

# **Bridge Over Troubled Water**

## **The Success Series: Cross-Cultural Communications**

*By Stefan Swanepoel*

### **Introduction**

Recently, genetic scientists have determined that in the 6 billion rungs of the DNA ladder that make up the nucleus of the human cell, there is less than .02% difference between one race and another. There may be many cultures, tribes, nations, languages and peoples, but apparently one common ancestry for us all. Because many real estate firms hire people from a variety of different cultures, miscommunication and misunderstanding can easily occur. Such miscues can lead to stress, frustration and anxiety that in turn can negatively impact performance, relationships and teamwork. Understanding the communication styles and cultures of the global workforce can open new gateways to successful cross-cultural communication. This 5 Point Plan, taken from The Success Series ([www.iSucceed.com](http://www.iSucceed.com)) hopes to show that being a child of the new modern world often requires being open to different international perspectives.

**1. Finding Common Interests.** When communicating across the cultural divide one must take the time to learn “Why?” Remember, communication is a two-way dialogue. Making assumptions is the Achilles heel of building bridges, and conclusions drawn on your own frame of reference will almost certainly fail. The logic of one culture seldom equates to the same answers or meanings in another. You will need to make fundamental changes in the way you think, feel and behave.

**2. Appreciating Different Values.** Due to the rapid changes brought about by globalization it is, now more than ever before, vital to understand that we react to our environment, its teachings and its belief systems. A lack of understanding of our cherished and deeply held values can lead to considerable stress. Be especially sensitive toward the areas of religion, racial equality, moral behavior, privacy, justice and fair play.

**3. Having Empathy.** Communication is your portal to the world. Learn to suspend judgment before you allow simple misunderstandings to influence or change events. Some personality types find it easy to boldly confront while others are more concerned with maintaining peace and unity. So it is that different cultures have unique communication styles attaching different meanings to certain actions, methods and or words.

**4. Being Understanding.** You may be an expert concerning your own culture, but until you have lived and worked in another country or culture you will most likely not begin to understand how substantial a difference can exist between nations and cultures. Living or undergoing formal training in a foreign country will result in fundamental changes in attitude, thought, emotion and behavior. The process tends to instill a truer cultural understanding that helps in dealing with these differences in a relaxed and nonjudgmental way.

**5. Being Patient.** You may not agree or wish to adopt a particular cultural philosophy or belief, but in order to effectively communicate you must understand its perspective. My father taught me that patience is a virtue of the highest desire. Never has this been more valuable than in today’s global market. Make certain that "What you actually said," "What you thought you said," and "What the recipient thought you said" are one and the same.

### **In Closing**

It may feel like a complex, confused journey of a thousand miles and a thousand cultures. Yet it all begins with small steps. Orison Swett Marden once said, “The universe is one great kindergarten for man.” So, have fun, learn to tune down your haste, bury your frustration, wash away your pre-conceived opinions and open your mind to variety and new friendships.

### **Acknowledgement**

This article is part of “*The Success Series*” by Stefan Swanepoel author of 11 books and whitepapers, and a celebrated speaker to more than 250,000 people on five continents. Stefan is CEO of The RealtyU® Group, the largest real estate education, training and career development company ([www.RealtyU.com](http://www.RealtyU.com)) in the US.