

*help your country
while you travel
for your company*



world citizens guide



In other countries, you are more than just an American. You are America.

For many years, the people of the world have had a love affair with America. They have admired our culture, our products, and our optimistic, can-do personalities. In recent

years, however, there has been a significant shift in those feelings. Research studies show that for a number of reasons, “favorability” ratings for America are declining around the world.

While it is true that the rise in negative feelings toward us may result more from

perceptions than reality, you know that perceptions are powerful opinion makers. You, and the some 60 million other Americans who travel abroad each year, have a unique opportunity to change at least some impressions of us from negative to positive.

By following the simple suggestions described

The small things you do can make a big difference in America's standing in the world.



in this pamphlet, you can have a better personal experience abroad, while showing America's best face to others including those with whom you do business.



Being a better citizen of the world is good for your company and your country.

16 simple suggestions



1. you'll never go wrong with a smile

A smile, even if you've got a problem, is always welcome. It's the one worldwide equalizer. Anger, impatience, and rudeness are universal turnoffs.

2. show your pride, but respect theirs

People all around the world are fascinated by the U.S. and the lives we Americans live. They admire our openness, our optimism, our creativity, and our independent spirit. But that doesn't mean they feel less proud of their own country and culture. Be proud of the American way, but remember, it's not the only way.

3. think as big as you like, but talk and act smaller

In many countries, any form of boasting is considered very rude. Talking about wealth, power, or status—corporate or personal—can create resentment. When Americans meet each other for the first time, our job (and its implied status) is a key part of who we are and how we introduce ourselves. This is less important elsewhere and can be perceived as just boasting.

In Japan, it is considered rude to look a person directly in the eye for more than a few seconds.



4. it may be Greek to you, but they'll love it

Try to speak a little of the language, even if it is only “hello” and “thank you.” It is not insulting to mispronounce a word or make a mistake. The effort will be appreciated.



In most European countries, the correct way to wave hello and good-bye is palm out, hand and arm stationary, fingers wagging up and down. Common American waving means “no” except in Greece, where it is an insult.

5. it’s okay to talk with your hands if you know what they’re saying

Gestures are powerful communicators in any culture and are obviously easier to learn than language. A combination of both can help you communicate better and more quickly. But be aware that some gestures don’t mean the same thing in different cultures.

6. leave the slang at home

Our colloquial or slang expressions mean little or nothing in other cultures. Using them can make you seem insensitive. They are difficult to translate and may come across as gibberish or something stupid. And even casual profanity is unacceptable.

7. listen at least as much as you talk

By all means, talk about America and your life in our country. But also ask people you’re visiting about themselves and their way of life. Listen, and show your interest in how they compare their experiences with yours.

8. save the lectures for your kids

Whatever your subject of discussion, let it be a discussion, not a lecture, and try to leave right and wrong out of it. Justified or not, the U.S. is seen as imposing its will on the world. Try to show a willingness to understand other viewpoints.

9. think a little locally

Try to find a few topics that are important in the local popular culture. Learn a few names of pop singers,

actors, TV personalities, sports heroes. Remember, most people in the world have little or no interest in the World Series or the Super Bowl. Show some interest in local sports, even if only to ask questions.

10. slow down

We talk fast, eat fast, move fast, live fast. Many cultures do not. In fact, time is understood very differently around the world. Instant solutions, immediate satisfaction, and short-term thinking are often unimportant and not respected.

11. speak lower and slower

In conversation, match your voice level and tonality to the environment and other people. A loud voice is often perceived as bragging. A fast talker can be seen as aggressive and threatening.

12. remember that your religion is your religion and not necessarily theirs

Religious worship and beliefs differ greatly around the world. Most non-Western cultures have little knowledge of the Bible and will not understand references to it. And in most other countries, religion is usually considered deeply personal, not a subject for public discussion.

What we call “soccer” is football everywhere else in the world. And it’s the most popular sport on the planet.



Mandarin, English, Hindi, Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, and Russian—if you can say “hello” in these languages, you can greet over half the people in the world.



*Politics
among friends
isn't easy—
among strangers
it's even harder.*

13. if you talk politics, talk—but don't argue

Make yourself aware of the political environment of the region, but avoid expressing opinions about local issues.

Steer clear of arguments about American politics, even if someone is attacking U.S. politicians or policies.

Agree to disagree.

14. read a map

You may not believe that anyone could confuse “Australia” with “Austria,” but it happens. Everyone’s country is important to them. Familiarize yourself with the local geography to avoid making insulting mistakes.

15. dress up— you can always strip down

In some countries, casual dress is a sign of disrespect. Check out what is expected. When in doubt, err on the side of attire that is more formal than casual. You can remove a jacket and tie if you’re overdressed, but you can’t make up for being too casual.

16. a few extra hours in their country will do a lot for yours

Few things will make a bigger or better impression in another country than your interest in that country. Try to carve out a few hours to tour the city or area you are visiting. And let your hosts suggest what you should see, so they will feel your interest firsthand.

building new bridges



This pamphlet was prepared by Business for Diplomatic Action, an organization dedicated to enhancing respect for America. When our motives and reputation are being questioned and assailed, it's time for a new direction.

building new bridges to the world

Since the birth of our nation, America has been devoted to the principles that **(1)** people should be allowed the greatest possible individual liberty consistent with the need to live in a communal society, **(2)** we are governed by laws administered with equal and consistent justice for every citizen, and **(3)** our government acts through the will of the people, who decide through the democracy of free elections who will lead us.

America is that simple. And that complex.

We have learned that it is not easy to always adhere to these concepts, balancing their idealistic hope with the reality of the vagaries and often conflicting demands of human nature. We know our record has not been perfect. But when we have strayed from our beliefs, we have always worked our way back.

Liberty, justice, and the democracy of representative government are what we stand for, what we want the world to see in us, and what we wish for all mankind.

But it cannot happen simply because we say so. It cannot happen just because we have the power to

impose our will. It cannot happen unless the world wants it to. It cannot happen unless we build the bridges that bring America closer to the world and the world closer to America. Our vision of an America understood, respected, and believed can be achieved only by an America willing to understand, respect, and convince.

As difficult as it is to govern just ourselves and find solutions to our own socioeconomic problems, it is that much more complicated for America to be both a citizen and a leader in today's world. We must work not only with those who believe in and admire us but also with people who view us with mistrust or even hatred.

We must accept as reality even what we know is irrational in order to cope with it. We must consider compromise when our instincts are to remain unyielding. We must enhance our well established and still appreciated tradition of sharing our wealth, our power, and our success for the benefit of others. We must build more such bridges to more of the world, crossing them ourselves so that we might better listen and hear while inviting the world to cross over to us so that they might better experience the fundamental truths of America.

It is to this end that Business for Diplomatic Action enlists leaders in business and communications as two of the most powerful and potentially effective forces in guiding how America is and will be seen around the world. Our goal is to work on issues that we feel affect people's beliefs about us—subjects such as **(1)** the social and economic consequences of globalization,

(2) the impact on other countries of the entertainment and popular culture we export, and **(3)** the personality of our nation as seen in the American people working and visiting abroad.

And while we are not associated with or supported by the U.S. government, we will encourage and endorse any administration's effort that can lead to building new bridges to the world—bridges that will be good for business, good for America, and good for the world.

This is the America that Business for Diplomatic Action would have the world perceive: a nation striving to perfect its own commitments to liberty, justice, and democracy while working in partnership with the rest of the world to provide both the hope and the realities of a better life for people everywhere.

Is this just our dream alone, or does the world share it? Do we have both the will and the resources to make it happen? In a world as diverse, as difficult, and in fact as fragile as ours has become, is it even possible?

What America has accomplished in its relatively short history should leave no doubt about our answer. As a people, we have shown our resolve, our commitment, and our determination to meet such challenges at home and abroad, time and again. In this new time, we will do so again. And we believe it must be the business community supported by the communications industry that leads the way.

If you would like more information about our organization, you can find us online at

businessfordiplomaticaction.org



nbta.org

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