

Cultural Differences

Hot Climate - Cold Climate

Notes from the book *Foreign to Familiar* by Sarah A. Lanier

(McDougal Publishing Company, 2000)

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Foreign to Familiar explores cultural differences one encounters between relationship-based and task-oriented cultures using the metaphor of “hot-climate” / “cold-climate”. Here are some highlights from the book.

Relationship versus Task Orientation

Task Oriented (Cold Climate)

- Communication must provide accurate information
- Efficiency and time are high priorities and taking them seriously is a statement of respect for the other person

Relationship Based (Hot Climate)

- Communication must create a “feel-good” atmosphere.
- Efficiency and time do not take priority over the person
- It is inappropriate to “talk business” first

Direct versus Indirect Communication

Direct Communication (Cold Climate)

- Short, direct questions show respect for the person’s time
- A “yes” is a “yes” and a “no” is a “no” – there are no hidden meanings
- An honest, direct answer is information only. It does not reflect on how the person feels about you.
- You can say what you think (nicely) and it will usually not be taken personally

Indirect communication (Hot Climate)

- It is all about being friendly
- Every question must be phrased in such a way as to not offend by its directness.
- Use a third party for accurate information.
- A “yes” may not be an answer to your question.
- Avoid embarrassing people.

Individualism versus Group Orientation

Individualistic Culture (Cold Climate)

- I am a self-standing person, with my own identity
- Every individual should have an opinion and can speak for him or herself
- Taking initiative within a group is good and expected
- One must know how to make one’s own decisions.
- My behavior reflects on me, not on the group.

Group-Oriented Culture (Hot Climate)

- I belong, therefore I am.
- My identity is tied to the group (family, tribe, etc.)

- The group protects and provides for me.
- Taking initiative within a group can be greatly determined by my role.
- I do not expect to have to stand alone.
- My behavior reflects on the whole group.
- Team members expect direction from the leader.

Different Concepts of Time and Planning

Time Oriented & Structure (Cold Climate)

- Are time oriented.
- Are structured in their approach to life.
- Try to plan their day, and saving time is a value.
- Expect the event to begin at the time announced.

Less Time Conscious & More Spontaneous (Hot Climate)

- Are not as oriented toward the clock as cold-climate cultures.
- Are spontaneous and flexible in their approach to life.
- Respond to what life brings.