



## From Melting Pot to Salad Bowl: Understanding Cultural Diversity

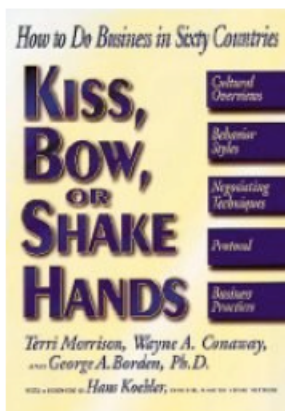
The United States used to be referred to as the Melting Pot – where people came and assimilated themselves into the ‘American’ culture.

Today the trend is toward multiculturalism, not assimilation. The old "melting pot" metaphor is giving way to new metaphors such as "salad bowl" and "mosaic", mixtures of various ingredients that keep their individual characteristics. Immigrant populations within the United States are not being blended together in one "pot", but rather they are transforming American Society into a truly multicultural mosaic.

### What is culture?

- Guidelines and values society develops for judging and enforcing behavior
- Human response to the need to adapt to circumstances and transmit adaptive skills and knowledge to following generations.
- A system for creating, storing, sending and processing information
- The product of a group’s efforts to make itself comfortable in the world.

Reference and research material:



You are advised that this course is presented to stimulate learning. For specific advice prior to taking any action, consult with your attorney, accountant, etc. This program is for educational purposes only and neither the sponsor nor the instructor is giving anyone advice, legal or other.

### Where Cultures Vary

- conversational distance
- pointing and beckoning
- use of personal vs. family name
- attitude toward body contact
- willingness to answer personal questions
- eye contact.
- standards of personal appearance
- nodding and head shaking
- hand gestures
- body posture and orientation
- clothing
- use of 'no'
- family involvement
- voice level

### High Context Cultures

- Conduct business thru development of relationships
- Non-verbal communication is important
- Contract not seen as binding document but as basis for relationship
- Schedules tend to be flexible

Asia                      Mid East                      Latin America  
Russia                    Southern European

### Low Context Cultures

- Relationships get in the way of practical business decisions
- Precise verbal agreements are important
- Contract is binding and seen as separate from personal relationship
- Schedules carefully observed

America  
Northern Europe

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### North Americans

Informal  
Direct  
Results oriented  
Fast pace

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### Asia/Latin America

Formal  
Face saving  
Relationship oriented  
Slower pace

## Multicultural Communication Model

### Step 1. Approach People As Individuals First

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- ◆ We should resist stereotyping and automatically treating people according to their primary culture's customs.
- ◆ People want to be evaluated on their own merits.
- ◆ People reflect varying degrees of their home country cultures.
- ◆ We get along best with people when we treat them the way they want to be treated, which is usually a mirror reflection of how they act.
  - When a client greets you at the door with a smile and a firm handshake – return the smile and handshake with equal energy.
  - If your style is more out-going and your client's more reserved, try reining in your enthusiasm to a level more comfortable for your customer, at least at first.
- ◆ Inherent in this first step is being aware of your own multicultural style – how you are likely to think and act, and proactively controlling your responses to be most effective with the other person.

### Step 2. Listen, Observe and Clarify

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- ◆ As you are mirroring the other person's demeanor, put your active listening skills to work.
- ◆ Research indicates:
  - only 7% of communication occurs through words
  - 38% is through voice (tone, rate, inflection)
  - 55% through the face and body
- ◆ Paraphrasing what you have just heard, then repeating it back to the speaker is an effective and polite method for assuring that you understand something.
- ◆ Hesitancy on the part of the speaker does not necessarily signal disagreement or lack of understanding. It may be a result of the level of language fluency.
- ◆ Use the time when you are not talking to focus on the speaker, not to formulate an anticipated response.
- ◆ The quick pace of real estate may cause some to interrupt a speaker or complete sentences to speed up communication. This may be particularly hard to overcome when communicating with someone who is not very fluent in English.
- ◆ Do not pretend you understand or shrug it off if you do not really comprehend.

**Step 3. Consider Cultural Heritages**

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- ◆ Cultural values are based on perceptions and beliefs about concepts.
- ◆ Communication challenges occur when these perceptions and beliefs differ.

**Step 4. Develop Dialogues and Relationships**

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- ◆ The goal is to develop ongoing dialogues and fruitful relationships with people of all cultures.
- ◆ Getting to know individual people is one of the best ways possible to really understand each other.
- ◆ When interacting with someone for whom English is a second language, remember these suggestions:
  - When an adult learns a foreign language, the ability to understand spoken communication usually develops before the ability to speak.
  - Speak slowly and distinctly, pausing after each main point if a translator is being used. Use simple sentences.
  - If the person does not seem to understand, don't talk louder or "down" to them, as you would a child. Instead, try rephrasing what you said, with the attitude of "I'm sorry, I did not make myself clear."
  - Avoid using slang, jargon, colloquialisms or sports metaphors.
  - Be aware of your words, gestures and their meanings.
- ◆ In your everyday dealings, remember these points:
  - An individualistic person will probably want to be very direct and open with you; a group-oriented person more indirect and non-revealing until trust is established.
  - For those who believe in formal hierarchy and/or are highly group-oriented, you may want to have a trusted intermediary introduce you, someone both of you trust. That person may need to be present until the third party is comfortable with you. Several meetings may be necessary before you can conduct business.
  - Select a topic of conversation of mutual interest which sets you on equal footing, which may be unrelated to business – such as the weather or kids. Build on similarities – we all have a lot in common. Beware of getting too personal too soon, however.
  - Treat people with respect. Everyone on this planet wants their human dignity acknowledged.
  - Be positive and good-humored in your demeanor and speech.

- Guard against taking offense at something that is said or done; it may have been innocent. Consider the possible cultural reason or intent. Be non-judgmental.
- Use “I” statements when you speak, demonstrating that you take responsibility for what you are thinking and feeling. This takes the onus off them and helps to clarify your position. For example, you could say, “I perceive that you are angry about...Am I correct?” rather than saying “You are angry.”
- People who have a hearing impairment often rely on lip-reading to comprehend the spoken word. This does not mean that you must speak at an artificially slow pace or raise your voice to be understood by someone with a hearing impediment. The courteous approach is to assure that your listener can clearly see your face when you speak.
- When working with a disabled client who has an attendant, speak directly to the client, not to the attendant. This same approach holds true for interpreters and other types of assistants.

## Understanding Cultural Differences

### Europe

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- ◆ European business people want to check business credentials carefully before entering into a business relationship.
- ◆ In Europe, one has the “regal right” to protect individual personal information.
- ◆ Nowhere in the world is punctuality more important than in Germany. Be on time for every appointment. Arriving just two or three minutes late can be insulting.
- ◆ Exact titles are *very* important. In Germany titles accumulate, such as “Herr Doktor Geschäftsführer” (Mr. Doctor President). They do not necessarily represent the function performed.
- ◆ Humor in business dealings in Germany is considered inappropriate.
- ◆ Europeans dislike breakfast, lunch or dinner meetings. They prefer to keep business and pleasure separate.
- ◆ Superlatives are viewed suspiciously. Understatement is valued.
- ◆ In the U.K., to “table” a topic means to bring it into open discussion.
- ◆ Italians find Americans too much in a hurry, not taking enough time to talk and being too combative.

- ◆ In France, direct questions are considered rude. An indirect approach is preferred, e.g., “Excuse me, I have a problem” rather than “What can we do about...”
- ◆ Guests in Europe bring either cut flowers (an uneven number and never red roses) or a box of chocolates for the hostess. Gift wrappings are symbolic; avoid white, red and brown, which have negative connotations in some countries.
- ◆ Avoid hard sell. Decision making is slower in England than in the United States. Don’t rush the English toward a decision.
- ◆ Especially when speaking with someone from the British Isles, speak in complete sentences.

### **Body Language**

- ◆ Men, women and children all shake hands, one quick pump.
- ◆ In England, Scotland and Sardinia tapping the side of the nose means, “You and I are in on the secret.” If a Welshman does it, however, he means, “You’re really nosy.”
- ◆ The “V” sign with knuckles turned out is England’s equivalent of the American middle finger.
- ◆ The hand wave with palms exposed in Greece could be misinterpreted as “go to hell”. Greeks wave with the backs of their hands.
- ◆ Tapping the temple signifies something or someone is crazy except in Holland, where the gesture means, “how clever!”
- ◆ Appropriate kisses on the cheek: Zero to one in Britain, two on most of the Continent, three in Belgium and French-speaking Switzerland, and four in Paris.
- ◆ Excessive smiling is perceived as being dim-witted and condescending in France. Smiles have to be earned. A serious, even funereal, expression is usually most appropriate. Subtle messages are conveyed with the eyes.
- ◆ The British often do not look at the other person while they talk.

### **Latin America**

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- ◆ Personal relationships are essential to successful business ventures and are usually established before business is conducted. Business relationships are built on trust between people, rather than organizations.
- ◆ Social ranking in the society is significant.
- ◆ Mexicans can be wary of outsiders.

- ◆ Manana means soon as well as tomorrow.
- ◆ In Mexico it is common to have long lunch breaks, often to nourish business relationships, then to return to the office and work late.
- ◆ Family relationships are supreme in Mexico; business commitments take lower priority than family obligations.
- ◆ Time is relative in Mexico. Meetings often start late.
- ◆ Style and presentation are important.
- ◆ The business world is very formal. Relationships become more casual only with time. Much attention is paid to status. Senior officials should always be addressed first.
- ◆ Use professional and courtesy titles. Ask before using first names.
- ◆ Always take a period of time for small talk before getting down to business.
- ◆ There is a strong sense of pride. Loss of face in front of others is to be avoided. Conflict will be avoided, and it can be difficult to interpret negative reactions. For example, an answer of agreement may be given to show respect, when the actual answer is negative.
- ◆ Business negotiations are likely to start with generalities and lead to specifics slowly, in a style similar to that in the USA and Europe.

### **Body Language**

- ◆ Physical embraces between men are common greetings.
- ◆ Handshakes should be firm and long, lasting about four or five shakes.
- ◆ The “A-OK” sign, thumb and forefinger forming a circle, is an obscene gesture in Mexico (and Germany, too).

### **Asia**

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- ◆ Asian countries have a high group orientation, requiring consensus in all matters. There is no sense of “self” as the Western world defines it – people exist only as part of a family and other groups, not as individuals with rights. Conformity is valued over autonomy.
- ◆ Japanese fear mistakes and rejections, which would shame themselves as well as those they represent, e.g., their company and family.
- ◆ Asians consider persistence and hard work more important components of intelligence than cognitive ability.

- ◆ Asians never look back, only forward. Therefore, they don't go back to correct a mistake; rather, it is done again and again until perfection is attained. The focus is on the future.
- ◆ Clocks are inappropriate gifts in China as they may be interpreted as marking the passage of the recipient's life.
- ◆ The cow is sacred in India; therefore leather gifts are inadvisable.
- ◆ The number "5" is lucky in Asia, representing the five elements of earth, water, fire, sky, air.
- ◆ In Chinese, the surname comes first and the given name comes last, e.g., Mr. Lo Win Hao should be addressed as Mr. Lo.
- ◆ In China the phrase, "Have you eaten," is interpreted as inquiring about a person's health.
- ◆ A missing button, frayed cuff or cheap cuff links may be interpreted by the Japanese as a reflection of slovenly personal or work habits and a lack of dependability.
- ◆ Sensitivity to status is important in Japan. Always concentrate on dealing with the most senior man in the room.
- ◆ To avoid shame to anyone, and thus "save face," affirmative answers will be given to most questions. There are 16 different meanings to the word "yes" in Japanese. Confrontation will be avoided.
- ◆ The Japanese word "Hai" is a sign of acknowledgment, not necessarily agreement. This word is used in Japanese conversation frequently to let the speaker know that the listener is following the conversation, much as we say "uh-huh".
- ◆ With the Japanese, the more important the subject, the greater the need to be circumspect and avoid giving offense. Refusals may come in the form of, "it will be very difficult," "I will have to discuss it further," silence or unwarranted delays.
- ◆ Loud speech is regarded as lacking in refinement or threatening by the Japanese, who are encouraged not to dominate conversations or try to impress with words and not to interrupt or speak over someone else.
- ◆ The Japanese regard hesitancy in answering an important question as a sign of maturity and giving due consideration to serious matters.
- ◆ When negotiating, allow silences. They can be meaningful and are common in Pacific Rim countries. Many Americans, uncomfortable with silence, have misinterpreted them and given away points prematurely.
- ◆ For the Japanese, the comment "By the way" is a signal to start talking about serious business matters.



## Body Language

- ◆ In Thailand the head is sacred and to touch it is offensive, even that of a child.
- ◆ The handshake is likely to be a single firm gesture, accompanied with a bow. It is polite to return both.
- ◆ Do not use your left hand in India, or show the bottom of your shoe, such as sitting with crossed legs. Both are perceived as insults.
- ◆ In Malaysia, beckoning with the index finger to single out a person in a group is perceived as being treated like a child, and is insulting. In Indonesia the gesture is used only to call animals. Pointing should be done with the thumb outward and the fingers closed in the palm.
- ◆ A smile may be used to hide embarrassment or mask true feelings in Japan. In Korea smiling is reserved for intimate relationships. Broad smiles are considered inappropriate with strangers, and flirtatious for women.
- ◆ The Japanese are respectful of each other's personal space. Touching is inappropriate in most situations.
- ◆ Kissing is very private and never done in public.
- ◆ Broad sweeping gestures are impolite.
- ◆ A nod of the head means, "I hear you," not necessarily agreement.
- ◆ The Chinese greet a friend with a vigorous handshake and may put an arm around you.

## Arab Culture

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- ◆ High group orientation.
- ◆ Time is elastic
- ◆ Do not ask personal questions
- ◆ Hold hospitality, seniority and building relationships as top values

## Body Language

- ◆ The Arab handshake may be limp and lingering. Pulling the hand away too soon is interpreted as rejection.
- ◆ Eye contact must always be made in the Arab world when meeting another person because of the Arab belief that the eyes are the windows of the soul and to avert them is to expose their owner's lack of sincerity.
- ◆ Nodding your head up and down means "no"
  - ◆ In Arab culture a common greeting among friends and acquaintances is a hug, although strangers usually greet with a handshake.