

Lessons Learned: Different Customs

	Item	DCC Handbook	Page	Topic
1	CORs who work with local nationals or third-country nationals should be aware of the total spectrum of communication, including language, nonverbal communications, customs, perceived values, and concepts of time and space.	Appendix E	281	Cultural Awareness
2	In some non-Western cultures, contractors confronted by criticism might react by interpreting the facts to suit themselves or flatly denying the facts.	Appendix E	282	Cultural Awareness
3	CORs should take a very indirect approach to any corrective action. The contractor, who might be preoccupied with appearances and politeness, could automatically answer Yes, regardless of whether that answer is valid.	Appendix E	282	Cultural Awareness
4	The polite way for many non-Westerners to say No is to say, "I'll see what I can do," no matter how impossible the task might be. Another common phrase is "in sha' Allah," which means "if it is God's will" (a more realistic translation: it is not going to happen). Remember that Yes does not always mean Yes. After every meeting with a contractor, the COR should prepare meeting minutes and ask the contractor to review them and accept or reject the minutes.	Appendix E	282	Cultural Awareness
5	U.S. citizens value equality and believe that they can be successful if they work hard. In the Middle East, family status is more important to success. For example, to become a police officer in Saudi Arabia, a person must be related to the King, even if remotely (e.g., a third cousin).	Appendix E	282	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
6	U.S. citizens value competition, but in many parts of the world, cooperation is more important. This cultural difference can lead to collusion among contractors submitting proposals for contracts. In addition, nepotism (i.e., multiple family members who are involved in one or more business units) is very common in some parts of the world. For example, contractors might collude to decide which one of them will get the next contract, especially if some of the competing offerors are extended family members who run multiple business units.	Appendix E	282	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
7	U.S. citizens value individuality. In places like the Middle East, the group or tribe is more important than each individual and could be key to individual success.	Appendix E	283	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
8	In Mediterranean, South American, and Asian cultures, extended family is very important.	Appendix E	283	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
9	In many countries, age is more important than youth. Tribal people in the Middle East value elders because of their knowledge of the tribe; given a choice, they would rather a child die than an elder because a child can be more easily replaced than an elder's knowledge.	Appendix E	283	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
10	Be careful when using first names. In some cultures, first names can mean a lifelong relationship. Therefore, use only last names and honorifics appropriate to the specific culture (e.g., Mr. or Ms. in our culture) unless the relationship is sincerely close. Using first names too freely can hurt the COR's reputation and possibly the business relationship.	Appendix E	283	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
11	Foreign cultures handle criticism differently. Constructive criticism is often viewed as a personal attack. Learn the local way of handling criticism and making a point properly. Be careful when providing needed constructive criticism or making a negative point. Always try to make the case without too much direct criticism unless you have a lot of back-up documentation.	Appendix E	283	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
12	Learn key phrases in the local language (e.g., hello, goodbye, please, and thank you). People from other countries often can speak more than one language, but U.S. citizens more frequently know only English. Most foreigners go more than half way by learning English and will greatly appreciate a COR who tries to meet them part way.	Appendix E	284	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
13	Avoid discussing religion and politics, asking highly personal questions, and making ethnic jokes.	Appendix E	284	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships

14	Find different ways of saying No without actually saying the word. For example, the COR could say “I’ll see what I can do.” U.S. citizens appreciate an honest answer, but in many cultures, an evasive answer is the norm. People from such cultures do not want to disappoint others. Moreover, in some cultures, No is interpreted as an expression of personal dislike.	Appendix E	284	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
15	Learn and be sensitive to ethnic and national sensitivities. For example, do not refer to people from Okinawa as Japanese, and do not refer to the Arabian Gulf as the Persian Gulf when speaking to a Saudi. In other cases, not knowing or not distinguishing the difference between nationalities can cause hard feelings. Much like Canadians would resent being grouped with U.S. citizens (and vice versa), the Scottish and Irish often do not like being referred to as English, and other cultures have a wealth of similar sensitivities.	Appendix E	284	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
16	Ethical and legal dilemmas are always prevalent. For example, many foreign cultures do not have either a legal or ethical limit on providing gifts, food, money, or other items or services of value to people in positions of influence or power. Be very careful not to cross the legal boundary and violate any U.S. law. It is the COR’s responsibility to find the most appropriate tone and phrase for saying No when necessary.	Appendix E	284	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
17	There is a thin line between working within the foreign culture and violating U.S. laws. The COR should always consult with the legal office about such concerns.	Appendix E	285	Cultural Awareness - International Relationships
18	When scheduling meetings with non-U.S. contractors, remember that such contractors might customarily begin meetings with small talk and even a meal before turning to business. The COR should discuss this issue—particularly the need to accept meals—with the relevant managers, legal office, and contracting officer.	Appendix E	285	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
19	U.S. citizens place a great emphasis on timeliness. A COR might find that a contractor’s approach to time is much slower and more relaxed than the view of a comparable contractor in U.S. culture. To be most effective, the COR must understand pertinent cultural differences and work within the local system rather than enforcing U.S. ideas of urgency.	Appendix E	285	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
20	U.S. citizens love their personal space, but in many regions (e.g., the Middle East), personal space is very small. In such countries, moving away from a person gives the impression that you do not like that person (and might well be considered rude).	Appendix E	285	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
21	Touching can be more or less prevalent in different cultures. For example, in the Middle East, a handshake commonly is soft and entails holding hands for a long time (30 seconds to a minute), compared to the normally firm and brief U.S. handshake. Such a handshake can be awkward if you are not used to it.	Appendix E	285	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
22	Living patterns in some countries are very different. For example, in Saudi Arabia, transactions are slower from June to September because of vacations. In Europe, many people take the entire month of August as a vacation. In addition, CORs should be prepared for contractors to accomplish very little during Ramadan, a month-long Muslim holiday.	Appendix E	286	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
23	Some contractors expect kickbacks, finder’s fees, exchanges of gifts, or other gratuities that are illegal for U.S. personnel to provide or accept. CORs must be vigilant to ensure that they do not violate standards of conduct. Typically, corruption is a COR’s number one threat.	Appendix E	286	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
24	When communicating, CORs should use clear and concise language and should avoid jargon and acronyms.	Appendix E	286	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
25	CORs should cultivate and maintain a professional working relationship. CORs should take cultural factors into account, but should discern between cultural differences and excuses.	Appendix E	286	Cultural Awareness - Business Culture
26	English phrases should be used with care—and the local language should be spoken with caution—to avoid misinterpretation	Appendix E	286	Cultural Awareness - Language and Conversations
27	CORs must remember to use appropriate measures and equivalents in their requirements because most CORs are probably in countries that use the metric system.	Appendix E	286	Cultural Awareness - Language and Conversations