

Top Ten Tips for Working with Other Cultures

As companies continue to grow internationally, more employees are finding themselves working with people from other countries and cultures that they are not familiar with.

Don't make the mistake in assuming there is no difference in the work environment. Our values and personalities develop largely from the values and belief systems of the cultures we grow up in. However, not all cultures value the same things or in the same priority. Improve your knowledge of your co-workers cultures and you will improve your work experience as well.

1. Remember they are human beings with the same basic wants and needs that you have.

You are working for the same goals and outcomes. It isn't about you vs. them or one culture vs. another

2. Make an effort to learn a bit about their culture

If you work with a variety of nationalities - have a sincere curiosity in their language, rituals, holidays etc.

3. Remind yourself that your cultural approach and views are only one way of looking at it not necessarily the right way or only way.

Be willing to try another cultures approach. You may surprise yourself with what you find. In turn, if you have ideas that might work better approach your colleagues with baby steps and see which ones they may be willing to try as well.

4. Remember that the language spoken may be someone else's 2nd, 3rd or 4th language.

Be clear with your ideas and avoid slang. Check-in with the person or group and see if anyone has questions and understands your message. Don't assume they understand just because they haven't asked a question. Learn to rephrase ideas throughout your communication to help them process what it is you are saying

5. Become confident in who you are and the culture and/or country you represent.

Avoid bad mouthing your country to others as you become a representative of that country to all you meet. Focus on what is positive in your country and the positives you are aware of in someone else's country. Leave the negative international politics at the door and you will remain professional and attract respect from your international co-workers.

6. Address confusion in working styles immediately.

Remember that culture comes through in a corporate setting as well. Meeting structures, decision-making processes, and the chain of command will most likely look different from culture to culture. Accept the approach that is used within this group and focus on your strengths within that approach.

7. Develop an outside support system.

Working in an international setting can have additional stresses; it may take longer to accomplish simple tasks or work through the language barriers. Find ways to manage the stress and use an outside support system so it doesn't reflect back on your job.

8. Enjoy the experience.

The world is an exciting and diverse place. International co-workers allow us to explore areas of ourselves and the world we may not have previously explored. Use these contacts to enrich your life and in turn enrich theirs.

9. Accept that humans make mistakes.

Focus on the solution so the mistake doesn't occur again. This way you can avoid the trap of assigning a mistake to a culture. In other words, if you have a co-worker who continually does the same thing wrong, help them resolve it instead of internalizing it into - Grrr; (insert nationality) people don't know how to do their jobs.

10. Listen.

Learn to listen - at all levels. Allow the other culture the time and approach that they need to share their thoughts and express themselves. You want to be heard...so do they.

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