

Importance of Language Skills in Business

.... And daily life...

Why is it best to know more than one language?



Introduction:

Who am I, and why am I speaking to you?

- My name is Nils Koren and I am the General Manager and Operations Director for Hydra Offshore UK Ltd, a Scottish Company with activities in UK, Norway, Ghana, Nigeria and India
- I am Norwegian National, and have lived and worked outside Norway for nearly 20 years, very much because I can speak and understand other languages than my own.
- I have worked in countries such as Norway, USA and the UK for different companies, and done business round the world.
- I can understand or speak: Norwegian, English, Swedish, Danish.. “and a little French and German”



A few questions:

- Have any of you have ever lived abroad?
- How many of you have been to another country where English would not be the main language?
- How many of you know of or can speak a foreign language?
- If you have been in a foreign country, have you always been understood?



How has knowing more languages helped me?

- My own language Norwegian, is not a so called “world language”, so if I wanted to travel and also work abroad, I had to learn at least one more language.
- By being able to speak and understand more than one language, I have been able to work and travel round the world, and making my self understood in the places I have been to.



Examples of work where language skills have been important and useful

- Worked in Norway for a Norwegian oil company, but had international colleagues who I needed to speak to on a regular basis.
- Worked for a Norwegian technology company in the US, and had to speak both Norwegian and English, and write reports in both languages.
- Being able to understand more than one language and sometimes also not letting people know you understand and speak their language, can be very useful. I will give you an example...



Other situations where language skills can be useful:

- More and more companies have international activities, and send their people to live and work in other countries, and very often the families move as well.
- People are usually very proud of their language and country, and like to be able to communicate in their own language, such as French in many African countries, Spanish and Portuguese in South and Central America, and Chinese in parts of Asia.
- Reading and understanding contracts and documents.



A big international company, with activities in the UK and many other countries, some years ago offered a language course to all interested staff, who did not know the language of the country the company came from.

Some staff took up the offer, and some did not. One was John, who thought he was OK because he spoke English, as «everybody speaks English» he told his friends.

A few years later, the company, which had English as their official «company language», offered their UK staff the chance to work in the other country for a while, but said that the applicants needed to be able to understand and speak the local language, so they could work in teams with other colleagues.

John very much wanted to work abroad, but even if he spoke English as his main language, and English was used in the company, he lost out on the opportunity, since he had not taken the language course when he could.

So my conclusion and advise to you all would be: **DO NOT BECOME ANOTHER JOHN, LEARN ANOTHER LANGAUGE WHEN YOU GET THE CHANCE.**



Any questions?

Noen spørsmål?

Einige fragen?

Enkele vragen?

Quelques questions?

Algunas preguntas?



Even if you only speak or understand a little, any effort to communicate in a foreign language will always be appreciated.

