

Non-Verbal Communication Cultural Contexts

What are typical “American” patterns?

Degree of Directness

Other cultures:

- Much of rest of world sees communication as a means of building relationships.
- Middle East – business is not transacted until after cup or tea and a period of conversation that can build into a relationship.
- US Patterns are pragmatic and “let’s get to the point” approach which can be seen as rude, cold and offensive.

Appropriate Subjects

- Many Asian groups regard feelings as too private to share.
- Latinos generally appreciate inquiries about family members.
- Arabs and Asian groups find family far too personal to discuss with work associates.
- Filipinos and Arabs find nothing wrong with asking the price you’ve paid for something, which many Americans would find as rude.

Facial Expressions and Eye Contact

- Widened eyes as an American’s anger is the same as a Chinese person narrowing his/her eyes.
- A smile may not signify affability and friendliness, but a sign of embarrassment in some Asian cultures.
- A direct stare by an African-American or Arab is not a challenge to authority or intimidation.
- Dropped eyes by Latino or Asian people may be a sign of respect.