

JAPANESE LEADERS STEP THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS EXPERIENCE

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In January, a team from the Center for Creative Leadership traveled to Japan to deliver the very first *Looking Glass Experience* to a bilingual group of Japanese leaders. The Japanese leaders represented the oil, pharmaceutical, banking, government, electronics and tobacco industries.

The *Looking Glass Experience* is a Center program that provides managers with a realistic but safe business environment to learn how they lead and influence within the context of an organization. Participants encounter difficult decisions under pressure to discover how their leadership style impacts their organization, those they work with, and their own success.

“To say we were a little cautious about taking the program to another country would be a fair assessment,” said Kim Kanaga, group director for CCL’s Greensboro campus. “*Looking Glass* has a lot of materials. We were concerned about the translations from English to Japanese. The cultural inferences in the simulation are very much Western-culture oriented.”

The group realized their deepest concerns were unfounded.

“What we learned is the resiliency of the *Looking Glass* program,” said Al Calarco, CCL faculty member. “We also learned that the program could fully translate to another country.”

Cindy McLaughlin, CCL faculty member, agrees:

“A major component of the program is giving and receiving feedback in a small group setting. Initially we felt some concern about how this method would fit with Japanese culture but were pleased at the effort and depth participants made to prepare and provide meaningful feedback. Some participants expressed that it was

unusual for them to provide such direct feedback but they found the process to be rewarding and extremely valuable. Many had never received such direct and honest feedback.”

The program however was not without some challenges.

“Among the challenges we faced was how individuals behave in group environments,” observed McLaughlin. “In the United States trainers have no difficulties getting participants to volunteer stories, thoughts or reactions as part of a group debrief. In Japan we had to be more patient. Participants expressed that it was unusual for them to volunteer freely in such a setting. With time, this became a more comfortable environment for all.”

By the end of the program, the CCL team and participants walked away with some valuable lessons.

“The Japanese leaders told us they were very appreciative of the feedback offered through the program,” said Kanaga.

For McLaughlin the experience reinforced that people from different countries have more similarities than differences. “We all want to be effective in whatever work we do. We all struggle to have a reasonable balance between work and home. People want to enjoy life. While it is important to honor the cultural differences, finding the common ground you share will make a meaningful connection.”

The Japan Management Center, Inc., an executive leadership development provider and one of the Center’s 18 global Network Associates, hosted the *Looking Glass Experience* program in Japan. The *Looking Glass Experience* was delivered in Japan as a first step toward licensing the program for continued delivery by the Japan Management Center in Japanese. ▲



Masazumi Eshita, pictured with CCL faculty Betty Williams, Al Calarco, Cindy McLaughlin and Kim Kanaga, takes time out from the classroom to tour the ancient city of Kamakura. Eshita is chief HRM consultant with the Japan Management Center.