

# European Careers & Leadership in China - 2016

By Xin Xin Hu & Nadine Niknafs



From left to right: Wolfgang Illing, Claire Pouly, Thomas Guillemaud, & Saurabh Gandhi.

## Insights on doing business in China

The China-Europe Business Studies (CEBS) students in Shanghai had the opportunity to organize this year's 'European Careers and Leadership in China' Event; inviting speakers to shed more light on how to start a career in China. The evening featured four speakers, Wolfgang, Claire, Thomas, and Saurabh, all from different disciplines and backgrounds.

Wolfgang shared his inspiring story of starting a business in China without any prior knowledge about China, known as Saucepan. The entrepreneur's passion for the food and beverages industry and international experiences working in large hospitality corporations allowed him to discover a market opportunity for healthy and sustainable food in Shanghai. He found turning market research into actual business ideas a complex process. Nevertheless, with agility, adaptation and to consumer needs, his idea penetrated the market. For Wolfgang, other challenges associated with starting a business in China was the lack of support of resources and security that are usually at the disposal of established businesses. Trust between suppliers and employee loyalty are the continuous challenges entrepreneurs might face in China.

Before coming to China, Claire has always said never to go to China but soon found herself taking on the challenge to relocate herself to the, for her, unknown People's Republic. As Account Director she is responsible for accounts such as Twinings Tea and AirBnB. The daily struggles she encounters are timing, language and cultural differences. However, Claire stresses that these differences can be overcome. In fact, Claire states that the tiniest effort from a foreigner such as speaking a few words of Chinese, is greatly appreciated by Chinese people and can immediately affect and advance the (business) relationship. In line with Wolfgang, Claire has also found that loyalty and trust between employees in large corporations are one of the greatest challenges she has encountered in her professional career. The biggest contrast she observed between foreign and Chinese employees is the high level of curiosity and eagerness of Chinese employees, which is a great asset in her line of work. Claire advises foreign professionals to adapt, show effort and not to be afraid.

Thomas founded his digital agency, IT Consultis, in Shanghai right after graduation and is now working with clients such as Budweiser, Zara and

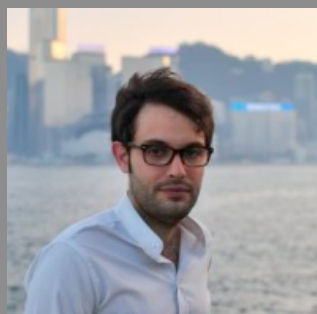


**Wolfgang Illing** is Co-Founder of the Shanghai-based healthy meal delivery service called Saucepan founded in 2015. Saucepan delivers fresh and healthy seasonal products, always with their mission of responsible sourcing and sustainability in mind. In a fast-moving city like Shanghai this delivery service provides you with nutritious and tasty meals. Originally from Germany, he got his experience in the food & beverage sector during his work for the luxury hotel group Hyatt in several countries such as Qatar, India and Egypt.

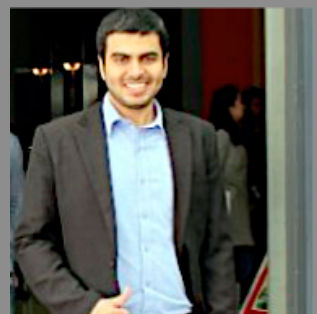


**Claire Pouly** is currently working as an Account Director for TBWA in Shanghai. TBWA/Greater China provides fully integrated communication solutions for clients and is a Fortune 500 Marketing Services Company, which has grown significantly in the last three years. Claire has graduated at ESSCA.

Angers with a Master of Arts in Communication and Advertising, since then she has gained working experience in Marketing, Accounting and Sales. Claire has obtained significant experience as Account Director and collaborated with major companies such as Pernod Ricard, L'Oréal Group and Twinings Tea.



**Thomas Guillemaud** is a tech and design enthusiast, he has a broad scope of skills and knowledge when it comes to the digital industry. He combines appropriate technical solutions and finds creative ways for websites to perform better. Originally from France, he holds a double Master Degree in Entrepreneurship from ESSCA in Digital Business. Right after graduation, he co-founded IT Consultis. As a leading digital agency in Shanghai, they are specialized in E-commerce, web design and mobile apps and serve customers like Budweiser and Zara.



**Saurabh Gandhi** is currently working as a Consultant for Infosys China, a wholly owned subsidiary of Infosys Ltd., with major responsibilities in Pre-Sales and Functional Consulting. He has a total of 7.5 years of experience of which more than 6 years of experience are in Pre-Sales and Sales Support. Furthermore he has handled various other responsibilities in Project Management, Functional Consulting and as a Trainer. He is also guest lecturer at ESSCA Shanghai campus and teaches courses on "Doing Business in China". Saurabh has working experience in countries like India, Saudi Arabia and Latvia.

Saucepan. The opportunity surfaced through his large network as Thomas said: "Why not?" Over-delivering, fast adaptation to the market and understanding the client's needs are essential and allowed his business to advance quickly. Thomas notes that hiring European employees instead of local employees can be a more valuable investment due to the low retention ratio in China. He counters this with a clear payroll strategy of continuous, structural and frequent growth in salary. This not only allows him to retain talent but also motivate employees. This strategy shows the great extent of adaptation one must engage in when doing business in China.

Saurabh's childhood fascination for China made him decline a job offer from PwC New York. Overcoming the pressure of his parents to accept the offer from PwC, he faced his Chinese adventure. Soon he realized that integrating into the Chinese culture was more difficult than anticipated; even buying toilet paper was a complex matter. After failing to set up his own business, Saurabh found his way to Infosys where his capabilities are stretched and challenged continuously. He too experienced that large corporations struggle with the lack of loyalty of Chinese employees and he noted that even a too small increase in salary can already be a reason for resignation. "For Chinese people success does not exist. Success is measured in money, hence more money means more success." Saurabh finally noted that freedom in doing business in China is what he enjoys most. "When doing business with Europeans you need a 20-page contract, when doing business with Americans you need a 200-page contract, when doing business with Chinese, all you need is a handshake."

The event has given us some great insights and awareness on the current business environment in China. The increasing salary and overflow of opportunities have made Chinese employees more demanding. China is a big country with a distinctive culture and history; hence, one might feel overwhelmed with the idea of

doing business in or with China. Therefore, Claire advises from her own experience "do not be afraid and never say never." In order to make your venture with China work, you have to adapt, not the other way around and realize that making and nurturing relationships (Guanxi) can cost a lot of time and effort but is of utmost importance in the Chinese culture. Most importantly, don't forget that at the end of the day, the Chinese market is no different from any other market: it is all about supply and demand."

This inspiring event closed with dinner and drinks with the event participants and students of the CEBS Master of Science Program.

Special acknowledgment to the participants of this event:

Mr. Wolfgang Illing, Co-Founder of Saucepan

Mrs. Claire Pouly, Account Director at TBWA Greater China

Mr. Thomas Guillemaud, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of IT Consultis

Mr. Saurabh Gandhi, Consultant at Infosys

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