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FOCUS

Ken Sturgess explains how American companies' ways of doing business in the US have evolved due to pandemic and social and political interruptions.

EVER SINCE ITS INCEPTION 30 YEARS AGO, ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL FUNCTIONS OF AMCHAM HAS BEEN TO MAINTAIN PLATFORMS FOR SHARING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE BETWEEN ITS MEMBERS. THERE ARE SEVERAL SUCH PLATFORMS, INCLUDING AMCHAM MONTHLY MEETINGS, THE AMCHAM COMMITTEES, ONLINE EXPERT DISCUSSIONS AND *AMCHAM.PL QUARTERLY* AVAILABLE IN PRINT AND ONLINE AT AMCHAM.PL

FOCUS

Business with the US

AMERICAN COMPLEXITIES

THE EVOLUTION OF HOW AMERICAN COMPANIES IN THE US DO BUSINESS

In February, The American Investors' Desk—an AmCham program executed within the chamber to assist Polish companies eyeing business opportunities in the US—held an online session with guest speaker Ken Sturgess, Founder and Managing Partner of Transatlantic Trade Partners, a consultancy specializing in forging a business partnership between American and European partners. The speaker discussed the pandemic and its effect on how Americans do business. He also highlighted social disruptions, starting with the Black Lives Matter movement and how companies have spoken up about social challenges and the US presidential elections.

LONG SUPPLY CHAINS

In discussing the pandemic's impact on American business, Struggles noted that the pandemic that began in China made American companies painfully aware of the fragility of long supply chains from Asia. With travel restrictions in place and economies in lockdowns, companies in the US realized that having long supply chains was problematic for business transactions and the need to build capacity to maintain a locally-held inventory of goods imported from China. The geopolitical aspect of trade with China also became a big issue for corporations in the US following a trade dispute between China and the US, which resulted in the introduction of trade tariffs for certain goods.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

The pandemic caused many governments to shut down entry to their countries for foreigners. While there were no travel restrictions for a long time in the US during the pandemic, there were many in the EU and globally and were viewed in the US as a major stopping block to interna-

tional business. With it also came to the realization that to do business with US companies, European partners need to have US-located resources, and US companies need people located in Europe to help conduct business.

THE WFH PHENOMENON

WFH, or the work-from-home model, was not a new solution for many businesses in the US. Still, before the pandemic, it was mainly applied to commercial jobs, such as marketing, sales, and business development. With the pandemic, firms had to transform their work structure to WFH, which had significant implications. The American business life was completely disrupted. Instead of face-to-face meetings, business lunches, and business travel, corporate America turned to online meeting platforms. It soon transpired that in these new circumstances, access to senior managers and decision-makers improved. Once they began working from home, their work habits changed dramatically, and they no longer had the same gatekeepers to their office. It became quite easy for someone from corporate America to click on the accept a meeting request button. It opened many doors. Sturgess noted, however, that it is important to follow up online meetings with additional information and data by emailing them to people we talk to. We have limited time to engage during an online meeting, and follow-up is important to make a lasting impression.

SOCIAL IMPACTS

The speaker also talked about the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on corporate America. He said that the movement created upheaval in the US and social unrest unseen in America

since the 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement took off. As a result, American companies started to speak about social issues. These included companies of all sizes that had consistently been outspoken about social issues as well as older, more traditional American corporations. It transpired that at the board level of some of many American big companies and the ownership level of smaller companies, there appeared empowerment to speak up about social issues. It also caused a lot of corporations to ask themselves whether they were inclusive enough. The inclusion issue will be important many years from now as American companies embrace social causes in a more intensive and focused way than ever before.

POLITICAL CYCLE

The speaker also discussed the last presidential election cycle, explaining its effects on the polarization of American society. The Capitol events that led to the Presidential Inauguration were very difficult for many Americans because what happened put America in a negative light globally. Many European business partners of American companies were waiting on the sidelines to see how things would play out on the US stage. Fortunately, the next presidential election will take place in 4 years, which means, the speaker explained, that companies may be sure there will be less political uncertainty in the US for the time being, which is very desirable for fostering a good business environment.

THE BASICS

In the second part of his presentation, Ken Sturgess talked about the ABCs of conducting business in the US with respect to its geography and the barriers to trade that the size of continental America creates. He commented on cultural differences and their implications for European businesses eyeing partners in different cultural areas such as New York City, Los Angeles in California, Miami in Florida, or Seattle in Washington. He concluded his presentation with two case studies that showed how mastering fundamental business tasks in the country is more beneficial for success in the US than immediately jumping to advanced-level tasks.