I’ll be the first to admit, I was a sucker for the allure of emerging markets. Anyone in my commerce program or any of my MGB cohorts of 2011/2012 would tell you they’ve seen me carrying around books and articles that contain phrases in the title like “bottom of the pyramid,” “the next billion” and “BRIC countries.” It should be no surprise that when given the opportunity to start the next chapter of my career in India it was a no-brainer. In August 2012, off I went.

Welcome to Bangalore, a city of nearly nine-million inhabitants, the who’s who of multinational technology companies and most importantly, endless opportunity. I can’t say that India was what I expected because I simply had no expectations. My first week was a bit of sensory overload: the noises were somehow noisier; the smells smellier; the colours more colourful; and the tastes tastier (and spicier!). Nevertheless, I jumped right into my job with EADS, owners of well-known commercial aviation giant Airbus. I was employed to work as the corporate controller and assigned to support EADS’s fledgling business in India’s defence sector—not an easy task. We submit bids starting at $50 million and range into the multi-billions! On average, it takes three years to successfully develop new business and the contracts are known to run 20-plus years!

When asking a customer to make such a substantial commitment, any success you have boils down to one thing... relationships. Indian people believe that informal relations are the underlying element to all prosperous business dealings. In the end, it is as much about how you communicate as it is about what you communicate. I learned some hard-and-fast rules through my own successes and failures; here are a few:

1. There is an organization chart for a reason: Indian people are very responsive to hierarchy and expect their superior to come to them with concrete demands on what, how and when something should be done.

2. Save face: There is simply nothing more important than saving face in Indian business circles. This translates into an overall risk aversion, which means convincing a partner or customer to join you in taking a well-calculated risk.

3. Go big or go home: While doing business in India is notoriously slow, it is also unimaginably lucrative if you have all your ducks in a row. There are 1.2-billion mouths to feed, eyes to catch and tastes to exploit. If you can offer a product or service that fits the notoriously price-conscious needs of the average Indian, you have it made.

After living in India for almost a year, I wouldn’t say I have a work-life balance. Nothing in this chaotic and culturally-rich subcontinent seems to balance as it is a predominantly Hindu culture—whatever isn’t balanced in this life can be balanced in the next. Nevertheless, the little free time I do have is spent passionately involved in the “enLIGHT” Corporate Citizenship Project I founded six months ago.

Along with EADS employees worldwide, we will be constructing an Integrated Energy Centre (IEC) in one of Bangalore’s urban slums. The centre will provide portable LED lights to over 150 households and host education programming for the most disadvantaged youth. With luck, we’ll be supporting these young Indians through their greatest challenge—gaining literacy and graduating from the public school system. After all, if the optimistic economic scenarios in the countless emerging market books I read are to come true for India, youth education will be the key driver.

For more details on the enLIGHT project visit enlight2013.wordpress.com. For a deeper look into my life in India stop by my blog: freelunching.wordpress.com.