

POSTCARDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Plan, Plan, Plan Some More, Then Do What You Need To

by Robert Alan Black, Ph.D., CSP

I worked on planning my 2003 World Creativity Tour for several months. I wrote e-mails daily, sent faxes, wrote letters, sent packages, made phone calls and used a professional air broker for country-to-country airplane tickets. I made Excel charts of all actions to keep track of them; sent copies of my schedules to people at each location verifying so that no conflicts would occur; made lists of phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses; created a file of all e-mail and mail from each country; changed all my bills to direct check withdrawals where possible or pre-wrote and sent checks before I left and tested my ATM cards (personal and business.)

All this would make you think I was well-prepared. I had no more than arrived at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Philadelphia—my first stop—when my credit card was refused. Because of my unusual spending over the previous two weeks, their computer “red-flagged” my account. Through some patient lip-and cheek-biting discussions over the phone, it was cleared up. Over the next three days, I double- and triple-checked to make sure that VISA had really taken care of it. For many reasons, I did not want what happened in Philadelphia to happen in Osaka.

A few days later, I left Philadelphia to fly to Chicago and then nonstop to Tokyo, following on to Osaka.

My host in Osaka had advised me how to take a bus from the airport to my hotel once I cleared customs. The airport I was

arriving in is several miles from downtown Osaka while my hosts live in Kyoto, many miles in another direction.

Customs went smoothly. Once I got out in the ground transportation area—at least it looked like one—none of the signs was in English. I asked and asked person after person until I found the best bus to take me into downtown Osaka near the main train station. I had learned that my hotel was located only six minutes away from the station, according to their web site and e-mails from my contacts there.

It was after 10:00 p.m., and all the way into Osaka, in the dark, I was concerned that I might have hopped on the wrong bus. Two salesmen behind me were speaking American English. Once I got off the bus in downtown Osaka, I could not see any evidence of the train station. I quickly found one of the American salesmen and asked if he would help me by asking the bus employee at the stop where my hotel was.

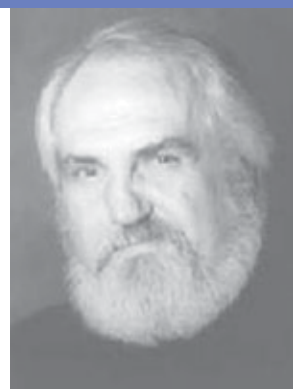
In a few minutes, the two of them came back and both gestured beyond a cluster of high-rise buildings behind us, both saying in their respective languages, “It is over there, on the other side of those buildings.”

Off I went—with my backpack on—carrying the name, address, phone numbers and e-mail address of the hotel in hand, using my physical directional skills to work my way through a three-level multi-zoned complex.

After many left and right turns and sets of stairs, I saw a name that was similar to my hotel’s, but not exactly the same. I headed toward the registration desk and was stopped by a bellman that spoke in very clear English: “Can I help you?” I showed him the name of my hotel, and he immediately guided me outside, onto the street again, and pointed down a narrow back street. He said, “You are at the Annex.”

Within a few minutes, I was walking into my hotel’s Shinto Hanku Annex lobby. As I turned toward the registration counter, I heard my name called out. I turned, and there stood two Japanese gentlemen, both rising to their feet and smiling very widely. They were my hosts, Miyoshi and Mr. Mori.

It turned out that they had gone to the airport to make sure I got on the right bus, but we had missed each other because I had come out a different door. When they could not find me after several announcements at the airport, they drove all the way into Osaka to my hotel, totally out of their way, to be sure that



Alan's hosts: Miyoshi and Mr. Mori standing near a very large Shinto Gate

I had arrived there safely.

Plan, plan and plan some more—and still you will have to work out problems as they arise!

*Since earning his CSP, **Robert Alan Black** has spent much of the last two years traveling the world and speaking on his expertise, Creativity. Because he has been a frequent and popular speaker overseas for many years, Alan is sharing his experiences in a monthly feature, with a view toward preparing some of our other Members for international speaking. While he is traveling internationally, Alan can be reached through his web site: www.cre8ng.com.*



Alan on a stepping stone in a famous garden in Kyoto