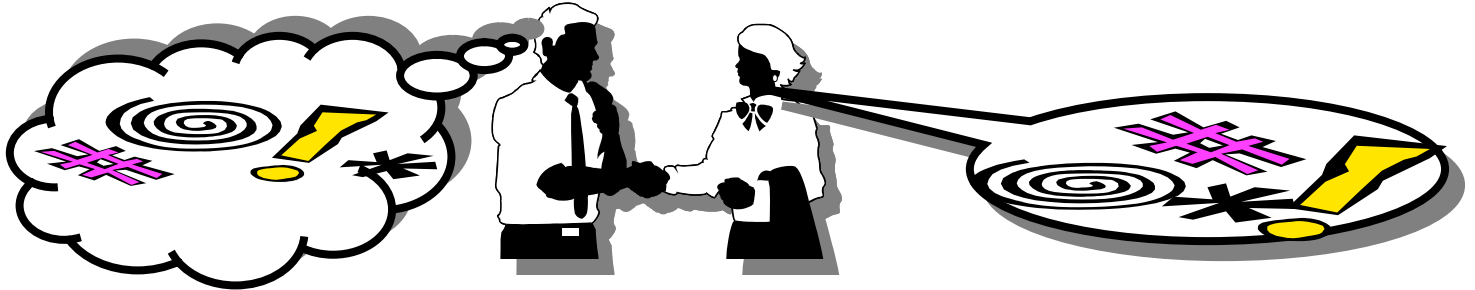


What is Culture Shock? And How to Adjust in a New Culture.

**Information adapted from the Worldwide Classroom (WWC)
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What is culture shock?

Dr. Lalervo Oberg, Anthropologist; Health, Welfare and Housing Division; United States Operations Mission to Brazil defines Culture Shock in an editorial, as “culture shock an occupational disease of many people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad”. Although disease may be a harsh word, different cues, customs, and norms are ways in which we relate ourselves to other individuals in our daily lives. For example:

- ✦ Words, facial expressions, norms, and customs we use everyday to relate to others
- ✦ When to “shake hands”
- ✦ What to say when we meet someone
- ✦ How and when to bargain
- ✦ How and when to give tips
- ✦ When to take statements seriously or not
- ✦ How to gesture or speak to others
- ✦ When, where, how to be polite and direct with others

Without these familiar clues, one can feel out of his/her own element, even frustrated or angry. Others from the “host” culture many even act the same way back to the visitor/international person. Without even intending to do so, the host culture may in fact make the visitor/international person reject the new culture because it makes the visitor feel unwelcome.

How people relate?

Typically, international students from the same culture or country stick together when first arriving and grumble about the host country until they are acquainted with the new culture. International students may even be somewhat secretive about themselves, until they have begun to trust others. They are careful who to say what to and who to trust. Some experts even suggest that everything from home becomes wonderful and only the good things are remembered and desired from home until one returns.

Some symptoms of culture shock:

- ☞ Being concerned about everything being dirty or over concern about cleanliness
- ☞ Feeling helpless and feeling dependent on residents from one's own nationality
- ☞ The feeling of being irritated over minor delays or frustrations
- ☞ Feeling frustrated over language and dialogue differences of the host country
- ☞ Fear of being alone, cheated, robbed, and/or minor irritations in skin
- ☞ Feeling terrible longing to be back home

Although these are just a few symptoms, it is important to speak to someone right away if these feelings continue. Regardless of culture or concerns of appearing “weak”, these feelings are real and most everyone goes through them. It is important to speak to someone you trust. Most persons after a period of time, become accustomed to the new culture and make quite a few new friends and have a wonderful experience in the new culture. However for those who do not, you should speak to someone you trust right away. Persistent feelings can lead one to return home without truly acquainting oneself into the new culture or can lead to more severe symptoms later.

Stereotypes

With severe culture shock, poking fun or looking at the stereotypes of the host culture may soothe one's ego. *“Americans are rude and ‘how are you?’ does not mean anything. They really do not care how you are doing.” “The Polish really are stupid.”* These stereotypes may help one to make sense of what is going on or why persons from the host country may not understand him or her. However, this is not how to understand or appreciate a different culture. Often times, international students, who do not gain a genuine understanding of the host country's culture, may just end up returning home. Those who do become adjusted to the host country's culture will learn the different customs, language, dialogue, slang, and just how to get around. Stereotypes occur on both sides, from the host country's inhabitants and visitors to the host country. Once more adjusted to the culture most stereotypes will turn into understanding. But regardless of feelings of frustration or just lack of understanding from the host country, it is important to keep an open mind. Everyone goes through some form of culture shock and most persons overcome it and gain some practical understanding of the host culture. There will always be someone from the host country, who may have some stereotypes of where you may come from based upon lack of experience with your culture. So, the most important thing to remember is that frustration from lack of understanding on both sides is a normal experience with a new culture. Keeping an open mind and realizing that you will become more comfortable with the host culture will come with time.

Suggested Factors Important to Successful Intercultural Adjustment (Taken from the Worldwide Classroom)

Open Mindedness... The ability to keep one's opinions flexible and receptive to new stimuli seems to be important to intercultural adjustment.

Sense of Humor... A sense of humor is important because in another culture there are many things, which lead one to weep, get angry, be annoyed, embarrassed, or discouraged. The ability to laugh off things will help guard against despair.

Ability to Cope with Failure... The ability to tolerate failure is critical because everyone fails at something overseas. Persons who go overseas are often those who have been the most successful in their home environments and have rarely experienced failure, thus, may have never developed ways of coping with failure.

Communicativeness... The ability and willingness to communicate one's feelings and thoughts to others, verbally or non-verbally, has been suggested as an important skill for successful intercultural communicators.

Flexibility and Adaptability... The ability to respond to or tolerate the ambiguity of new situations is very important to intercultural success. Keeping options open and judgmental behavior to a minimum describes an adaptable or flexible person.

Curiosity... Curiosity is the demonstrated desire to know about other people, places, ideas, etc. This skill or personality trait is important for intercultural travelers because they need to learn many things in order to adapt to their new environment.

Positive and Realistic Expectations... It has been shown frequently that there are strong correlations between positive expectations for an intercultural experience and successful adjustment overseas.

Tolerance for Differences and Ambiguities... A sympathetic understanding for beliefs or practices differing from one's own is important to successful intercultural adjustment.

Positive Regard for Others... The ability to express warmth, empathy, respect, and positive regard for other persons has been suggested as an important component of effective intercultural relation.

A Strong Sense of Self... A clear, secure feeling about oneself results in individuals who are neither weak nor overbearing in their relations with others. Persons with a strong sense of themselves stand up for what they believe but do not cling to those beliefs regardless of new information, perspectives, or understandings which they may encounter.

