

Cultural Differences in the Job Search

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Below are common cultural norms when job searching in the United States as well as variations that may exist in other cultures. Being aware of these differences can better help you understand and navigate the job search process both in the United States and abroad.

Common U.S. Employer Expectations	Values Common in Other Cultures
1. Self Promotion Expected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk openly about skills and strengths ▪ Share examples of past excellent performance ▪ Openly discuss future goals and interest in advancement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharing specific skills, strengths and accomplishments seen as boastful ▪ Focusing on individual experiences and goals seen as too individualistic
2. Direct Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open and direct responses to questions are expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questions are often answered vaguely and constructive criticism is avoided even if feedback is requested
3. Body Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Firm hand shake shows confidence ▪ Direct eye contact is expected and is seen to show honesty and confidence ▪ Crossing legs is common 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Light/limp handshake may be more common ▪ Handshakes/touching may be inappropriate between men and women ▪ Direct eye contact may be seen as disrespectful, rude or a sign of physical attraction ▪ Crossing legs and/or showing the soles of your shoes may be perceived as rude
4. Informality and Self Disclosure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questions regarding likes, dislikes and hobbies are not unusual ▪ Interviews may be conversational and include humor or joking ▪ First names are sometimes used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questions about likes, dislikes or hobbies would be seen as an invasion of privacy/inappropriate ▪ Interviews are more formal and candidates would show much respect to interviewer ▪ Using first names would be too informal
5. Career Plans and Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Candidates are expected to be passionate about the field and why they chose it ▪ Short term and long term career goals should be clearly articulated by the candidate ▪ Candidates may be able to request specific job responsibilities they most enjoy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Job seekers may have chosen profession due to family or government expectations ▪ Career goals are defined by company and community needs, not individual preferences ▪ Company or manager assign work tasks and individual must accept what is available/assigned

Common U.S. Employer Expectations	Values Common in Other Cultures
6. Individual Responsibility in Job Search <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job seekers are responsible for finding positions on their own and may use many resources to aide this including the online tools, family, friends, faculty, networking contacts, career services etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family and/or government may assign you to jobs Someone may act as an agent to “place” candidates into a job
7. Time Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates are expected to arrive for interviews 5-15 minutes before the start time Being late would be seen negatively by the employer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant lateness from scheduled meeting time is not uncommon Relationships are seen as more important than timeliness
8. Resumes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resumes are typically 1-2 pages and tailored to the specific job and or field Date of birth, social security number, marital status, gender and photos would never be included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resumes are often called Curriculum Vitae (CV) and often include a more comprehensive overview of all experience and education Personal data is more commonly included in the resume.
9. Company Research & Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates are expected to research the company thoroughly prior to the interview Questions of the employer during the interview are expected and show genuine interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researching the company before the interview may indicate excessive interest Asking questions during the interview may be seen as disrespectful
10. Follow Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following up after interviews via thank you notes and calls or emails to determine the status of an application is considered appropriately assertive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking an employer about the status of a job application would be seen as rude
11. Equality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age, race, gender should not impact the interviewing relationship Laws protect candidates from discrimination based on age, race, gender, national origin, marital status, religion, and disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Males are expected to dominate interactions with females Younger candidates defer to older professionals Laws may not protect candidates from discrimination

Note: These values do not represent one particular culture, but those that may be true across a variety of cultures around the globe.

Adapted From “International Students and the Job Search.” Goodman, A.P., J.A. Hartt, M.K. Pennington, and K.P. Terrell. *Journal of Career Planning & Employment*, Summer 1988.

Additional Resources

To learn more about differences that exist across cultures or to learn more about a specific culture, visit World Business Culture www.worldbusinessculture.com