

Cultural miscommunication case study



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This case study had multiple examples of how a lack of cultural awareness, ethnocentrism, and different communication styles can create poor first impressions among managers from different countries. The Western way of doing business also contributed to the difficulties experienced by both parties during the initial business meeting. Mr. Astor quickly discovered how challenging it is to conduct business outside of his home country.

Mr. Williams made two important mistakes after committing to the meeting with Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto. His first mistake was sending his son-in-law who had no prior experience with business negotiations outside of selling cars. As soon as he knew he would be unable to make the trip to Brazil, Mr. Williams should have appointed another executive employee to go on his behalf, along with Mr. Astor.

Mr. Williams' second mistake was when he demonstrated poor communication skills by neglecting to inform Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto that he would not be joining his son-in-law for their initial business meeting. Instead of having Mr. Astor apologize on his behalf, Mr. Williams should have notified Mr. Silva himself as a sign of goodwill and relationship building. Also, ensuring that Mr. Astor was well versed in Brazilian customs prior to the trip would have been beneficial and reduced initial feelings of negativity.

Mr. Astor committed a multitude of faux pas that led to a tense initial meeting with his Brazilian counterparts. Although he wanted to dress comfortably, his casual attire showed a lack of professionalism as Brazilian businessmen pride themselves on their appearances and dress more formally than Westerners when conducting business. Putting forth a

professional appearance instead of one of comfort would have been more respectful to Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto.

Mr. Astor also insulted the Brazilian businessmen by greeting them informally by their first names. Latin American people prefer to take time to get to know someone and build a relationship prior to loosening the reins on formality. Mr. Astor should have greeted both men by using their surnames until he was invited by the men to call them by their first names.

Mr. Astor further insulted Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto when he balked at the idea of eating dinner at nine o'clock in the evening. Deresky (2013) mentions that Westerners should avoid being blunt or critical so as not to embarrass other people involved in the conversation. By expressing his displeasure at eating so late, Mr. Astor came across as rude and created a potentially embarrassing situation for Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto.

According to Deresky (2013), Latin American people are very animated and expressive when speaking and tend to stand closer than the average Westerner is accustomed to. Since Mr. Astor had not brushed up on Latin American culture prior to his departure, he did not understand why Mr. Silva stood so close to him and used his hands a lot while speaking. According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2014), when managers practice cultural sensitivity, they are more likely to understand their foreign business partners' communication style and behaviors. By backing away when Mr. Silva was speaking, Mr. Astor once again showed a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Lastly, it is considered to be in poor taste in Latin American countries to discuss business before a proper relationship has been developed. Mr. Astor made the mistake of rushing into the negotiation process right away without getting to know his potential business partners. He also made the mistake of implying that the relationship between the two companies was not important when he mentioned he was going to Rio the next day. Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto were taken aback and declined to discuss any negotiations at that moment.

According to Deresky (2013), ethnocentrism occurs when people operate and assume that their ways of doing things is the only way of doing them, regardless of the situation. Mr. Astor showed an ethnocentric attitude during his initial meeting with the Brazilian businessmen. He made the assumption that his way, the Western way of doing business, would be acceptable to his host country partners instead of acknowledging that he may need to change his business strategy to appeal to his hosts.

Luckily, Mr. Astor was able to mend the relationship after discussing how the initial meeting went with his father-in-law. Mr. Williams also insisted that Mr. Astor build a relationship with their potential business partners and cancel his trip to Rio. At dinner that night, Mr. Astor enjoyed stimulating conversation with Mr. Silva and Mr. Agosto while discussing his family, work life, and hobbies as well as learning about his hosts. By the end of the dinner, the three men had mended their differences and were well on the way to building a good working relationship.

“ Miscommunications with a Brazilian Auto Parts Manufacturer”

demonstrated how important it is for managers to be knowledgeable about cultural communication differences that exist between countries.

Understanding that there is no one size fits all process to business negotiation and partnerships can save managers on both sides a lot of embarrassment and conflict. While there is no guarantee a business relationship or partnership will work out or last long term, being culturally aware can generate feelings to trust and mutual respect between all involved parties.

References

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