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Jon Bon Jovi, globalization and education

By Ron Kitchens

As usually happens with these columns, I am writing this one on an airplane. This trip is different from the usual business trip in that I am returning from attending my brother John's retirement ceremony from the United States Air Force. After 22 years and 22 days traveling the globe for our nation, his tour has come to an end in Honolulu, the place he and his family will call home.

While on this trip, I was struck by two discoveries — the first was just how truly global our economy has become. By global, I do not mean the NAFTA/free trade kind of globalization. I spent five years living near the Mexican border, and I get that kind of global. I am talking about the kind of globalization that has freed the movement of capital, people, information and cultures.

How might you ask in such a short trip did I gain such insight? Well, to be honest, I spent a couple of hours on the beach talking to Japanese and German tourists.

It all started when the young Japanese man next to me asked me to tell him about the shirt he was wearing. He explained that he had seen Jon Bon Jovi (he is a rock star for those of you over 45) wearing the shirt in a video and he liked the looks of it, so he tracked it down on the Internet, where he ordered it from a California company, paying with his Visa card.

I cannot think of better metaphor for globalization than the exchange of capital (Visa card), information (Internet search), people (Jon Bon Jovi and the Japanese man) and culture (the T-shirt).

My second discovery was really a rediscovery. As the father of a 12-year-old daughter, I struggle every day on how to ensure that she is prepared for a future that changes at a never-before-seen rate. My conversations with these young Asians and Europeans reinforced what I know was the key to a global relevant future - education.

I was absolutely taken aback by the understanding of the United States that each and every foreign tourist I spoke with had, and their commitment that travel was for more than just a vacation - it was an education. I am reminded of the words of Mark Twain, who wrote, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." It seems that these young people have taken Mr. Twain's words to heart.

When I asked each of these people about what factors would determine their futures in their home countries, each told me in near perfect English, that it was the value that they could deliver to their companies through applying their knowledge and education. Wow, talk about understanding the modern global economics of our times.

So, Mr. Twain was correct. Sitting on a beach in the shadow of Diamond Head, a little prejudice I held against our global trading partners disappeared. I learned, as Bill Johnston, the chairman of Greenleaf Trust has told me more than once, "People are not in our way, they are fellow travelers in our path." And if we want to stay on that path to global prosperity and relevancy, we must commit to life-long learning that includes our neighbor's culture.

So I guess if my new friend can wear a Jon Bon Jovi T-shirt, I need a Yomiuri Giants baseball jersey. I better hit the Web.

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