

CULTURE CLUB

Tips for speaking with international audiences

Every culture is different, so what works in the United States doesn't always work overseas. For example, Europeans tend to want more detail than Americans. Their attention spans aren't quite as short! So, your key points may require more explanation, more numbers and more background than what you would include in a typical presentation at home.

COLORS CAN COLOR IMPRESSIONS

Colors give different messages to different cultures. In Japan, white symbolizes death. In Venezuela, yellow often has negative meaning. Do a little bit of research when you're putting your slides together so you use culture friendly colors.

PUT ON THE BRAKES

Often, a translator will be employed so everyone can understand the presenter. In some cases, the audience is comprised of people who speak several languages. While their primary language may be Spanish, it's possible that they are listening to the translation in English. It will take them a bit longer to process the information even when it's being translated at a slower pace.

Additionally, if you're talking too

fast, the translator may be working so hard to keep up, that he or she is not able to reflect your tone, speech variation or give emphasis when you do. It's best to build in additional pauses. Not only will this help you slow down, but it will help audiences digest the material.

IT WAS FUNNY WHEN I TOLD IT HERE

Jokes and stories don't always translate well. And, in some countries, jokes that worked here might actually be insulting there. If you aren't sure, tell your story, joke or anecdote to someone in advance. If you don't know anyone from that country, ask an organizer, meeting planner or someone who travels there often. They are often quite helpful.

GESTURE ACCORDINGLY

Americans gesture big. We wave our arms, open our mouths wide and step forward to make our points. This isn't always welcome in other parts of the globe. In Japan for example, people take offense if you get too close and can feel as if you are invading their space. Others find fast movement and big motions distracting and distasteful.

WATCH YOUR WORDS

Not too long ago, I presented at a conference represented by people from a variety of countries. As they became comfortable and a dialogue ensued, I too became comfortable

and lapsed into a much more conversational tone. While that made everyone else comfortable, unknowingly, I used a few slang or American words that are fairly standard here. Many in the audience didn't understand the meaning and had to interrupt to ask me to explain. So remember, expressions that are common in one culture translate very differently or not at all in another culture. As an example, if you're invited for dinner in Britain, after you're satiated, don't say "I'm stuffed." It means: "I'm pregnant."

A UNIVERSAL CODE

There is a technique that works in every part of the world. It's easy to master. SMILE. A smile translates everywhere. It eases your audience, invites them to listen and positions you as approachable. A smile can cut through even the toughest of cultural differences to help make your presentation or meeting a success.

*Karen Friedman brings 20 years of on-air television experience to media and communications training and consulting. Her Philadelphia area company, **Karen Friedman Enterprises, Inc.** prepares people to take advantage of media interviews, presentations and public appearances. Friedman is an international consultant and professional speaker who can be reached at: 610-292-9780 or through her website at www.karenfriedman.com.*

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