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In form

In Form no. 19

Test your international business communication skills

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In today's growing international business culture it pays to know as much as possible about standard business practices around the world. Good preparation for meetings and negotiations is not just studying the business issues, but should also involve finding out about the people you are going to be working with.

How well would you be prepared for the following situations?

1. You are in Rio de Janeiro in a preliminary meeting with a potentially important customer. You are fluent in both Spanish and English. Would you try to carry out the first meeting in Spanish or in English?
2. You are in the office of the CEO of a Mid-West American manufacturing company. You have been small talking for a few minutes. Should you change the subject to business at this point?
3. When dealing with a British supplier which of the following should you spend most time discussing?
 - Quality issues
 - Delivery capabilities
 - Price levels
4. Just when you think you have arrived at an agreement with your Finnish customer, she suddenly asks for a 6% discount. It's a large order with high future potential. Should you say "yes"? Should you say "no"? Or should you start discussing the other conditions you have agreed on such as delivery conditions and terms of payment?
5. Your Malaysian counterpart does not seem concerned about a written agreement for the small order he has placed with you. Should you insist on one?
6. In which of the following countries will you be expected to be punctual for meetings?
 Mexico - Sweden - Tanzania - USA - China - Italy - Thailand - Oman.

Answers

1. As Portuguese is the main language in Brazil it would not be particularly appreciated if you spoke Spanish. However, if your counterparts have very limited English your Spanish would then be very useful. Portuguese speakers generally understand Spanish quite well.
2. You should probably get on with the business as quickly as possible. There is sometimes the mistaken generalisation that all Americans love small talk. In many business situations time is money - so get on with it unless your counterpart initiates the continued small talk. Building relations in the right way means that you are not only sensitive to the culture in which you are working, but also sensitive to the individual who might be the exception to the rule.
3. Get as much information as possible about their delivery capabilities as British companies have a poor reputation for delivery on time. If you exchange and gather the right

information at the start of the negotiation you can judge whether you will need to negotiate stiff penalty clauses for late delivery or whether this particular company has a good delivery record.

4. Say "no". Finnish business people like to think of themselves as straightforward, honest and reliable. And appreciate a direct approach from their partners. And you can always have the re-opening of the discussion of the other conditions as a fallback position. But if you structure the negotiation carefully and agree step-by-step, this should not happen.
5. Personal trust is very important - more important than written contracts in many cultures. But it's also useful to have the agreement in writing so that you know exactly what's been agreed. Use the fact that you are working in a second language to motivate writing the agreement down. And put in a generous escape clause if you think it would help the relationship. Total commitment to the outcome of the negotiation requires a feeling of mutual trust.
6. Be punctual everywhere! You are the visitor so show your hosts respect by being on time. In some cultures the meeting might not start at the appointed time - but you will be ready when it does.

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