

# Foreign to Familiar

NOTES FROM THE BOOK FOREIGN TO FAMILIAR by Sarah A. Lanier



In this book the well-traveled author divides the world into two general cultural groups: those who live in hot-climates and those who lives in cold-climates. Notes have been summarized below to give a snapshot of general concepts that apply to these two cultural groups. As a guest in a culture different than your own, use these notes to guide how you relate with, understand and appreciate our extended family on the other side of the world!

For examples and greater explanation of these topics, read the rest of the book! This book is an excellent resource as you prepare for any cross-cultural experience.

## **ORIENTATION: Relationship vs. Task**

### **RELATIONSHIP: Hot-Climate Cultures**

- Relationship based
- Communication must have a “feel-good” atmosphere
- Though individuals may be otherwise, society is feeling oriented
- Efficiency and time do not take priority over the person
- Inappropriate to “talk business” upon first arriving at a business meeting or making a business phone call

### **TASK: Cold-Climate Cultures**

- Task oriented
- Communication must provide accurate information
- Though individuals may be otherwise, society is logic oriented
- Efficiency and time are high priorities, and taking them seriously is a statement of respect for the other person

## **COMMUNICATION: Indirect vs. Direct**

### **INDIRECT: Hot-Climate Cultures**

- It’s all about being friendly
- Questions must be phrased in such a way as to not to offend by directness
- Use a third party for accurate information if you sense that a direct question will be too harsh, or not get the results you are seeking
- A ‘yes’ may not be an answer to your question. It may be the first step in beginning a friendly interchange. Or verbal compliance may be required by culture. (avoid yes-no questions)
- Avoid embarrassing others.

### **DIRECT: Cold-Climate Cultures**

- Task-oriented
- Short, direct questions show respect for the person’s time as well as professionalism
- ‘Yes’ is ‘yes’, ‘no’ is no. 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

## **IDENTITY: Group Oriented vs. Individualism**

### **GROUP: Hot-Climate Cultures**

- My identity is tied to the group (family, tribe, etc.)
- 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
- Southern US doesn’t necessarily fit the group orientation
- Team members expect direction from the leader

### **INDIVIDUAL: Cold-Climate Cultures**

- I am a self-standing person with my own identity
- Every individual should have an opinion and can speak for him/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 the group

## **COMMUNITY:** **Inclusion vs. Privacy**

### **INCLUSION: Hot-Climate Cultures**

- Group oriented culture
- Individuals know they are automatically included in conversation, meals, and the other activities of the group
- Possessions are to be used freely by all: food, tools, etc.
- It is not desirable to be left to oneself
- It is rude to hold a private conversation or make plans that exclude others present

### **PRIVACY: Cold-Climate Cultures**

- Enjoy time and space to selves
- People are expected to ask permission to borrow something or to interrupt a conversation
- Each person is considered to be the steward of his or her possessions and has the responsibility to maintain and protect them
- In a community setting, it might be common to label one's food, tools, etc. to set them apart from the group's common possessions
- It is acceptable to hold private conversations or make exclusive plans with a few people, not including everyone

## **CONTEXT:** **High-Context vs. Low-Context Societies**

### **HIGH: Hot-Climate Cultures**

- Who you are related to matters
- Who you know matters
- It is better to overdress than to underdress
- Watch to see how others respond in a situation in order to apply appropriate behavior
- Remember to honor the people you are dealing with; too casual is insulting
- Ask a local person who has lived overseas for a while what is important to know
- Use manners
- Respect the rules
- Give attention to appropriate greetings

### **LOW: Cold-Climate Cultures**

- Who you know matters, but not as much. What you know is important
- Do not be offended by the casual atmosphere
- Lack of protocol does not mean rejecting, nor is it dishonoring
- They do not know what your rules are, so leave your rules at home
- Address people by their given names unless others use titles

## HOSPITALITY

### Hot-Climate Cultures

- Hospitality is spontaneous, often without an advance invitation
- It is the context for relationship (even business relationships)
- Takes place in the home
- Host fully takes care of the needs of the guest. The guest pays for nothing
- A gift is usually expected
- Food and drink are involved
- Travelers are taken in and provided for

### Cold-Climate Cultures

- Hospitality is taken very seriously and is planned for
- Not as spontaneous. Host usually needs advance notice of a visit
- Travelers are expected to make their own arrangements other than what is specifically communicated to the host ahead of time
- Guests need to expect to pay for their transportation and restaurants if visiting the US. If the host plans to pay, he usually will say so
- Hospitality is a special occasion, taking the full attention of the host

## TIME & PLANNING

### Hot-Climate Cultures

- Are not as oriented toward the clock as cold-climate cultures
- Are event oriented
- Are spontaneous and flexible in their approach to life
- Respond to what life brings
- Consider that saving time is not as important as experiencing the moment
- Recognize that structure is required in some areas of life (the military, for example)
- Have informal visiting as part of the event

### Cold-Climate Cultures

- Time-oriented
- Structured in their approach to life
- Enjoy using time efficiently
- Try to plan their day, and saving time is a value
- Expect the event (dinner, guest arrival, meeting) to begin at the time announced. Visiting or informally chatting happens before or after the event

## HELPFUL HINTS

1. Look for a “culture interpreter”.
2. Read as much as possible about the history of the people in the culture.
3. Seek out book sources in libraries or on the Internet.
4. Before leaving home, find people from that country who can tell you about their country.
5. Try to find out the values of the society.
6. Be aware of culture shock and culture stress.
7. Returning home: be aware of “reverse” culture shock.
8. Look for others who have traveled, or people from your host culture once you return home.
9. Learn phrases in the local language.
10. Go listening, observing. Don't pass judgment until you have discovered the reason behind people's “strange” habits.

