

Hospitality's Global Translation



It is frequently referenced that the first festivals in history took place in Egypt in the Pre-Dynastic Period thousands of years B.C. This is not surprising, as the Egyptian culture is well known for placing high value on hospitality and comradery. In the millennia that have followed, this sentiment has spread throughout the globe and become one of the primary motivations for the development of some incredible events—the best of which are right here in Michigan! However, as our environment continues to become more diverse and globalized than ever, planning and

executing a successful event requires that we must bear in mind a definition of hospitality and service that is much more broad and fluid in scope than ever before.

An interculturalist by the name of Dr. Livermore tells of an event being organized in the United Arab Emirates to raise consciousness about environmental sustainability. However, because of a strong obligation to demonstrate extravagant hospitality, they were going to use eye-catching bouquets of flowers as the center pieces for the table. The event planner finally convinced them that, although this was a grand gesture of respect and hospitality, the fact that these flowers were plucked from the ground simply for the enjoyment of the guests did not sent the right message about environmental sustainability. The lesson in this story to professionals in the realm of cross-cultural event planning and execution is two-fold.

First, the definition of hospitality and service is different across cultures. Take even the various regional cultures within the United States for example. Here in Michigan, we have a very Midwestern perception about the definition of these terms. In general, this is based on a down-to-earth and friendly mentality, as well as a characteristic that many refer to as 'bread and butter'. This is a reference to the agricultural foundations of our region, but also a testament to the hard-working nature of our regional population. We tend to go above and beyond to make people feel as comfortable as if we've known them for a long time. However, if you are a Midwesterner who has ever stepped foot into a local eatery in New York City, you will recognize right away that their service culture is much more oriented towards sentiments of edginess, directness, and a brisk pace. If the conception of hospitality can differ this much even just within our own borders, imagine the different expectations that we aren't even aware of from people with various cultural backgrounds all over the world!



It is important to keep these dynamics in mind in everything from the marketing of our events to their implementation, and remember that not every visitor or guest has the same expectations for their experience. If you are catering to an Egyptian person, then perhaps our Midwestern, over-the-top style of hospitality will bode well. Based on an extremely high prioritization of relational loyalty, the warm hospitality of the Egyptian culture is generally regarded as one of the most memorable components of interacting with its people. Even when taking into consideration the way that different cultures view time, it is evident how this can impact the way that they people approach providing and receiving service and hospitality to others. For example, the Japanese culture places high priority on *jikangenshu*,

or punctuality (potentially reflecting more of a New Yorker mindset when it comes to this attribute), whereas the Spanish culture places much higher value on improvisation and quality of life in the moment rather than operating with strict expectations for time or service.

The second important lesson here is that your event has a unique culture of its own, reflecting a style of



service and hospitality that is one-of-a-kind. While this may seem obvious for people who dedicate much of their lives to ensuring the success of the events they plan and operate, it does not always come as easy as it may appear. In the story above, the hosts became so wrapped up in demonstrating his hospitality through the beautiful table

decorations that they forgot about the primary focus of the event which was geared toward environmental sustainability. As we begin to accommodate more and more diversity at our festivals and events, adapting our hospitality and services to attendees all over the globe, it is important to remember that your event has a unique culture of its own that can be appreciated and enjoyed even by people of drastically different cultural backgrounds. You don't want anyone to feel like they don't belong—as I did as a Michigander visiting New York City—but the goal instead should be to break down potential barriers and instead create opportunities for everyone to appreciate the components of your event that are new and unique, no matter how different.

Reconciling **the need to adapt and cater to the globalizing population within our state, while maintaining the history and characteristics that are unique to our Michigan culture is truly an art, but it is an exciting responsibility for those who take leadership in defining our direction as a state.** The planners, volunteers, attendees, and supporters of all of our local festivals and events *are* the leaders of this movement, and will be looked up to as they approach these responsibilities confidently. And your local cross-cultural communications experts at 7C Lingo want to be your resource every step of the way! **Join us at the MFEA Convention in November as we unpack more cross-cultural insight to help you along this exciting journey.**

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