all S&P 500 companies today report some kind of [international](http://www.forbes.com/international/) revenue. International consulting firm Egon Zehnder in its 2014 Global Board Index report shows that only 28% of S&P 500 companies generate all of their revenue in the U.S. Seventy-two percent of all S&P companies report some kind of international revenue, and international revenue as a share of total revenue is 37% – an increase of 5.5% since 2008.

But American leaders are not global. The Egon Zehnder report shows just 7.2% of companies had foreign directors (up from 6.6% in 2008), and 14.1% had directors with foreign work experience (up from 8% in 2008). The opportunities for lost business are ubiquitous - one of the biggest being the attempted take-over some 25 years ago of Honeywell by then GE CEO Jack Welch, which was finally thwarted at the EU level. Welch failed to “charm” European bureaucrats. GE immediately dispatched one of its most senior French executives to Brussels to set up an EU-oriented office.

One way to conquer this shortfall is to address it early, by studying and living abroad. Yes, I'm talking about sending your kids overseas.

**Becoming Bi-Cultural**

"Studying and living abroad is a must,” says Alain Benichou, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in France and vice president of Strategy & Solutions at IBM in Paris. “Not just to acquire language skill, but in order to become truly bi-cultural. In a global economy even if the business is done with less boundaries the culture remains local.”

This is more than just knowing how to shake hands or which fork to use.

It is an adventure in self-discovery in which many American students do not participate. Sometimes it’s because of sports commitments – football, for example, requires students to stay on campus. Or it’s social reasons, not wanting to leave friends behind, or school programs such a pre-med that are not conducive to leaving the country. But often, the reasons for not studying abroad are more simple. “Just 10% of students study abroad, and many don’t even have passports,” points out Maritheresa Frain, excutive vice president of Study Abroad Programs at [Council on International Educational Exchange](http://www.ciee.org/), a Portland, Maine-headquartered non-profit, non-governmental tuition-supported organization created following World War II to promote understanding among countries through student [travel](http://www.forbes.com/travel/) abroad. Originally called “Council for Student Travel,” CIEE offers hundreds of study abroad programs through a network of some 350 accredited educational institutions to U.S. students age 16 and older.

 “Many school degree programs do not offer an international component in the curriculum, and international study is not encouraged in general. The benefits that international study can bring to one’s career are not fully understood,” she continues. Frain herself has studied abroad in Salamanca, Spain, and worked abroad for 24 years in Lisbon, Portugal; Athens, Greece; Madrid, Spain; Moscow, Russia; Zug, Switzerland; and Seville, Spain, where she ran CIEE's Study Center for 13 years.

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**Comments**

**Denise DuBarry** Another great article Shellie. I led the foreign student program at my daughter’s high school and worked closely with CIEE. We hosted high school kids for 6 years and I think that’s one of the reasons Whitney was so interested in studying abroad as a university freshman. She can’t wait to live abroad again.

**Shellie Karabell**: Thanks, Denise. Whitney is a great example of how inspiring an international education can be.

**Colton Oliphant** It is worth noting that the idea that studying abroad is inherently expensive is false. It is a common misconception—there are many study abroad programs where cost, or better yet value, take on primary importance in program planning. I know of sites where total cost of attendance is as little as $10,000 for a semester; which is comparable to the total cost of attendance at an affordable in-state public university in the U.S. It is more a matter of where (and with whom) you study rather than any sort of inherent expense.

**Shellie Karabell** Indeed, there are a number of affordable programs out there, apparently.

**Api Leiann** Great article! It’s also important to note that there are many program providers that can assist with cost-effective options to go abroad! Weigh your options and choose a program that fits your needs academically, financially, culturally and support-wise.

**Mike Tomasello** While I agree with everything you wrote, until American CEOs and Executive functional leaders make studying abroad, an international internship, or international experience a strong preference or requirement in their recruiting strategies both on campus as well as after college, this won’t be truly valued. Having international executives especially those outside the US doesn’t do much to convince Americans of its merits unfortunately.

**Shellie Karabell** Yes, there is a strong disconnect between the need for international experience in American companies and the actual fulfillment of that need. Earnings reports show how important foreign business is, but recruiting doesn’t seem to follow…yet.

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