

COMMON CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE JOB SEARCH

Obviously, American cultural attitudes and behaviors related to job hunting and work may be more or less alien to those of your own culture. If you have not thoroughly absorbed American work-related cultural values and expectations, you may want to read this section, which addresses some possible cultural barriers to an effective job search.

- ***Self-Promotion***

You must be confident in discussing your goals and accomplishments, and assertive in making your case, initiating calls and following up with all contacts.

- ***Directness in Communication***

In business, people expect open and direct questions and answers, and a firm handshake, eye contact and a confident, but relaxed posture. If these are uncomfortable for you, practice with American friends.

- ***Self-Disclosure***

Many cultures consider personal questions about likes and dislikes or strengths and weaknesses as an invasion of privacy by all except family and close friends. However, you will probably be asked to disclose along these lines in an interview. Preparation should enable you to do this more comfortably.

- ***Career Self-Awareness***

In the U.S. you are expected to demonstrate knowledge of yourself, your career goals and how they relate to the job. Informational interviewing will help you prepare.

- ***Individual Responsibility in Finding Employment***

Although personal and professional networks are very important in finding jobs in the U.S., in general, you must create them, rather than - as may be in the case in your culture - identifying already established family or government or educational connections that lead to jobs. So as you already know, you have to put great effort into generating a wide variety of resources in order to identify multiple job possibilities. If it's any consolation, this comes as a surprise to most Americans, too.

- ***Language Barriers***

It is important to practice interviewing people. If you do not speak English well, you need to practice seriously and regularly with English-speaking friends, with tapes, in classes or with a tutor.

- ***Two-Way Stereotypes***

Stereotypes that limit the "objectivity" of both interviewers and interviewees are almost inevitable. You can best deal with this issue by examining your own stereotypes of Americans, as well as of the particular work culture you are interviewing for, and by imagining what the stereotypes of the potential employer toward you might be. Then, when you communicate, try to indirectly counter questions or actions, or in some cases, confront them directly in your cover letter or the interview.

You will need to have a convincing argument for wanting to remain in the U.S. for career reasons. Even more difficult, if you are seeking practical training only, you will have to counter the employer's bias against hiring and training you for just a year. There is no obvious response beyond assuring them that you learn quickly and would like to stay longer and that the INS process is manageable. Finally, it is always a good strategy to stress both your unique strengths and qualities as an individual and the special contribution you can make because of your international background.

Common Cultural Barriers to the Job Search*

U.S. Employer Expectations	Conflicting Values of Another Culture
<p>1. Self Promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertiveness • Confidence in openly discussing goals and accomplishments • Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries about status of application, thank-you notes) • Appropriate dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless presented as part of group activity, citing accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving, and too individualistic • Asking employer directly about status of application is rude
<p>2. Directness in Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and direct responses to questions • Eye contact with interviewer, relaxed posture, and other appropriate nonverbal behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (e.g. employer, interviewer) is disrespectful • Appearance of criticism must be avoided to save face
<p>3. Self-Disclosure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths, weaknesses • Answers to questions related to personality (e.g. leadership style, problem-solving abilities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal questions about likes, dislikes, etc., are considered an invasion of privacy and are discussed only with close friends and family
<p>4. Career Self-Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating knowledge of self, career goals, and how they relate to the job • Discussion of long-range career plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs are assigned by government or family • Questions about role in a company indicates potential disloyalty • Company assigns work responsibilities • Individual must be flexible to accept whatever job becomes available
<p>5. Individual Responsibility in Finding Employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of wide variety of resources for identifying jobs (friends, family contacts, associations, career services, academic mentors, etc.) • Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs are found through government or family • Dependency relationships in job search are fostered. One resource (e.g., academic adviser, employment agent) will find appropriate work for job seeker
<p>6. Informality in the Interview Process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting with person of higher status requires deference. The job applicant is

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congenial interviewing environment that encourages openness, some joking, exchange of information 	<p>very polite and does not ask any questions or provide information that may indicate lack of respect for interviewer's position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handshaking, touching, using first name, crossing legs, etc., are inappropriate
<p>7. Punctuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive 5-15 minutes before appointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal relationships are more important than time. Anywhere from 15 min.-2 hrs. lateness from agreed meeting time is not insulting
<p>8. Effective Letters of Application and Resumes One page, error-free, concise and attractive outline of relevant job experiences, skills, accomplishments, and academic credentials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized to reflect each individual's qualifications and professional interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resumes are a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and not a tool for self-promotion
<p>9. Individual Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race, sex, age should not affect interview relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males are expected to assume dominance in interactions with females • Younger persons defer to older ones
<p>10. Preparation and Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain as much information as possible about job and organization before interview • Demonstrate awareness of organization in letter of application and during interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research about organization may indicate excessive and undesirable initiative or independence

Excerpt from Jessup, Catherine (1995). "Discover the Hidden Job Market" in Global Opportunity, 1995, pgs. 48-51.