



When Being Yourself Isn't Enough

Many managers take it for granted that the way they greet colleagues, give direction to subordinates, present ideas to staff, and converse at business lunches is fine and appropriate. After all, skillful communication is a key tool that effective leaders work to master.

You might wonder then why you can't just keep speaking and writing as you always have, even if some of the people across the table, down the hall, or at the other end of the phone happen to come from countries and belong to nationalities other than your own. The answer to your question is that your natural, customary ways of communicating can have an unexpected and unwanted impact on people whose cultural backgrounds are different from yours. And you are just as likely to misunderstand and misinterpret their words and behavior.

Unless you make a conscious effort to be sensitive to different cultural styles, to recognize signals of culture clash, and to modify your own communications accordingly, you risk at the very least confusion and embarrassment. More critically, cross-cultural communication blunders can lead to more serious consequences—lost confidence, lost customers, and lost business relationships and opportunities.

In our ever-more-connected world, cross-cultural awareness and ability is no longer just a polite gesture to your international customers and colleagues. It's a new essential for leading in a global environment. This guidebook can help you improve your skills in cross-cultural communications. From this guidebook you'll learn how to:

- Expect and identify cultural differences.
- Look out for cultural differences.
- Draw cues from nonverbal communication.
- Speak and write clearly for other cultures.
- Learn the importance of names and titles.
- Use humor judiciously.
- Show your respect for other cultures.
- Become a lifelong learner of other cultures.