

Language and cultural barriers

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



With so many people immigrating to the United States and all the companies that are doing business internationally, we must find a way to make it work. There are many ideas, learning groups and classes that are specifically designed to help people of all languages and cultures learn to work together and understand one another. The internet has shown that progress is inevitable; it is time for a change. Foreign-born immigrants are rapidly becoming a central part of the American labor force. This entry of immigrants is creating jobs in the fields of manufacturing, service and construction.

With so many immigrants joining our workforce, it is the best idea for employers to embrace this idea and find ways to link these languages and culture barriers. Charleston, WV Immigrant Statistics (quickfacts.consensus.gov, 2010) • Charleston, WV Population as of 2006: 50, 846. • Foreign Born Persons as of 2000: 3. 2% • Language other than English spoken: 5. 3% In 2006, the foreign-born population of West Virginia was 2. 5%. The majority of immigrants in West Virginia are from the following (usimmigrationsupport.com, 2010). • 34. 9% Mexico 10. 1% Canada • 6. 7% Germany • 23. 6% UK, Korea, Philippines, China, Japan, India and Soviet Union Cultural and language barriers can create communication problems which can cause hazardous conditions, especially in the blue collar fields. People's stereotypes can get in the way of hiring a good worker, we need to look beyond the stereotypes and see what kind of person they really are. Some companies require certain educational backgrounds, and don't take into consideration the applicants experience and education when coming from another country.

All countries can stand to learn a little bit about tolerance when it comes to foreigners. In foreign countries, certain acts are considered socially unacceptable, such as receiving a business card from someone in Japan and stuffing it in your pocket. The Japanese consider their business cards a symbol of themselves. Some other common cultural differences are:

- Roles and Status—in some countries women are considered inferior and are expected to walk behind the males. Some countries females are not expected or allowed to work.

What is considered normal in American culture regarding etiquette for a working woman is far different in other countries. In Latin American countries, colorful business attire is welcomed, however, in Asia and the Middle East, the norm is neutral-colored clothing and nothing else. When conducting a meeting in Islamic Middle East, a female must have a male host that accompanies them to their meetings, where they may well be the only female in attendance.

- Personal Space—Americans usually stand about 5 feet away from each other, however, Japanese cultural likes more space and the Latin cultural likes to stand closer.

In China it is acceptable to push your way through a crowd and you may be invited to spa where nudity is considered appropriate.

- Body Language—In America, eye contact is considered a sign of respect. People in the Japanese culture considers it is a sign of disrespect to look directly at a superior. Where Americans are very animated with their facial expressions, Asians are sometimes considered emotionless. Closed eyes mean a person is bored or sleepy in America, but in Japan and Thailand it shows that you are listening and concentrating.

Such a simple gesture as a friendly kiss is prohibited in parts of Asia where it is considered a sexual act. In the Middle East and parts of Indonesia, the left hand is considered unclean. • Personal Appearance—In various parts of the world, Americans are considered careless with dress, manners and body movements; generous with neighbors, superficial, shallow and short-lasting with friendships, ethnocentric—less interested in others, independent, and individually feeling. In some countries, our dress is considered provocative and rude.

In countries such as China, India and Russia, women must keep their knees and elbows covered and shirts must be buttoned completely up to the neck. Pants are frowned upon in Japan and in the Middle East, cleavage is a definite no-no! However, in Latin America, women are appreciated for wearing bright, stylish clothing. Employers can help by being practical and learning to tear down the barriers, employers can reduce worker's compensation injuries, improve the ability to recruit, hire and retain workers and increase productivity (charlotteworks.org, 2010).

There are a lot of people in the United States who feel that people who live in our country should learn to speak our language; while this might not be the most practical statement, it makes sense when talking about positions such as customer service or anything that requires directions. It is so easy to misunderstand someone and then something goes terribly wrong. However, who's to say it shouldn't be the same way when we go to another country to work? Most foreign countries have a large number of citizens that do speak the English language, especially in terms of the business world.

However, the more languages you can speak fluently will help you if you plan a future in International Business. International businesses should require employees to take language classes in at least one language where they conduct business; it's only fair to the people in that country. So many things can be misconstrued if you don't know the language and try to conduct business without an interpreter, especially when it comes to jobs that require strict policies to keep employees safe. If an employee doesn't understand instructions, or misinterprets them, there is a significant change of injury which can hurt the company as well.

Even when foreign workers in America can speak English, there are so many slang terms that they may not really understand what is being said. When going to a foreign country to work, the employee must conduct research and learn as much as they can about the country and their customs and realize that they cannot generalize the people of a certain area. There are many different cultures inside a country and they should not all be lumped together under a stereotype. We must learn that every person is an individual and has different values and ways of life.

The employer can provide a mentor to the new employee so they can get better adjusted with the culture and office policies. Culturocity. com (2010) provides the following 10 Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers: • Speak slowly and clearly. • Ask for clarification. • Frequently check for understanding. • Avoid idioms. • Be careful of jargon. • Define the basics of business. • Be specific. • Choose your medium of communication effectively. • Provide information via multiple channels. • Be patient. In summary, our

world is changing and the idea of International Business is coming upon us quickly.

We must learn patience no matter if we are the foreigner in a different country, or if we are welcoming new employees into our company. The key to overcoming language barriers is education. We must learn about the countries we do business with and they must learn about our country. There are so many different cultures and languages that it will be helpful to learn different languages and brush up on other countries way of life.

References 1. 10 Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers. (n. d.) Retrieved from [www. culturocity. com](http://www.culturocity.com) 2. Breaking Down Language Barriers. (November 19, 2005) Retrieved from [www. forbes. com](http://www.forbes.com) 3. Communication Breakdown; Overcoming Cultural and Language Barriers in the Global Gear Market. (May 2008); Retrieved from [www. geartechnology. com](http://www.geartechnology.com) 4. Cultural and Language Barriers in the Workplace. (February 2002). Retrieved from the [www. charlotteworks. org](http://www.charlotteworks.org) 5. State and County Quick Facts. (October 26, 2010). Retrieved from [www. quickfacts. census. gov](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov) 6. Immigration to West Virginia. (n. d.) Retrieved from [www. usimmigrationsupport. org](http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org).