Case Analysis: The Road to Hell
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1. DESCRIPTION. The case "The Road to Hell" follows John Baker as he closes out his position as Chief Engineer and hands over the reins to Matthew Rennalls, a young Barracanian.

While discussing both the positive and negative aspects of Rennalls’ performance, Baker touched on a hot topic of Rennalls not getting along well with the expatriates in the company but rather just native Barracanians. Baker also references a complaint from Mr. Jackson in which he said it was not the first time Rennalls was rude to him. Rennalls assured Baker that the treatment had nothing to do with the color of his skin and that he had treated him no differently than he would have any other employee. The conversation then turned to Baker congratulating Rennalls on the ability to overcome the challenge of facing a developing and revolutionary economic environment. He went on to state that he was impressed with the progress the Barracanians had made when adjusting to a world of commerce that they have only experienced over the last 50 years vs. the expatriates having been brought up in it for 200 to 300 years. The interview ended amicably.

The following morning Rennalls submitted a letter of resignation expressing fury over the insults on the Barracanians.

2. DIAGNOSIS. This case is a prime example of how people from different backgrounds and cultures fail to take diversity into consideration and instead allow their perceptions to get in the way. This story focused on the point of view of John Baker and his perception. What we missed out on is the perspective from Matthew Rennalls. Some of Baker’s message can very well be seen as condescending to Rennalls. Miscommunication and misinterpretation caused severe consequences that will now negatively impact the business in this case. Rennalls sensitivity caused him to perceive Baker’s comment in a negative manner despite there being pure intentions. Baker on the other hand knew Rennalls political views, racial concerns and intolerance of discrimination yet still made mistakes in how he conducted the interview.

3. THEORY. “Intercultural miscommunication occurs when there is a breakdown in communication between speakers of two different cultures and languages due to cultural differences and/or sociolinguistic transfer,” (Huang, 2012). The opposing views of the social interaction directly cause intercultural miscommunication. This was the case with Rennalls and Baker, a prime example of intercultural miscommunication.

By not being cognoscente of the fact that cross-cultural communication is taking place, both Rennalls and Baker neglected to take the full scenario into perspective. Baker failed to recognize that his words could be taken the wrong way or interpreted as insulting, despite his intention of giving a compliment. On the other
hand, Rennalls should have taken into consideration where Baker was coming from in that he was trying to applaud Rennalls for his amazing achievements despite his background and coming from a country that is newer to the economic scene in the world.

It is unfortunate that the situation took place as it did but important to note that both parties should have been more aware of their perception in the situation. It would be important for Baker to consider the background of Rennalls and his experiences overseas attending the university. It would also be beneficial for Rennalls to take into consideration the fact that Baker has worked with many different regional teams and his complimentary words are to be appreciated. Overall, there was miscommunication and perception issues on both sides.

4. PRESCRIPTION. (focus on short & long term)
In the short term, it is important that someone reach out to Rennalls and see if they can rectify the situation. An apology on behalf of the company is deserved and it would be in the company’s best interests to see if they can retain Rennalls for the Chief Engineer position. Additionally, the issue needs to be addressed with Baker. Baker’s manager or someone from the diversity team needs to have a conversation with Baker regarding the inappropriate nature and comments made during his discussion with Rennalls. It is important that his behavior change immediately before it further impacts the organization.

In the long term, diversity and inclusion training including awareness about the various cultures represented at the organization seems necessary. Given the global nature of the company and its regional staff working with expatriates, I would like to hope that a diversity council or department already exists. In the case that it does not, I would highly recommend such a department be created.

5. FALLOUT. “Ignoring diversity issues costs time, money, and efficiency,” according to the University of California, San Francisco. “Some of the consequences can include unhealthy tensions; loss of productivity because of increased conflict; inability to attract and retain talented people of all kinds; complaints and legal actions; and inability to retain valuable employees, resulting in lost investments in recruitment and training.”

The fallout from the situation between Rennalls and Baker could be disastrous. For one, the company has lost great talent. There is a strong possibility they will not be able to convince Rennalls to return. Additionally, there could be a broader conflict between the company and the country of Barracania. Seeing as how Rennalls father is the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, there could very well be fallout politically with the company being able to do business in Barracania. Lastly, is the potential fallout of Bakers career. He has been known for his ability of getting along with the regional staff at various locations. Will he still be considered so talented? What does this mean for the rest of the staff in Barracania once they get wind of
what happened with Rennalls, causing him to leave the company? It does not look good for the Caribbean Bauxite Company of Barracania.

References
