

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Cultural Differences in Business."

IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED (Stories of Cultural Disaster)

An American engineer was sent to Saudi Arabia to negotiate a deal for his company. He approached his contact, a native of Saudi Arabia, with great care and manners. After their initial and subsequent meeting, the American was invited to dinner. Here he met his host's father. When he was asked about his own family, the American said he had visited his father at his nursing home just a few weeks before he left for Saudi Arabia. He explained that his father's health was failing. Suddenly the mood of the Saudi Arabians changed. He was escorted out of the home a short time later. He knew he had done something, but he was clueless what error he had made. Can you find his mistake? The people of the Middle East place high importance upon family, especially respect for their elders. Because the American had admitted that he had abandoned his father into the care of strangers during his father's time of need, it was interpreted that this American could not be trusted.

In France, an American IT person was working with his French colleagues. He felt he had held his own and even impressed them with his knowledge. He was very encouraged when they invited him to dinner that evening. Because he spoke French rather fluently, he was aware that the Frenchmen were making negative remarks about the quality of the food. The American wanted to assure them that they had chosen the restaurant well, so in their language he told them that he thought the food was good. The American felt the walls close instantly. What was the problem? The French pride themselves upon being superb connoisseurs of food. When the American found the same food not only acceptable, but, actually good, they lost respect for him for his lack of "savior faire."

Cultural differences extend beyond words and gestures. It begins with intent and values. Learn the values of the culture you are dealing with before you begin the deal.

For example, trust is a concept that is viewed



quite differently across the globe. In the United States, we trust someone in business when they have demonstrated acceptable or superior performance over time. For instance, if John has kept his commitment and completed his portion of the project on time and within budget, we would likely say we trust him in business.

In the Arab, Asian, and Latin world of business, trust requires a lengthy discussion on non-related issues. You may be invited to breakfast and discuss everything under the sun except business. Work-related discussions begin only after they are comfortable with you as a person. If you rush into business, you do so without their trust.

The Chinese respect seniority and wisdom, while the Americans are viewed as respecting success. Chinese success is centered on relationships while more focus is given to the individual in our country. It may serve you well to mention the efforts of your team or company when presenting products and services to sell.

Humility is seen as strength in Asia, much more so than the United States. In American business, it is often considered a liability or weakness. One of our popular phrases is, "The squeaky wheel gets the oil."

When dealing with different cultures, do your homework. Learn their values and culture. You'll be glad you did.

IN THE NEWS: YA-YA SISTERHOOD CONVENTION

Beverly Inman-Ebel was the keynote speaker for this year's Ya-Ya Sisterhood Convention in Orlando, Florida, on February 24th. Beverly spoke on, "The Heart of a Leader."

To arrange for Beverly, or one of our other dynamic speakers to present at your next business gathering, call Don Wheeler at (423) 622-8255.



MARCH 2005

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE	2
WHAT'S IN A NAME?	2
ASK THE EXPERTS	2
BEAUTY IS SKIN DEEP, BUT CULTURE IS TO THE BONE	3
"YOUR BODY IS TALKING IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE!"	3
CEO CORNER: "Be Nicer"	4
FEATURED SERVICE: Season Tickets	4

LOOKING AHEAD:

♦ Exercise for Mind & Body - the focus of the April issue of the Exchange.

LOOKING BACK:

- ♦ For previous editions of *The Exchange*, go to our [back issues](#).
- ♦ Re-read the [11/2003](#) edition: **Reducing Defensiveness**.

You can't shake hands with a clenched fist.

Indira Gandhi

What Our Clients Are Saying

"TLC does a great job helping your team build their communication skills while also creating a fun environment that helps them establish lasting personal relationships."

Ann Dozier, Atlanta GA



Helpful Hints:

When communicating with someone of another culture...

- **Decrease your volume.**
- **Increase your politeness.**

There are two statements about human beings that are true: that all human beings are alike, and that all are different. On those two facts all human wisdom is founded.

Mark Van Doren



To learn more about it, click here!

DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

By Tabi Upton, MA, LPC

Diversity. It was the buzzword of the nineties. Multiculturalism took on new meaning when the push for individuals of different ages, orientations, genders, as well as ethnicities came to national attention. It was the age of inclusion and political correctness, and it infuriated the conservatives. I'll never forget a philosophy professor in college telling the class that this new push for diversity was going to "balkanize" the U.S. We would end up fighting each other and eventually destroy the nation, just like during the Civil War. He felt that everyone should consider their culture to be Angle-Saxon, and then we'd have no differences, and therefore no problems.

Sadly, that really happened, though it sounds unbelievable. Ten years later, the country continues to grow more diverse, and racial tensions ebb and flow, though the controversial group changes face periodically. The debate over diversity is mainly carried out in hushed terms, especially if you think it's a pain in the backside.

Melanie Goetz, a writer on diversity, defines it in much more complex terms than the norm. She includes education, skills, religion, geographic origin, style, and more. She cites a tool called the "Four Layers of Diversity," which includes personality, inner dimension qualities such as age and race, external dimension qualities like income and appearance, and an organization dimension that focuses on work department, seniority, or location. One key to promoting diversity in the workplace, she says, is to educate the employees on what it is and what it is not. You must also be realistic. This is a long-term commitment. There are solid reasons for companies to diversify, though the drawbacks must also be considered.

Advantages include that companies can increase their target population exponentially by learning from and utilizing the viewpoints and skills of many different perspectives. As an example, women make up almost half of the workforce currently, and women are a powerful voice in the consumer market and politics. A diverse workforce can boost productivity as well as creativity.

Disadvantages include that some individuals feel threatened when working with individuals of different backgrounds. Employees often mismanage diversity, making one group appear more valuable than another, causing isolation and fragmentation of the staff in general. All members must know their value and contribution.

Though it is important to continue to work

toward diversity, I don't believe it is necessary to preach it continually. As the leaders set the tone, the workers will receive the message. At the same time, each individual's talents should be highlighted. After all, each member of the body is important, and everyone must work in harmony to one another.

Tabi Upton is a psychotherapist and columnist. She can be contacted at Johnson Mental Health Center, (423) 634-8884, x1113.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Germans and Japanese typically do not use first names. They prefer titles and last names. The Japanese refer to themselves as "international visitors" not foreigners. Asians are insulted if they are called "Orientals."

ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

I am an American citizen currently working in an international office overseas. My new co-workers have different work habits than what I am used to in the United States.

This new group comes in as late as 10:30 a.m., leaves around 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, and usually the entire group either goes to lunch for an hour and 30 minutes minimum, or, they take multiple breaks as long as 30 minutes each. I am getting the reputation of being a party pooper because I have spoken out about my disapproval of all their "goofing" off, and I am reluctant to hang out with them. Please advise.

American Pooper

Dear American,

Try to look at this situation from their perspective. Just because your new international team works differently than your American team, it does not mean the new team is "goofing off." Frequent breaks and strong relationships with co-workers are paramount in an effective professional team. If you are invited to go with them, I recommend you go, since they are embracing you as a member of their team. Even if you only go sometimes, you are showing that you are flexible. Observe, listen, and learn from you new team's culture. You might bring back to the U.S. a new way to work and play.

BEAUTY IS SKIN DEEP, BUT CULTURE IS TO THE BONE

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

Have you ever heard the expression "culture shock"? Well, this time last year I experienced "cultural electrocution"!

In February of 2004, I was conducting a workshop near London, England. Although I travel frequently, I was exposed to more cultural diversity within my 9 days in the United Kingdom than ever before in my travels.

As I walked down the internationally popular shopping section of downtown London, Piccadilly Circus, I ventured into a nearby pastry shop and coffee café. Inside, it was normal to hear French, Italian, Spanish, Jamaican, English (both ours and theirs), and a multitude of other languages all within the same booth!

At a nearby table, I sat near two businessmen discussing a corporate merger over a latte and a laptop. Even though this place was very noisy, my American voice boomed as I placed an order. After I spoke, the two men snickered, "Is this your first time hopping the pond?" (If this makes no sense to you, ask someone who has visited England!)

The first man was the complexion of what we would consider "Caucasian" here in America. Let's call him, "Mr. White." The second was the complexion of what we would call an "African-American." Let's call him "Mr. Brown." After talking with them briefly, I learned that Mr. Brown, who had the heavier of the English accents, was born, raised, and educated in London, England. Mr. White was born and raised in South Africa! He was living in Washington, D.C. and had been an American citizen for years.

So, let's say that both of these men were sitting at the same table in downtown Atlanta. If you were their server and you were told that the "African-American" was paying, to whom would you give the bill?

Mr. Brown would appear to be the "African-American," but he has never been to Africa or America. Mr. White is officially an "African-American" because he was a citizen of both countries, but how many of us would describe him as anything other than "Caucasian?"

I learned that, regardless of what we call them, what society calls them, or what box they check off on their income tax forms, these two gentlemen wanted me to call them Winston and Stevan, their names.

Traditionally, the month of February is acknowledged in the United States as African-American (Black) History month. Celebrating our culture is wonderful, just be sure to remember that culture goes deeper than

complexion. Culture includes words, customs, belief systems, music, foods, and more. So the next time someone asks me if I am an African-American, I will smile and say, "Yes, but what else?"

"YOUR BODY IS TALKING IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE!"



Body language is a fun topic whenever we at TLC are speaking or coaching. Most people are amazed just how many messages are sent non-verbally and how the body talk reveals true feelings.

When dealing with different cultures, it becomes even more interesting. Take eye contact for instance. People from the Arab countries give intense eye contact almost 100% of the time. Asians use much less eye contact and can become uncomfortable if you look at them too much.

People in Mexico are more comfortable with smaller zones of space than their northern neighbors. Standing your normal three feet apart from them in a conversation may send the wrong message.

When a Japanese person hands you a business card, it is very important to receive it and hold it carefully in two hands. Take the time to read it in front of that person and then carefully place the business card in a place of respect, such as a breast pocket or a metal card holder.

Then there are the gestures. You probably have heard the story of when Kruchev visited the United States. He stood at the door of the plane with his fingers in a "v" thinking he was being friendly. Of course, it was interpreted as "victory" here in the states and was not well received.

The word, "okay," may be the most commonly recognized word around the globe, but not the gesture for it. If you make a circle with your index finger and thumb while raising and separating your remaining three fingers, this means, "OK," in the USA and the UK. In Russia, it means, "zero." In Japan, it means, "money" and in Brazil, it is a general insult. So unless you want to communicate that it's okay to insult someone with zero money, you might want to omit this gesture abroad!



When communicating with someone of another culture,

Remember to...

- **Increase your listening.**
- **Avoid using idioms ("raining cats and dogs," "frog in your throat" ...).**
- **Observe facial expressions and body language changes.**
- **Ask questions to clarify.**

There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it.

Dale Carnegie

It is never too late to give up your prejudices.

Henry David Thoreau



The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.

St. Augustine

What is traveling? Changing your place? By no means! Traveling is changing your opinions and prejudices.

Anatole France

The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be only the beginning.

Ivy Baker Priest

TLC, Talk Listen Communicate, LLC

842 S. Germantown Road
Chattanooga, TN 37412

Phone: 423-622-8255
Fax: 423-624-4365
1-888-BECAUSE

Email: tlc@talklisten.com
www.talklisten.com

CEO CORNER: "Be Nicer"

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

Last year, I made four separate trips to Europe, interacted with business people from over forty-two countries, and visited seven countries. On my last trip home in November, when I arrived at Kennedy Airport in New York, I stepped outside while waiting for my connecting flight and would have kissed the ground if I could have found any that wasn't plastered with asphalt or concrete!

When I went to Czech and Poland, I failed to do my homework. While I read a little about their culture, I did not learn even the first word in their language. That was a mistake I would not repeat.

It is often said that the English language is the language of business. When you do "business," you do it with their people. Only 7% of the world's population speaks English as a first language and a mere 30% speak it as a second language. Looking at those odds, if you are going to rely on English as your source of communication, you may miss out on 70% of what is being said!

Whenever I would speak Italian or Spanish to Europeans, they responded very favorably. Even when I mixed up the two languages, the people did their best to accommodate me. Learning social language phrases is so easy to do with courses offered on CD's in practically any language. While these are very helpful, I recommend that you also study some words in print. I got to Italy and could be very sociable but couldn't order a thing off the menu because I had never studied the written language.

I attended a large conference in Scotland that had business representatives from across the globe. My meager Italian and Spanish were of little help there, so I used a different strategy. Before I arrived, I contacted acquaintances with extensive travel experience, to gather the current cultural trends and learn how people from these countries might view Americans. I learned that while they may admire our success in business, we are often seen as arrogant and loud.

I toned down my normally outgoing



personality. I used every manner my mother ever taught me. I smiled more. When I had the availability of interpreters, I asked questions so that I could listen more than talk. A woman from France told me in broken English that I was a very humble and yet successful American woman. I am sure that will be in my top 25 compliments for my lifetime.

In all of my trips "over the pond" last year, I noticed my fellow travelers in the airplanes. The happiest people seemed to be those, not who were going on a grand adventure, business trip or vacation, but rather those who were coming home. No matter where we live, most of us will prefer our own culture. We see our "rules" as the right ones.

When you are visiting another country or hosting a guest from another land, be nicer. Learn how to say, "Thank you," "Please," and, "I'm sorry," in another tongue. Be an ambassador for the United States. We need all the good ones we can get. Go. Travel. Be nicer. Live your dreams!

FEATURED SERVICE: Season Tickets with TLC

TLC is providing top-notch seminars at The Chattanooga the third Friday of each month. Each program provides six hours of training, a continental breakfast, a superb buffet lunch, and customized materials to enhance learning.

Materials, refreshments, and lunch are included. This program can also be brought in-house and customized for a company.

Topics include; "Customize Your Communication", "Understand What People Are Trying to Say", "Reduce Defensiveness", "Intuitive Interviewing", "Presentations That Get Ovations", "L.E.A.R.N. as a Team", "Understand Your Leadership Capabilities", "Find a Better Way to Say It", "Meetings That Matter", "S.O.S. Success Over Stress", and "Listen for Success".

Call Don Wheeler today at 423-622-8255 to get your Season Ticket!

TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

All original materials in this newsletter are the copyrighted property of TLC, Talk Listen Communicate, LLC. For reprint permission, please email a request to tlc@talklisten.com.