

Newsletter September 2011



Dear Chameleon Friends,

This month's newsletter is the first trimestrial newsletter of 2011, and we are looking into providing you with interesting articles every trimester from now on.

In this September issue:

- "People don't understand me" syndrome
- Case study: a Franco-German wedding
- An insight into the OAR model, what is it about?

Viel Spass! Enjoy! Bonne lecture!

„People don't understand me“ syndrome

When coming back from your expatriation, have you ever thought that people around you in your home country had changed? That to get a pen or some paper in your company, it takes time and you need to go through a lot of paperwork before you get it? What happened, why is it that people don't understand you?

People haven't really changed, the one who may have changed is you. Indeed, you have been living abroad for a certain amount of time, adapting to your host country and incorporating some of your host culture's values and customs. Let's also not forget that whilst you were abroad you had probably more freedom in your job, you could make your own decisions, direct your own team and get as much paper and pens as you wanted!

Coming back may seem like a culture shock for you because the people you have left behind, whether colleagues, friends or family, have in reality not changed, they have continued to live their lives as before, keeping to their work habits, getting together habits and have kept their usual hobbies. It may seem strange to you and you may feel as if you were the odd one in the group. What you project onto people is actually projected onto you as well; they see you as a different person: you have been away for so long, you have seen different countries, cultures, have picked up new hobbies, have escalated the hierarchy ladder, so for them you are different and that is why they probably do not understand you.

To get back into your home culture smoothly, think about what you have experienced, what has changed in your value system and in your customs, what was important for you in your culture that you didn't forget on your assignment and think of how you can build a bridge between you and your friends, colleagues, family to enable a smooth repatriation and re-adaptation.

Case Study: a Franco- German Wedding

This summer I was invited by one of my French friends to her wedding in France. She was getting married to a common friend who was German. The city hall and church wedding were held in both languages so that all guests could enjoy the wedding.

After the ceremonies, all guests gathered in a Chalet and the party was celebrated “French style”, hence an emphasis on food and wine. The dinner lasted for about 4 hours, around great food and wine. After the dinner, all gathered up on the dance floor to celebrate the couple’s union!

Now, I was interested in understanding how the German guests perceived the wedding and thus I went on a little expedition and asked a few questions to them, here are some of the remarks that came out:

- The difference between a French and a German wedding is that in France, you prefer to sit at a table enjoying good food and wine, whilst having discussions with one another, whereas in Germany, we have a quick dinner and then we drink and dance until dawn.
- Another interesting point that was raised about the French culture was that the French work to live, and the Germans live to work! So work is perceived as very important for Germans, it comes before everything else.
- The French family, as opposed to the German family seems to be more united, family values and unity are very important, and when there is a celebration such as a wedding or even for Christmas, the family comes together; whereas in Germany it is slightly different, it stays within the nuclear family. Of course we celebrate with the grandparents and aunts/uncles, but the occasions are rarer.

By the end of the evening it seemed clear that both cultures are neighbours, but their way of living life and celebrating is different. This case study is food for thought: think about your friends or neighbours from other countries, and try to see whether your perspectives on life are the same, and if not, why is it different and how can you find a common ground?

An insight into the OAR Model, what is it about?

In the following Newsletters we will go through the Observe, Analyse and Replicate Model into more depth enabling you on your own to work with it and include it into your day to day life.

In this newsletter however we will look at what it is. Through my travels, and residencies abroad, having dealt with colleagues and friends from different cultures, I have learnt from my mistakes which have sometimes lead to miscommunication and have, after reflection, observation and interviews, created a model that is easy to use and has very quick results.

The model is called Observe, Analyse and Replicate; it is quite straight forward and can change the way you communicate with others, whether from different cultures or from your own culture. It is all about understanding your counterpart’s point of view, perspective on life and customs (food, hobbies, work habits) and how you can find a common ground and have a successful relationship with them.

The next newsletter will tackle the first step of the model which is “Observe”, please look out for it as it may be of interest to you.

If you have any questions, have any topics you would like us to tackle, or would like more information on the topics discussed, please feel free to email us.