

CULTURE SHOCK

Annenberg International Programs

DEFINITION:

- ✘ **Culture shock** is the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to a move between social environments.

- ✘ (“[You’re] not in Kansas anymore.”)

FOUR PHASES

- ✘ Honeymoon phase – Everything's amazing!
- ✘ Negotiation phase – Why is everything so strange and different?
- ✘ Adjustment phase – Things make more sense now
- ✘ Mastery phase – I fit right in

I. HONEYMOON PHASE (3 MONTHS)

- ✘ Fascinated by new culture and see differences in a romantic light
(i.e. food, pace of life, local habits)
- ✘ Full of observations and new discoveries
- ✘ You associate with polite nationals who speak your language

II. NEGOTIATION PHASE (3-6 MONTHS)

- ✘ Differences between old and new culture become more apparent and may cause anxiety
- ✘ You might perceive unfavorable events as strange or offensive to your original cultural attitude
- ✘ Students may have extra anxiety and pressure living in a new country without parental support
- ✘ May feel lonely and homesick having to meet unfamiliar people every day

II. NEGOTIATION PHASE CONT.

- ✘ Biggest challenge is communication
- ✘ Language barrier may be a big obstacle in creating new relationships
- ✘ Special attention must be paid to one's and others' culture-specific body language signs, linguistic faux pas, conversation tone, linguistic nuances and customs, and false friends.

II. NEGOTIATION PHASE CONT.

- × Other practical difficulties to overcome:
 - Insomnia and daylight drowsiness due to circadian rhythm disruption
 - Adaptation to different bacteria levels and concentrations in food and water
 - Medicines may have different names from the native country's and the same active ingredients might be hard to recognize

III. ADJUSTMENT PHASE (3-9 MONTHS)

- × Grow accustomed to the new culture and develop routines
- × Start to develop problem-solving skills for dealing with the culture and begin to accept the culture's ways with a positive attitude
- × The culture begins to make sense, and negative reactions and responses to the culture are reduced

ADJUSTMENT PHASE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

- ✘ Some people find it impossible to integrate. They isolate themselves from the host country's environment, which they come to perceive as hostile, withdraw, and see return to their own culture as the only way out. These "rejectors" also have the greatest problems re-integrating back home after return.
- ✘ Some people completely integrate and take on all parts of the host culture while losing their original identity. They may choose to remain in the host country forever.
- ✘ Some people adapt to some positive aspects of the host culture, while keeping some of their own. They have an easier time returning home or relocating elsewhere.

IV. MASTERY PHASE

- ✘ Able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture
- ✘ Does not mean total conversion; people often keep many traits from their earlier culture

CULTURE SHOCK TIPS

- ✘ **Try to stay positive.** If you are frustrated and have an aggressive attitude to the people of the host country, they will sense this hostility and may respond in a hostile manner or try to avoid you.
- ✘ **Be a participant observer** by joining the activities of the people. This could be a carnival, a religious rite, or some economic activity. Yet you should never forget that you are an outsider and may be treated as such. You should view this participation as role playing.

CULTURE SHOCK TIPS CONT.

- ✘ **Realize that your trouble is due to difficulty communicating and a lack of understanding** of the new culture, rather than hostility of an alien environment.
- ✘ **Know that you can gain this cultural understanding** and means of communication. Learning a new language is difficult, but once you begin to be able to carry on a friendly conversation with your neighbor, or to go on shopping trips alone, you not only gain confidence and a feeling of power but a whole new world of cultural meanings open up for you. You begin to find out not only what and how people do things but also what their interests are.

CULTURE SHOCK TIPS CONT.

- ✘ **Make friends with someone from the new culture.** Go to them when something happens that you can't make sense of, or if you are not sure of what is culturally appropriate.
- ✘ **Make friends with someone from your own culture.** It helps having someone who is experiencing or has experienced a lot of the shocks you are currently going through.

CULTURE SHOCK TIPS CONT.

- ✘ **Every day make yourself find something that you like about the culture.** Finding the good of the new culture can help curb the things you see as bad. Think of it as the things you'll miss when you go back home.
- ✘ **Be a tourist.** Plan time to do the touristy things that the locals would never do. It helps to be an outsider because you can appreciate things the locals don't even notice anymore.
- ✘ **Do something familiar.** Make your favorite food, watch your favorite movies, listen to feel-good music in your own language.

CULTURE SHOCK TIPS CONT.

- ✘ **Go for walks.** Explore on foot in order to notice cultural details and get out for some exercise.
- ✘ **Ask for packages from home.** Ask anyone from home to send you a care package of items you can't find anywhere in the new country.
- ✘ **Do your research.** Know what you're getting into before you go. Research the web, buy some books, watch local movies, and learn the language.

REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

- ✘ A.K.A. "Re-entry Shock", or "own culture shock"
- ✘ Returning to one's home culture after growing accustomed to a new one
- ✘ More surprising and difficult to deal with than the original culture shock
- ✘ May experience reactions that members of your re-entered culture exhibit toward you

TIPS FOR REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

- ✘ **Accept that you are not the same.** You see things with different eyes and people may not recognize this anymore. Understand that is okay. Remain true to who you are.
- ✘ **Spend time with those who accept the new you and start making new friends.** Join a new club or group. You can still enjoy your close friends, but also be comfortable being the new you with new friends.
- ✘ **Understand that most of the time those you are conversing with have little understanding or connection with what you have done.** Others may shut off because they aren't sure how to relate to you the way they used to.
- ✘ **Don't make all of your conversations about your travels, but don't completely shut it off either.** Your experiences are part of who you are and are important to you. You can let others know that this is important and it hurts you when they don't act interested.
- ✘ **Don't forget the life of your travels, but don't hold on too tightly to them either.** It is important to continue living in the present.

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