



## **Closing the deal with multicultural clients: Educating staff to communicate/negotiate effectively**

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Why do multicultural clients have the tendency to continue negotiations even after a contract or lease has been signed?

It's a great question that many U.S. Realtors and property managers often ask when working with clients from other cultures. For real estate professionals, cultural sensitivity can help build rapport, streamline the negotiation process and yield more satisfied clients. In this market, effectively communicating with multicultural buyers and renters has an immediate and tangible effect on a company's bottom line.

**Dramatic Demographics**

Property professionals - both residential and commercial - cannot afford to ignore the multicultural market:

- \* New York has the second highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the country, second only to California. Texas and Florida round out the top four.
- \* There are more foreign-born residents in New York City than there are people living in Chicago, (Huffington Post.)
- \* The Chinese population in New York City is the largest outside of China itself (WNYC.)
- \* More than one in five New York and New Jersey residents are foreign born.
- \* Pockets of ethnic communities are rapidly growing in upstate New York, from Buffalo to Utica to Westchester County.

Across the board, effective communication is a critical factor in successful negotiation and sales with multicultural clients. The main challenge arises when your communications style is not necessarily the same as theirs. Ethnic, national and corporate cultures, as well as personal interaction style, are just some of the factors influencing the way someone approaches a business interaction.

**Culture?**

Culture is a loaded word that means different things to different people. It is based on your family history, your religion, your reality and your perceptions. In a world of cultures, there is no right or wrong culture, no one culture that is "better" than another. Approaching education in cultural sensitivity with an open mind, devoid of stereotypes can help you achieve the "cultural mind shift" that your perception may not be their reality. By understanding the reasons that drive their behaviors - the "why" - you will be better prepared to handle various communication styles and achieve your goals without offending.

Some countries have a fluid time culture that does not place significant value on punctuality. Others do not have a history of fixed-term or fixed-price leases. Cultural differences can also impact gender relations and issues of hierarchy on both sides of your business dealings, particularly during the initial stages of the process. By taking into account these differences from your very first meeting,

you will set the stage for an open and welcoming atmosphere.

#### Helpful Tactics

Accommodating cultural differences does not have to consume a great deal of time or money as long as you are prepared.

\* Understand your own communications preferences. Do you prefer to rely on facts and figures or do you like to develop a relationship before getting down to business? Do you communicate with emotion or are you more reserved?

\* How does your counterpart prefer to interact? Although everyone is different, some cultural generalization can be educational. People from some cultures will never tell you "no." Others may not be verbally expressive, but their body language can indicate their feelings. Still others may have different ideas of personal space.

\* Don't assume. This is particularly true with foreign-born clients. Not all countries transact business in the same way or have the same living and working conditions as we do. In a commercial setting, you may need to respect hierarchy, meaning that your client may not be the ultimate decision maker. We Americans tend to approach negotiation looking for a "win-win" situation, while other cultures view being the sole winner as the desired outcome.

\* Expect unusual requests. Clients may request properties or units that face a specific direction or floors that do/do not contain a specific number, for example. They may not want to have a stairway in front of the door. People who make these sorts of requests are not doing so to be difficult: Desires and beliefs like these are deeply rooted in their cultural background. For example, in China the number four is considered unlucky because when spoken, it sounds similar to the word for death. If you think that's odd, consider our own superstitions here in the United States: Most buildings don't have a 13th floor.

\* Watch your language. Communicating with non-native English speakers sometimes can be challenging. Be mindful of the language you use. Speak slowly and avoid compound words and idioms, which can be difficult for them to understand. Don't be afraid to say you are having trouble understanding and ask someone to repeat themselves. Also, it's best to steer clear of any religious, political or controversial topics in discussion.

Progressively minded companies will seize the opportunity to attract and retain this sizeable market segment. Educating and training staff members to effectively communicate and negotiate with multicultural clients will have an immediate and tangible effect on the bottom line.

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