

your credibility is severely affected. Approach the person privately or use a go-between. Apologize profusely. Be especially respectful of the person in the future, and try to find ways of giving face. For example, do something to enhance their reputation or present them with a small gift.

One Canadian recalls trying to fire a term employee who was lazy, incompetent and corrupt. It took months of delicate manoeuvring to get rid of him, even though both Canadian and Chinese staff agreed he must go. The

preservation of harmonious relations was more important than months of inefficiency and disruption. The employee was never told he was incompetent. A face-saving excuse was invented and the appearance of harmony was preserved. In the end, he was treated like a valued employee and given a farewell banquet at a restaurant of his choosing. The Canadian had to foot the bill, but did so happily. Handling the situation with any less care might have resulted in an act of revenge.

*Chinese go through life wearing masks. The ones that tradition decrees. The ones that society decrees.*

-Betty Bao Lord, Legacies

*Guanxi*, indebtedness, can extend over long periods of time and be used either for oneself or to promote the cause of another. In order for *guanxi* to work, a person must have face. It would be unthinkable for a Chinese person to ask a favour without having enough personal prestige to expect the request to be granted. To ask and be denied would be an unacceptable loss of face.

You will discover you have earned *guanxi* simply by being involved in a project. For example, you can anticipate gifts from Chinese people who have received project benefits (or who

wish to). Frequently the gifts are tokens and should be received gracefully. *Guanxi* should not be regarded as a form of bribery, as it would be in Canada. *Guanxi* is an obligation which you may or may not choose to acknowledge or accept, depending on the situation and your ability to respond.

A Canadian in China will find many things that seemed impossible are, in fact, accomplished through the use of his or her own *guanxi* and that of Chinese colleagues or their friends and associates.