Cultural Barriers to the Job Search

U.S. Employer Expectations	Conflicting Values with Some Cultures
Self-Promotion	
• Assertive • Able to openly discuss goals and accomplishments with confidence • Follow-up with employers • Appropriate dress	• Unless participating in a group activity, mentioning specific skills and accomplishments is seen as boastful • Following up with employers about application status is seen as rude
Directness in Communication	
• Openly responds to questions in a direct manner • Maintains eye contact with interviewer and displays appropriate nonverbal feedback	• Maintaining eye contact with someone of higher power is seen as disrespectful
Self-Disclosure	
• Openly discusses experiences, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses • Answers personality questions regarding leadership and problem-solving	• Personal questions are considered an invasion of privacy and are only discussed with close friends and family
Career Self-Awareness	
• Openly demonstrates knowledge of personal self in relation to short-term and long-term career goals • Discusses career concentration and expresses interest in doing specific job tasks	• Jobs are often assigned by government or family • Questioning someone about career role is seen as disloyal • Companies assign work responsibilities • Individuals must be flexible and willing to accept available jobs
Individual Responsibility	
• Uses multiple resources to identify job opportunities • Actively seeks career information independently • Networking with friends, family and professionals is crucial	• Jobs opportunities are found through family and/or the government • Depends on specific person/people to coordinate job search (e.g. advisor or employer agent)
Informality	
• Interviewer and interviewee may engage in friendly, open conversation that may incorporate some joking	• Job applicant is very polite to interviewer and is very careful about saving face and not appearing impolite • Handshaking, touching, using first names, crossing legs, etc. may be seen as inappropriate
Punctuality	
• Arrive approximately 5-15 minutes early for interview/appointment	• Time is not of high value, and 15 minutes-2 hours of lateness is not seen as insulting
Effective Resumes and Cover Letters	
• Resumes need to be one-page, error-free and concise • Strong focus on accomplishments and skills that relate specifically to the job • Personalized according to the job and employer • Does not contain a picture or personal information such as a age, sex, religion	• Resumes are detailed chronology of academic and work experience and not a tool of self-promotion • May contain personal information and a picture
Individual Equality	
• Race, sex, and age should not affect the outcome of a hiring decision	• Males are expected to assume dominance in interactions with females
Preparation	
• Obtain as much information as possible about the job and the employer and demonstrate this in the cover letter and during the interview	• Researching the organization may indicate excessive initiative or independence

Excerpt from Jessup, Catherine (1995). "Discover the Hidden Job Market" in Global Opportunity, 1995, pgs. 48-51.

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U.S. Employer Expectations

Characteristic	Employer Expectations	Employer Perceptions
Personal Responsibility and Branding	• All candidates are to take responsibility for their own job search and personally market their skills and abilities to employers • Candidates are expected to research employers, find job openings, reach out to employers and follow-up with employers in a timely manner • Candidates should talk about marketable skills and accomplishments	• Candidates who speak modestly about personal achievements may seem uncomfortable working independently and unable to achieve personal goals • Candidates who fail to take responsibility for their job search show employers that they lack accountability • Candidates who focus too much on technical skills risk demonstrating "in the box" thinking
Interpersonal Interaction & Networking	• All candidates are expected to demonstrate abilities beyond technical skills, therefore joining organizations and making friends from other cultures is important • While networking, start with informal conversation; focus the conversation around the other person and their needs and interests • Always greet professionals with a firm handshake	• Only interacting with people from your home country may inform employers that you are not comfortable with American culture or language • Handshakes that are too limp demonstrate a lack of confidence
Written Communication	• Poorly written documents are typically not given consideration; employers expect all candidates to have proficient written business level English • Resumes and cover letters are to be free of errors and awkward language • Resumes and cover letters are to be primarily focused on accomplishments and abilities that directly relate to the job description	• Candidates who use translators to type correspondence to employers may use words incorrectly and come off sounding awkward • Poor grammar and spelling gives off the impression that a candidate has trouble with the English language and may have a hard time communicating with colleagues and customers
Verbal Communication	• All candidates are expected to have proficient verbal business level English • Employers expect candidates to be prepared and demonstrate assertiveness, confident answers in a clear, projecting voice with natural enthusiasm	• Spending too much time searching for the right word to say may lead to employers questioning your ability to communicate effectively
Eye Contact	• Candidates are to make direct eye contact when corresponding with people of all authority levels	• Candidates who demonstrate averted eye contact appear to lack confidence
Professional Appearance	• Candidates are to dress professionally and demonstrate exceptional personal hygiene out of respect to the employer • Gentlemen are expected to wear a shirt and tie under a business suit with polished dress shoes • Ladies are expected to wear a professional dress or pants suit with hosiery and polished closed toe shoes	• Wearing unprofessional clothing gives off the impression that the candidate lacks attention to detail • Candidates who wear ill-fitting clothing that is wrinkled come off looking unprofessional • Candidates who do not demonstrate personal hygiene risk coming off disrespectful

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