

Crossing Borders: From Iowa to Argentina

*A Cross-Cultural Training Program for
Business Professionals*

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Everything Argentina: Topics of Conversation

Travel Argentina

Argentina is a vast country with a large array of places to vacation. Argentines are very proud of their country and speaking of these places or wanting to visit them will be good for conversation. The following are some of the more popular tourist destinations:

Mendoza: This region is famous for its wine and borders Chile and is separated by the Andes Mountains. The area is breathtaking and offers much to do.

Salta: This region is famous for its beautifully colored rock in the mountains as well as many outdoor activities. One can take the “tren de los nubes” (train of the clouds) infamous for its altitude which offers an outstanding panoramic view of the area.

Iguazu Falls: This area boasts beautiful waterfalls that rival if not supersede those of Niagara Falls.

Bariloche: If you are an avid skier this destination is perfect for you. Bariloche offers a top-notch skiing by day and a vibrant nightlife by night.

Tango

Tango originated in La Boca has become very famous. The movements are extremely intricate and it is very exciting to watch. Ask to be taken to a show and this will be shown as a sign of interest into their culture. However, I would advise against going to a milonga with co-workers to learn how to dance the tango. It is inherently sexual as a dance and could become awkward in the workplace for the Americans who are not used to this type of dancing and entertainment

Asado

Argentines are very proud of their meat as well as their ability to make an astounding “asado”. An “asado” is unlike anything we have here in Iowa. They cook all parts of the cow and sometimes pig on a large grill together. The person who cooks the asado is called an

“asador”. He or she will cut the meat and serve each type to everyone at the table. Definitely try all parts that are given to you during the presentation of meats. Try the smaller pieces first and if you like it you will more than likely be given an opportunity for seconds. It is easier this way to finish all and politely decline seconds as though you were saving room in order to try the other types of meats. Or better yet ask for more if you are still hungry and enjoyed the meat. Argentines are very proud of their meat so take care to not say anything negative. Praise is welcomed and often expected from the “asador”. Like most things in Argentina, the "asado" is typically made to be a social event lasting for hours. This is a great time to get to know your business associates and their family.

Futbol

Futbol or soccer as Americans call it is a very popular topic of conversation. People live and breathe soccer in this country, especially in Buenos Aires which is home to world’s greatest concentration of professional soccer teams. The two most notable teams in this league are River Plate and Boca Juniors. The rivalry between these two teams is historic and almost every Argentina is a fan of one team or the other. They play twice a year and this spectacle has been rated as one of the top sporting events in the world to attend. Be aware that this rivalry is quite serious and friendly banter against fans from the opposing teams is not welcomed.

Cultural Do's and Don'ts

Dos

- Accept Social Invitations (Everything is built around relationships)
- Attempt to Speak Spanish (Even a simple greeting will be appreciated)
- Dress Well and Conservatively (It is very important to be fashionable at all times in Argentina. People are very concerned with looks)
- Go to an Asado (Try all of the meats while there)
- Use Formal Titles (Titles are very important in Argentina)
- Learn to eat “continental style” with fork remaining in left hand at all times.
- Smile (Argentines are friendly and react well to those who are friendly)
- Exaggerate praise (In general Argentines will offer excessive praise to be polite so it is considered rude if you do not return the favor)

Don'ts

- Talk about travels in other Latin American Countries
- Compare Argentina to Brazil or Chile (Argentines are proud of their country and have a history of conflict with these two countries)
- Talk Politics (Although they may try to get you to. Then state your opinion in a non-committal manner.)
- Mention the Falkland Islands or “Malvinas” as they are called in Argentina.
- Carry excessive amounts of money (There is a lot of petty theft)
- Don't yawn in public (cover mouth if it can't be avoided)

Key Cultural Differences

The key cultural differences that are included in this workbook are based off of the work of Hofstede & Hofstede's 2005 book titled "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind" and Edward T. Hall's 1976 book labeled "Beyond Culture". Hofstede & Hofstede defined four dimensions of cultural values: power distance, masculine/feminine, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism/collectivism. These differences represent the core values of all cultures and are the basis for cultural differences. Edward T. Hall identified two major preferred communication styles for all cultures of the world: high context and low context. He also defined two different attitudes toward time management: polychromic and monochromic thinking.

Power Distance (Acceptance of Inequality)

Argentina is more Power Distant than the U.S. meaning that titles are more important, formality is important and appreciated, hierarchies are more accepted, centralized decision making, greater deference to superiors

Masculine/Feminine (Pre-conceived gender roles)

The U.S. and Argentina differ only slightly in this dimension in that the US is slightly more masculine in general than is Argentina. This means that gender roles are slightly more evident in the U.S. and Argentines have more of a preference for leisure time over pay than Americans. In other words there is less work centrality in the lives of Argentine people as one could see in the average United States citizen.

Uncertainty Avoidance (Fear of the unknown)

Argentines score significantly higher on this dimension than the United States meaning that Argentines are more resistant to change, less optimistic of people in general, have a need for formalized rules, appreciate precision, and top-level management deal more with the day to day challenges/problems.

Individualism vs. Collectivism (Self or group oriented)

The United States scores much higher on individualism than does Argentina meaning that U.S. citizens focus on the importance of the self, achievement motivated, hire based on skills, high occupational mobility, and task tends to take precedence over relationship.

High Context vs. Low Context (Indirect vs. Direct)

Argentina has a high context culture and the United States is low context. This means that Argentines are more indirect in their communication style and the meaning is based more in who says it, when they say it, and how they say it than what they say. Open criticism could perhaps

damage the relationship more than anything and should be avoided. Whereas, United States citizens are more inclined to say what they mean.

Monochronic vs. Polychronic (Linear vs. Simultaneous Occurrence of Events)

The United States is a monochromic culture and Argentina comes from a Polychronic view. This means that Argentines are used to having many things going on simultaneously and actual time is not that important. In fact, coming to a social event on time is considered bad fashion.

Negotiating with Argentines

(Taken from “Passport Argentina” by Andrea Campbell)

Tips for Negotiating with Argentines

1. Know with whom you are dealing.

It is always important to know with whom you are dealing with in a negotiation. This rings especially true when negotiating with those of another culture. Argentines typically feel free to put pressure on you and it is best to have too much information than not enough.

2. Use independent references.

Do this in order to find out accurate statistical information as this is sometimes hard to find. Argentines have a gift of gab and will sometimes come up with statistics off the top of their head which at times is not accurate. You can seek out other expatriates for help or look to private market studies as well as the government statistics bureau.

3. Don't play all of your cards at once.

Argentines prefer an options approach instead of an ultimatum/take it or leave it attitude. Confrontation is not part of the Argentine culture so if you keep some of your equally desirable options to yourself then you can offer those later on in a friendly way in order to avoid conflict when you sense it coming.

4. Take it seriously.

Argentines tend to take work and gathering information very seriously and are put off by those who do not have this approach. One can show that he or she is serious by taking vigorous notes, repeat key points, as well as stress the long term future.

5. Be prepared to walk away.

As stated earlier, Argentines have a tendency to pressure their counterparts and are skilled negotiators. If the terms do not coincide with the company objectives be prepared to walk away in a polite manner. Do not place blame but leave on friendly terms as this will keep many doors open in the future.

Argentine Negotiating Strategies

1. Impassive

They tend to listen to all of your ideas and wait for you to finish. They can then pick and choose from those options keeping in mind what works towards their best interest.

2. Aggressive

Argentines will attempt to demand an extreme amount and push the limits. Be prepared to counter in a friendly manner without showing anger or frustration.

3. Stubborn

Meaning that they are slow to change their proposal or make concessions.

4. Social

There is almost nothing in Argentine culture that cannot be made social. Therefore they will use this to get to know you and create a feeling of familiarity and friendship which could possibly be used while negotiating.

5. Hierarchical

Chain of command and hierarchy is highly prevalent in Argentina and they sometimes use this to their advantage while negotiating by claiming that they are not the decision maker and ultimately they will have to check with their superiors to clear anything. Therefore they are powerless to make any concessions.

Castellano Básico (Basic Spanish)

(Spanish is called Castellano in Argentina and not Español)

Conversación (Conversation)

Buenos días	Good morning	¿Cómo anda?	How is it going
Buenas tardes	Good afternoon	¿Qué tal todo?	How is everything
Buenas noches	Good evening	Estoy bien.	I am good.
Por favor /gracias	Please/Thank you	¿Cómo se llama?	What is your name?
No hablo español.	I don't speak Spanish.	Me llamo _____.	My name is _____.
¿Habla inglés?	Do you speak	Mucho gusto.	Nice to meet you.
English?		Soy de _____.	I'm from _____
¿Cómo está?	How are you?	Chau/ Hasta luego.	Good bye

Comida (Food)

Está (muy) rico / delicioso	It is (very) rich / delicious.
Tengo sed/ hambre	I am thirsty/hungry
¿Cómo se llama esta comida?	What is this food called?
Tengo una alergia a ____.	I have an allergy to ____.
Me gusta(n) ____.	I like ____ (s).
No me gusta(n)	I don't like ____ (s).
Asado	Argentine BBQ

Transportacion (Transportation)

el aeropuerto	airport
el boleto	ticket
el bus o colectivo	bus (colectivo o cole is more commonly used)
el subte	subway
el estación del subte	subway station
la combi	small commuter van
la calle	the street
la esquina	street corner
de pie	on foot
¿Dónde está ____ ?	Where is ____?

Familia (Family)

Hermano / hermana	brother / sister	Tío / tía	uncle / aunt
Madre / padre	mother / father	Primo/prima	cousin
Hijo / hija	son / daughter	Abuela/ abuelo	grandma/ grandpa
Esposo / esposa	husband / wife	Cunada/ cunado	brother or sister in law
		Sobrino/sobrina	niece/ nephew

Números (Numbers)

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Cero, Uno, Dos, Tres, Cuatro, Cinco, Seis, Siete, Ocho, Nueve

Diez 10 veinte 20 treinta, treinta y uno, treinta y dos, ... 30,31,32,...

Once 11 veintiuno 21 cuarenta... 40

Doce 12 veintidós 22 cincuenta... 50...

Trece 13 veintitrés 23 sesenta... 70 ...

Catorce 14 veinticuatro 24 ochenta 80...

Quince 15 veinticinco 25 noventa 90...

Dieciséis 16 dieciséis 26 ciento 100...

Diecisiete 17 veintisiete 27 doscientos, trescientos, ... 200, 300, ...

Dieciocho 18 veintiocho 28

Diecinueve 19 veintinueve 29

Días de la Semana (Days of the Week)

Monday	Lunes
Tuesday	Martes
Wednesday	Miercoles
Thursday	Jueves
Friday	Viernes
Saturday	Sabado
Sunday	Domingo

Otras Palabras Útiles (Other Useful Words)

Estados Unidos	USA
Tarde	late
aquí / allí	here / there
los deportes	sports
Futbol	Soccer
el centro	downtown
¿A qué hora?	At what time?
¿Qué hora es?	What time is it?

Class Exercises

Contrasting Values

52 Activities for Exploring Values Differences by Donna M. Stringer and Patricia A. Cassiday
Intercultural Press 2003 Chapter 11: Contrasting Values

Adapted from activities in Developing Intercultural Awareness: A cross-cultural training
Handbook by L. Robert Kohls and John M. Knight

Time required: 70 to 85 minutes (20 minutes for small group work, 20 minutes for large group
consensus process; 30 to 45 for debriefing)

Objectives:

1. To identify cultural values that are widely accepted in the United States
2. To contrast US values with those held in other countries
3. To identify the implications of cultural differences when conducting business across
national values differences

Process:

1. Prepare values cards by photocopying the “Contrasting Values” on card stock and
cutting them into individual vales cards. One complete set should be provided to each
small group.
2. Place participants in groups of 3-5. Give each group a set of values cards, tape and a
flipchart page with “US Values” printed on the left side and Contrasting Values
printed on the right. Ask the group to tape each values card to the side of the easel

page on which it belongs. Decisions should be based on the group's beliefs about dominant US Values

3. In the large group compare similarities and differences in the placement of each values card and try to reach consensus.
4. Discuss the potential implications of working or negotiating with people whose cultural values are not the same as US Values. Identify specific behavioral modifications that will increase effectiveness with groups who hold those contrasting values. (Start with my own examples.)

Debriefing Questions:

1. For which values sets did you find it easiest to achieve agreement? Which were the hardest? Why?
2. Which values would be the most difficult for you to adapt to?
3. How could these value differences influence intercultural interactions in the workplace?

Debriefing Conclusions:

1. Identifying common U.S. cultural values can allow an individual to contrast her or his personal values with those of the larger culture.
2. Identifying contrasting cultural values can prepare us to be more effective working cross-culturally by adapting our behavior
3. Identifying cultural values – both our own and those of others can also help us to avoid stereotyping others (recognizing that there are individual differences within every culture) and to be more understanding when others may stereotype us.

4. Identifying the specific behaviors associated with values can also help us understand that the same value can be demonstrated in different behavioral ways.

Rules Rigid	Rules flexible
Change Positive	Tradition/Stability
Gender Equity	Male Superiority
Equality	Rank/Status/Hierarchy
Individualism	Group Welfare
Status Earned	Status Given
Competition/Individual Achievement	Cooperation/Group Achievement
Focus on Future	Focus on Present or Past
Action/Task-Oriented	People/Relationship-Oriented
Informality/Casual Interaction	Formality Status Interaction
Directness	Indirectness
Direct Eye Contact	Eye Contact Avoided
Frankness/Honesty	Harmony/Face Saving

Craig Storti's Cross-Cultural Dialogues

1. Class of '97

Karen: How did you make out at registration?

Carmen: Quite well. I got into every course I wanted. But one thing confused me.

Karen: What was that?

Carmen: They said I was in the class of '97 I don't understand what that means.

Karen: That's easy. You'll graduate in 1997, four years from now.

Carmen: But that's just what confused me.

Storti's Explanation:

To Karen, it's rather straightforward: If you enter college in 1993, you will graduate four years later, in 1997. This is the presumption, unless the unexpected happens. But Americans don't put much stock in the unexpected. Indeed, if the unexpected should happen, chances are we will manipulate the situation to reach our original goal, providing it still matters to us. This is the American norm of self-determination, captured perfectly in the expression "Where there's a will there's a way."

From Carmen's point of view, it is arrogant, if not preposterous, to say with any certainty what is going to happen four years from today. Carmen could die tomorrow, get married next week, or move to Japan next year. Alternatively, the university might burn down, go out of business, or stop offering Carmen's major. Americans start from the presumption that we can control

external events and stand up to forces of nature—that come hell or high water, we can achieve our stated goal. But hell and high water count for much more in Carmen’s culture, which starts from the presumption that many events are beyond our control. One can go ahead and make plans, of course, but one shouldn’t become too fond of or come to depend too much on them. Whenever it wishes, fate can intervene. Americans believe in fate, but on the whole we’re not terribly impressed by it.

2. Helping Miss Thomas

Roberto: Miss Thomas! How nice to see you.

Miss Thomas: How are you, Roberto?

Roberto: Fine, Fine. Thank you. What can I get for you?

Miss Thomas: Well, to start with I’d like half a dozen eggs.

Roberto: Yes

Miss Thomas: And then I’d like 500 grams of butter.

Roberto: Yes. Ah, Octavio! Good to see you. Como estas?

Octavio: Bien, gracias. And you?

Roberto: Bien. How can I help you?

Octavio: I need some bananas.

Roberto: Of course. Rosita! Como estas? I haven't seen you in a long time. How is that little boy of yours?

Rosita: He's very well.

Roberto: What can I do for you?

Miss Thomas: Roberto, I thought you were helping me.

Roberto: But I am helping you, Miss Thomas.

Storti's Explanation:

Miss Thomas comes from what has been called a monochronic culture (as opposed to the polychronic world of Roberto). Among the prominent features of such a culture are lines at the post office, precise schedules, and one-on-one conversations. In a monochronic culture, you get the exclusive attention of whomever you're talking to, and your business is completed before the business of someone else is started. (Note, in passing, how small children in a monochronic culture deviate from this norm and are always interrupting Mommy or Daddy, which is to say talking to Mommy when she is talking to Daddy.)

Polychronic cultures are less linear and more dynamic; several transactions are carried out at the same time. It's rude for Roberto, for example, to ignore Octavio—who has, after all, walked into the store—just because he hasn't finished Miss Thomas's business yet. (Miss Thomas, were she a Latina, would find Roberto's ignoring of Octavio very unusual and feel quite uncomfortable.)

It's not so much that Roberto has stopped helping Miss Thomas, but that he has now started helping Octavio and Rosita. If you are meeting with someone in a polychronic culture, don't expect him or her to close the door and have all calls held.

3. Falling Behind

COL. GARCIA: Yes, we know that, Colonel Wilson.

COL. WILSON: This battalion has not been doing as much as it could.

COL. GARCIA: Yes, yes.

COL. WILSON: I've told Sergeant Diaz that if we don't get a few projects started before the end of the year, we'll be falling behind some of the other units.

COL. GARCIA: Yes, some units have fewer projects

Storti's Explanation:

Colonel Wilson is trying to light a fire under Colonel Garcia, but he's using the wrong fuel. He's trying to appeal to Colonel Garcia's sense of competition, goading him with the suggestion that if he and his men don't get cracking, their unit is going to fall behind some of the others—in that great race to win.

Colonel Garcia sees things rather differently. If some other units are doing quite well in the area of projects, then his unit need not work so hard. They're all in the same army, after all; why should they compete against each other? For its part, perhaps his unit can distinguish itself in some other regard, in an arena some of the other units might not choose to enter. In any event,

competition, at least for its own sake, is certainly not a virtue. On the contrary, an appeal to the spirit of cooperation would probably be more potent in this case.

Competition tends to be better developed in more individualist societies like the United States. In cultures where people identify more with a primary group than with the self, competition may threaten group harmony, and that, in turn, threatens the very survival of the group.

4. A possible candidate

MS. MILLER: Have you finished writing that job advertisement yet?

MRS. DeJESUS: Not quite.

MS. MILLER: Don't take too long. Filling that vacancy is a priority.

MRS. DeJESUS: I agree. Actually, I think I know of a possible candidate.

MS. MILLER: You do? Who?

MRS. DeJESUS: He's my youngest nephew, Eduardo. A good boy.

MS. MILLER: Great! Tell him to apply

Storti's Explanation:

There's a good reason why Mrs. DeJesus hasn't finished writing that job advertisement yet: advertising is a mighty poor way to fill a vacancy. After all, *anyone* can respond to an ad, and what company wants just anyone working for it? What you want is someone you can trust and

rely on, someone from the right background, with the right values and the right style and manners. And it goes without saying that you don't *find* such people, you *know* them. Or someone you know knows them and can therefore vouch for them.

Thus it is that when Mrs. DeJesus mentions her nephew to Ms. Miller, she expects that will solve the matter of the vacancy and make the advertisement unnecessary. Clearly Mrs. DeJesus wouldn't mention her nephew if the young man weren't the right sort of person, and if Eduardo *is* her nephew, then she will know he's the right sort of person. But unaccountably, Ms. Miller tells Mrs. DeJesus to ask Eduardo to *apply* for the job, implying that Eduardo will be subject to some other set of criteria. For Mrs. DeJesus, Eduardo meets the only criterion that really matters.

For Ms. Miller, of course, there is another issue here: is Eduardo the most technically qualified person available? He may be a nice guy, the right sort of person, from a good family, etc., but the bottom line is: can he do the work? This matters to Mrs. DeJesus too—she wouldn't have recommended the boy if he didn't have the necessary basic skills—but Eduardo doesn't have to be a whiz in this regard so long as you can work with him. It's a question of emphasis: for Mrs. DeJesus, the main thing is the boy's personal qualities; whatever skills he needs can always be trained into him. For Ms. Miller, the issue is the skills; the boy's character, though important, is secondary.

In many American organizations the DeJesus approach smacks of favoritism at best and discrimination at worst—and may even be illegal. This is an excellent example of a fundamental cultural norm being written into the law of the land (*your* land, that is). That's fine, you say, but if my company or employer has this regulation and it conflicts with a local cultural norm, what am I supposed to do? You can't ignore the regulation, of course, but you can try to explain the

cultural basis for your company's policy. That is, you should not just leave the impression that this is an arbitrary regulation based on expediency but rather take pains to point out that it derives from a cultural notion of what is right and wrong. Your listeners may not agree with your conclusion, but at least they will see you are trying to be reasonable.

5. The Flu

SARAH: I was hoping we could have that meeting of the sales team tomorrow morning.

FELICE: Actually, my daughter has some kind of flu and I was going to take her to the doctor tomorrow morning.

SARAH: I see. Well, let me check with Bob and see if he can sit in for you. Shouldn't be any problem. I'll let you know.

FELICE: Thank you.

SARAH: Don't mention it.

Storti's Explanation:

In all honesty, Sarah might be insensitive even by American standards; by Felice's, she's downright boorish. To a Latin, one's family comes before one's work (and one's boss would, of course, understand this). The least Sarah could have done was to express her concern about Felice's daughter. The next thing she could have done was to postpone the meeting. And beyond that she should have offered to help in any way that she could. Sarah may have thought she was helping by arranging for Felice to miss the meeting, but all she was doing was communicating that the real emergency was the one here at work—not the one at Felice's home.

6. An Opportunity in Monterey

MR. MARTIN: Hector. Come in and sit down.

HECTOR: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

MR. MARTIN: I've got a little proposition for you. A friend of mine up in our Monterey branch needs a production supervisor. He asked me if I knew of anyone who might be interested.

HECTOR: I can ask. We don't have any relations up in Monterey, but I know a few people.

MR. MARTIN: I was thinking of you.

HECTOR: Me?

MR. MARTIN: Yes. It would be a nice promotion for you. We'd miss you down here, but we wouldn't want to stand in your way.

HECTOR: In my way? Are you not satisfied with my work?

MR. MARTIN: Are you kidding? I wouldn't recommend you if I didn't think you were the best

Storti's Explanation:

Mr. Martin assumes that if Hector is at all normal, he will be interested in getting ahead in life, which—as we all know—really means getting ahead in his work. In such a world, a promotion is one of the best things life can offer, and Mr. Martin has thoughtfully just dropped one in Hector's lap.

Hector might be interested under the right conditions, but certainly the lure of a promotion, in and of itself, is not sufficient reason to move to Monterey. As he points out, he hasn't got any family in Monterey. To uproot his own family and move to where they have no relatives, merely to get ahead in one's work, is not appealing. Indeed, the notion is so foreign to Hector that he now begins to suspect that Mr. Martin, who can't possibly expect Hector to take this offer seriously, must be trying to tell him something. All Hector can think of is that Mr. Martin is not pleased with his work and wants to get rid of him. Indeed, he may even be asking Hector to quit and has only mentioned the move to Monterey as a gesture to save Hector's face.

The cultural value here is once again the American preoccupation with work and the centrality of work to one's happiness and overall sense of self. It's not so much that Americans don't care about friends and family, about quality of life, but that they see quality of life as inextricably linked to satisfaction and opportunity on the job. Because we identify with doing (as distinguished from being) or, rather, because we see *being* as a function and result of *doing*, anything associated with one's work (especially promotions or, conversely, firings) automatically has repercussions which extend well beyond the workplace, to the very heart of one's self-worth.

7. Dr. De Leon

MS. PORTER: I heard the board has chosen a new CEO.

MR. DOMINGO: Yes, they've appointed Dr. Manuel Cabeza de Leon of the de Leon family.

MS. PORTER: Who is he?

MR. DOMINGO: It's an old family with large landholdings in Guadalajara Province.

MS. PORTER: But what's his background?

MR. DOMINGO: I just told you.

MS. PORTER: I mean does he know anything about the textile industry.

MR. DOMINGO: I don't know.

MS. PORTER: Do you think he's a good choice?

MR. DOMINGO: Dr. de Leon? I'm sure.

Storti's Explanation:

Ms. Porter assumes the CEO will at least know something about the textile business, that one's knowledge and expertise—one's experience—are at least part of what qualifies a person for a job. But that doesn't seem to be the case in this culture, at least not at the top levels of a company. What matters here is who Dr. de Leon is, not what he knows. In a culture with a strong class system, the most important qualification for an executive position is one's personal background. Mr. Domingo makes this clear from the very beginning, when he rattles off Dr. de Leon's distinguished family name. The right name, after all, guarantees access, and access means clout. Another Latin would understand at once that we're dealing with someone of substance here.

But Ms. Porter, having just been told, now asks: "Who is he?" Mr. Domingo, no doubt taken aback, elaborates about the family to fill in the picture. Once again Ms. Porter, who evidently has

a hearing problem, asks the question that's just been answered: "But what's his background?"
And so on. You get the point (even if Ms. Porter does not).

8. A call to Personnel

HAROLD: I was wondering if we could hire two temporary people for the next month, to get through this peak period?

RICARDO: I think we'll have to.

HAROLD: I could speak to personnel today.

RICARDO: Did you mention this to Señor Ramos?

HAROLD: The chief? I didn't want to bother him. He's got his hands full with those buyers from Japan. Besides, it's your division. He'll agree to anything you say.

RICARDO: Yes. I'm sure he'll approve.

HAROLD: Good. Then I'll call Miss Garcia in personnel.

Storti's Explanation:

The issue here, from Ricardo's point of view, is the importance of respecting the chain of command, especially the need to defer to one's superiors. In this instance that means referring the decision to hire the temporary workers to Señor Ramos, the chief, for his approval. Harold is

correct when he says that Señor Ramos will only ask Ricardo what he wants to do and then agree, but he's missing the point. It isn't so much the substance of the decision that matters, but the form. In other words, it's not a question of who knows best—everyone realizes that Ricardo does—but of who's in charge. While going to Señor Ramos might seem to Harold like an empty gesture—and certainly a waste of time—to Ricardo and the chief (and anyone else who may be watching) it is an expression (albeit ritualistic) of respect for and deference to authority. It may all be highly symbolic, but symbols are more real in some cultures than in others.

Naturally, Harold sees things a little differently; his priority is not the chain of command (respecting the hierarchy) but getting these people on board so he can get the job done. If he were in Señor Ramos's position, he would expect Ricardo to seize the initiative and take decisive action. And he would certainly not appreciate being interrupted in the midst of sensitive discussions with Japanese buyers.

In the United States we regard hierarchies as artificial, self-imposed structures that are often quite convenient, and we respect them so long as they suit our purposes. But when they stand in the way of getting the job done, we think nothing of going around them. In one study,^[4] 68 percent of American managers said they agreed with the statement that “in order to have efficient work relationships, it is often necessary to bypass the hierarchical line.” And in a related question, managers were asked whether they agreed with the statement that “the main reason for a hierarchical structure is so that everybody knows who has authority over whom.” Only 18 percent of the Americans said yes.

The American attitude toward hierarchies is of a piece with our antipathy toward rank and status. Hierarchies remind us of class systems, where some people think they're better than others. And

as we have noted elsewhere, if there's anything Americans can't abide, it's people who "put on airs," "pull rank," or otherwise "lord it over" others. Egalitarianism is so much a part of our culture it's become firmly embedded in idiomatic expression. There's also the problem that respecting the chain of command takes time—and that can be inefficient.

Needless to say, this attitude toward hierarchy and the chain of command can vary greatly from one organization to the next, and even within the same organization, depending on the circumstances. In the government, for example, the pecking order is closely respected, and in the military it's a way of life. But even then, it's curious how those higher up the ladder are not respected if they act superior.

^[4]Andre Laurent, "The Cultural Diversity of Western Conceptions of Management," *International Studies of Management and Organization*, vol. XIII, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer, 1983), 75-96

9. Feedback

LETICIA: What did you think of the new design?

BILL: Very nice. I'm quite pleased.

LETICIA: It's good then?

BILL: Yes. There's one drawing that needs to be worked on a little, but that's about it.

LETICIA: I see.

BILL: What about that other piece you were working on? Any chance I could see it soon?

LETICIA: We can make it a priority, if you'd like.

BILL: Great. Thanks.

LETICIA: So you want us to scrap this design then?

Storti's Explanation:

Latins are inclined to be indirect so as not to embarrass one another. Criticism, accordingly, has to be handled with the utmost delicacy and in any case must never appear to be what it is. In practice, critical comments usually come in the guise of faint or insufficient praise or as outright avoidance of the touchy subject. In either case Latins, with their heightened sensitivity in this regard, note the critical omission and get the intended message, which is what Leticia thinks she is getting here.

When Bill makes only one reference (albeit positive) to the new design, Leticia is immediately suspicious. Even then she checks out this impression by asking Bill if the design is good—and knows there's trouble when Bill cites a minor problem. As if this weren't enough, Bill then drops the subject entirely and brings up another one, proof positive to Leticia that Bill is very displeased with the new design. At which point, Leticia naturally offers to junk the new design altogether.

Bill's mistake, clearly, was not to be effusive in his praise. In a culture where faint praise is damning, slightly exaggerated praise is simply the norm. Most Americans, given to directness, are suspicious of effusive praise (except where clearly warranted) and take faint praise for

nothing more (or less) than what it is. We don't read between the lines, in other words, because we usually say what we mean in the lines themselves—and expect everyone else to.

10. The Workers Speak

MS. PARKER: Efficiency is falling in the quality-control division. What can we do?

MISS RAMIREZ: The workers may have some ideas.

MS. PARKER: Good. Why don't we call a meeting and ask them.

MISS RAMIREZ: A meeting?

MS. PARKER: Yes. And I'll run it myself and let them know how much we value their input.

MISS RAMIREZ: You'll go to the meeting?

Storti's Explanation:

This is our old friend, the concept of face, showing up in yet another guise. Ms. Parker wants to get to the bottom of things, and as quickly as possible. That means going directly to the workers in quality control and asking for their ideas.

Miss Ramirez knows this won't work and delicately tries to make this point (she must be delicate because this is her boss, and the ideas of one's boss are inevitably quite shrewd). Miss Ramirez first questions the idea of having a meeting because she knows the workers will be reluctant to present their suggestions—a suggestion, after all, is an implicit kind of criticism—in such a public setting. When Ms. Parker then goes on to state that she will chair the meeting herself,

Miss Ramirez is even more surprised, for she knows that even if the workers could get up the courage to criticize the company in public, they certainly wouldn't do it to the boss's face.

Once again, notice how Miss Ramirez, ever the correct subordinate, doesn't directly deflate Ms. Parker's crazy notion but merely tosses it back to her for further reflection ("You'll go to the meeting?"), which then allows the boss to make the right decision seemingly all on her own. If Ms. Parker comes out of this looking good, Miss Ramirez comes out looking even better: not only has she saved the boss from herself, she's done it so quietly that no one will ever know—except for Ms. Parker, of course, who will no doubt express her gratitude in a suitable and most satisfying manner. (The irony here is that Ms. Parker, unlike a Spanish boss, has probably missed most of this, and Miss Ramirez may wait in vain for some sign of her boss's gratitude.)

Recommendations for Further Reading

Books:

1. Trompenaars, Fons. (1998). *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Global Business*. McGraw-Hill.
2. Axtell, Roger. (2007). *Essential Dos and Taboos: The Complete Guide to International Business and Leisure Travel*. Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
3. Morrison, Terri., Conaway, Wayne. (2007). *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: Latin America, How to do Business in 18 Latin American Countries*. Avon, MA, Adams Media.
4. Campbell, Andrea . (2000). *Passport: Argentina by: Your pocket Guide to Argentinean Business, Customs, & Etiquette*. Novato, CA, World Trade Press.
5. Hernandez Requejo, William and Graham, John L. (2008). *Global negotiation: The new rules*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Websites:

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