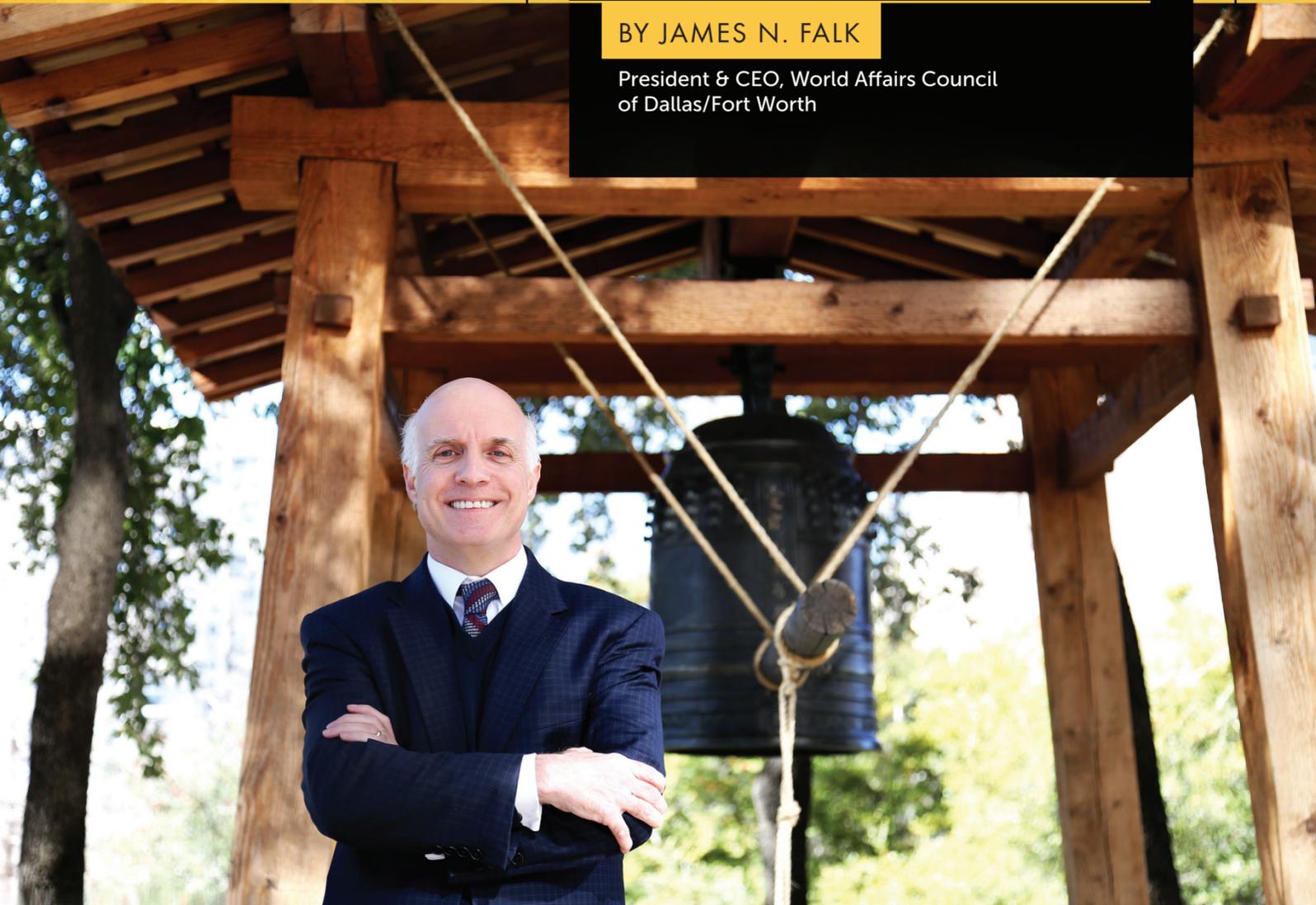


MAXIMIZING A GLOBAL CONNECTION

BY JAMES N. FALK

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Location courtesy of the Crow Collection of Asian Art.

The world's longest commercial air route is a 15 ½-hour, non-stop flight between Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) International Airport and Sydney, Australia.

Yet, this Qantas jetliner, like hundreds of international flights in and out of DFW Airport, routinely travels at or near capacity. Why? Because planes are the 21st Century company car, used relentlessly to scout new opportunities and nurture existing relationships.

Relatively inexpensive air travel, the instantaneous Internet and increasingly lucrative e-commerce have combined to intensify global competition, thus forcing businesses to reach beyond traditional "local thinking" to avoid becoming extinct.

Awareness of current global events, once a casual office luxury, has evolved into a daily necessity for the successful business leader. Can you monitor your supply line? Will political unrest threaten a planned factory?

We are now more dependent than ever on worldwide sources for split-second information used for rapid reactions to both crises and opportunities. This is especially true in internationally ambitious Texas where, if we were a sovereign nation, our economy would be the 14th largest in the world. Despite this strength, our economic well-being is very much shaped and buffeted by world events beyond our control.

In the busy swirl of daily challenges, business leaders benefit from personal knowledge of people and culture. We learn from others; others learn from us.

I was fortunate my father's international career gave me the privilege of living and studying in different countries, teaching me from an early age the IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING OTHER NATIONS AND THEIR PEOPLE. By appreciating and learning about our differences, we respect the individual, and paradoxically, our similarities become more apparent.

Here are a few pointers to help maximize your global connection.

KEEP LEARNING.

It wasn't long ago when we could confidently feel informed by reading only a weekly publication, such as *Time*, and our hometown daily paper, but that is not the case in today's 24-hour world of constant online updates.



PURSUE INFORMATION.

Without question, *The Economist* is at the top of my reading list. Its analysis of political events focuses on business impact. Weekly reports and briefings provide otherwise hard to find, in-depth information. The *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and *The Dallas Morning News* are steady sources of key information. *Foreign Policy* and *Foreign Affairs* offer daily email digests on specific regions and issues. For risk analysis, global "alerts" and timely information, Stratfor, the Austin-based geopolitical intelligence firm, is hard to beat. And I now subscribe to *Jeune Afrique*, a Paris news magazine that monitors Africa's powerful economic potential. (Plus, reading *Jeune Afrique* makes me practice my French.) Which leads me to say, tackle a foreign language. Community colleges and Rosetta Stone offer good options but, of course, nothing beats total immersion!

As President John F. Kennedy said, "LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING ARE INDISPENSABLE TO EACH OTHER."

SCHEDULE TIME FOR CULTURAL ENRICHMENT.

One of my first bosses, a hard-charging, Type A banker, always made sure our business trips included time to visit a museum, explore a neighborhood or have a drink with a local. I learned business partners and prospects appreciate the fact that we took valuable time to learn about their cities and history. Personal communication establishes trust and comfort as cultures intersect. Nothing opens the mind more than exploring a culture other than your own.

A.J. Armstrong, the founder of Baylor's Armstrong Browning Library, said it best, "In its educative effects, travel is the greatest of all teachers. It brings one face to face with realities far more striking than the printed pages of a book. It pictures indelibly upon the retina of the soul those things about which one has dreamed, longed for and agonized to see and understand."



CREATE AN INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS PROGRAM.

Whether you are a large international company or a small enterprise, engage speakers to discuss global issues and opportunities with your employees. (The World Affairs Council can help you identify such speakers.) Your employees want to learn about things that both challenge and benefit the company. Because innovation is not the exclusive product of established employees,

open the sessions beyond senior staff and management. Let the ambition of others work on your behalf.

LISTEN TO OTHERS.

Often we approach certain issues with some prejudice shaped by our environment and education. By making the effort to listen to other viewpoints, we may find we are able to empathize better, minimize conflict and reach a happy business and personal understanding.



JOIN YOUR WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OR SIMILAR ORGANIZATION.

The World Affairs Council offers valuable opportunities to network with people engaged in international business and also creates a forum for discussion and learning. Local and regional chambers of commerce often have international committees that can provide key information and networking opportunities.

UTILIZE THE CONSULAR CORPS.

Utilize a nearby consular corps. The Texas Consular Corps is the nation's third largest group of foreign diplomatic representatives. Among their responsibilities is the task of business development. Because they are "local," members of the Corps are understanding of your needs and better able to quickly provide information and assistance. (Washington embassies concentrate on the bilateral relationship with the United States; the more accessible Consular Corps enjoys the in-state, person-to-person connection.) As honorary consul for Morocco in Texas, I have had several opportunities to connect Texas and Moroccan companies and organizations. The mission is mutually beneficial communication. Leadership thrives when it finds new avenues to succeed.

OPEN YOUR HOME TO INTERNATIONAL VISITORS.

This may seem an elementary suggestion, but I am surprised at how rarely it happens in businesses operating with an international aspect. The World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth administers the International Visitor Leader Program for the U.S. State Department. Foreign leaders in business and politics come to the U.S. for short-term programs. We always make certain the visitors have the opportunity to be a guest in an American home. Exposing others to our culture is an important tool in fostering global relations.

A relationship established in your own home can also pay rich dividends beyond your business world—prime among them is lasting friendship.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERSHIP

Every element of today's successful business is the result of insightful, innovative and perceptive leadership. The responsibilities of leadership are not limited to managing today's office and today's challenges. The responsibilities of leadership belong to the future these leaders are building for their businesses, employees and customers.

bbr.baylor.edu/maximizing-global-connection