COOK ROSS, INC'S

CULTURAL COMMUNICATION GUIDE

3RD EDITION

Introduction

The United States is currently experiencing major demographic shifts that are challenging the cultural understanding of its residents. This new dynamic often requires communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

No matter how well we attempt to understand each other, we are increasingly finding that communication is hard. Additionally, within the workplace we are often surprised at how differently people approach their jobs. Unfamiliarity with cultural communication styles can lead to misinterpretation, misunderstanding and even unintentional insult.

The Cultural Communication Guide identifies areas of differences among cultural communities which, when unknown, may compromise trust and respect. We describe communication tendencies observable among many U.S. cultural groups as a resource for fostering cross-cultural interactions that are comfortable, meaningful and inclusive.

Please note: Tendencies are *not* universal. In order to avoid generalizations and stereotypes about cultural groups, variations within cultures must always be considered, along with the fact that each person may (*or may not*) display these cultural behaviors.

In establishing the categories for this guide, we have used a combination of those established by the U.S. Office of Management & Budget for the 2000 Census and common Western geopolitical terms. We do so as a convenience and acknowledge that these may be controversial to some readers.

Guidelines for Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, oversimplify or categorize.
2. Don't assume that there is only one right way (*your* way) to communicate.
3. Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because **others** are wrong or unyielding.
4. Listen actively and empathetically.
5. Stop, suspend judgment and attempt to look at the situation as an outsider.
6. Be aware of power imbalances.

Important Awareness for Removing Cross-Cultural Communication Barriers

1. Be aware of rules regarding spatial distance between speakers during conversation.
2. Be aware that cultures may vary in what they consider humorous or taboo.
3. Be aware of different rules for taking turns during conversations.
4. Be aware that cultures may use different standards for loudness, speed of delivery, silence, gestures, attentiveness and response time.

Tips for Increasing the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Use common words.
2. Follow basic rules of grammar.
3. Avoid slang.
4. Repeat basic ideas, without shouting.
5. Paraphrase important points.
6. Check for understanding.

Arab

Notes		An estimated 3.5 million people of Arabic origin reside in the U.S. Arab Americans, who first emigrated here in the early 1800s, have their origins in 21 countries extending from North Africa to the Saudi Peninsula. The largest numbers reside in Detroit/Dearborn, Los Angeles, New York City/New Jersey, Chicago and Washington DC. Highly diverse in level of acculturation, education, occupation, profession and economic status, Arab Americans are also varied in their religious beliefs: more than half are Christian, one quarter are Muslim.
People & Relationships	**Relationships**	• Often distinguish between formal, ritualized public relationships and warm, supportive private relationships (family and close friends). • Tend to build business relationships of trust through adherence to rules of social status and behavior – respect, politeness and group solidarity.
	Expression of Feelings	• Likely to be reluctant to disclose feelings in public. • May be very attuned to inner feelings, and open in private. • Typically comfortable giving and receiving advice when with family and close friends.
	Power Distance/ Deference to Authority	• Traditionally organize society in rigid hierarchies according to family social/professional status, age, gender, education, religious devotion. • Tend to be dependent on and highly deferential to those in positions of power/authority.
	Individualism/ Collectivism	• May define self through family, clan, tribe or group. • Often exhibit primary loyalty to extended family. • Value sharing, generosity and hospitality are typically seen as expressions of collective orientation.
	Conflict	• May avoid disagreements in order to preserve pride or privacy, seeking to resolve conflict indirectly.
	Face Saving	• Tend to focus on being patient and self-controlled to maintain dignity and respect. • May show sensitivity to criticism or insults to family honor. • Typically very aware of how behavior is viewed by others.
	Taboo Subjects	• May not ask strangers or acquaintances about private matters – household, family or spouse. • Might not discuss religion, current events (esp. Middle East), gender roles, sex in public sphere.
Reasoning	**Approaches to Knowing**	• Generally revere knowledge from historical or religious sources. • Respect intuitive, analogous, subjective and empirical reasoning. • Muslims believe in Allah's determination of one's fate.
	Decision Making	• Tend to make decisions gradually, relying on face-to-face interactions. • Those in positions of authority are accustomed to making decisions and taking risks; others may not. • Women, especially older, sometimes make domestic decisions.

Arab

Communication Patterns	**Greetings**	• Often wait to be introduced to strangers. • Typically greet everyone in a room: men shake hands; women may extend hand (if not devout Muslim) or kiss on both cheeks. • May hug and kiss family members and friends of same sex. • Tend to use honorifics, titles, terms of relationship and given (first) name.
	Style	• May move easily from English or French to standard Arabic/regional dialect. • May speak expressively using effusive, poetic language, complex metaphors, proverbs and repetitions for emphasis. • Tend to use quiet, measured tones but raise voice and speak more rapidly to convey importance or anger. • Often indicate discomfort or disapproval with silence.
	Gestures	• Usually employ right hand for all public functions – eating, drinking, passing objects, touching others. • Traditionally consider showing soles of feet to be insulting. • May be offended by many American gestures – "OK" sign (symbol of bad luck or evil eye), thumbs-up, motioning with palm up, closed fists, hands on hips.
	Eye Contact	• Frequently make direct eye contact with everyone. • Often avert eyes when listening or talking to a superior.
	Time Orientation	• Traditionally polychronic – manage multiple activities and relationships at once. • Tend to feel that everything proceeds as it should. • Sometimes switch between punctual time in business/ formal encounters and fluid time for informal gatherings. • Frequently past- or present-oriented.
	Direct/Indirect	• May prefer to make indirect, ambiguous statements.
	Contextual	• Generally very high context; cognizant of non-verbal messages – body language, facial expressions, shared and implicit meaning. • Likely to place all communication within context of clearly defined social roles and expectations.
	Personal Space	• May stand close when talking with someone of same sex. • Affectionate and touch-oriented with others of same sex; touching members of opposite sex might not be acceptable. • May be pushy and jostling when in a crowd.
Work Styles	**Competition vs. Cooperation**	• Tend to emphasize interdependence, cooperation between those in same family, clan or group. • At times, highly competitive with outsiders.
	Task Completion	• May place great importance on maintaining relationships within an effort to accomplish a goal.
	Tolerance for Change and Uncertainty	• Could be quite wedded to traditional way of doing things. • May perceive that which is different to be dangerous. • May follow a person in authority into the unknown.