



Why Learn to Communicate Across Cultures?

by Anna Katrina Davey

"...the single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture."

Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall

Today, more than ever business is conducted in some kind of multicultural environment - at the office or with customers and colleagues abroad. Many companies, however, do not offer their personnel the necessary training to succeed in the global marketplace. Misunderstandings and poor communication are the result. Furthermore, employees are unable to manage cultural differences, expatriates suffer from culture shock thus negatively impacting the company's productivity and foreign assignments end prematurely. All the above translate into major costs and losses to companies.

In fact, the main reason for failure in international business is not the lack of technical expertise or good will, but rather cultural illiteracy and the lack of people skills.

Knowledge of a foreign language is a key element in communicating across cultures. It not only promotes understanding and mutual respect by allowing for dialogue in another's tongue but also gives an insight into foreign cultures and different ways of thinking. In fact it is believed that the language we speak not only expresses but also determines the way we think!

Learning a new language broadens our horizons, builds and strengthens relationships while allowing us to take advantage of new opportunities.

In view of the subtle yet powerful impact of culturally conditioned behavior on international business transactions, **intercultural competence** is now recognized as a critical element to succeeding on the global stage. Intercultural or cross-cultural trainings combine a company's business skills with the necessary people skills. They provide management and staff with the knowledge and tools to develop general and specific intercultural skills in order to work more effectively with international clients or colleagues. Employees having received formalized cross-cultural training are more effective in leadership roles, are good communicators and valuable company ambassadors. Incidents of culture shock are reduced and the premature return rate for

expatriates drops dramatically.

For a company, cross-cultural training is an investment that pays, yielding the benefits of increased productivity, successful business relationships, and the avoidance of costly misunderstandings.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and raised in Italy, Anna Katrina has extensive international living and work experience on three continents, has traveled 40 countries, and is fluent in German, English, Italian and versed in Spanish as well as in Vietnamese. Anna Katrina earned a Master's degree in Geography, Ethnology and European Cultural Studies, from Albert-Ludwigs Universität in Freiburg, Germany. She received further professional training in Intercultural Communication from InWEnt, the German government's organization for human resources development, further training and dialogue.

