

Help us with our cultural communications! She says tomăto, I say tomăto! Part 2 of 2



Disclaimer: The names of exporters and their stories have been changed to protect their identity. The names and expertise of our advisors are very real and often understated. The story is funny, the advice is authentic.

A review from part one! Rhonda Rhodophyta from Steilacoom, WA needs to impress a CEO from a major Colombian beauty company. She needs to know what cultural considerations to address so she doesn't offend. This is a huge expansion opportunity for Rhonda's business. Betty Sue asked her friend Patricia Moore, CEO of Sentrum International with many years of protocol experience serving as Consul of Colombia to Norway and Iceland for advice. The second part of Patricia's recommendation follows.

Dear Rhonda Rhodophyta,

In our last post, we discussed cultural protocol before you actually meet your client. Today we will discuss protocol for when you meet in person. Cultural issues will impact the success of the negotiation. Confirm the CEO wants to visit your factory and send a tentative agenda for her approval. Include a list of staff and guests participating in the meeting and general information (weather, shopping, art and culture, etc.). This is the time to ask about special meals, allergies, and other relevant information. As the host, you or someone from your team, is expected to pick her up at the airport and drive her around during her visit.

Using the information you have gathered, decide where and how the meeting should be held, who should be invited, who should speak and in what order, and what food and drinks should be served, if any. For Colombians, and in general for South Americans, coffee, water and herbal teas are enough. Mugs are not as common as in the U.S., so serve them with cup, saucer and spoon. Be aware of different greeting rituals such as kisses, handshakes or bows. There are differences in how close people stand to socialize, how loudly they speak. Meanings of words differ from culture to culture and "casual dress" almost never means jeans or flip flops in countries outside the U.S.

Meet your guest and introduce yourself by stating your name and title and welcome her. As the host, point out a chair for her saying "please sit here". In a working meeting, the guest of honor should be seated across from the highest executive in the room and facing the door. No purses or briefcases should be on the table. If she has brought a small gift or souvenir, open it immediately, thank her, and if appropriate, share it with everyone at the table.

Start the conversation by asking about her trip and her family members. Be sure to convey you will be glad to adjust the agenda as needed. Make a brief introduction of your seaweed products with reasons why you believe its distribution will benefits both parties. Listen to her thoughts and address her concerns in a professional way and close the meeting. Take the CEO back to the airport and follow up with an email asking about her return home.

Yours truly, Patricia

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#BettySueExportQueen

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