

Leading in the American Branch

Participant workbook: cultural leadership, confident pushback, and relationship-safe directness

Audience: Japanese and Chinese managers working with US branch teams

Focus: cultural leadership, pragmatic communication, meeting behavior, conflict repair, and confident pushback in US branch environments.

Designed for advanced Japanese and Chinese managers who already have functional English and need a clearer map of American workplace expectations.

Teaching stance: culture is a pattern, not a prison. The materials describe common workplace expectations and perception gaps, then ask learners to observe the actual company, team, role, and person in front of them.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is not mainly an English grammar course. It is practice for moments when you already know the words but the workplace meaning is unclear. You will learn to read American directness, lead through disagreement, and push back without becoming either passive or harsh.

Your starting point

- A US colleague challenges your plan in public. What do you normally feel first?
- When you disagree with a US employee, do you become indirect, silent, detailed, humorous, strict, or overly apologetic?
- What behavior from American employees feels most disrespectful to you?
- What behavior from you might American employees misunderstand?

The Main Cultural Reframe

In many US workplaces, an opinion can be attacked very strongly while the person remains accepted. The proposal is treated like a draft, prototype, or stress-test object. This is not always pleasant, and it is not always skillful. But it often has a different meaning from personal hostility.

Remember

Do not ask only, 'Was the tone polite?' Also ask, 'Was the speaker attacking the work, the process, my status, or my dignity?' Your response should match the real level of the problem.

Idea attack vs personal attack

Type	What you may hear	Useful response
1. Normal debate	No, I disagree. The timeline is unrealistic.	Answer with evidence; invite alternatives.
2. Strong but task-focused	That assumption is wrong, and here is why.	Slow the pace; restate the business issue.
3. Process problem	Repeated interruption, sarcasm, eye-rolling, or dominating.	Intervene: set meeting rules and protect the floor.
4. Personal attack	You clearly do not understand this business.	Stop and redirect: behavior is not acceptable.
5. Escalation issue	Threats, slurs, harassment, discrimination, retaliation, or safety risk.	Pause the exchange and involve HR or appropriate leadership.

Pushback Ladder

Use the ladder when you need to push back. Start low when the risk is low or the relationship is new. Move up when the business risk is high, the decision is near, or people are avoiding the real issue.

Level	Purpose	Example
1. Clarify	Find the assumption.	Which part of the forecast are you most concerned about?
2. Add evidence	Bring data or operational facts.	The last two launches needed six weeks of QA, so four weeks is a real risk.
3. Name consequence	Show business impact.	If we keep the date without reducing scope, customer defects will likely increase.
4. Decide	Create commitment or escalate.	I am deciding to move the launch by two weeks. I will explain the tradeoff to headquarters.

Practice: build your ladder

Situation: A US colleague says your team's plan is too slow and asks you to skip a review step.

Level 1 - clarify:

Level 2 - evidence:

Level 3 - consequence:

Level 4 - decision:

Meeting Leadership Moves

Open the meeting mode

- Brainstorm mode: 'We are generating options. No decision for the first twenty minutes.'
- Debate mode: 'I want the strongest risks on the table. Challenge the plan, not the person.'
- Decision mode: 'We will hear final objections, then I will make the call.'
- Execution mode: 'The decision is made. Today is about owners, dates, and blockers.'

Control interruptions

- Light: 'Hold that thought. I want to let Mei finish.'
- Firm: 'I am going to stop the interruption. You are next.'
- Boundary: 'We are losing the process. One speaker at a time.'

Close a decision

- Decision: 'We will proceed with option B.'

- Reason: 'It gives us the fastest customer learning with acceptable risk.'
- Tradeoff: 'We are accepting a temporary manual workaround.'
- Owner/date: 'Alex owns the customer pilot by Friday.'
- Review: 'We will review defects and customer feedback next Wednesday.'

Feedback and Accountability

Direct feedback in the US should still protect dignity. The safest structure is behavior, impact, expectation, support, and consequence. Avoid vague labels such as careless, lazy, not serious, immature, or not loyal. Use observable behavior.

Less effective	More effective
You are not careful enough.	The last two reports included pricing errors. The impact is that sales cannot quote confidently.
You need to be more proactive.	When the customer changed the deadline, I needed you to alert the team the same day.
Your attitude is bad.	In today's meeting you interrupted twice and said the plan was stupid. Challenge is welcome; personal wording is not.

Planner

Behavior I observed:

Business impact:

Expectation from now on:

Support or resources I can provide:

Follow-up date or consequence:

Cross-Border Translation

A US branch manager often translates in two directions. Headquarters needs local facts without emotional noise. Local employees need business context without feeling that all decisions are mysterious or predetermined.

Instead of blaming headquarters

Avoid	Use
Japan will not allow it.	The global standard is fixed because it protects product consistency. The open question is how we implement it for US customers.
China already decided.	The investment level is already approved. We can still influence timeline, staffing, and launch sequence.
I cannot say anything.	I cannot share the confidential detail yet. I can tell you the decision criteria and when we will know more.

Repair After Conflict

Use this sequence after a meeting that became too tense or when someone may feel dismissed.

1. Name: 'Yesterday's discussion became sharper than useful.'
2. Own: 'I moved to decision too quickly and did not make enough room for the risk you were raising.'
3. Clarify: 'My intent was to protect the launch date, not dismiss your expertise.'
4. Reset: 'In the next review, I will open with risks before we discuss dates.'
5. Invite: 'What do you need from me so you can raise concerns early?'

My repair script

Personal Action Plan

Choose three behaviors to practice in the next 30 days. Make them visible and measurable.

Behavior	Situation where I will use it	How I will know it worked

Module Practice Pages

Use these pages during class, coaching, or self-study. The goal is not to memorize perfect sentences. The goal is to build a repeatable leadership move: read the situation, name the business issue, choose the right level of directness, and preserve dignity.

Module 1. Reading the US Branch Room

American workplaces often reward visible participation, concise opinions, and quick objection. Silence may be misread as weak agreement, lack of expertise, or disengagement.

What you should be able to do

- Separate personal identity from workplace role behavior.
- Name three US branch signals that can feel aggressive but may be intended as participation.
- Identify personal triggers that make pushback harder to answer.

Practice situation

Scenario

A US employee says very little in a one-on-one but strongly challenges the plan in a larger meeting.

Your leadership moves

1. Write two possible interpretations that do not assume disrespect.
2. Write one question that tests intent without sounding defensive.
3. Write one meeting norm that would make earlier disagreement easier next time.

Reflection

Which behavior do you usually trust more: private harmony or public challenge? How might that preference affect your reading of US staff?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 2. The American Idea-Combat Style

Some Americans verbally attack an opinion with intensity while feeling no personal hostility. They may believe they are improving the plan, respecting the seriousness of the work, or proving engagement.

What you should be able to do

- Describe the difference between idea attack, relationship attack, and status attack.
- Practice staying present when language sounds stronger than the speaker's intent.
- Set boundaries when the attack becomes personal or disrespectful.

Practice situation

Scenario

A colleague says, 'That proposal ignores the customer reality.' The sentence feels like an attack.

Your leadership moves

1. Underline the business issue hidden inside the sharp wording.
2. Ask for the strongest evidence behind the objection.
3. Set a boundary only if the person moves from the proposal to your competence or identity.

Reflection

What physical signal tells you that you are reacting to tone more than content?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 3. Confident Leadership Without Overcorrecting

Managers who are used to indirect authority may overcorrect in the US by becoming either too soft and invisible or too hard and controlling. The target is calm clarity plus credible openness.

What you should be able to do

- Use leader language that shows ownership without shutting down input.
- Make a decision after disagreement and preserve commitment.
- Explain the reason behind a decision without sounding defensive.

Practice situation

Scenario

The room disagrees with your preferred plan, and you are tempted either to withdraw or to force the decision.

Your leadership moves

1. State the goal in one sentence.
2. Invite one more objection with a time limit.
3. Close the decision using reason, tradeoff, owner, and review date.

Reflection

What does confidence sound like when it is calm, not loud?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 4. The Pushback Ladder

Effective US branch pushback usually moves from curiosity to evidence to consequence to decision. Jumping straight to authority can look defensive; staying only curious can look weak.

What you should be able to do

- Use four levels of pushback based on the risk and the relationship.
- Push back upward, sideways, and downward.
- Avoid common traps: apology loops, vague disagreement, status arguments, and hidden no.

Practice situation

Scenario

A US director asks for a shortcut. You believe the shortcut will create quality risk.

Your leadership moves

1. Write Level 1: a clarifying question.
2. Write Level 2: a data-based objection.
3. Write Level 3: the business consequence.
4. Write Level 4: your decision or escalation request.

Reflection

Which ladder level do you overuse? Which level do you avoid?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 5. Meetings, Interruptions, and Decision Rights

US meetings often mix discussion, debate, decision, and performance display. Managers need to name the meeting mode and control the process without suppressing useful challenge.

What you should be able to do

- Distinguish brainstorm, debate, alignment, decision, and execution meetings.
- Interrupt constructively and reclaim the floor.
- Convert noisy discussion into action owners, deadlines, and decision records.

Practice situation

Scenario

Two people dominate the meeting while a technical expert stays quiet.

Your leadership moves

1. Interrupt the dominator without humiliating them.
2. Invite the quiet expert by function, not personality.
3. Summarize the decision and assign owners before the meeting ends.

Reflection

What meeting mode do you need to announce more clearly: brainstorm, debate, decision, or execution?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 6. Feedback, Accountability, and Face

American employees may expect direct feedback, but they also expect fairness, specificity, documentation, and respect. Public embarrassment, vague criticism, or surprise consequences can create serious trust problems.

What you should be able to do

- Give direct feedback without humiliation.
- Name performance gaps in observable terms.
- Understand why documentation and HR partnership matter in US branches.

Practice situation

Scenario

An employee missed a deadline twice but says the expectations were never clear.

Your leadership moves

1. Describe the missed behavior in observable terms.
2. Name the business impact without judging character.
3. Set the future expectation, support, follow-up date, and consequence.

Reflection

Where might indirect feedback have protected comfort but weakened fairness?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 7. Cross-Border Tension: Headquarters, Local Staff, and the Manager in Between

Foreign managers in US branches often translate between headquarters expectations and local American expectations. The manager must protect strategic intent while making local reality speak clearly.

What you should be able to do

- Explain headquarters constraints without blaming headquarters.
- Represent US branch realities upward with evidence and options.
- Prevent employees from feeling that decisions are mysterious, delayed, or already made elsewhere.

Practice situation

Scenario

Headquarters rejects a local adaptation that the US team believes is necessary.

Your leadership moves

1. Explain the fixed constraint without blaming headquarters.
2. Name what is still open for local decision.
3. Prepare one upward message to headquarters using local evidence and options.

Reflection

Do your employees know which decisions are fixed, consultative, or locally owned?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Module 8. Repair, Escalation, and Long-Term Trust

A tense exchange does not have to damage the relationship if the manager can repair quickly, clarify intent, set norms, and follow through. Some behavior, however, must be escalated.

What you should be able to do

- Use a repair conversation after a difficult meeting.
- Separate normal disagreement from bullying, harassment, discrimination, or retaliation risk.
- Build a team norm that allows challenge without personal attack.

Practice situation

Scenario

A debate became too personal, and one employee has stopped contributing.

Your leadership moves

1. Write a repair opening that owns the process without surrendering the business decision.
2. Clarify what kind of challenge is welcome next time.
3. Name the boundary that protects dignity.

Reflection

What relationship repair do you tend to delay because the task seems more urgent?

Transfer to your branch

Where will you use this skill in the next two weeks?

Phrase bank

Ground yourself

- Let me separate the tone from the business concern.
- I want to understand the risk you are seeing.
- Give me the strongest version of your objection.

Clarify

- Which assumption are you challenging?
- Are you concerned about cost, timing, quality, or customer impact?
- What evidence would make you more comfortable with this direction?

Push back

- I see the concern. I disagree on the conclusion because the current data points another way.
- That solves one problem but creates a larger operational risk.
- I cannot support that timeline unless we remove scope or add resources.

Lead the room

- We are in debate mode for ten more minutes; after that I will make the call.
- I want one objection from each function before we decide.
- We have heard the risk. Now we need options.

Set boundaries

- Challenge the plan, not the person.
- The interruption is making it hard to evaluate the idea. Let her finish, then I will come back to you.
- That wording is too personal. Restate the concern as a business risk.

Close decisions

- I am deciding to proceed with option B. The reason is speed to customer impact.
- This is not unanimous, but it is clear enough to move. We will review results on Friday.
- The decision is made. I expect full support in execution, and I will own the tradeoff.

Repair

- The discussion became sharper than useful. I want to reset the working relationship.
- My intent was to test the plan, not dismiss your expertise.
- Next time I will name debate mode earlier and protect time for each function.