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Culture Shock!

By Jim Kayalar

Summary: Culture Shock is a normal part of settling into a new country and culture. There are several things that expats can do to deal with it.



Love your new country?

Hate your new country?

As most expats will tell you, living away from one's own country can be a little difficult. The new culture may not be explicit or easy to adapt to. Daily social paradigms and norms we are used to back home may no longer be applicable. Dealings with the local population may be stressful. On the other hand, locals will often show acts of kindness and forego their daily paradigms in their dealings with foreigners. Expats living in their new country may thus create comfort zones by avoiding the strains of local paradigms.

Unfortunately more often than not, normal paradigms that work back home, do not work in the new setting. Assumptions that we use to assess business or social situations and communicate intentions are not valid. Losing mastery of basic situations can lead to a feeling of losing control. The inability to interpret the surroundings and act accordingly often leads to frustration, anxiety, and in some cases to depression.

Reaction to the new culture

After the initial euphoria of being in the new country is over, the typical reaction most expats initially display to the new culture is to reject the environment and the local people. Inevitably the comparison between 'back home' and the 'new home' is made. More often than not, customs and traditions in the 'new home' are perceived as a little 'strange'.

Dealing with this 'strangeness', and the difficulty of adaptation to new business and social settings may result in withdrawal into work, family or the expat community. Other culture shock symptoms may include fatigue, tension, anxiety, excessive concern about hygiene at home, and the constant obsession with being cheated by the 'locals'.

How to deal with 'Culture Shock'

Improving daily communication with the local population will help you to adapt. There usually are numerous language classes for foreigners. Alternately you can hire a private teacher.

Understanding the country, the people and the culture will help you to assess your differences and similarities better. Seek out

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you to assess your differences and similarities better. Seek out opportunities to educate yourself about the country's history, geography, and traditions.

Exploration of the new culture by sightseeing will help ease the rigors of the learning curve. This can be a great opportunity for meeting other expats and locals.

How we adapt

Expats are usually stationed abroad for a limited amount of time. Sometimes they choose to stay longer. There is a substantial expat population that has chosen to retire in the various countries they have been posted to. Others choose to leave as soon as their contract finishes. Some add to their careers and move up the corporate ladder; usually to a new international posting. Others fail dismally and the unsuccessful expat posting becomes a career moot point.

International business success comes as a result of how we adapt to new cultures. The better and quicker we adapt, the more success we will have.

Levels of Adaptation:

High:

Convert to the new culture: Reject one's own culture and convert to the new culture

Medium to High:

Participate in the new culture: Adapt to the new culture while retaining one's own strong cultural heritage

Medium:

Become stuck in the middle: Unable to either adapt to the new culture, or preserve one's own culture

Low:

Avoid the new culture: Minimize contact with the new culture and fully maintain one's own culture

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About the Author

Jim Kayalar is a Certified Management Consultant (CMC) with the Institute of Management Consultants USA (IMC-USA) with 20 plus years of business experience in a myriad of countries and industries. Jim Kayalar is the founder and managing director of [Business Tune Up](#) and helps companies to improve their business performance by fine tuning their business model.

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