

N°3 – May 2009

Editorial

La prise de fonction reste un enjeu majeur pour tout manager en mobilité internationale. Faire une bonne « première impression » auprès des dirigeants du pays d'accueil, auprès des équipes locales ou auprès de vos clients ou partenaires locaux, c'est souvent à minima 3 mois de gagnés. C'est aussi l'acceptabilité de votre expatrié lui-même puis sa capacité à « faire du lien » et à établir la confiance avec une équipe ou un client qui sont en question. Mais, avant tout, n'est-ce pas l'image du siège tout entier ou de la filiale dont est originaire le manager qui est en jeu ici ? Plus fortement qu'à d'autres moments, cette image se construit avec toute nouvelle arrivée.

Natalie dans l'article ci-contre explore comment **l'arrogance perçue** se pose trop souvent comme obstacle dans les premiers contacts d'affaires entre Français et Américains. Mais, **bien au-delà de ces deux seuls pays**, elle nous rappelle que quelques adaptations du comportement ainsi qu'un travail sur leur communication verbale et non-verbale permettent à vos managers de réussir leurs prises de contact à l'international. Encore faut-il avoir conscience du besoin !

Le management interculturel permet une prise de conscience à nulle autre pareille. C'est pourquoi les stagiaires disent souvent « C'est le stage le plus utile que j'ai fait de ma carrière ». Seulement alors, leurs compétences techniques peuvent jouer à plein. Combien d'entre nous ont vu de jeunes ingénieurs talentueux ou des cadres dirigeants de haut niveau s'effondrer à l'international ? **Plus jamais cela chez vous !** Laissez donc ceci à votre concurrent favori.



Laurent Lepez
Associate Partner

Les Américains sont tellement arrogants !

The French are so arrogant!

By Natalie Lutz, Senior consultant based in Paris

We've heard it over and over as fingers point across the Atlantic: THEY are so arrogant! When the topic comes up in intercultural trainings, people from other countries usually laugh and say: Both French and Americans are arrogant! What's there to talk about?

Beyond a fun but ultimately sterile debate over who is the most arrogant, perceptions of arrogance can be a window into the different ways we interpret behavior through the filter of our cultural values. Therefore, it can help solve a few problems managers meet in the corporate world.

Ironically, the findings indicate that French perceptions of arrogance stem from US American informal behavior, while American interpretations of arrogance stem from French formal behavior. So while each culture is putting its best foot forward to give a good impression, the opposite occurs as the behavior is filtered through a different cultural preference.

Indeed! French managers tend to favor formal behavior when meeting someone for the first time. Such "deference politeness" shows that one respects the other and is not "arriving on conquered territory." One French business woman described what she saw as arrogant US American behavior in an interview: *He was so at ease. First of all, he took up a lot of space! He sat opposite me and leaned on*

the chair in a very relaxed way. As we talked, he seemed to have no doubt that building relationships with others is easy. He was so confident and so comfortable!

In France, the opposite behavior is expected when meeting someone for the first time. Reserve and formality show that one is "bien élevé" (well brought up), discrete, and ultimately modest. Formal behavior is expected in the public sphere. Informal behavior, on the other hand, is associated with the private sphere of family and friends. The private and public spheres in France are very clearly defined as separated, which means that by expressing formality and respecting protocol, you stay within the expected public sphere and show that you don't assume you have earned the right yet to be in the private one.

In most American companies, expectations around meeting people for the first time are quite different. Informality is often appreciated and helps create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere that shows we are accessible, transparent and not infatuated by our hierarchical position. When meeting a new colleague, a casual air of confidence can put others at ease and show one is trustworthy. Confidence, in the form of such things as taking stock of one's achievements, encouraging chants of "we're the best," and showing one's leadership qualities, is rewarded throughout childhood and adulthood in the US, and all of these are usually seen as positive. But from the perspective of French core values, we see how Americans can be perceived as arrogant, particularly around the French value of discretion and expressing reserve to show one's modesty.

Expressing modesty in the US is in fact focused around topics such as sophistication and intellectual acumen, which are more easily associated with elitism and snobbery.

A US American described French arrogant behavior by saying: *They are seen as feeling superior, snobbish with respect to history, fine wine, their intellectual tradition, that the US lacks. I suspect they see Americans as the nouveaux riches, unrefined and uncultivated.*

With perceptions of arrogance from both US Americans and French, we can see how opposing behavior (formality from the French and informality from the US Americans) can be viewed by the other cultural perspective as arrogance. Because managers don't always get a second chance to make a good first impression, it is important to understand these differences. By making a few minor changes in their behavior, managers can save valuable time building common trust.

Mini-biography of Natalie Lutz



Natalie has been training international managers in business communication for over 15 years. She has lived in the US, London, Mexico & France. She has extensive experience designing training programs for top executives in various areas of business communication. Most of Natalie's time is dedicated to training expatriates in international corporations on living and working in their host country.

Cultural Tips

Erasing perception of arrogance in the first contacts

TIPS for Americans managers in France:

- 1 – Maintain a respectful distance in the early stages
- 2 – Body language is equally important (voice, gestures, posture,...)
- 3 – Talk about this cultural difference and ask if you are coming across alright

TIPS for French managers in the US:

- 1 – Act as you would do with friends recently introduced to you
- 2 – Speak plainly: avoid abstract, conceptual thinking