

Introduction:

United International Ministries

UIM exists to extend hospitality to the international community of local educators and college students of Rock Hill by helping meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

UIM's tag line is "loving the nations" ...

Love is not merely a feeling. It is choosing to understand and act. Love requires us to give of ourselves and expect nothing in return.

Ice Breaker:

Doohickies, Thingamajigs, and Whatchamacallits (object)

Running like a chicken with its head cut off.
He thinks the sun comes up just to hear him crow.
He's only got one oar in the water.
I was born at night, but not last night.
He fell out of the ugly tree and hit every branch on the way down.
My belly thinks my throats been cut.
He's as useful as a screen door on a submarine.

WORDS:

Catrywampus - crooked, cock-eyed
Fixin - about to
Hankerin - strong desire to do something
Highfalutin - pompous, trying to appear important
Piddlin - doing something trivial
Skedaddle - get going, move
Down Yonder

Introduction:

When you are of a culture it is often difficult to see that culture.

When we moved to Malaysia, we would hear their stereotypes of Americans. Some of them, not so good. Like, "Kamu orang America tetapi kamu tidak sombong." = "Wow, you are American and you are not arrogant." And then they would introduce me to people and say, "Dia dari America tetapi dia tidak sombong." I was so confused by these stereotypes, and I would often defend my people and insist we were not like they thought we were. Then I moved back to America. Can I just tell you after living in another country you not only learn much about that culture...you learn a lot about your own. The culture of my country has a strong character, which was invisible to me while I was a part of it.

When you hear stereotypes about your country as you engage with others, please do not take it as a personal attack. Instead listen, learn, and take the opportunity to educate. We have friends from Colombia who like to share all the positive things about their country because Americans hear about the columbian cartel and very little else.

Because Americans live isolated from other cultures, we do not recognize that others are different than us. Most cultures have the benefit of other cultures surrounding their country within a relatively short distance. Not America. It gives us blinders. We have much to learn. Be

patient with us. And help us support you by educating us in a gracious and forgiving manner. Generally speaking, Americans do not intentionally mean to offend you.

(Sometimes it is culture, not personality.)

American Culture

One of the biggest complaints from our French students is the following:

They will meet someone in the food court, or in the bookstore, start up a conversation, and it will end with, "Let's get together." or "We should do lunch sometime." or "I'll call you." And then they never hear from that person again.

In the south all those sayings are just a nice way to say good-bye.

You will also find that as you are walking around campus people will smile, wave, and ask, "How are you?" You will stop to answer them only to see them continuing down their original path. They are just simply greeting you.

So, let's summarize:

"How are you?" Is hello

"See you soon." Is goodbye

Americans, especially southerners, are quick to smile, engage in personal discussions with people they hardly know, and inquire freely. Others interpret this as an offer of friendship. It isn't.

Friendly does not equal Friendship

This can cause other cultures to believe Americans are fake or hypocritical.

Claudine has admitted that she tells her French students that Americans are very superficial. It depends on how you define superficial. In America superficial means you disapprove of someone because they are shallow. It can also mean insincere. If this is your definition of superficial, I would disagree that Americans are superficial. Americans are sincere when they smile, when they say hello (or how are you doing?), when they inquire about your family, major, hobbies, time in America, etc.

However, if your definition of superficial is not wanting to go deep - then Americans can be superficial. They do not want to go deep until they get to know you well - just like many other cultures. The biggest difference is that other cultures don't typically smile, engage, and act polite to complete strangers. This can be confusing.

ILLUSTRATION: Check out line at Grocery store...

Malaysia cashier - different approach/view/culture.

Guard Shack

It is easy to mistake certain social customs of Americans that might suggest strong personal connections where none are intended.

PEACHES and COCONUTS:

Peaches are soft on the outside. They smile. They are friendly, engaging, personal to a certain extent. But eventually you get to the pit. It is a hard shell that protects the real self.

Coconuts are tough on the outside. They rarely smile to strangers. They do not ask personal questions or engage in lengthy conversations with people they hardly know. It takes awhile to get through that hard shell, but as you do, you encounter the soft fruit which runs throughout. They begin to warm up. The relationship develops slowly, but it usually goes deeper.

Southerners can be Crazy friendly - this can be confusing because we are also crazy independent!

Let's talk about this independence. Many cultures are community oriented. American's are not.

HISTORY LESSON: Americans started out as pioneers. Against all odds, they braved the oceans to embark on American soil in hopes to build a new life. Jamestown is considered the first "permanent" English settlement. Of the first 104 colonist, only 38 survived the first winter. Out of the 10,000 colonist that left England for Jamestown in its first 15 years only 20% were still alive at the end of the 15 year period. It was a harsh beginning. Americans had to be strong, resolute, and independent. This has been passed on from generation to generation. I grew up hearing the phrase, "you gotta pull yourself up by your bootstraps". This means you need to succeed without any outside help. My daddy often said, "Well nobody is going to do it for you." - get off your rump and gitt'r done. These phrases are the perfect examples of self reliance.

Keep in mind the colonist wanted to escape the control of Kings, Aristocrats, Noblemen, and Priests. In order to have true freedom, one has to care for themselves - one must become independent. The dream was (and still is) to control one's own destiny without interference from government or organized authority. The idea is that one must stand on their own two feet or risk losing their freedom. This history has a profound effect on American character.

Please do not mistake independence for lack of concern for another. As you engage with UIM partners, you will see their willingness to invite you into their homes, help you with transportation, errands, and other needs, demonstrate the Rock Hill community is one of compassion and generosity.

But do recognize that our independence greatly influences our interaction with others.

Americans often have more concrete boundaries between male and female relationships than other cultures. ESPECIALLY, if one party is married. Mandy and I freely share our phone numbers with international students and teachers, regardless of gender. We do this in an effort to make you feel welcome and be available incase you have an emergency.

HOWEVER, this is not typical. Outside of UIM, I do NOT freely share my number with people of the opposite sex. I would not want to miscommunicate anything inappropriate.

Americans are task oriented.

Let's discuss this and how it can be misinterpreted.

In America we are planners. We live by the clock and the calendar. Time is VERY tangible. It is **concrete**. It can be saved or lost, made up or run out. Time orders life. If a meeting is scheduled for 3:00, it is expected you arrive at 3:00. If someone invites you to dinner at 7:00, it is expected you arrive at 7:00. Because we value a person, we will value their time. It is a form of respect.

Sometimes internationals will have the viewpoint that Americans care more about time than about people.
Because I respect you, I will respect your time. Time is the way we respect people.

Affective/emotional trust vs Cognitive/factual trust

Depending on the culture, trust is developed differently. Americans draw a sharp dividing line between cognitive trust and affective trust. Most Americans develop trust in a cognitive way - Cognitive trust is a factual trust.

Americans have confidence in their leader if that leader is educated, accomplished, skilled, reliable, effective ...this is cognitive trust.

Americans have a long history of separating the practical from the emotional. It is considered unprofessional to mix friendship with business. In addition, it creates a conflict of interest and a perception of partiality/favoritism. There are many businesses in America that will not hire someone if they have a relative who works for the company.

On the other hand, Affective trust (found in many other cultures) is based on feelings of emotional closeness, empathy, friendship.

In America Business is Business
In other countries Business is Personal

ILLUSTRATION: Americans and Brazilians were trying to negotiate a deal. The Brazilians came to America for two days. The Americans planned a schedule that was efficient with productive discussions. They kept the lunch short so as to signify to the Brazilians they respected their time and travel.
The Brazilians perspective was that the Americans were organized and efficient, but beyond that they didn't get a sense as to who they really were. We don't know you as a person outside of work. So we don't know if we can trust you.

Then the Brazilians hosted the Americans in their country. The Brazilians had extended lunches and even had things planned for the Americans after work. This symbolized their respect for the Americans and that even if the negotiations broke down at least they got to know one another.

The American perceived their schedule in the following way - In the midst of these long socializing marathons, we wondered if the Brazilians were taking these negotiations seriously. If they are not serious about the business at hand, how can we trust them.

ILLUSTRATION: The husband of my dearest friends is a contractor. We asked him to quote a construction job for us. We received a very detailed spreadsheet of the material costs and the labor costs. Nothing was left out. It was in writing. It had a place for signatures. And there was no friendship discount. This is very cultural - we separate the friendship from the business so we can keep the integrity of the friendship.

If the job isn't done to our satisfaction, we go back to the contract. We would say, friendship aside, let's look at what we agreed to in the contract.

In some Asian cultures personal trust fundamentally shifts the way two parties do business. It is possible there would not even be a written contract. Not so in America.. we do not want personal relationships to cloud the way they conduct business.

In many cultures trust is improved by sharing drinks, often alcohol is used to forge communication and move negotiations forward. These cultures want to see you let your guard down. They may even take clients to a spa or karaoke. This would be so awkward for most Americans. We might feel silly singing with a potential client, we would feel as if it would discredit us to appear anything but what we consider professional.

Swiss went to China to negotiate a deal

The Swiss were friendly and transparent while the Chinese seemed closed and secretive. A consultant explained to the Swiss that the Chinese desired time, energy, and effort of friendship before they could focus on a deal. So, the Swiss invited the Chinese for drinks, enjoyed several meals with them, and allowed the Chinese to see them with their guard down. Afterwards the Chinese were open and cooperative.

Implicit/Explicit

STORY: Directions in Malaysia.

Go straight straight straight, turn left, go straight, turn right, go straight straight straight and you will see it.

I cannot tell you how many times we got lost in Southeast Asia.

We could not understand why people did not just say, "Go three blocks, turn left on Gaya Street, travel one block turn right at Wisma Merdeka, then walk another three blocks and you will see it on the left side of the road beside the Pesar Basar."

This is how we like information give to us - Direct and precise.

In most Anglo Saxon cultures people are taught to communicate as literally and explicitly as possible. Accountability for the accuracy of the communication is placed primarily on the communicator. Therefore, the communicator wants to be very clear, giving specific details that do not leave anything to chance.

By contrast in many cultures, messages are often communicated implicitly, requiring the listener to read between the lines. Communication is subtle, layered with underlying themes. This requires the responsibility of understanding to be shared between speaker and listener.

Some cultures communicate their messages without stating them directly. If you cannot read between the lines, you are not a good listener. With Americans, there is often no meaning besides our simple words - no need to read between the lines. It is possible people from cultures who read between the lines are picking up messages in which Americans never meant to pass.

Americans mean what they say and say what they mean. Americans communicate without vagueness. The US is the lowest context culture in the world - messages are directly stated so there is no risk of confusion.

The best way to explain implicit/explicit communication is through illustrations.

ILLUSTRATION: Good communication in **high context** cultures requires unconscious assumptions on reference points and shared knowledge.

If someone has traveled a long distance and arrives to your home late, you may ask if they would like something to eat before retiring for the evening. Only when someone asks three times will you accept. And only when someone says no three times will you

accept this as the real answer. There is a shared assumption that a well mannered person will not accept food the first time it is offered. A "no thank you" means, "please ask me again."

Whereas in America, a low context culture, there is a shared assumption that you would not offer food if you were not sincere. Therefore, it is not rude to accept. An American may respond, "Absolutely! Thank you for offering. I am famished." Obviously, this would be considered ill-mannered in some cultures. PLEASE NOTE, your desire to be polite in America by turning down an invitation, more than likely cost you the one chance you had at a meal, a ride, a jacket on a cold evening, etc.

History strongly impacts where one is placed on the scale. High context cultures tend to have a long, shared history. Networks of communication are passed on from generation to generation. Japan is the highest context culture in the world. It is an island society with a homogenous people and thousands of years of history. People became skilled at picking up contextualized messages.

By contrast, America has just a few hundred years of shared history and a heterogeneous population from people all over the world. There is little shared context. This explains their low context communication.

In the midst of all this direct communication, Americans do not like to debate at the dinner table.

Typically the French like to debate. In business they will challenge decisions. They are taught to disagree openly brings out hidden contradictions, produces creativity and eliminates risk.

The French will even debate with friends at the dinner table over topics or interest. Spirited battle does not negatively impact relationships. They are simply conversations.

The German, Dutch, and Danish also disagree openly. They believe it is a critical step on the path to truth. If they challenge you it is because they find you the person or topic interesting. They can separate the position or opinion from the person.

(I am German Dutch Irish - I can definitely understand this philosophy)
I can separate the position from the person.

In this very sensitive culture *To attack one's perspective could mean you've attacked the person.*

In most, if not all, Asian cultures, and in Middle Eastern cultures saving face is very important. These are shame/honor cultures. It is inappropriate to challenge someone publicly. There are strong efforts to avoid confrontations. Harmony is strongly valued.