

## Scoring with Cultural Intelligence

### A sneak peek at David Livermore's CQ book

By **Kat Avila, Contributing Writer** | Published on LatinoLA: November 29, 2011



"C'mon. Just try it. Here, put some sauce on it. It'll make your fried squid on a stick taste better."

Okay, it doesn't have to be fried squid, but you know what I mean. Are you the type who would've jumped at the opportunity to try it? Or would you have been standing there with your upper lip curled back in disgust? If you did the latter in front of your client overseas, you'd probably lose the

business contract to a more courageous rival.

Many U.S. businesses fail when they go abroad because they don't do their cross-cultural homework. Culture shock in the boardroom. They lose to foreign competitors who invested time and resources to learn about the people and the corporate terrain in the country they're doing business in.

Is cultural ignorance a permanent condition? David Livermore, Ph.D., says no. His book **LEADING WITH CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE** (New York: American Management Assoc., 2010) provides a plan for leveling up one's people skills when dealing with unfamiliar cultures. His four-step cycle is summarized as drive, knowledge, strategy, and action.

Now you may think just because you were raised in a bicultural (or even a multicultural) family that makes you "culturally intelligent." Sure you may be better positioned than an ethnocentric English-only goon, but how effective are you outside your own comfort zone(s)? You got a great start, but the world changes.

In Southern California, you don't have to stroll too far to be in another totally different ethnic neighborhood. Many of us will feel a certain level of discomfort. The people may look a little different, speak a different language, or even be hostile to your presence.

Livermore encourages you to take advantage of these learning opportunities. If you're going to be doing business in China, then it makes sense to find out what you're getting into before you get on the plane. Visit Chinatown. For some people, cultural literacy comes easily. It might be you.

Wanting to be successful in an overseas assignment is usually enough motivation to learn more. Those of us who constantly bump into other cultures know the most common pitfalls, like time orientation. I'm clock-oriented as are many Americans, but many of my friends are on "Latino time" - no matter what their ethnicity or nationality. Note that while cultural generalizations are often true, there is still a lot of individual variability.

Another stumbling block is the business greeting. Handshake, bow, or hug-n'-kisses? Take the business card with one hand or two hands? The list of cultural differences that can steer a business negotiation to the side of the road goes on and on.

Livermore's book includes a chart of "Cultural Values of Regions and Nations." Five core values to know for the culture you're working in are: 1) time orientation (clock vs. event), 2) high

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vs. low context, 3) individualism vs. collectivism, 4) power distance (between leaders and followers), and 5) uncertainty avoidance.

His suggestions for increasing your cultural intelligence are ones that many of us in SoCal already do, such as learn a new language, watch foreign movies, sample ethnic foods, and so forth. But the difference is doing those activities not just for personal enrichment but as an integral part of your job and leadership.

You never know. Maybe you're next in line for the business trip to Russia or India, and you won't fail because you got CQ.

*An American writer who reads online foreign newspapers to find out what's really happening in the United States.*

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