**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 62 Transcript**

**How Do Cultural Codes Affect Business?**

**Featuring Dr. Clotaire Rapaille**

Michael I’m Michael Stevens.

Renato And I’m Renato Beninatto.

Michael Today on Globally Speaking, we have a guest who has written and published 17 books, is an expert, does consulting, is the CEO and founder of Archetype Discoveries Worldwide.

Renato Dr. Clotaire Rapaille was born in France, has been living here in the United States for a while, and he has developed a methodology to identify the first imprint that we get for several things in our lives.

Michael These first imprints are the underlying drivers of why we act the way we do.

Renato He developed a methodology where he interviews people in a focus group. He puts on relaxing music, people lay down on the floor and then—

Michael They just talk.

Renato That’s how he unveils these imprints, these original ideas. He is able to reduce big concepts to one word or a couple of words that represent an idea.

Michael His teaching can be a way to help have less communication errors where people just seem to misunderstand each other, they seem to be missing the point. Sometimes it’s because you’re coming with an underlying assumption, and the person who’s listening to you has an underlying assumption, and it just doesn’t fit, it doesn’t make any sense.

Renato And that’s the story of our business. So, without further ado, Dr. Clotaire Rapaille.

Dr. Rapaille The most important thing for me is that I don’t believe what people say. It’s not that they usually lie, or they want to tell you the wrong thing, it’s just that they’re not aware of why they’re doing what they’re doing. And my work is to try to go beyond what they say and to understand why are they doing what they do even when they say something else?

Another of my passions is to say you don’t just need to learn another language, you need to learn another culture. We need cultural translations. I do a lot of work in China, in Japan, in Brazil. We do double translation, which means I get something in Chinese, and I ask the translator to translate that in English. And then after that, I’ll ask another translator to translate that from English to Chinese. Then I ask my Chinese team to compare the two texts and they are completely different.

Double translation is frightening because there are so many big mistakes. Why? Because the words people use don’t exist in abstract, or they just don’t exist by themselves. They exist with the cultural background. And when you understand the cultural background, when you have the culture code, then these words start making sense.

Renato So, you developed a methodology to identify this code.

Dr. Rapaille Absolutely. I take people back to the very first imprint they have of a word or a concept. When was the very first time you discovered what “coffee” means? My methodology is to take them to a relaxation phase. They go back to the very first experience, the first imprint they have about coffee.

They describe the first experience they had. We do that with almost 200 people, we collect all this information and then we look at the structure; it’s called structural analysis or pattern recognition. And when we find the same pattern among all these 200 people, we know we’ve got something. Let me give you an example.

With coffee, we discovered, reading all these documents, the first time you imprint the meaning, the signification and the emotion associated with coffee is when you are two years old. You don’t drink coffee. The taste is irrelevant. You *smell* it. And the aroma is so powerful—it means mother is in the kitchen, she is preparing breakfast and she is going to feed me; she loves me; I’m home; I’m safe.

All that package is imprinted at the same time. All these emotions associated with the word coffee. If I knew the word “coffee” in America and I just translate “coffee” in Italian, it’s not the same at all! It is difficult to translate coffee into something else than coffee.

Renato In Brazil we say breakfast is the “morning coffee”—café da manhã—so for us, coffee is part of the culture in a completely different way.

Dr. Rapaille I was born in France and raised in France and for me, in the morning—café au lait. I was a little kid and I would have a big bowl with café au lait: a lot of milk and a little bit of coffee. And that was my first imprint. It was big. It was huge. So when I see an Italian espresso, you look in the cup and you cannot see the coffee because there is so little. It’s not coffee for me, it’s something else. So, it varies from Brazil, from France, from America, from Italy. The translation is not enough.

I’d say don’t speak another language, speak culture. Understand what the culture is all about behind that.

Michael It gets to a deeper level of understanding and reality for both the listener and the person who’s speaking when you engage at this level. We often talk about that in our industry as quality. Do you see quality as part of what you’re doing?

Dr. Rapaille Many years ago, I was working for AT&T and GM, and we discovered the codes for quality in America, which is different from the codes for quality in Japan. And there are two things that are very very interesting here.

The notion of perfection. Perfection is very Japanese and very German. For the American, perfection is not possible. Why? We only learn by making mistakes. The more mistakes you make, the more you’re going to improve. You know, continuous improvement. You want people to make mistakes.

I had a big meeting with AT&T. On Monday morning, I had all the managers there and I said, “Okay, let’s make a list on a flip chart of all the mistakes you made last week.” “What?” “Yeah, give me the list of all the mistakes.” “Oh! Why do you want that?” “Well, because let’s see.” They were kind of shy, so two or three mistakes. I said, “This is bad.” “What do you mean it’s bad?” “They’re not enough. You need more mistakes.”

Michael You need more mistakes.

Dr. Rapaille “What did you learn from this?” “Next week, I want to meet again on Monday. I want to have a lot more mistakes because I want you to learn a lot more.” When you value not just the mistakes, but the learning from the mistakes, you increase in the American mind the continuous improvement.

In Japan, it’s completely different. You make a mistake, you kill yourself—seppuku, harakiri. You are not supposed to make mistakes. And so, when we work with the Japanese, they want to prepare and prepare a long time before they start doing something because when they do it, they want that to be perfect.

Renato This is absolutely true in our space. We know that the toughest market for language services is the Japanese market because they seek perfection, and with language it’s very hard to reach perfection. Here in the United States and also in Europe, there is a little bit more tolerance. But there is a big focus on quality and I think that the important message for us here is that the concept of quality varies according to the culture.

In your book, you mention that quality in the United States means that something works, that’s good enough. In other countries it’s completely different.

Dr. Rapaille You can translate “qualité” in French into “quality” in England or America, but you need more than that. For example, in France, there is a notion of elegance and beauty and sophistication associated with quality. The notion of quality should be associated with the fact that you don’t need it. It’s beautiful because it is useless, you see? There is an expression in France that what is useless is absolutely necessary. In order to have quality in your life, you need to have a lot of things that have hidden motivation. It’s something that you do with no intention. It is very different from other cultures.

Michael For a company who’s looking to move into a foreign market, how important is it that they connect to the code?

Dr. Rapaille It’s crucial it resonates with people. The first imprint cannot be done without emotion, and there is always a tension in the emotion. There is logic of emotion. But this logic is a different system in each culture, and so if you don’t understand how it resonates with the people, you cannot really communicate with them.

There is an expression I like in Brazil: “Saudades.” How do you translate “Saudades”? It’s difficult! This is, “I miss you and I’m sad to miss you, but I’m happy because I miss you, which means I love you.” So, “I’m happy and sad at the same time.” Americans say, “Are you happy or are you sad?” “Well, you know, I’m happy to be sad and I’m sad to be happy.” Argh…it doesn’t make sense in some cultures.

Michael So, how do companies go about trying to achieve this? How do they connect?

Renato We work a lot with marketing communications, with websites and so on. You have to localize a website into 50 languages. The challenge is, it’s one thing to translate, it’s another thing to do a marketing localization, but then there is transcreation—rewriting the content for the local markets.

If we follow your rationale, that’s the only way that you would be able to really conquer different markets, by transcreating the content.

Dr. Rapaille You need to resonate, and you need to activate the local cultural logic of emotion, otherwise it doesn’t go there. How do you do that? Well, we can try to translate the word, you can maybe write a paragraph to explain the word like “saudades” or maybe sometimes the best is to tell a little story. Storytelling is very good in communicating the emotion that is behind that.

It’s so interesting to see just what is happening today, between America and France regarding sexual harassment. It’s so different. The French say that we don’t want to lose the art of seduction and for the American it is “yes” or “no.”

I did discover the code for seduction for L’Oreal in seven countries. It depends completely in which culture. I was doing some work for match.com in Japan, for example. Seduction in Japan has nothing to do with seduction in Italy or in France. If you look at the American, it’s completely different: seduction is a man manipulating a woman to have sex with her even if she doesn’t want to. This is terrible. You don’t want to go into that dimension there. You see, this is a no-no.

But in the French culture, it’s an art. It’s like learning how to play the violin or like the art of cooking. It’s an art and it’s a pleasure; it’s like a duet when somebody plays the cello and someone other plays the violin. It’s a completely different context, completely different attitude.

Renato You mentioned something about the Islamic countries, that seduction there—even though women are completely covered—still plays a significant role in society.

Dr. Rapaille I was doing some work in the Middle East last year and I had a young woman that was helping me in translation. She was almost all covered. I could only see her face. She had makeup like she was going to the opera, because that was the only part of her body she could show. The attention she was paying to her makeup was incredible.

Renato You did interesting work identifying code words for different countries. You said that the code word for Germany is ‘order.’ The code word for France is ‘idea,’ for Britain is ‘class’ and for America is ‘dream.’ Do you see this as permanent or do you see this changing over time?

Dr. Rapaille Cultures can change, of course. But they change at what I call a glacial pace. They move very, very slowly. What changes sometimes is the content, the expression of that. But what doesn’t change is the structure. France is an idea. Today the French say, “I think, therefore I am,” not, “I do, therefore I am.”

Americans, this is like Nike: “Just do it.” The French think this is absurd. “What do you mean, ‘Just do it’? You didn’t think before doing something?” The French want to think, think, think, because this is the idea, thinking to discover the brilliant idea. And then what do you do with it? Nothing. Why? Because this is not the purpose. The purpose is not to do anything. The purpose is to think about creating this beautiful idea.

In business, they have fantastic ideas. They never make money with that! It’s enough to have a brilliant idea—you should be proud of it. In France I made a mistake and I asked a guy, “What do you do?” And he looked at me and he said, “Why are you asking? That’s none of your business.”

And then he said, “I do nothing,” and he was very proud of that. In America, you only exist by what you do, and of course, the first thing people ask you is, “What do you do?”

Renato It’s fascinating. If you think from a historic perspective, most of the advances in science that happened in the 1700s and 1800s were by French aristocrats that didn’t do anything, so they could invest their time in chemistry and physics and things like that, and philosophy and so on. So, there is a role for doing nothing.

What message do you think is important for businesses that want to succeed internationally? What is the key thing that they can do to differentiate; have a lead over their competitors?

Dr. Rapaille I work with big corporations all the time. I was recently doing some work in China and in the team that I was working with, I had four different cultures, four people speaking four different languages. The number one thing that we need to do is to create this communication between cultures and be very careful about the language we use, because we can get stuck only in the translation that doesn’t mean what I want to express. How can we help a multicultural team to understand each other, to speak a common language? It’s not just English or Chinese. It’s culture, respecting culture.

I can give you an example. I was asked by Boeing to help create a team in Osaka in Japan between American, Japanese, German, Italians, French, for the 787. There are 27 different nationalities that work on this airplane, Dreamliner. It was so interesting to say, “Okay, let’s go and see what do you think the Americans are doing uh the best?” So the Japanese make a list of what Americans are doing best. “And what is the worst thing they do?”

The Japanese say, “Okay, the worst thing they do is they don’t do blah.” Then we asked the opposite; we asked the Americans, “What are the Japanese doing better?” And then we become aware of the good and the bad, the cliché and the stereotype, and they go beyond that.

When we decide to have an action plan, we say, “Okay, because the Japanese are very good at long-term planning, let’s give them the long-term planning. Americans are very good at adapting quickly and short-term; let’s give some short-term to them.” And so they all agree with that—you see, this is not forcing anything. When we value the positive and negative of each culture and we help a multicultural team to become aware of these positives and negatives, then they can decide who are the best people to do that or this or this.

And that is absolutely fascinating to see how we can build a team with different languages, backgrounds, different imprints, different codes.

Michael That is so practical and such good advice for people; that you have to step back and slow down in your business and understand the strengths, the weaknesses, and then move forward with those in mind.

Renato Do you have any new books coming out?

Dr. Rapaille One is called The Global Code, how to go from the culture code to the global code. The other one is in Spanish and published in Mexico; it’s called El Verbo. It’s a verb for each culture.

I published a book in Penguin London called Move Up—why certain cultures are thriving and going up and why some other cultures are going down.

I’m going to have a 13-hour TV series on cultures and the culture code. I present one hour on each culture: one hour on China, one hour on Brazil, one hour on Korea, and so on. This is going to be finished at the end of the year and hopefully will be on Netflix, Amazon and so on.

Michael We thank you so much for this time.

**End of conversation**