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# The Lenovo Way

**Managing a Diverse Global  
Company for Optimal Performance**



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- Make innovation part of your organizational DNA



**Gina Qiao** is the Senior Vice President of Global HR at Lenovo, where she has been employed for more than 23 years. After working several years in Lenovo's U.S. offices, she is currently headquartered in Beijing.



**Yolanda Conyers** is the Vice President of Global HR Operations and Chief Diversity Officer at Lenovo. She has been with the company since 2007, previously working at Dell. Conyers is based in Austin, Texas.

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Managing a Diverse  
Global Company for  
Optimal Performance

**Gina Qiao and Yolanda Conyers**



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## CHAPTER 1

# Going Global

When Lenovo announced its acquisition of American icon IBM PC (IBM's personal computer division) in 2005, most people predicted the merger would fail. Few could imagine that a business would be able to absorb another business that was three times its size, least of all one that had its headquarters on the other side of the world. Even some of us inside Lenovo had our moments of doubt.

But, over the course of 30 years, we have transformed ourselves from a tiny Chinese company based in a sparsely furnished guard shack on the outskirts of Beijing into a truly global corporation, with 54,000 employees who speak more than 40 languages and live in more than 50 countries. We are not simply a Chinese company, nor are we a typical multinational that's dominated by a single culture. In fact, we have roots in China, the United States, and Europe, with headquarters in Beijing, North Carolina, Paris, and Hong Kong.

Lenovo's strength comes from our diversity. We are really defining what it means to be global. We have a leadership team that is balanced and diverse. Our top 9 executive committee

members come from 6 different countries and our top 100 executives come from about 20 different countries. From the top down, our ranks fully reflect the evolving demands, tastes, and needs of our consumers, and that is our great strength.

The story of Lenovo's success must therefore be told through our people and how we wove the many threads of our different cultures together to form a single strong fabric. Among multinationals, the usual model is to grow locally, then export that culture worldwide, but we have grown in multiple regions at once, and this has allowed us to use our global footprint to create a single culture that takes the best from everywhere.

It wasn't easy, but our deep differences and the efforts that we've made to overcome them are the precise reason why we have shot up the charts of the PC industry, reaching the number one spot in July 2013 with 16.7 percent of the global market. At the time this is being written, we've seen 20 consecutive quarters of growth, outpacing the rest of the industry for the past five years, and that's because our leadership has gone to great lengths to embrace a culture of diversity from the ground up. It is an approach that we call the Lenovo Way.

This strategy of balance and diversity cuts across all our business functions. Our team combines many areas of knowledge and expertise, reflecting the diverse tastes and requirements of global IT customers, and that gives us the edge in all our markets.

Moving beyond China's borders was a business decision that our leaders made early on, long before our headline-grabbing acquisition of IBM's PC division (IBM PC), and in this book, you'll learn exactly how we built that road and created a blueprint for a whole new level of globalization, one that is key

We protect our mature markets and attack our emerging markets; we blend ideas from both East and West; we focus on both consumer and commercial businesses; we focus on PCs, tablets, and smartphones; and we have extended into servers and storage as well as into the cloud with our ecosystem of apps.

for any consumer brand that's seeking to reach its full potential in the international marketplace.

Over these next pages, you'll learn just how bold and prescient our leaders truly were. We took a huge risk and pushed ourselves way beyond our comfort zone. It's the worthy aspiration of many to own a small but manageable business, join the middle class as an entrepreneur, and build the backbone of the local economy—and that's how we at Lenovo began. Then we chose a different path by becoming a global corporation. Those of us who went through the original IBM PC acquisition, transition, and transformation of the business were willing to take a leap into the unknown. We understood that when you are swirling the tail of a phoenix (a mythical bird that represents great possibilities), you can soar.

This book is about much more than a Chinese business operating in the United States or U.S. businesses expanding into China, although the backdrop of Lenovo's unique journey as a business is part of the connective tissue of the narrative. It is about cultural awakenings. Anyone who is or will be operating on the global stage can learn from this book. Its readers can expand their knowledge about cultural dimensions and

nuances and what it's like to work in two starkly different environments.

We will include a personalized viewpoint on the creation of a new kind of global company, as we each played our own role in the acquisition and integration of IBM PC and in a number of other major acquisitions since. We will provide our inside perspectives on what this unprecedented transition was like, how it became a catalyst for our own life changes, and the extraordinary adventures that followed for us and our families. After all, globalization isn't just some abstract concept or business strategy—it has a deeply human impact. It transforms lives.

In this post-recession economy, globalization is the favorite buzzword, but all too few walk the talk. Instead, most executives throw the term around without understanding what it really means. So how do lives change, how do families adjust, and how are careers transformed when businesses merge and expand across borders? What does globalization really mean for employees at all levels? How do corporate leaders build a diverse and inclusive culture that shapes best practices in ways that can motivate and inspire their most important resource: their people?

We will answer those questions through our personal and professional experiences, as well as through the stories of our colleagues and our founder and former chairman Liu Chuanzhi. The first chapters will focus on Lenovo's origins as a Chinese company and the pioneers whose courage and persistence helped us conquer the largest and arguably the most challenging consumer market in the world. To understand how far we've come, and the extraordinary nature of the decisions that we made, it's important for you to understand where we began.

Next, we'll detail the steps that we took to acquire an iconic brand and the difficult aftermath of that acquisition as we and our counterparts struggled, not always successfully, to understand each other and blend our cultures. We'll also take you from the transition period following the acquisition of IBM PC to our transformation into the high-tech behemoth that Lenovo is today. In later chapters, you'll also hear from each of us as we break down our HR strategy and tell you how we helped all the moving parts come together into one seamless operation. Because we want you to lose yourself in the chapters to come, we'll include our individual stories, as members of a cast of colorful characters.

Throughout, we'll share takeaways and principles that guided our long journey toward globalization, including:

1. Cultivate a *zero mindset*; past successes don't determine future growth.
2. Leverage the people who are willing to change.
3. Understand that clear communication goes beyond language.
4. Cultural integration is not a sprint; it's a marathon.

## Protect and Attack

We'll delve deeply into our Protect and Attack strategy, the development of our core values as a company, and how we execute through our Lenovo Way Five Ps—Plan, Perform,

Prioritize, Practice, and Pioneer—with concrete examples of how we leveraged these principles in our business, whether by streamlining our global supply chains or by developing innovative new products for the post-PC era of our business, making the transition from a core business of PCs to tablets, smartphones, servers, and other mobile Internet devices.

We'll give you all sides of our globalization story, from the integration of our high-tech manufacturing centers to our earliest struggles with basic communication. You'll meet Chinese executives who were so Westernized by their experiences living in the United States that they felt almost foreign when they returned home to Beijing. And you'll hear stories about veteran IBM executives who've formed lifelong friendships with their Eastern counterparts.

Not only does *The Lenovo Way* reflect the big-picture changes in how global businesses operate, but it illuminates the personal challenges of families confronting change, language barriers, and the challenges of moving from isolation to inclusion. It also highlights the dramatic shifts in perspective that women face when we find ourselves learning to navigate high-level careers and high-pressure jobs while simultaneously trying to figure out how to simply survive as wives and mothers in a completely foreign environment, without the usual support networks.

This is also a story about how colleagues can become friends. As longtime high-tech executives, the two of us have mirrored each other in some startling ways that demonstrate just how much people from different cultures have in common when they are willing to dig deep enough.

There will be takeaways, told through engaging and often amusing anecdotes of adjustment and acclimation to new cultures. These tales will capture the before, during, and after of “going global” and the evolution from pat assumptions to complex reality, from isolation to inclusion.

We’ll also share the many insights our leaders have gained from analyzing our successes and failures, replaying each move like chess masters. These opportunities for personal and professional dialogue have been a godsend, providing us with essential checks and balances as we navigated our strange new worlds.

This is no ordinary business book because ours is no ordinary business. We’ve made things happen because we don’t cling to conventional business practices. We adapt and adjust to the ever-evolving realities of our global business environment, yet what we do is always based on a set of core values that’s become part of our DNA. We live and breathe this stuff, because we believe it is key to the successful future of any global business.

*The Lenovo Way* is a sweeping book full of urgency about the future of multinational corporations and how we as global business leaders need to conduct ourselves in the world at large. Consider this your official invitation to join us on this expansive ride. In the chapters that follow, you will learn exactly what it’s like to dive into the unfamiliar worlds of our colleagues on opposite sides of the earth—and to experience firsthand what it truly means to *go global*.



## About the Authors

**Gina (Jian) Qiao**, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Lenovo, is the eighth-highest-ranking female executive in China, according to *Fortune China*. In many ways, Gina's steady climb from a secretary to the C-suite of the largest PC seller in the world reflects the extraordinary growth story of both Lenovo and China itself.

As leader of the technology giant's HR function, Gina oversees the organizational development, global talent, compensation, and benefits operations for more than 54,000 Lenovo employees across 60 countries, overseeing a corporate culture that is so diverse that six of the nine top leaders at the company are of different nationalities.

It was a long way to the top. Raised in the northeastern city of Dalian during China's Cultural Revolution, Gina remembers a time when the wealth, inclusiveness, and economic freedom that her country now enjoys were impossible to imagine. Her family members suffered greatly during this time. Her grandfather, a doctor who had been educated at Columbia University in New York in the 1930s and had practiced medicine in Boston before he was called back to help his country build hospitals, was arrested and imprisoned for more than two years as part of his "reeducation."

The repercussions affected everyone, including his children. In a family that reveres education, Gina's academically gifted father was barred from attending top-tier schools, although he eventually went on to become a mathematics professor at the University of Dalian.

Like most Chinese families before Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms took hold, the Qiaos had little. Food, especially meat, was scarce, and luxuries like new clothes were almost nonexistent. The small amount that Gina's parents had left from their meager resources was spent on books and school supplies. No one had to tell

her the importance of studying hard, and Gina scored at the top of her class throughout her school years, earning a spot at the prestigious Fudan University in Shanghai.

Gina obtained a bachelor's degree in management science, and, after graduating in 1990, she gained an entry-level position within Lenovo's planning department. Because of her knowledge of Lenovo's computer technology and her ability to communicate well in Mandarin, she was given the job of writing progress reports to the government and explaining why the business needed access to U.S. currency—at the time, the renminbi, the Chinese currency, was nonconvertible.

After six months in this role, Gina joined the secretarial pool for the chairman's office. While she is the first to admit that she was not cut out to be a secretary, it was there that Gina learned the art of prioritizing and multitasking, impressing the leadership with her diligence and building lasting relationships with the founding partners that would become crucially important later in her career.

Lenovo gave her not only a career but also a home. As a young university graduate, neither Gina nor her family had the funds to pay for accommodations in Beijing, so she lived in Lenovo's employee dorms, sharing a small space with four other colleagues. Two years later, a company-endorsed mortgage enabled her to buy her first apartment, in a housing complex built by Lenovo and also inhabited by 71 of her colleagues.

Before long, she moved on to Lenovo's marketing and branding divisions, helping to drive the company's growth in market share and its rise to leadership in China's PC market. She distinguished herself as an award-winning marketing manager and devised many advertising campaigns, some of which Lenovo still uses to this day.

By 2000, as Lenovo became the dominant player in China with a market share of 27 percent, CEO Yang Yuanqing (known as YY) decided that it was time to develop new goals for the company: to transform it into a diversified and global business. In 2002, YY asked Gina to help run the increasingly vital function of human resources. While she was reluctant to leave marketing, which she loved, Gina embraced the challenge and began the arduous process of recruiting more multinational talent to Lenovo to help support its global ambitions.

In 2004, Gina was involved in the yearlong negotiations to acquire IBM's PC division, a deal that finally closed on May 1, 2005. In October 2005, with the newly merged businesses doing better than expected, she moved to New York for a short-term assignment to design the organization, titles, compensation, benefits, and culture integration for the newly merged operation. She then followed the executive team to Singapore in June 2006, where she ran human resources for Lenovo's Asia-Pacific region.

Her task was daunting; the language and cultural barriers were profound. Few Lenovo executives had international experience, much less English language skills, including Gina. But Gina's collegial attitude and her commitment to learning English and immersing herself in unfamiliar corporate styles and cultures eventually won over the IBM PC employees.

In September 2007, Gina, along with her husband and her teenage daughter, relocated to Lenovo's U.S. headquarters in Raleigh, North Carolina, to serve as the Global Consumer Business HR head, living and working alongside her Lenovo International colleagues, learning their best practices, and incorporating those practices into the Lenovo Way. In 2009, while still in Raleigh, she led Lenovo's strategy and planning department, where she was responsible for helping to define, articulate, and implement the company's overarching global strategy, working closely with Lenovo's board of directors and executive committee. In 2011, she was promoted to senior vice president in charge of global HR.

Gina has since returned to Beijing with her husband, Frank Zhang, leaving her daughter, Georgia, to study art and economics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Gina also began a blog on Weibo, the Chinese online social media platform, writing about her daily life as a busy female executive and mother; her blog has more than three million subscribers across China. She is regularly sought out as a speaker at colleges and corporate campuses throughout the world.

Gina holds an executive MBA from the China-Europe International Business School; she is also a 2012 graduate of the University of Michigan's Advanced Human Resource Executive Training.

In 2012 and 2013, she was recognized as one of the top 10 businesswomen in *Fortune China* and *China Entrepreneur* magazine.

Today, Gina speaks fluent English, leading meetings and giving speeches to thousands of employees, and motivating her American team with jokes and stories about her own struggles to adapt to the dramatic changes that have occurred throughout her career at Lenovo.

**Yolanda Conyers** is Vice President of Global HR Operations as well as the Chief Diversity Officer for Lenovo. As the first global diversity officer for a Chinese-heritage company, Yolanda is a pioneer in the field of human resources and one of the chief architects of the cultural integration of computer giants Lenovo and the IBM PC division. Nothing in the textbooks could have prepared her for the challenges of integrating two such widely divergent corporate styles from opposite sides of the globe—Lenovo, the successful Chinese company formerly known as Legend, and American icon IBM’s PC division. Early in the merger, Lenovo committed to finding innovative and realistic approaches to cultural integration and diversity; these have been critical in enabling its top global talent to partner seamlessly within this new phase of growth, and Yolanda, sponsored by Lenovo’s leadership executive committee, has played a significant role in helping to implement these changes. Yolanda led the launch of the Lenovo Way, a worldwide corporate culture initiative that has become a blueprint for business diversity across industries.

Born the youngest of seven children in the small town of Port Arthur, Texas, Yolanda was raised in a predominantly African American neighborhood by a working mother, while her father worked on numerous merchant ships that traveled internationally, remaining at sea for months at a time. Although he had no formal education, her father gained the knowledge and skills he needed to become the ship’s chief steward, eventually earning a middle-class salary to support his family. His dedication to learning, his wisdom, and the stories he brought back from far-flung corners of the globe inspired Yolanda and awakened in her a desire to keep expanding her knowledge, as well as a curiosity about other cultures that remains with her to this day.

Yolanda became the first and only member of her family to receive both a bachelor's and a master's degree. During her freshman year studying computer science at Lamar University's college of engineering in Texas, from which she graduated a member of the Cap and Gown Senior Honor Society, she caught the attention of Texas Instruments, which hired her for three semesters of internships. Upon graduation, TI gave the young software engineer a full-time position.

In 1991, Yolanda moved to computer giant Dell, where she was the first African American female engineer hired by the company and where she had various roles in Product Development, Sales, Customer Service, Human Resources, and Procurement/Global Supply Chain. During her tenure at Dell, she earned an executive MBA in international business and won numerous professional accolades, including the YWCA Woman of the Year in Science and Technology, the Texas Legislative Black Caucus Outstanding Texan in Business, and the Women of Color in Technology National Award for Special Achievement.

But health problems before, during, and after the birth of her second son in 2005 followed by time away on maternity leave gave Yolanda some distance from and perspective on the company that she'd served for 15 years, helping her to realize the paramount importance of a work/life balance. This enabled her to see that it was time for a change, and she resigned from Dell and spent a year focusing on herself and her family in order to determine where her true passion lay.

In 2007, Yolanda was recruited by Lenovo and asked to take on one of the most significant challenges facing the company: global culture and diversity integration. That year, in order to better understand the culture and practices of her new colleagues in Asia, she relocated to Beijing for a short-term assignment, leading the design and implementation of strategies to integrate the complex fabric of Eastern and Western cultures. A year later, she was asked to expand her responsibilities by leading and creating programs to develop top global talent, foster a high-performance culture, and build employee capacity and alignment to drive better business outcomes.

Traveling extensively among Lenovo offices throughout China, the United States, and Europe, Yolanda has continued to be the chief

diversity officer. Her responsibilities have included redefining what diversity means at Lenovo and within the industry at large, and integrating Lenovo employees from all cultures and backgrounds to promote teamwork across cultures. She has worked closely with the Leadership Executive Committee, including the chairman and CEO, her HR peers, and the global team, to improve understanding, respect, and communication among the wide range of nationalities and backgrounds that exist in the organization as a result of the IBM PC acquisition. This work ultimately led to the creation of the Lenovo Way, which has been embedded in the culture of the organization from the top down.

In 2009, Yolanda made the decision to move her family to Beijing for a longer-term assignment. Being based in China allowed her to work more closely with Lenovo's most senior leadership, including Chairman Liu. Moreover, during this critical period in Lenovo's global integration, the move also lessened her overseas travel schedule and enabled her to spend more time with her husband and her two young boys. She dedicated herself to the study of Mandarin and made a point of visiting different parts of China and other countries in Asia with her family in order to experience as much of her newly adopted home as she could.

In 2012, Yolanda was asked to take on another complex project: the overall reorganization of global HR operations. While continuing to oversee diversity, she has been given the task of completing the alignment of all Lenovo's employees into a single HR system, globalizing processes in order to ensure consistent day-to-day management and increased accuracy, speed, and efficiency in support of the business. In 2012, Yolanda also graduated from the University of Michigan's Advanced Human Resource Executive Program.

By far Yolanda's proudest accomplishment is the success and happiness of her family and the journey of personal growth that she and they shared during their almost 3½-year stay in Beijing. In 2009, Yolanda was declared Working Mother of the Year by *Working Mother* magazine, and she was featured on the *Today* show as a result. This is an achievement that she attributes to the unwavering support of her husband, Chris, and the love of her three sons, Christopher, Cameron, and Colton.

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