

Cultural Faux Pas – Teacher's Commentary

Situation 1

You greet your new British colleague with three kisses on the cheek. It's your first day at a London office.

Explanation: In British workplace culture, greetings are usually more formal. A handshake or a simple 'Hello' is standard. Multiple cheek kisses may be seen as overly personal or unprofessional.

Situation 2

At a business dinner in Japan, you leave a generous tip to show appreciation. The waiter follows you out, returning the money.

Explanation: Tipping is not a common practice in Japan and can even be considered rude. Good service is expected as part of the job, not something that should be rewarded with extra money.

Situation 3

You give a thumbs-up gesture to your Arab client after a successful pitch. He frowns and avoids eye contact.

Explanation: While the thumbs-up is positive in many cultures, in some Middle Eastern countries, it can be interpreted as offensive or vulgar.

Situation 4

You ask your Indian host where to get a good beef burger. He goes quiet and looks uncomfortable.

Explanation: In many parts of India, the cow is considered sacred by Hindus. Mentioning beef casually can be seen as insensitive or disrespectful.

Situation 5

You show up exactly on time for a networking event in Mexico. You're the only one there – for the next 45 minutes.

Explanation: In some cultures, punctuality is more flexible. Being 'fashionably late' is often expected at social events in Mexico, where strict timekeeping may not be the norm.

Situation 6

You crack a joke about your boss to break the ice during a German team meeting. Silence.

Explanation: German business culture tends to be more formal and respectful of hierarchy. Jokes about authority figures may be considered inappropriate or unprofessional.

Situation 7

You hand your Chinese client a gift with one hand, smiling as they open it immediately.

Explanation: In Chinese culture, gifts are typically given and received with both hands as a sign of respect. Opening a gift in front of the giver may also be considered impolite or greedy.

Situation 8

You pass your Turkish coworker a document using your left hand. He seems slightly offended.

Explanation: In many cultures, including Turkey, the left hand is traditionally considered unclean. Using it to pass items can be seen as disrespectful.

Situation 9

Visiting a Russian family, you politely decline food, saying you're not hungry. The host seems hurt and insists.

Explanation: In Russian culture, offering food is a gesture of hospitality. Refusing it may be interpreted as a rejection of the host's kindness.

Situation 10

During a job interview in South Korea, you give and receive a business card without bowing or even looking at it.

Explanation: In South Korea, exchanging business cards is a formal ritual. Cards should be received with both hands, accompanied by a slight bow, and studied briefly before putting them away.

Situation 11

You interrupt your American teammate several times during a brainstorming session to show enthusiasm.

Explanation: While Americans generally appreciate open discussion, constant interruptions may be seen as disrespectful or disruptive, especially in a professional context.

Situation 12

You buy white flowers for your Indian colleague's birthday. They thank you politely, but seem confused.

Explanation: In Indian culture, white flowers are often associated with funerals and mourning. They are not typically used for happy occasions like birthdays.

Situation 13

While having dinner with your French host family, you ask for ketchup for your pasta.

Explanation: In France, food is taken very seriously and traditional dishes are respected. Asking for ketchup can be seen as an insult to the cook or as a sign of poor taste.

Situation 14

You say “I disagree” directly to a Japanese supervisor during a group discussion.

Explanation: Japanese communication favors harmony and indirectness. Open disagreement, especially with someone of higher status, may be viewed as rude or confrontational.

Situation 15

Your Turkish client insists on offering tea. You say no three times before finally accepting. He beams with approval.

Explanation: In Turkish culture, refusing hospitality once or twice before accepting is part of a polite ritual. Accepting too quickly might be seen as greedy, while refusing completely could be rude.

PROUD USERS OF

