

Cross-Cultural Business Tips



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Winning on the Cross Cultural Battlefields.

Doing business in the neighbourhood; Greece for instance

Cross-culture competence in international business is supposed to cover unknown and new long-haul markets; like China for example. The truth is however, Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is equally required in the very neighboring markets. Take Greece, for example; a country nearby, so rich in history, and well known for great summer vacations and Mamma Mia's. Yet, so far in our present comprehension.



Although Hellas is in the daily news, we seem to understand little about it. How they manoeuvre through the debt crisis of the Eurozone, and what their agenda with Europe is really all about. How they manoeuvre through the never-ending arrivals of refugees at their shores; let alone the hundreds of thousands irregular migrants inside. Tough times, to say the least, with unemployment of over 24%, and a rate nearly 50% for the young people.

In this chaos, it must be difficult for Greece to identify their priorities. And it will likely not include the newest reunification talks in Cyprus, as much as this is a Greek issue too. Understanding the Greeks and their needs would be vital, but communication, for example between Brussels and Athens, is not really smooth. Stereotypes influence the thinking; and blame-games obstruct a constructive exchange. And there is, often, a simple lack of respect.

So, what are some of those cultural characteristics in Greece? First of all, their communication patterns are different than in Western Europe. Greeks enjoy verbose and theatrical exchanges; emotions are used as a tool in discourse and strong eye contact applied to endorse their position. Their body language is vibrant with gestures and mimics. Arguments can be lengthy and intense, but always with a certain softness and empathy. Status is important and gained in different ways. There is great respect on one hand for education and intellectual prowess, on the other for wealth and family connections.

There are powerful dynasties; much admired in the past, yet a handicap in Greeks political presence. Also rather different from European values are statuses of space and time. Their distance of comfort is close; hugging and kissing are common. Northern Europeans appreciate that, but less the Greek's Mediterranean pace of life, which includes unpunctuality and easiness with agendas.



A bit more complex are values and self-intuition, and that might not always be helpful in their affairs with the EU. They are still very aware that their city-state period (800 to 480 BC) laid the basis for Western European civilisation and liberal democracies. Then, the resistance and occupation periods during and after the Second World War, have left some badly healed scars; with a complicated relationship for example with Germany. And their affairs on the East with Turkey have created even more, may we call it, insecurities.

Anyway, a complex 20th century-experience for Greece, only concealed by a several decade-long success-story as one of Europe's major holiday destination. But the honeymoon is over and Greece faces international misinterpretation and exaggeration about their country, their people, and of course their leadership.

So what are the motivational factors in doing business with Greece? Obviously, basic respect for different needs and behaviour is as important as in every other nation or ethnicities.

Regardless of history, mistakes or present problems, people need to meet with respect. Greeks need a personal closeness and a basic trust expressed by generosity in communication. It helps appreciating their past achievements, even if those are not relevant today.

Then, if one accepts lengthy discussions and digress from the agenda, Greeks do know how to achieve pragmatic conclusions. During meetings, often starting late and with small-talks, the senior person will dominate the discussion. What is difficult sometimes is that Greeks rarely show open opposition, seemingly accepting proposals, only to modify them later. Yet, even when dealing from weakness, Greeks maintain pride and are unwilling to be humiliated in any way. Then, although they speak much better English than most Mediterranean people, agreed items should be put in writing to avoid misunderstanding or corrections at a later date.

If these tools are applied, business with Greeks can be successful; and their excellent hospitality then to be enjoyed.

About the Author



Daniel Tschudy is speaker, coach and consultant about cross-cultural issues and competences in the global business environment. He focuses mainly on the emerging markets in Africa and Asia; and often features Japan and China.

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