


Język Angielski Biznesowy

Business English

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How to Avoid Culture Clashes



Dear Readers,

In this edition of BEM's business vocabulary handbook, we offer you a real treat¹: an in-depth² guide³ that will help you learn your way around⁴ dealing with a foreign culture in business. It's no secret that many business deals⁵ can be completely derailed⁶ by someone who doesn't behave⁷ properly in a given⁸ context, either by saying or doing something that may offend⁹ someone. Most often this is caused by being unprepared¹⁰ to understand and adapt¹¹ to another culture. Since the business culture of the US and English-speaking countries is very Western in nature, many entrepreneurs¹² wrongly assume¹³ that it's the norm, thinking that merely¹⁴ learning another language will let them get by¹⁵, or even expecting¹⁶ everyone to speak English and behave in some uniform¹⁷ way.

That first expectation is indeed¹⁸ the standard nowadays¹⁹, but what about various²⁰ cultures, habits²¹ and traditions that are cherished²² by members of other cultures? After all, if we all act the same way, we may lose what makes us so different and unique²³ as human beings²⁴. So instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all²⁵ bland²⁶ Western business culture, why not learn what other cultures find proper and which traps to avoid²⁷, learn how to embrace²⁸ modern multiculturalism²⁹ that isn't synonymous with³⁰ lack of individuality³¹. And besides, who knows what great new business opportunity awaits³² if you simply learn about other cultures and find how to operate in them? Read on!

¹ **treat** tri:t miła niespodzianka

² **in-depth** 'ɪndɛpθ obszerne

³ **guide** gaɪd poradnik

⁴ **to learn one's way around doing sth** tə lɜ:n wʌnz weɪ ə'raʊnd 'du:ɪŋ 'sʌmθɪŋ nauczyć się jak się czymś zajmować/jak sobie z czymś radzić

⁵ **deal** di:l kontrakt, umowa

⁶ **to derail sth** tə dɪ'reɪl 'sʌmθɪŋ wykoleić, popsuć

⁷ **to behave** tə br'heɪv zachowywać się

⁸ **given** 'gɪvɪn dany

⁹ **to offend sb** tu ə'fend 'sʌmbədi obrazić, urazić kogoś

¹⁰ **unprepared** ,ʌnpri'peəd niegotowy

¹¹ **to adapt** tu ə'dæpt dostosować się

¹² **entrepreneur** ,ɒntɹəprə'nɜ:(r) przedsiębiorca

¹³ **to assume** tu ə'sju:m założyć

¹⁴ **merely** 'mɛəli zaledwie, tylko

¹⁵ **to let sb get by** tə let 'sʌmbədi get baɪ pozwolić komuś (jako tako) dawać sobie radę

¹⁶ **to expect sb to do sth** tu ɪk'spekt 'sʌmbədi tə dɔ 'sʌmθɪŋ oczekiwać od kogoś, że coś zrobi

¹⁷ **uniform** 'ju:nɪfɔ:m jednakowy, taki sam

¹⁸ **indeed** ɪn'di:d w rzeczy samej

¹⁹ **nowadays** 'nəʊədeɪz obecnie

²⁰ **various** 'veəriəs rozmaity

²¹ **habit** 'hæbɪt zwyczaj

²² **to cherish sth** tə 'tʃerɪʃ 'sʌmθɪŋ pielęgnować coś, hołubić

²³ **unique** ju:'ni:k unikalny

²⁴ **human being** 'hju:mən 'bi:ɪŋ istota ludzka

²⁵ **one-size-fits-all** wʌn saɪz fɪts ɔ:l uniwersalny, pasujący do wszystkiego (tylko przed rzeczownikiem)

²⁶ **bland** blænd nijaki

²⁷ **to avoid** tu ə'vɔɪd unikać

²⁸ **to embrace sth** tu ɪm'breɪs 'sʌmθɪŋ przyjąć coś, zaakceptować

²⁹ **multiculturalism** ,mʌltɪ,kʌltʃərəlɪz(ə)m wielokulturowość

³⁰ **to be synonymous with sth** tə bi st'ɪnɒnɪməs wɪθ 'sʌmθɪŋ być tożsamym/równoznacznym z czymś

³¹ **individuality** ,ɪndɪ,vɪdʒu'ælətɪ tu: czyjeś poczucie unikalności/niepowtarzalności

³² **to await** tu ə'weɪt czekać (na kogoś/coś)

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Cultural Dimensions as the Starting Point for Multiculturalism

Geert Hofstede is a social psychologist whose seminal works have both created and shaped the field of cultural dimensions – an area of study of social behaviour that transcends and encompasses psychology, sociology and anthropology. Any practical advice on how to deal with different cultures and avoid clashes should begin with at least a nod in his direction.

According to Hofstede, various cultures (and hence various countries and societies that are comprised of members of such cultures) present certain quantifiable, visible and categorisable character traits that are very different from one nation to the next. Initially, that difference would be ascribed by him to just four areas.

On his website, he states that there are “four anthropological problem areas that different national societies handle differently: ways of coping with inequality, ways of coping with uncertainty, the relationship of the individual with her or his primary group, and the emotional implications of having been born as a girl or as a boy”.

Since his initial research, others have come up with two more dimensions – one having to do with being more oriented towards one’s pleasure or more towards showing moderation, and the other connected to the way certain cultures approach goals that are closer or further away in time. These two dimensions also play a certain role in business and commerce.

Of course, Hofstede’s (and his successors) research into cultural dimensions has much wider implications than just business, but in our handy guide we will try to simply explain what each of these so-called dimensions is and what it means for doing business in another country, in a multi-national context or when dealing with foreigners of certain descent. Let’s start with Individualism versus Collectivism.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

This aspect describes how much of an emphasis is placed on one’s own achievements, independence and autonomy in making decisions or following rules. In places where individualism is highly valued, personal opinion is very important, there is respect for smaller groups, where each person can stand up to all the others and express their opinion freely.

Societies or communities where collectivism is more valued tend to form coherent groups (e.g. larger families) where one’s own well-being is dependent on that of the group, and hence one’s own ideas, independent decision-making or personal achievements are treated as either unimportant or even detrimental to the group. Traditionally, Asian countries are regarded as more collectivist in nature. The same concerns most less developed countries, where families tend to be larger, and many Latin and African countries. By the same measure, America and Europe are often regarded as low-to-middle collectivist. However, this perception is mostly based on some rather superficial observations and may not hold entirely true.