Communicating in Business

Second Edition

A short course for Business English students:
Cultural diversity and socializing, Using the telephone,
Presentations, Meetings and Negotiations

Student’s Book

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MODULE 1

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIALIZING
Building a relationship

1 Cross-cultural understanding (1)

AIMS
- Cross-cultural understanding (1)
- Welcoming visitors
- Small talk: Keeping the conversation going

1 Look at the photo. In groups, discuss the situation. Decide what you think the people are talking about. Suggest various topics. Say what you think they are definitely not talking about. Then spend a few minutes acting out the conversation.

2 Read the text below. Identify the basic message implied by the text.

Eye contact
In many Western societies, including the United States, a person who does not maintain “good eye contact” is regarded as being slightly suspicious, or a “shifty” character. Americans unconsciously associate people who avoid eye contact as unfriendly, insecure, untrustworthy, inattentive and impersonal. However, in contrast, Japanese children are taught in school to direct their gaze at the region of their teacher’s Adam’s apple or tie knot, and, as adults, Japanese lower their eyes when speaking to a superior, a gesture of respect.
Latin American cultures, as well as some African cultures, such as Nigeria, have longer looking time, but prolonged eye contact from an individual of lower status is considered disrespectful. In the US, it is considered rude to stare – regardless of who is looking at whom. In contrast, the polite Englishman is taught to pay strict attention to a speaker, to listen carefully, and to blink his eyes to let the speaker know he or she has been understood as well as heard. Americans signal interest and comprehension by bobbing their heads or grunting.

A widening of the eyes can also be interpreted differently, depending on circumstances and culture. Take, for instance, the case of an American and a Chinese discussing the terms of a proposed contract. Regardless of the language in which the proposed contract is carried out, the US negotiator may interpret a Chinese person’s widened eyes as an expression of astonishment instead of as a danger signal (its true meaning) of politely expressed anger.

Adapted from Managing Cultural Differences, Fourth Edition, by Phillip R. Harris and Robert T. Moran. © 1996 by Gulf Publishing Company, Houston, Texas. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

3 If necessary, read the text again. Then comment on the following:
   a) observations about many people from the United States
   b) observations about the English
   c) an observation about Japanese children
   d) the meaning of lowering one’s eyes in Japan
   e) why looking at someone for a long time may be considered disrespectful
   f) the meaning of widened eyes in Chinese culture.

4 Before receiving a visitor from a foreign country – or before travelling abroad – you need to think about the cultural issues that may affect the relationship.
   a) Suggest some basic research that you should do before receiving your visitor, or before traveling. What issues should you think about?
      Note: After suggesting your own ideas, compare your list with the Skills Checklist at the end of this unit.

   b) Listen to the recording. An American, Peter Wasserman, who is the CEO of an international company, talks about what he thinks is important in preparing for business contacts with people from other cultures. He mentions several key areas to find out about. Identify six of them. Did you think of any of the same issues?

Discussion

In what way is the advice in this section useful when doing business? Look again at the Skills Checklist on page 12.
2 Welcoming visitors

What happens when a visitor arrives with an appointment to visit a company? What are the typical stages of the first meeting? What conversations take place?

1 Listen to the recording in which Len Ewing arrives for a meeting with Jack Caruso and Luisa Caldos of Evco, an advertising agency in Seattle, Washington.
   a) Is the meeting between Len Ewing and Evco formal or informal? Give reasons for your answer.
   b) Do they know each other quite well?
   c) Len has a problem. What is it?

2 Listen again. Think again about how Luisa and Jack talk to Len.
   She interrupts him at the start. Is this acceptable?
   They use first names. Is this right, given the situation?
   Jack begins to talk about the program for the day. Is this appropriate at this stage?

3 Listen to the recording of Peter Marwood’s arrival at SDA Ltd., in Sydney, Australia. He has to wait a few minutes and asks Stephanie Field for some assistance.
   Identify two things he needs and three things he does not need.

   Needs
   a) ________________________
   b) ________________________

   Does not need
   c) ________________________
   d) ________________________
   e) ________________________
Practice 1

Make a dialogue based on the following flow chart. If you need help, look at the Language Checklist on page 12.

Visitor

Introduce yourself.

Say you have an appointment with Sandra Bates.

Decline – ask if you can use a phone.

Decline – you only need the phone.

Thank him/her.

(a few minutes later)

Thank assistant.

Ask how far it is to station.

Accept offer – suggest a time.

Receptionist

Welcome visitor.

Explain that SB will be here shortly.

Offer a drink / refreshments.

Say yes / Offer fax as well.

Show the visitor to the phone.

Reply – offer any other help.

Two miles – ten minutes by taxi.

Offer to get one.

Promise to do that – say that SB is free now.

Offer to take him/her to SB’s office.

Now listen to the recording of a model answer.
Small talk: keeping the conversation going

1 Randy Hemp from the U.S. is visiting a customer in Taiwan. He is talking to the Production Manager of a manufacturing plant in Taipei. Listen to the recording of an extract of their conversation.

**MANAGER:** Is this your first visit here?

**HEMP:** No, in fact the first time I came was for a trade fair. We began our East Asian operations here at the 1999 Exhibition.

**MANAGER:** Shall we have a look around the plant before lunch?

a) What is wrong with what the production manager says?

The answer is, of course, that it breaks a “rule” of conversation. Generally, if you ask a question you should comment on the answer or ask a supplementary question.

b) Now suggest a better version of the same conversation. There is a recording of a model version.

2 Complete the following dialogue by writing appropriate sentences in the blanks.

**PETER:** Have you been to San Francisco before?

**JANIS:** No, it’s my first visit.

**PETER:** a) ____________________________

**JANIS:** I’m sure I will.

**PETER:** And … er, is the hotel all right?

**JANIS:** Yes, it’s very comfortable.

**PETER:** b) ____________________________ So, do you have much time here in the U.S.? Are you staying long?

**JANIS:** No, I have to go back tomorrow afternoon.

**PETER:** c) ____________________________, You’ll have to come back again!

**JANIS:** d) ____________________________.

**PETER:** So what time’s your flight tomorrow?

**JANIS:** In the evening, 6:35.

**PETER:** Well, I can get you a taxi if you like, to get you there in good time.

**JANIS:** e) ____________________________.

**PETER:** No problem at all. Was it a good flight today?

**JANIS:** No, it wasn’t actually.

**PETER:** f) ____________________________ . g) ____________________________?

**JANIS:** It was raining – quite hard. There was a lot of turbulence.

**PETER:** h) ____________________________.
3 Listen to the recording of four conversation extracts.
   a) Match each of them to one of the four photos below.

b) Listen to each one again. In each case, suggest how you think the conversation might develop.
c) Do you think any of the topics included would be unacceptable in a particular culture that you know about?

Practice 2
Look at the four pictures above and use each of them for two or three minutes of continual conversation with a partner.

Note:
• there should be no breaks of more than three seconds in your conversation
• listen carefully to what your partner says and pick up on specific points
• keep the conversation flowing.

Role play 1
Working in pairs. Student A should look at File card 1A and Student B should look at File card 1B.

Role play 2
Keep the same A and B. Student A should look at File card 2A. Student B should look at File card 2B.

TRANSFER
Look at the Skills Checklist and prepare ideas on these topics in relation to a country you know well either through work or pleasure. Discuss the country you choose with a colleague.
Language Checklist

Cultural diversity and socializing (1)

Welcoming visitors
Welcome to …
My name’s …

Arriving
Hello. My name’s … from …
I’ve got an appointment to see …
Sorry – I’m a little late / early.
My plane was delayed …

Introducing someone
This is … He/she’s my Personal Assistant.
Can I introduce you to … He/she’s our (Project Manager).
I’d like to introduce you to …

Meeting someone and small talk
Pleased to meet you.
It’s a pleasure.
How was your trip? Did you have a good flight / trip?
How are things in (London)?
How long are you staying in (New York)?
I hope you like it.
Is your hotel comfortable?
Is this your first visit to (the Big Apple)?

Offering assistance
Can I get you anything?
Do you need anything?
Would you like a drink?
If you need to use a phone or fax, please let me know.
Can we do anything for you?
Do you need a hotel / a taxi / any travel information / etc.?

Asking for assistance
There is one thing I need …
Could you get me …
Could you get me a car / taxi / hotel room / … ?
Could you help me arrange a flight to …?
Can you recommend a good restaurant?
I’d like to book a room for tomorrow night. Can you recommend a hotel?

Skills Checklist

Socializing (1)

Before meeting business partners and fellow professionals from other countries, you could find out about their country:
- the actual political situation
- cultural and regional differences
- religion(s)
- the role of women in business and in society as a whole
- transportation and telecommunications systems
- the economy
- the main companies
- the main exports and imports
- the market for the business sector which interests you
- competitors.

You might also want to find out:
- which topics are safe for small talk
- which topics are best avoided.

If you are going to visit another country, find out about:
- the conventions regarding socializing
- attitudes towards foreigners
- attitudes towards gifts
- the extent to which public, business and private lives are mixed or are kept separate
- conventions regarding food and drink.

You might also like to find out about:
- the weather at the relevant time of the year
- public holidays
- the conventions regarding working hours
- leisure interests
- tourism
- dress
- body language
- language.
Quick Communication Check

1 Welcoming visitors

Complete the dialogue with words from the box.

A: Hello, (a) ____________ to meet you.
B: Thank you for (b) ____________ me.
A: How long are you (c) ____________ here?
B: Just two days.
A: Oh, not long, then. Let me (d) ____________ you to my colleague Paul.
B: Paul, (e) ____________ is Angela Fox.

2 Making small talk

Match the phrases 1–5 to the correct responses a–e to make a conversation.

1 Did you have a good trip?
2 Was the flight on time?
3 That's good. And how was the weather in London?
4 Really? Well it's much better here.
5 Can I get you a drink or something?

a) Very wet and cold, I'm afraid.
b) Yes, it was.
c) Thank you. Coffee would be great.
d) Very good, thank you.
e) Yes, it's very warm.

3 Asking for and giving help

Classify the sentences below into offering something (O), declining an offer (D), asking for help (H), accepting an offer (A).

a) Can I get you anything?
b) No, I'm fine thanks.
c) Just a question, is there a drug store near here?
d) Would you like something to drink, tea or coffee?
e) Yes, maybe … a cold drink, if I may.
f) Can I use your phone?
g) I'd like to print something from this disk, if possible.
h) Would you like a lift to your hotel?