

## **How to embrace Korean work ethics?**

There have been questions going through my mind about whether Indonesians can catch up to the growth of Korea? So far, if they want to do so, through my observation, Indonesians should be able to eliminate the ponderous mountain on their shoulders. What I mean by this metaphor is that Indonesians should comprehend their heedlessness as late comers in the competition against leading international countries such as Korea in terms of technology and work ethic.

In Indonesia, people tend to accept when things go against their expectations. They were born to be satisfied with what they have because they believe that things might not be destined to be. If they cannot finish their assignment on time, for example, they would say that it's beyond their control and that nothing can change the situation. This work ethic has been influenced by the belief that there is a natural order that human beings cannot fight, but that they need to accept, and need to not worry. Besides, human relations among workers are also very important. When business is finished, there must be something of a personal relationship working in the situation. The phrase, "Nothing personal, just business," does not operate in their working circumstances in Indonesia. In consequence, it's difficult for non-Indonesians to understand the working code of Indonesians. The fact that there are many expatriates, such as Koreans, doing business in Indonesia makes it problematic because the expatriates need to adjust when dealing with other professionals. I'm not saying that Indonesian workers are unprofessional, but that their job culture should be taken into consideration. For example, when Indonesian workers encourage personal relationships to make their job more advantageous, Korean people inspire personal relationships in their job to build trust.

No doubt, Koreans who keep a strict work ethic at their jobs find it hard to reconcile their work habits with the local culture here. One Korean woman who owns a Korean restaurant in Surabaya once complained about her workers, who give credence to the proverb of being "slow but sure," while for Koreans a job should be done quickly. When the job is not yet complete, Koreans are willing to work extra hours until they achieve their goal. On the other hand, Indonesian employees think that there's always another day to accomplish whatever it is that has to be accomplished. There's no guilty feeling. It's beyond their control and nothing can change nature. Therefore, the mixing of work ethics of these two societies often creates stress, frustration and conflict on both sides.

However, it doesn't seem fair to compare the two work ethics of Indonesians and Koreans, since both have their own habits and social norms. In my opinion, both must learn about the another to engender a perfect work ethic, because understanding each other's countries will overcome economic and political hurdles. For Indonesians, trying to work faster to accomplish a target should be practiced. The motto, "Work fast, but don't delay," must be practiced, despite the difficulties of changing old habits, such as working very slowly and procrastinating. For Koreans, to deal with Indonesian workers they need to shift their paradigm from toleration to encouragement, encouraging them to catch up with the work. In such a manner, both work ethics will be complementary to each other.

Finally, there's always a way to eliminate lax attitudes toward a job. Some educators have started to whip their students since they're at a young age where they can be positively aware of

competition in the globalized world. If Indonesians want to survive in the international job market, they have to borrow the Korean work ethic, be comparable in their spirit or move toward job performance. So trying to adopt a different work ethic and to make it into a habit, I think, will make people stand for a better future. As Aristotle said, "We are what we do repeatedly. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."

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**Liliek Soelistyo is a professor in the English Department at Petra Christian University.**