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DEVELOPING CROSS CULTURAL SENSITIVITY: A STUDY OF INDIAN NETWORKING ETIQUETTE

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Abstract

Any interaction among individuals should be governed by certain etiquette and its absence would result in a huge loss, for an individual or enterprise. Paradoxically, despite India being culturally diverse, one cannot assume that this would ensure success in the international space. Against this backdrop, my paper has examined the experiences of Indians, in networking etiquette - covering greeting, salutation, dining, hospitality, gifting and time etiquette, these being primary areas of interaction. By drawing upon the experiences of Indians, who have travelled across the globe, my research has outlined general suggestions, which could ease interactions, in a cross cultural space.

Keywords: *Cross cultural sensitivity, Indian globe trotters, networking etiquette.*

Introduction

“Good manners will open doors that the best education cannot.”
- Clarence Thomas

The importance of etiquette, in personal and professional interaction with people cannot be denied. Adhering to etiquette has no longer remained a fancy, or a matter of choice, given that it is extremely essential, in day-to-day functioning. Consequently, ignorance about etiquette would not just taint one’s reputation, but could also result in a lot of embarrassment.

Two most striking examples of awkward situations on this account, in recent times, have been in the context of the American President Barack Obama’s visit to England in 2009. Despite months of preparation about etiquette, when the American President raised a toast at the Buckingham Palace, while

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the national anthem played in the background, the action caused quite a stir. The President continued to raise the toast, before the national anthem could end. The other significant lapse was when Michelle Obama hugged the Queen of England, a gesture reported by *The Telegraph* as “a departure from what is considered appropriate protocol when meeting the Queen.” (Wardrop, 2009). These two examples of cultural faux pas, at the highest level of protocol, to be followed by countries, simply go to show that cross cultural sensitivity, needs to be taken more seriously, and any slip up in this area may have repercussions on a small or large scale.

While cross cultural sensitivity is gaining importance across the globe thanks to the opening up of the world in 1990, in the Indian context, globe-trotting, for personal and professional reasons, has become an increasingly common phenomenon. This, in turn, has opened vistas for Indians to associate with different cultures. By throwing open avenues, for business and tourism, globalisation has also facilitated a cultural exchange between Indians and others. However, whether or not Indians have been able to successfully sail through the challenges, posed by differences in cultures, is an issue that needs to be analysed, not just for its own sake, but for the valuable lessons in networking etiquette, it could offer to other Indians, who wish to undertake the journey across varied cultures, with minimum possible obstacles.

In fact, one’s basic networking etiquette, which includes greeting, salutation, hospitality, dining, and gifting, proves to be more often than an icebreaker; failure in it, on the other hand, can result in the formation of an ice-block that may serve to sink the relationship.

1: Area of Research, Methodology and Limitations

Against this backdrop, my paper would focus on the subtle and vast differences in networking etiquette, across the globe and the coping mechanisms that Indians could use, to adapt themselves to the cultural kaleidoscope. Taking into account, the gamut of areas that fall under cross cultural sensitivity, this research has chosen to deliberate, only on six areas of networking etiquette viz. greeting, salutation, dining, hospitality, gifting and perception of time, given the limited scope of this intervention. 50 Indians who have travelled across the globe, for personal and professional reasons were interviewed and their experiences, coupled with the methods and tips they used, to be more culturally agile, have shaped the recommendations. Moreover, books and articles on Cross Cultural Sensitivity were used as secondary data. This research has incorporated experiences from countries/regions, to which Indians travel most frequently and an attempt has been made to cover diverse countries across the five continents. In this discourse, Indian networking etiquette will be discussed alongside that of America, Canada, Europe, Africa, South East Asia, the Middle East and Australia and comparisons and contrasts will be drawn. Although, this researcher has not herself travelled internationally, her interaction with professionals and friends, located around the world, has provided useful insights to this research.

2: Greeting Etiquette

The Conventions in Greeting

In any culture, the first impression one makes about the other is through greeting etiquette, which becomes a launch pad/foundation for further conversation. Paradoxically, there exists a huge diversity, in terms of greeting etiquette throughout the world. In India, people are greeted with the joining of both hands, referred to as ‘Namaste’. Most English speaking professionals in India, though, greet each other ‘Good, morning/afternoon/evening’, as is the case in UK. The Americans, on the other hand, would resort to the more informal ‘Hi’ and in Australia too, people greet each other as ‘Hi, buddy/Hi, mate’. What is

similar to almost all cultures, be it Canada, America, Europe, the Far East or Australia, is the convention of greeting even strangers. Most Indians, who were interviewed, opined that they were confused, when they were greeted by strangers in foreign countries, as most people in India greet others, only if they know the person. Dr. Preeti Shirodkar, Associate Professor, at Mumbai Educational Trust's Institute of Management, recounts how greeting strangers in public confused her, while she was on teaching assignments in Germany and UK, as she often wondered whether she had already met these people, who were greeting her. It was through observation that she realised, that greeting people, irrespective of one's familiarity with them, was a part of their culture.

Choice of Expressions for Greeting

Within the area of greeting, the vocabulary used too, differs from country to country. In Australia, for instance, when people greet each other as 'Hi, mate' or 'Hi, buddy', it doesn't necessarily mean that they are friends or want to seek familiarity. Delroy Coelho, an IT expert working, in an MNC, in Sydney, Australia, recounted how this greeting left him puzzled, as he thought people around him were trying to act overfriendly, while it was only later, that he realised, that this was just a way of greeting. The expressions used for greeting people, in varied countries, might thus also seem confusing, especially if the same expression is used differently in one's country. For example, Jay Loliyana, during his stint at London, for an executive MBA course, was often stumped by the expression 'You alright?' When he heard the expression for the first time, he wondered whether he looked sick or tired, as many people greeted him using this expression, during his first week of attending college and work. It was only after a week, that he observed people greeting each other, using the same expression that it was used, as a way to greet people and was not meant, to be taken literally, like it is, most of the times, in the Indian context.

Non Verbal Communication Involved in Greeting

Apart from diversity, in the choice of words, used for greeting, the nonverbal communication, that accompanies greeting etiquette, is also quite diverse in nature, in varied countries. In Japan and China, one is greeted with a slight bow, as a mark of respect and one is expected to reciprocate the gesture. In fact, in these two countries, if business cards are given immediately after greeting, they are offered with a bow and with both hands. As a receiver, one is expected to receive it with both hands, as a mark of respect to the other's identity.

A more common way of greeting people is by shaking hands; and, in this area too, each country has its own version of the right handshake. For e.g. in the US a firm handshake is the norm, while in the UK a light handshake is appreciated. In fact, in countries like Morocco, a firm handshake is a strict no-no. One has to also watch out for the duration of the handshake. In countries like France, the handshake is quick while in Brazil and United Arab Emirates, a long handshake is the norm for greeting. In India, more often than not, especially since people shake hands with each other, more out of the joy of meeting, on social occasions, they don't pay much attention, to the variety in the nature of handshakes. In fact, Indians who are shy of shaking hands, especially with the opposite gender, end up greeting people, with a limp handshake, which can be considered rude; in other cultures and a sign of disinterest in interacting. In the Middle East, a handshake can give way to a hug, if one is very close and one is expected to reciprocate the greeting. However, this does not happen in the context of women. In fact, in the Middle East there are strict norms, for interacting with women and any violation could cost one heavily.

3: Salutation Etiquette

General Salutation Etiquette

Moving beyond the first step of extending courtesies, by greeting people, to actually addressing them, salutation etiquette, in many parts of the world, is similar to what is used in India, while in others, it differs vastly. As India has been a British colony, in the past, there are traces of the British culture and

way of functioning, in many areas of Indian life. This holds true as regards salutation etiquette, where most Indians will be very formal and address their seniors as ‘Sir/Madam’ or ‘Mr./Ms.’ (followed by the surname), unlike the American way, where irrespective of age and hierarchy, most people are addressed by their first name. Using ‘Mr./Ms.’ or ‘Sir/Madam’ in the US is considered a sign of sycophancy, but in India, these salutations are used as a mark of respect.

Choice of Expressions for Greeting

In terms of using titles like ‘Dr.’, ‘Brig.’, ‘Col.’, most Indians are very particular and will insist on being addressed with the title, as they feel a sense of pride and honour, to be associated with the medical profession or armed forces. A person who has completed his/her doctorate will be addressed as ‘Dr.’ and so will a person practising medicine. In the US though, a person who has received a doctorate would prefer to be addressed by the name and surname, followed by the title ‘Ph.D.’. Thus, such preferences have to be kept in mind, especially when one is a part of forums, where people are introduced.

Use of Titles and Suffix Terms

Like titles, which precede the name, in many cultures, there exist certain terms, which one could use, like a suffix, after a name, as an indicator of either respect or endearment. For e.g., in Japan the term ‘San’ is used after a name, to symbolise that one holds the person in high esteem and one is expected to reciprocate, in the same fashion. On the other hand, in the Arab world terms like ‘bhai’ and ‘aapa’ that are suffixed with one’s name, serve to equate the person with one’s family. As Mr. Rajeev Gatne, CEO and Director at, Sunshine Healthcare, points out, through his experience of travelling to the Arab world and Afghanistan, terms like ‘bhai’ and ‘aapa’ help to establish a bond with people in the Arab world. In India, too, addressing a stranger by calling them ‘uncle’ and ‘aunty’ is very common. However, if applied without caution, to other cultures, this may backfire. Delroy Coelho, an Indian IT professional working in Australia, quotes an instance, of how one of his Indian friends addressed someone as ‘uncle’ in church and the friend got glared at and was requested to use the first name, as the unnecessary familiarity was perceived as an intrusion.

Moreover, other than the titles and suffixes, when it comes to focusing on the actual name, most cultures like France, China and Germany show appreciation for people by getting the pronunciation of their names correctly. In China, in fact, most people have an English name too, apart from their Chinese name and more often than not, the Chinese name is disclosed, only to people from China. In China, like in the case of certain communities in India, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the name and surname. Another similarity in salutation culture is that between India and Russia. Like in the Punjabi community in India, the name of the individual is followed by the term ‘Kaur’, in the case of women, and ‘Singh’, in the case of men, so too, in Russia the term ‘Vich’ is attached, after the name of men and ‘Ovna’, in case of women. Keeping in mind such observations might prevent embarrassment to the self and others.

4: Dining etiquette

Another very important and tricky networking etiquette is that related to dining. Considering that most people in the world bond over food, both on the personal and professional fronts, ensuring that one gets the basics and intricacies of dining etiquette right is of utmost consequence. Few among the many areas of dining etiquette that Indians should keep in mind are as follows:

Differences in Perception of Vegetarian Food

The perception of the concept of ‘vegetarian food’ differs from country to country. While in India, it means only vegetables, in South East Asian countries, vegetables cooked in pork fat or fish oil

are still considered vegetarian. In most European countries, like Germany and France vegetarian includes chicken and egg, unlike the Indian concept of vegetarian food. Kartik Ganesh, a professional from the automobile industry, narrated his dismay, when he was served fish toppings on a vegetarian pizza, at a high end hotel in Thailand. It took him a great deal of effort, to explain what he meant by vegetarian and after a lot of searching around, he managed to locate a Papa John's outlet, which served him a completely vegetarian pizza. In fact, as Rajeev Gatne, an HR professional, who has travelled to almost 40 countries in the world, remarks keeping in mind these subtleties, most culture savvy airlines nowadays serve two kinds of Asian meals - an Asian Hindu meal and an Asian Muslim meal. Most respondents also stated that airlines have gone one step ahead, and have started offering even Jain food to Indian fliers, which is vegetarian food sans garlic, onion and root vegetables, as the Jain community is among one of the most the upwardly mobile and travels frequently, on account of business.

Ways of Eating Food

Other than the cuisine of a country, the second challenge in dining etiquette is using the appropriate way of eating a particular dish. Mr. Vikas Shirodkar, an HR consultant, who has formerly headed the Asia Pacific Region for Johnson & Johnson, recounted how difficult it was for him, to get around the concept of a hotpot in Singapore, because in India, more often than not, prawns are served de-shelled, whereas in a hotpot they aren't.

As regards using cutlery, Ameya Naik, Senior Editor at, NDTV India, who travels internationally for motor shows, recollected it was cumbersome, for some of his team members, to understand the use of cutlery, when they attended a dinner in Paris. Since most Indians are used to eating with their hands, or then with the fork, spoon and knife, using diverse cutlery, that is associated with fine dining, might pose a challenge.

Another interesting anecdote, in the context of dining, was shared by Nupura Pendharkar, a fashion designer, who studied in Milan for three years. She recounted the shocked expression on her landlady's face, when she saw Ms. Pendharkar have piping hot food in Italy. According to Italians, food needs to be room temperature, when it is to be consumed or else they believe it causes harm to the body. Unlike this perception, except for some desserts, most food items in India are preferred piping hot.

The Overall Dining Experience

Moreover, the overall dining experience could, many a times, be quite difficult to come to terms with. For e.g. the host in Middle Eastern countries serves the guest, with the same hand that s/he uses to eat, if the guest needs a second serving. This is considered as a privilege for the host and the guest is merely expected to participate in the generosity offered by the host. On the other hand, in Japan, as Mr. Ajit Jadhav, India Head of a Japanese MNC, remarked the guest needs to actively participate, in the dining experience. If the host is pouring out water, the guest needs to hold the glass with both hands and tilt it a little, so as to make it convenient for the host.

However, the concept of sharing food with one's guest is not a universal norm. As Diti Amin, an Engineer, working in Chicago, pointed out, the Indian concept of dining revolves around sharing food that is ordered. However, in Chicago, the entrée is usually for the individual, who orders it, and sharing is rarely the norm. Even as regards offering food to one's guests, in African countries like Kenya and European countries, like Germany and France, for instance, as Mr. Rajeev Gatne states, one will not be offered food or beverages, until one asks for it, as it is believed that the guest will ask the host, if s/he needs something; whereas in India, this act might be perceived rude, since most Indian hosts will offer refreshments to their guests and will insist overtly, on finishing them.

5: Hospitality

This going a little over the top brings one to another area, which is hospitality. Most Indian families witness the concept of ‘Atithi Devo Bhava’ at play in their homes, which means that the guest is equal to God. So most Indian households put in lot of effort and time, to host their guests to the point that foreigners might often feel smothered by the hospitality showered on them. The picture however is not the same in other cultures.

Attitude Towards Hospitality

Most European cultures extend hospitality, on a professional level; although, even professionally, there exists a difference in being hospitable. As most people interviewed opined that, in America and Europe, the guest will be received at the airport and dropped off at the hotel. Thereafter, s/he will be expected, to fend for himself/herself. The same would be followed, while seeing the guest off. However, in countries like India and Japan, the guest will be provided, more than basic help to move around places and people will be willing to go through any amount of inconvenience, with the sole objective of making the guest feel comfortable.

As, Dr. Preeti Shirodkar, a Communication and Soft Skills expert, pointed out, most Europeans will generally take people out for dinner and not host them, in their homes. One of the respondents, who was invited to a restaurant in London, for a birthday party, also recounted that she had to shell out her share, for the birthday dinner, and was shocked by this, as in India, when one is invited for a birthday dinner, the host foots the bill. It was only later that she realised that one is invited for one’s company and is thus expected to share the expenses for the meal.

Interpretation of the Concept of Space

With respect to hosting someone at home, Europeans, Americans and South East Asians too have a guarded approach to their personal space. On the other hand, it is very common among Indians to invite people home immediately, even if they have met the first time. As Ranjini Manian points out, in her book, - *Make it in India*, “engaging with colleagues outside the office is more important here in India, than, perhaps is the case in the US or the EU”.(Manian et al, 2015:84).

This being the case, it is very common for Indians to bring along an uninvited friend to a party or even a wedding. Ms. Puja Bhatia and Dr. Shefali Jadhav, settled in Canada, voiced out that this Indian habit can land one in trouble as, in Canada, one has to call and ask, before randomly dropping in, as family time is considered very sacrosanct.

Participation of Family Members in Extending Hospitality

In terms of the inviting professional contacts home and the family pitching in to entertain the guest, most of the times in European countries, some parts of Asia and America, the personal and professional are exclusive worlds. On the other hand, in Russia, the Middle East and Afghanistan, one would get invited at home and be treated like a member of the family. In fact, in Afghanistan, even if one is on a business assignment, one gets invited to social functions. And when such an invitation is extended, one should not just honour the invitation, but also carry a small gift, as a token of gratitude, which is where gifting etiquette comes into play.

6: Gifting Etiquette

Gifting etiquette is an extremely delicate/tricky area and as noble as one’s intentions might be, one has to exercise great caution, to see that one does not gift something, that will offend the receiver.

Choosing the Right Gift

Mr. Vikas Shirodkar, an HR professional, shared about his experience with gifting etiquette, which went horribly wrong in Singapore, when the Ganesh idol he gifted was returned the following day, quoting that religious idols were not acceptable as gifts. There is also a similar case, in Russia, as Dr. Shardul Pandey and Dr. Raju Kanak, who completed their course in medicine from Russia, reiterated. Anything that is perceived as a factor that changes one's beliefs should not be chosen as a gift. In this context, one needs to study beforehand what is an acceptable and unacceptable gift in a country. Dr. Satyendra Upadhyay, a Chinese Language Expert, suggests that gifting a watch/clock to the Chinese is a strict no-no as, in their culture because, it symbolises death. What go down well as gifts with the Chinese and Japanese, however, are gift articles, which represent history or ancient culture.

As regards European countries, if one is invited to someone's home, it is expected that one carries some flowers or a bottle of liquor for the host. The type and colour of flowers and the type of liquor differ vastly, from country to country; and articles and blogs can be studied, before choosing a gift. Moreover, care should be maintained about not violating religious sentiments, while gifting. Gifting articles made of pigskin, in the Middle East, or cowhide, in India, would only cause more harm than good.

Researching about Certain Rules or Laws Related to Gifting

What also need serious examination are rules and laws regarding gifting. While in countries like USA and Singapore there is a cap on the monetary value of a gift, other countries like Malaysia and Paraguay look down upon gifts, as a symbol of bribery. While carrying idols of any kind are banned in the Middle East, agricultural products are not permitted in Australia. Thus, apart from the general dos and don'ts regarding gifting etiquette, in a particular country, it is also essential to find out about what is permissible or otherwise, in terms of rules and regulations laid down by way of laws.

Conventions about Presenting and Receiving Gifts

Furthermore, other than one's choice of a gift, it is equally important to remember the conventions for both presenting and receiving gifts. In most South East Asian countries, gifts would be presented with both hands and need to be received likewise. In Japan, great emphasis is placed, on the correct way of wrapping gifts, as also opening gifts. In fact, the etiquette regarding opening of gifts also varies from country to country. While in America and most European countries, people immediately open gifts and give a feedback about whether they like it, in India gifts are generally not opened in front of the person, who has presented the gift.

Apart from conventions of presenting and receiving gifts, one should also make it one's business, to learn about the popular festivals/occasions or the ideal time for presenting gifts. For instance, during festivals like Eid, in the Middle East, Christmas, in Europe and America, or Diwali, in India, gifting is usually the norm.

7: Perception of Time

Talking about the right moment, the perception of time, although not directly an area that falls under networking etiquette, plays a very crucial role in the process of networking. Other than the more general issues, about differences in time zones, certain other considerations should also be focused upon, with respect to time.

Etiquette Related to Punctuality

Like the Germans and Japanese are known throughout the world, for their precision as regards time, Indians are infamous for their lack of punctuality. This could prove to be a great deterrent for Indians, who carry the typical Indian notion of time into a foreign land. In Japan and England, as Ameya Naik, a media expert, and Jay Loliyana, a Finance professional, pointed out, if one reaches late to one's

workplace, one needs to get proof, from the transport department, which usually sends an email, about a delay of services. However, a delay in these countries is a rare occasion. In India, however, traffic snarls causing delays is very frequent and common. Trains or buses are rarely on time and hence the European or Japanese adherence to time usually shocks Indians.

An interesting anecdote about punctuality is one that was narrated by Mr. Arun Patil, who had formerly served as an Indian ambassador in Fiji. A one minute delay, in sticking to the appointment time, for meeting the Governor of Fiji, caused the appointment to get cancelled, resulting in the meeting getting rescheduled, only after 3 months. On similar lines, a delay in turning up for a hotel reservation in Italy, as stated by media professional Ameya Naik, results in cancellation of the reservation. This only goes to show the varied approaches towards punctuality that people in different corners of the world have.

Changing Value Placed on Time

Closely related to punctuality is the value most cultures ascribe to time. As two media professionals opined, German car companies ensure that they start their press conferences on time, in India. Similarly, since Americans, Europeans and people belonging to some countries of Asia place a very high value on time spent with the family, getting the weekend time to oneself is of great consequence. On the other hand, when it comes to Indians, although most companies have weekends off, exchanging work related emails and text messages, on weekends, is very common. Weekend time is also sacrosanct in countries like Australia, Russia, Africa and Korea, where no work related issues are entertained on weekends, as emphasis is placed on making optimum use of time, whether personal or professional.

Posing a contrast to this approach, however, time is not a factor that is valued in terms of money or profit in the Middle East. Here the focus is more on building relationships and the time frame is not of much consequence. Hence adhering to timelines for projects, or sticking to time for meetings, is not taken too seriously, as building a long standing relationship is given priority over time. An Arab would typically walk in late for a meeting quoting 'If Allah wishes, I shall be on time', which might be a sacrilege for a Japanese professional, who places immense value on time.

Figuring Out which is the 'Right' Time

Along with understanding the value placed on time, by different cultures, it is also necessary to do one's groundwork, as regards the appropriate time to visit a place. For instance, trying to sort out a professional commitment, in America or any of the European countries, post mid-December, is almost impossible. The same holds true during Eid in Middle Eastern countries and during the Chinese New Year, in China. Ms. Prajakta Shetye Deo, a Finance professional, who used to conduct training programmes for HSBC, recollected how she faced a problem vis-à-vis eating food openly, in malls, while she was in United Arab Emirates, during Ramzaan, as most people in the country observe a rigorous fast. Ms. Deo had to take great care not to offend sentiments, by eating in public, yet find something that could sustain her, through the training programme.

So too, elections, weather conditions, political upheavals etc. need to be taken into account, while scheduling one's visit to another country.

8: Coping Mechanisms

Considering the diversity in networking etiquette across the globe, making one's culture flight turbulence-free can be quite a challenge. However, certain general tips offered by the professionals, who were interviewed, could make this transition feel less cumbersome.

Learning Through Observation

Although most respondents said that they had read books and articles about other cultures, they admitted that they were not sufficiently prepared to face the subtleties in differences across culture. At such times, what came to their rescue was their power of observation. In this light, Dr. Preeti Shirodkar, a Communication and Soft Skills expert, states that, one needs to be observant about and alert to cultural variations and learn to adapt to the diversity in cultural etiquette. Although she had procured information from her Guide and from travel books, before her trips to UK and Germany, finally her sense of observation came to her rescue, in terms of dining etiquette, observing discipline as regards traffic and not walking on cycle tracks, (a concept which is largely unheard of in India), or losing and gaining time in England.

Apart from general observations, as Tanveer Bondre, a management professional based in Dubai, and Ameya Naik, a media professional, recommend that, one should try and observe one's host, in case one faces a particularly tricky situation. This applies to all areas of networking etiquette, discussed in this paper.

Cultivating a Learning Attitude

However, the key to observation is to have an open mindset, which is a challenge that is greater than adjusting to the minor subtleties in culture. Mr. Vikas Shirodkar, an HR professional, who is well travelled, opines one needs to accept that "one's way is not the only/right way of doing things." Ranjini Manian's and Joanne Grady Huskey's advice in their book, *Make it in India*, also needs mention, in this context. They state that "don't do the 'them versus us' thing... There is no 'us' and 'them'." (Manian et al, 2015:96) Once one accepts this, it becomes easier to shift gears more smoothly, in a cross cultural context.

As Archana Shirsat, Deputy Director General and Head of Capacity Development at IDI, Norway, suggests that, learning from colleagues, who hail from or have previously travelled to a particular country, helps immensely. As the Head of an International Team, Ms. Shirsat seeks information from her team mates, about region specific differences, which helps her gain practical insights into the culture. Moreover, learning basic greetings through books, articles and mobile apps and using them, while interacting with people is an indication, that one respects the other person's culture and has taken the effort to learn basic expressions related to it. Ms. Hetal Naik, the founder of IGNITE, who frequently takes students on trips to Kenya, shared that she makes her students learn the basic greetings and places great emphasis on the fact, that they should use courtesy words, while conducting themselves in Kenya, especially given that people in India are not used to greeting, thanking or apologising, on every small occasion. Ms. Naik also states that she encourages students, to develop a respect for another culture and not cultivate a mercenary tourist-like attitude, where the sole aim is to get value for one's money. She says, "one has to learn the basic courtesy words, if one has to taste the culture."

Abandoning Fear and being Confident

While adopting a learning attitude, one will always fear committing faux pas. However, one needs to be more confident, even about making mistakes and moving on, by apologising and explaining what went wrong and seeing that one does not falter again. One's willingness and eagerness to learn about new cultures could help in fostering friendships, which could itself be a huge source of confidence. As Vandana Gupta, a Corporate Communications professional, and Falak Kothari, a Management professional, put it, their openness to meeting and learning from new people, from across the globe, has made communicating in a cross cultural set up "a less daunting task, compared to following a strict set of dos and don'ts." Another way to quell one's fear is by bearing in mind what Diti Amin, an Indian engineer staying in Chicago, states "a key to international travel is to remember, that people are the same everywhere...we need to learn to accept their norms, just as we would like them to accept ours."

Conclusion

All in all, through the few tips that have been outlined in this research paper and by keeping an open mind, Indians would be able to successfully face challenges in networking etiquette, in the international sphere. Most importantly, every international traveller should remember the words of Rene Dubos, who says, “human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival” (2016, Quotable Quotes). One’s reconciliation and understanding of this simple, yet complex, truth, will go a long way in determining one’s agility and competence in a cross cultural context.

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