



PERU

UNFILTERED:

ENTER PERU WITH **U.S** PRECISION.

PERU UNFILTERED

What Every American Company Needs to Know Before They Land

20 years. 13 countries. 1,000+ companies. Zero sugarcoating.

By Eddy G. Zapatero Frank

About the Author

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Eddy G. Zapatero Frank was born in Lima, raised in Canada, and has spent much of his career somewhere in between, or considerably farther away. He has lived and worked across 13 countries, including the United States, Germany, Brazil, Macau (China), Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Qatar and Ecuador, negotiating directly with presidents, ministers, military officers, CEOs, investors and entrepreneurs along the way. That work has given him a practical understanding of how international business actually gets done, not simply how it is supposed to work on paper.

He served as the first official in-country trade representative for the State of Georgia (USA) in Peru, a role that had never previously existed. Over his career he has represented or worked with more than ten US and European government economic development organizations across Peru and Latin America, including those of Georgia, Ohio, Virginia, New York, North Dakota, New Mexico, Michigan, Mississippi, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Invest Northern Ireland, working directly with more than 1,000 US companies pursuing international opportunities.

He later served as South America Investment Representative, excluding Brazil, for Invest Hong Kong, receiving consecutive awards from the Government of Hong Kong for Exceptional Investment Promotion Services in 2019 and 2020. He has personally helped raise over USD 6 million through direct negotiations with heads of state, ministers and C-level executives, not through teams or intermediaries, but personally. His work has also been featured in USA Today and The Globe and Mail.

He is also co-founder of a US dual-use technology startup focused on national defense, where he draws on his background in international business, government relations and cross-border market development. He has led investor outreach for the company, reaching over 1,000 US-based investors through AI-driven workflows he built himself, and has held discussions with the USDA, NASA and the US DOD, as well as allied foreign militaries.

Much of that outreach, and much of his consulting work more broadly, comes back to a single obsession: cash flow. Eddy has long believed that cash flow, not profit on paper, is the real silent killer of most

companies, and he builds that belief directly into how he advises professionals on trade and investment attraction – chase the cycle, shorten it, protect it, before anything else. It is also, by his own account, how he has secured sponsorship and support from some of the world's largest companies, not through agencies or introductions, but by writing directly to the CEO or managing director. Copywriting is one of his other specialties, and the same approach he recommends in this book is the one he uses himself.

He is also an unapologetic capitalist and enthusiast for American technology, products, entrepreneurship and business culture. After working across developed and emerging markets around the world, he has become a firm believer that the U.S remains one of the greatest environments on earth for turning ideas into businesses, a view formed not from theory but from years of watching different business cultures operate firsthand.

He holds a Business Administration diploma from Camosun College in Canada and an MBA from the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management in Germany. He is a native speaker of English and Spanish, speaks German at the B2 level, and is a longtime martial arts practitioner with a second-degree black belt in Aikido. This is not an academic account of how business in Peru is supposed to work. It is a practical account of how it actually works.

This is what he'd tell you before you land in Peru; in person, or on a screen

Always Go to the Top. Always.

In the U.S, you respect the org chart. You contact the right department, speak to the right manager, follow the process. You do this because American companies are built on systems that actually work.

Peru is different.

Not because Peruvian companies are badly run, though some are, but because of how authority actually flows here. In most Peruvian organizations, real decisions travel in one direction only: from the top down. The production manager cannot say yes without the operations director. The operations director cannot say yes without the VP. And the VP is waiting to see what the CEO thinks.

So here is the shortcut that years of operating across 13 countries taught me: skip everyone and go straight to the top. Every time.

This is not rude in Peru. It is not presumptuous. It does not offend anyone. In fact it does the opposite. It signals that you are serious, that your company is serious, and that this conversation deserves attention at the highest level.

Here is what happens when you email a Peruvian CEO directly: they read it, they forward it downward with their name attached, and suddenly everyone below them is paying attention. The same request that would have taken weeks moving up the chain takes hours moving down it.

A Real Example

I learned this not only in boardrooms but in my own personal life in Lima. Recently I was incorrectly charged 2,000 soles (the Peruvian currency) by a health insurance company for a policy I had not renewed. I called customer service. I was transferred. I was put on hold. I was told to submit a form. I was told it would take weeks.

So I stopped. I found the VP of the company using one of the many AI tools available today that can locate senior executives in seconds. I sent her a direct message explaining that her staff was unable to help me and that I was therefore contacting her directly. Within ten minutes the General Manager of the clinic called my personal phone and assigned a dedicated person to resolve my case. By end of day my reimbursement was underway.

This works in business too. When I was representing US states and their companies in Peru, American executives would often ask me to connect them with a production manager, a procurement officer, or a technical specialist. I would always do the opposite. I would go to the CEO first, explain the opportunity and let the order come from the top down.

Why This Works

Peruvian organizational culture is deeply hierarchical. Authority is not just respected, it is feared. When something comes from the top it carries a weight that nothing coming from the side or below ever will. Combined with the enormous natural credibility that American companies carry in Peru, going straight to the CEO is not just acceptable. It is the only strategy that consistently works.

Today there are many AI-powered tools that can help you identify the right executive, find their contact details and even draft the initial outreach. Use them. The technology exists. The strategy is proven. The only thing left is the courage to send the message.

What to Do

Find the CEO or most senior person available. Use whatever tools you have at your disposal. Write a short, direct, professional message. State who you are, what your company does and why you are contacting them specifically. Do not apologize for contacting them directly. Just write as if this is the most natural thing in the world. Because in Peru it is.

What Not to Do

Do not start with the procurement department, the technical team or the regional manager. You will wait weeks for responses that lead nowhere. The org chart in Peru is not your friend. The CEO is.

Use Peru's Cost Structure to Your Advantage

If you decide to establish any kind of presence in Peru, understand this: Peru is remarkably affordable by American standards. Skilled local staff, administrative support, logistics coordinators, even legal and accounting services cost a fraction of what they would in the US.

Find the right local partner and let them handle the procedural heavy lifting. You focus on the big decisions, the relationships at the top and the strategy. This is not outsourcing. This is leverage.

Persistence is Not Rude. It is Required.

In the United States, following up twice on an unanswered email starts to feel aggressive. Three times and you worry about being annoying. Four times and you begin to question yourself.

In Peru, four follow ups means you are just getting started.

This is one of the most important cultural recalibrations an American company must make when entering the Peruvian market. What reads as persistence in Lima is not rudeness. It is not desperation. It is not unprofessional. It is simply how business gets done here.

Here is the rule: if a Peruvian is genuinely interested, they will reach out themselves. If they are not interested, or if they feel they cannot make a decision, they will not move a single finger. They will simply go quiet and hope the situation resolves itself without them having to say the word no.

My Octopus Strategy

"You need to be an octopus."

A mentor described the only effective way to operate in markets like Peru using a metaphor that has stayed with me ever since. Eight tentacles working simultaneously. Each one knows what the other is doing. But you cannot depend on just one.

In Peru you cannot put all your energy into one relationship, one contact, one channel and wait for it to produce results. You attack from every angle at once. The CEO and the operations director. The trade association and the government ministry. The local partner and the direct relationship. All simultaneously. All coordinated.

Why People are Scared to Sign

In Peru, people are deeply afraid of being held responsible for decisions. Signing a contract, approving a purchase, authorizing a payment, these are not routine acts. They are moments of personal exposure. If something goes wrong, the person who signed is the person who is blamed.

I have seen contracts get signed in Peru simply because someone at the top told someone below them to sign. The person who signed was not fully convinced. But the instruction came from above and so they signed. The fear of disobeying the boss outweighed the fear of the contract itself.

What Professional Persistence Looks Like

Following up in Peru does not mean calling every day. It means being present, consistent and impossible to forget. If someone says they will do something, build a follow up into your calendar for 48 hours later. In Peru, good intentions and follow through are two entirely separate things. In 90% of cases the follow through will not happen automatically.

What to Do

Follow up consistently but not aggressively. Mix channels: email, phone, WhatsApp, in person when possible. Use the octopus strategy. When you have top level support, make it visible to those below. And never interpret silence as a no. Silence in Peru usually means one of two things: they are not the decision maker, or they are waiting for someone above them to tell them what to do.

What Not to Do

Do not assume that a positive meeting means a positive outcome. Do not stop following up because you fear being annoying. In Peru, the deals that close are the ones that are followed up relentlessly but professionally. The deals that die are the ones left waiting for someone on the other side to take initiative. They will not. That is your job.

They Will Never Say No. Here is What That Actually Means.

One of the most disorienting experiences for an American doing business in Peru for the first time is this: you have a great meeting. The energy is positive. Everyone is nodding. They say they are interested. They say they will follow up. They say yes.

And then nothing happens.

Here is what actually happened: they said no. They just never used the word.

This is not unique to Peru. Cultural researchers and psychologists have documented this pattern across high-context cultures around the world, where the preservation of face, harmony and relationships takes priority over blunt honesty. But in Peru it has its own particular flavor, shaped by history, hierarchy and a deep-seated discomfort with personal accountability.

The Peruvian Dictionary of No

"Tendré que verlo" (I will have to look into it) means no. "Vamos a ver" (we will see) means no. "Mas adelante" (later, further along) means no. "Si, pero..." (yes, but) means no.

The body language tells a parallel story. Hesitation before answering. A smile that does not reach the eyes. Eye contact that breaks at the wrong moment. A sudden interest in checking their phone. These are not random. They are signals. Once you learn to read them, you will save yourself enormous amounts of time.

Why They Cannot Say No

Saying no in Peru is not just uncomfortable. It carries social risk. It implies conflict. It implies disappointing someone. The safer move is always ambiguity. Let the American keep following up. Let time do the work. Eventually they will tire and disappear and nobody had to say anything uncomfortable.

The Harder Truth: Envy and Sabotage

Sometimes the obstacle is a person who does not want your business to succeed, not because it conflicts with their interests, but because your success makes them feel worse about themselves.

Peru has a deeply rooted culture of envy, what Spanish speakers call "envidia." Studies on social comparison theory consistently show that people in environments with high inequality and low social mobility tend to experience the success of others as a personal threat rather than an inspiration.

Forcing the Answer

At some point you need a real answer. The most effective technique is to force a binary choice while giving the other person a comfortable exit: "I completely understand if the timing is not right. I just need to know so I can plan accordingly. Is this something we are moving forward with or should we revisit at another time?"

You are giving them permission to say no gracefully. And in doing so you are making it easier for them to give you a real answer than to continue the ambiguity.

The American Advantage. Use It. But Understand Its Limits.

There is an asset every American company brings to Peru that no amount of marketing budget can replicate. It is not your product. It is not your price. It is not even your reputation. It is simply where you are from.

When I represented US state governments in Peru, I would call any CEO, any minister, any director, and open with a simple statement: I am calling on behalf of the government of the State of X. That sentence alone was enough to get my voice heard. Not always to close a deal. But to get in the room. To get the call returned. To get the meeting.

When Advantage Becomes Expectation

The same dynamic that opens doors can also create an uncomfortable expectation. American companies will sometimes encounter a direct, unapologetic request for free product, free services or outright donations.

Decades of aid programs, donated equipment and goodwill gestures have created a culture where asking for something for free does not feel shameful. It feels reasonable. Even expected. Do not be surprised by this. Simply be prepared for it and have a clear, polite response ready. You are a business, not an aid organization.

Envy and the Danger of Visibility

In the United States, seeing a neighbor drive a Ferrari is motivating. It signals possibility. In Peru the default is often the opposite. Visible success does not inspire. It provokes.

I saw this firsthand once in Arequipa. A landlord I knew had just bought a brand new car. When I mentioned it publicly, intending it as a compliment, they immediately asked me to lower my voice. They were afraid of the quiet social hostility that follows anyone in Peru who appears to be doing better than those around them.

Be strategic about visibility. Lead with credibility, not with displays of wealth or superiority. Your American identity is already an advantage. The door opens because you are American. It stays open because you deliver.

Relationships First. But Not the Way You Think.

Every guide to doing business in Latin America will tell you the same thing: relationships matter. Build trust first. Take time. Do not rush. Share a meal. This is true. But it is also incomplete. And in Peru, the incomplete version of this advice has led more than a few American companies down a very expensive path.

The Preamble Culture

Communication in Peru is rarely direct. Where an American says "the price is \$500," a Peruvian will often spend ten minutes explaining the history of the property, the difficulty of the current market and the very reasonable nature of their request before arriving, eventually, at a number.

The preamble is not wasted time. It is the relationship being maintained in real time. Every interaction in Peru carries a social dimension that Americans tend to strip out in the name of efficiency.

The Informal Economy

Approximately 70% of the Peruvian economy is informal. That means the majority of economic activity in the country operates outside formal structures, outside regulated labor markets, outside standard contracts and legal frameworks. Due diligence in Peru requires a different kind of attention than due diligence in the United States.

The Hierarchy of Human Interaction

In Peru, certain contexts require clarity of authority rather than casual equality. A general manager I knew at one of Lima's finest hotels needed construction completed by a deadline. He had tried everything in the modern management playbook. None of it moved the needle. On my suggestion he walked onto the site, stated clearly that the work would be completed by a specific date or the entire crew would be replaced, and walked off. It was finished on time.

This is not an endorsement of management by fear. It is an observation that in certain contexts, clarity of consequence is the only language that produces results.

The Business Lunch

The Peruvian business lunch is an institution and you should embrace it. A proper lunch can run two to three hours. Do not rush this. Do not steer the conversation toward business before your host does.

Peruvians are enormously proud of their cuisine, and with good reason, as Lima has become one of the world's great food cities. Engaging with that pride genuinely and warmly will do more for your business relationship than any pitch deck you will ever prepare.

Get Everything in Writing. Everything.

In the United States, a verbal commitment from a business contact carries weight. In Peru, your word is a form of weather. It reflects how you feel right now. Tomorrow the forecast may change.

The practical implication for American companies is straightforward: get everything in writing. Not because Peruvians are dishonest. But because written agreements create a shared reference point that verbal ones simply do not provide in this environment.

WhatsApp is Your Best Friend

Do not count on email. I have dealt with very important local institutions, including government bodies, where officials use personal Gmail accounts and do not check them regularly. I have received official government documents via WhatsApp. WhatsApp is not the informal channel here. It is often the primary channel.

Always follow up a meeting with a WhatsApp message confirming what was discussed. Do not rely on email alone. Many people will not see it.

The Fear Factor

In Peru, written documentation serves a purpose beyond legal protection. It activates the fear dynamic. When something is in writing, when someone's name is attached to a commitment, the stakes feel real in a way that a verbal agreement simply does not produce. Use this strategically.

The Government and Military Exception

Procurement processes in Peru's public sector are heavily regulated and deeply bureaucratic. The gap between the informal agreement and the formal document is where most foreign companies get into trouble. Do not count on the informal agreement. Do not spend resources based on it. Wait for the formal document before treating anything as real.

How to Get Things in Writing Without Insulting Anyone

Say something like: "I want to make sure we are both clear on what we agreed so there are no misunderstandings down the line. Let me send you a quick WhatsApp summary of what we discussed and you can confirm I have it right." That approach is collaborative rather than adversarial. It positions the written record as a tool for clarity rather than a weapon for enforcement. And it works.

Finding the Right Local Partner. The Most Important Decision You Will Make in Peru.

Every chapter in this book has been building toward this one. Finding the right local partner is the single most consequential decision an American company makes when entering this market. Get it right and everything accelerates. Get it wrong and you will spend years undoing the damage.

Do You Actually Need a Local Partner?

The short answer is not always, but usually yes. Peruvian law does not require the use of local distributors or agents for private sector commercial sales. But the US Commercial Service in Lima is explicit: when selling to the government, US companies are strongly recommended to contract and register a local agent.

Agent vs Distributor. Which One Do You Need?

An agent sells your product on your behalf, usually on commission, without taking ownership of it. A distributor buys your product from you outright and sells it to end users at a markup, handling all distribution and logistics.

For high-value, technical or government-oriented products, an agent is usually better. For consumer goods or anything requiring local inventory, a distributor makes more sense. The hybrid model, a local representative who also has distribution capacity, is increasingly common and often the best of both worlds.

Before You Sign Anything. Verify Everything.

The first thing you must do, before any conversation about exclusivity or commissions, is verify that the company is formally registered and operating legally. Check the SUNAT registry to confirm an active RUC number. Check SUNARP for corporate registration. The US Commercial Service in Lima offers an International Company Profile, a report on the credit and business history of individual local companies. Use it.

The Red Flags That Will Save You

The most reliable red flag is a potential partner who focuses more on their commission structure than on understanding your product. A serious partner should be asking you detailed questions about what you sell, how it works, who the target client is.

If instead the first conversation gravitates toward exclusivity, territory size and payment terms, walk away. A partner who is not curious about what they are selling is a partner who is not going to sell it.

Hierarchy Is Not Negotiable

Regardless of your own title or seniority, always begin at the top. Your local partner's job is to get you that first meeting with the CEO or General Manager. An introduction from a CEO to a subordinate is an instruction. An introduction from a peer to a peer is just a suggestion.

What a Good Local Partner Actually Looks Like

They ask more questions than they answer in the first meeting. They can name specific clients and contacts by name. They are formally registered and transparent about their corporate structure. They respond to WhatsApp faster than email. And when something goes wrong, they call you rather than going quiet. That last one is rarer than you think.

Managing Timelines and Expectations. The Clock Runs Differently Here.

There is a scene that plays out in Lima boardrooms with remarkable consistency. An American executive wraps up a productive first meeting and says: "Great. Let's plan to have the proposal reviewed by Friday." The Peruvian counterpart nods enthusiastically. Friday arrives. Nothing.

This is not betrayal. It is not disrespect. It is simply Peru operating at its natural pace.

The Most Useful Tactic I Know: The False Deadline

Never tell a Peruvian counterpart your real deadline. If your actual deadline is May 30, tell them May 10. Build in a buffer that accounts for the inevitable delay, the unexpected personal situation, the government bureaucracy that takes three times as long as anyone expected.

The one exception is when money is directly at stake for the Peruvian party. When missing a deadline costs them a commission or a payment, timelines are met with precision. Financial consequence is the one universally reliable motivator.

Why Government Decisions Take Forever. The Legal Truth Nobody Talks About.

I once worked on a significant government project where the primary decision maker took almost a full year to sign off on an agreement that had been fully negotiated and approved in principle. He was not obstructing the deal. He genuinely wanted it to happen. He was terrified.

In Peru, government officials who sign contracts and authorize expenditures can be held personally liable if those decisions are later found to have violated procurement rules or caused damage to the state. The Contraloria General de la Republica, Peru's powerful comptroller institution, actively audits government contracts and can open investigations against individual officials years after a contract was signed.

Never interpret a government official's delay as lack of interest or capability. They want the deal. They need someone above them to tell them to sign it. The order must come from the top.

Chile vs Peru. The Confidence Gap.

Chilean business culture operates with a sense of superiority. That confidence produces assertiveness, directness and a bias toward action.

Peruvian business culture has historically struggled with an inferiority complex. That lack of confidence produces indirectness, deference to authority, fear of accountability and a tendency to say yes when the honest answer is not yet sure.

Ask any Peruvian what Peru is genuinely world-class at and I will wager with complete confidence that the answer is food. And they are right. Lima has become one of the world's great culinary cities. This matters

for business because food is not just sustenance in Peru. It is identity. A meal here is not a transaction. It is a relationship moment.

Pushing is Not Rude. It is Expected.

When you are communicating with someone on WhatsApp and the conversation reaches a natural pause with them having the last message, do not reply with a closing pleasantry. Simply stop. Leave the conversation open. When you want to follow up several days later, you are not sending a new message. You are replying to their last one. That framing matters. You are not the one pushing. You are the one responding.

When dealing with employees at any level, copying their CEO or General Manager on a critical email has a transformative effect. Use this sparingly but do not hesitate to use it when the situation calls for it.

What Peru Rewards.

You have read eight chapters of things that will go wrong, slow down, surprise you and test your patience. That was intentional. This book was never meant to discourage you from Peru. It was meant to make sure that when you arrive, you are not the American company that learned these lessons the expensive way.

Peru rewards patience combined with persistence. Not one or the other. Both simultaneously. The companies that succeed here are the ones that play the long game without going passive.

Peru rewards cultural humility. Not the performative kind where you pretend everything is wonderful and nothing is frustrating. The real kind, where you accept that a different culture operates by different rules, and that those rules are not inferior just because they are unfamiliar.

Peru rewards relationship investment. Who you know genuinely determines what you can access. Not instead of what you offer. In addition to it.

Peru rewards American credibility. Your technology, your standards, your institutional associations carry real weight here. More than in most markets.

In my experience, people do things in this world for one of two reasons: interest or fear. They act when they stand to gain something or when they are afraid of losing something. Peru is no different from anywhere else in that regard. What is different is how visible both motivations are, how openly they drive decisions and how little they are disguised behind the language of professionalism and institutional process that American business culture uses to cover the same basic impulses.

Interest and fear. Know which one is driving the person across the table and you will always know what to do next.

Peru is not an easy market. It never has been. But it is a genuinely exciting one, with a government actively seeking American technology and a business community that, at its best, is warm, entrepreneurial and capable of moving fast when the conditions are right.

The companies that succeed here are not the ones with the best product or the biggest budget. They are the ones that took the time to understand how Peru actually works. And now, so do you.

Bonus: The Real Checklist

Before Your First Meeting

Verify the company is formally registered with an active RUC number in the SUNAT database. Confirm you are meeting the CEO or the most senior person available. Research the company ownership structure. Set your internal deadline two to three weeks earlier than your real one.

Before You Send Anything in Writing

Use WhatsApp as your primary channel, not email. Confirm key terms in writing after every meeting, even informally. Never close a WhatsApp conversation with a pleasantry if you want to follow up later. Leave it open.

Before You Sign Anything

Verify your local partner or counterpart's formal registration. Get everything in writing regardless of how solid the verbal agreement felt. If dealing with a government entity, understand that the informal yes and the formal signed document are two entirely different things. Do not commit resources based on the former.

Before You Wire Any Money

Conduct a background check on the company and the individual. Use the US Commercial Service's International Company Profile service if available. Confirm bank details directly with the company principal, not through intermediaries.

The One Thing Nobody Will Tell You

Peru is a country where the rules are real but the enforcement is inconsistent, where yes often means maybe and maybe often means no, and where a meal at a great Lima restaurant will do more for your business relationship than six months of email correspondence.

Bring patience. Bring persistence. Bring genuine curiosity about the culture, the food and the people. And bring the knowledge that the gap between what Peru appears to be and what Peru actually is, is exactly where the real opportunity lives.

That gap is where I have spent twenty years. It is where the deals get done.

Welcome to Peru. Unfiltered.