
Knowing What to Expect

Good preparation is the best way to avoid a culture clash between Canadian and Mexican associates. Both sides need to understand in advance that their counterparts will not necessarily share their own views about how things should be done. Canadians have the advantage that most Mexicans consider them more culturally sensitive than Americans. Maintaining this reputation requires nothing more than remembering that neither culture is better.

Typically, problems are triggered by individual reactions to cultural differences rather than the differences themselves. Executives who know what to expect are less likely to act in a way that will be interpreted negatively. While the onus is on both parties to overcome cultural obstacles, a Canadian seller who is visiting Mexico must assume a greater part of the responsibility. At least at first, doing business "the Mexican way" is a good strategy. As the relationship matures, ongoing informal communications will help both parties understand how cultural differences come into play.

Although this kind of dialogue makes for good non-business conversation, it is wise to avoid observations about Mexican culture that might be interpreted as condescending or offensive. The best solution is to talk about the way things are done in Canada and let Mexicans volunteer opinions about their own culture.

The Mexican Perception of Canadians

Canadians enjoy a reputation in Mexico as reasonable and trustworthy people. This is an advantage over American competitors seeking the same opportunities. Traditionally, Mexicans say they dislike the typical American business style, which they tend to perceive as pushy and rude.

In the Mexican view, the United States has been able to flourish and prosper in the world economy without having to adapt to differences in culture, language, customs, and business practices. As a result, American culture has impinged upon both Mexico and Canada. Thus, Mexicans tend to perceive certain common interests with Canadians.

Canadians are seen as making a greater effort to learn Spanish than Americans, even though proportionately, there are many more Spanish speakers in the United States. Most importantly, Canadians are regarded as flexible and willing to adapt their strategies to fit Mexican needs. This contrasts with the perceived American approach of transplanting American operating methods and management principles in Mexico in an unaltered form.