

Common Cultural Barriers to the Job Search

As students consider employment or experiences in the U.S. or abroad, it is helpful to understand some of the unique values or cultural implications of the workplace. Keep in mind that much of the information below is based on stereotypes and may not be indicative of all cultures.

U.S. Employer Expectations	Conflicting Values of Another Culture
<p>1. Self-Promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assertiveness Confidence in openly discussing goals and accomplishments Follow-up with employers (telephone inquiries about status of applications, thank-you notes) Appropriate dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unless presented as part of group activity, citing accomplishments and skills is viewed as boastful, self-serving and too individualistic Asking an employer directly about status of application is rude
<p>2. Directness in Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open and direct responses to questions Eye contact with interviewer, relaxed posture and other appropriate non-verbal behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eye contact, especially with person of higher status (e.g. employer, interviewer) is disrespectful Appearance of criticism must be avoided to “save face”
<p>3. Self-Disclosure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths, weaknesses Answers to questions related to personality (e.g. leadership style, problem-solving abilities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal questions about likes, dislikes, etc., are an invasion of privacy and are considered discussed only with close friends and family
<p>4. Career Self-Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrating knowledge of self, career goals, and how they relate to the job Discussion of long-range career plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs are assigned by government or family Questions about role in a company indicates potential disloyalty Company assigns work responsibilities Individual must be flexible to accept whatever job becomes available
<p>5. Individual Responsibility to Find Employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of wide variety of resources for identifying jobs (friends, family, contacts, associations, career services, academic mentors, etc.) Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs are found through government or family Dependency relationships in job search are fostered. One resource (e.g., academic advisor, employment agent) will find appropriate work for job seeker
<p>6. Informality in the Interview Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congenial interviewing environment that encourages openness, some joking, exchange of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sitting with person of higher status requires deference The job applicant is very polite and does not ask any questions or provide information that may indicate lack of respect for interviewer’s position Handshaking, touching, using first name, crossing legs, etc., are inappropriate



It is up to you to obtain an understanding of the particular people and culture with which you are dealing. This information has been provided to give you a very broad comparison of cultural differences.

* Excerpted from *International Students and the Job Search* by Goodman, Hartt, Pennington and Terrel in the *Journal of Career Planning and Employment*, Summer 1988.