

Cross-Cultural Business Tips



Author Daniel Tschudy

Winning on the Cross Cultural Battlefields.

It's not getting easier

Despite 'intercultural behaviour'-textbooks and the Google's and Wikipedia's, doing business with enterprises and political institutions in Arabia is not getting easier for Western companies. Also because many are only just getting aware of how far the Arab World stretches; from the Maghreb countries, across Egypt, all the way to the Persian Gulf.

Yet, disturbed by the news about what's happening in Syria and Libya, and other countries, it is vital to learn more about the different Arab markets and how they are religiously and ethnically diverse. While in the daily business-reality, time is hardly available to get acquainted with unknown cultural and ethnical groups, we can at least try to apply some basic rules and tools in order to deal as comfortably (and successfully) as possible with our Arab counterparts.



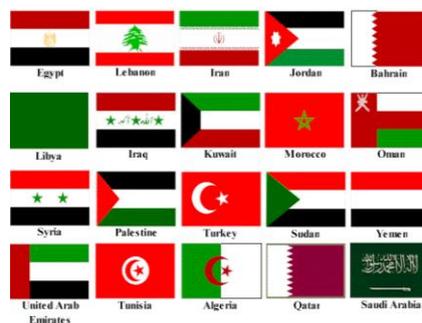
By 2015, some of the basic manners & taboos should be known by all. Alcohol is not allowed, pork not served, eating with the left hand (in certain Arab cultures) forbidden, and mingling of sexes either not tolerated or not appreciated. And women have different values and roles than in the West, although there are, of course, successful & independent business women; for example in Morocco, Egypt or the Emirates. But even if the West sees the Gender issue differently, respect must remain the key to dealing with Arabs.

Above all, Arabs carry that unwavering belief that Allah is the Only God. And that a good manager is a good Moslem too; referring frequently to Allah, both in formal speeches and social chats. A quality carried by both main branches of the Islam, Sunni and Shi'a. It would need substantial interests and deeper studies to fully understand Islam. But being aware about the pillars Shahada (belief), Salat (prayer), Zakat (charity), Sawm (fasting) and Hajj (pilgrimage)] can assist creating the fundamental respect required when dealing with other religions and traditions.

The differences in body language are evident too to foreign visitors. Arabs are quite emotional communicators, often theatrical, with a powerful rhetoric language and strong facial expressions. Direct eye contact is appreciated and touching among men frequent; a sign of bonding; and a tool to build trust. Creating a relation will allow then to overcome cultural divergences, which there are many.

What is right and what is wrong?

We have different views on what is right and wrong, good and evil, or acceptable and unacceptable. Arabia is a different world, and will stay so. Both sides must gain a deeper understanding about "that other side" and how to deal with it without conflicts and wars. During this time of resurrection of national and regional sensitivities, Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is required more than ever.



How to empathize with each other should therefore be a compulsory part of every preparation (and every Due Diligence) when doing business with Arabs. And some of those tools are: Respect their religion, as mentioned above, and find out more about it. Be cautious talking politics and, well yes, do not confront with asking about Israel; as much as we, in the West, are used to elaborate on political issues. But direct confrontations are not popular and open conflicts not appreciated.

Otherwise, speak up loudly and proudly, and emphasise your wish to build relationship. Business begins, similarly as in China, with a personal connection rather than a trade agreement. So, do not mind standing close to Arabs, even if they might breathe on you. Bonding is crucial.

Emotions & flexibility

Business meetings can be quite a challenge for linear-functioning European visitors. Privacy, for example, while talking on contract issues, is not always guaranteed, and contracts signed under local law are not sacrosanct. Timing is often rather 'flexible'; and so, meetings can indeed be somewhat chaotic.

But as long as praising and flattering is being exchanged, and a fundamental interest to meet with other cultures is applied, doing business in and with the Arab World can be joyful and entertaining too. And successful.

About the Author



Daniel Tschudy, from Switzerland, is coach, speaker and business consultant about globalisation, the shift from east to west, international marketing, cross-cultural competence, and the global hospitality industries. He offers keynote-speeches, ad-hoc consulting, and cross-cultural business seminars.

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