

Intercultural Communications:

The Key to Building (Guan Xi) or Breaking Your Relationships

Sauce for the Goose, not always for the Gander

Even in European countries, each nationality has its own way of communicating. Communicating across cultures requires extra effort. Good communication requires commitment and concentration. When communication causes conflict, be aware that problems may have more to do with style or process than with content or motives.

Dutch business people keep business and private matters strictly separate. When negotiating, they are very straightforward and to the point. A no-nonsense approach is used in business meetings and in society.

A foreign businessman should not feel offended when a Dutchman says he is wrong.

Business people from the UK and Belgium are more careful. They will be cautious in saying that they disagree and need time to think things over.

In Luxembourg, first contacts are quite formal. For them, it is important to know that a potential business partner is not just passing through, but that he has chosen the country for its individual characteristics.

In Germany and France, people are more distant and formal. The French do not use first names, and one must persevere to gain their trust.

Most Europeans have a good sense of humour, laughing loudly and self-mockery is not considered as impolite.

However, in China you may want to avoid making expansive gestures and using unusual facial expressions.

The Chinese do not use their hands when speaking, and will only become annoyed with a speaker who does.

The Chinese, especially those who are older and in positions of authority, dislike being touched by 'strangers' when they are communicating. Always acknowledge the most senior person in a group first.

Smiling is not as noticeable in China, since there is a heavy emphasis on repressing emotion.

Judging the book by its cover? Respect differences; don't judge people because of the way they speak. Use language that fosters trust and alliance. Remember that communication is a process and that the process varies among cultures. Look at what might be getting in the way of understanding. Constantly ask "What's going on here?" and check your assumptions.

It is interesting to know how to greet the other person in his own language. Sometimes business cards are translated into English and adapted to the style and usage of the country one is doing business with.

Making small talk is an entry to big opportunities. What should you be talking about and how you should conduct yourself professionally?

Compliments, flattery and flirting. Do you know how they work? Whether you are the contributor or the recipient, using the wrong approach may not only jeopardize your professionalism, it may cause you to lose your chance of moving forward with a prospect.

Find out how to avoid embarrassing moments at social gatherings and being a dinner guest in a family home. As a host, are you aware of unwritten rules to ensure that your guests are comfortable? Or how you should conduct yourself when you are a guest, and show respect to your host?

Marrying culture and colour

Aside from culture, the demographics within each culture also make the difference in colour and tastes, especially in Asia. Using the right colour will highlight your cultural astuteness, and conversely, using the wrong colour will end up being a disaster.

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