



Four Habits of Successful Internationals

As measured by the Intercultural Readiness Check, © Intercultural Business Improvement

Competencies that make or break success abroad can be identified. Competencies that form a prerequisite in completing a task successfully, but also in the welfare of the one who faces an international assignment. These competencies we can translate as the four habits of successful internationals:

Intercultural sensitivity

People who are successful in their intercultural contacts are intrinsically interested in other people and their ways of living. They do not judge, do not condemn, they try to find out what is happening on the other side.

They have a remarkable antenna for other ways of relating to other people, for different norms and values. They have a gift to notice quite precisely when someone else feels uncomfortable, even when that uneasiness is communicated implicitly. Their friendliness and involvement makes that others genuinely enjoy explaining their local culture.

They search for what works and goes on, for what makes the other tick. They are capable of taking their own shoes off and stepping into those of someone else.

Managing uncertainty

Enjoying other cultures is a priority to successful people. The uncertainty that comes with that is taken for granted. Often, it is exactly that uncertainty, the lack of routine, that makes excellent internationalists excel. They crave for complex situations, do not shun risks and are constantly on the lookout for a smarter way of doing things. Instead of: "No, that's impossible", they say: "Why not?"

They are prepared to accept failure, of themselves and of others, and to continue the exploration along winding roads to improvement.

Intercultural communication

Noticing that something's up with your counter part, and smiling in the face of uncertainty are first important steps. However, finding out what is then expected from you is the next step that brings you closer to success. Listening, observing, copying, showing interest, caring and asking through are key assets that allow successful people to adapt their communication, leadership style or negotiating style to that of their counterparts. They are capable of reflecting on their own cultural behavior and to control their first reactions when needed.

All this does not mean that you have to violate your own principles and values. Authentic people are respected the world over. But good internationalists show their preparedness to explore other grounds, and thereby, gain respect and recognition for their culture-specific contribution to the task and the community.

Building commitment

Successful internationalists do not simply adjust to the environment: they are capable of influencing their environment and to motivate people to get the job done, while creating a inspiring and harmonious ambiance. They encourage others to participate actively; they stimulate them to a mutual exchange of opinions and ideas. Excellent internationalist are extremely competent in group dynamics.

They identify political structures and networks and use these to gain clout and to ask for advice. They spend a lot of time to get to know their people and their families in-depth, certainly (and often in particular) outside working hours.

This makes that people trust them and confide in them, that they consider it a joy and honor to be part of the team. And that in turn, motivates the team to cooperate closely towards the same goals and aims.

Well, good on them! But what about me?

Sometimes you meet someone with the I-factor: the intercultural factor. Only a few lucky ones are born with the I-factor. By far the majority of us learn through trial and error, for example by acquiring a lot of experience abroad.

Yet, there is hope for all of us: you can learn it! By concentrating consciously on those competencies that you have not yet acquired. To start with, by exploring the skills you yet lack to achieve your goals abroad. By testing your intercultural competencies and, building on that, designing a plan of action, together with your manager, intercultural coach or trainer.

Not only the lucky few are successful abroad: you can be too. Perhaps you already belong to the Lucky Few, who share the I-factor?

Have yourself tested to find out!

For more information on testing your I-factor: contact your IRC-licensed local itim consultant or visit www.itim.org or www.irc-center.com