

# **13 Things You Should Know About Americans:**

## **1) They believe that they are in control of their own success (or failure)**

In some countries, people place a lot of weight on luck or fate.

In the U.S. culture, people hold a very strong sense that they can create their own success through hard work and dedication.

This also means that some people in the U.S. will often try to manipulate the natural environment around them to suit their needs.

## **2) They embrace change**

While some cultures remain centered on tradition and stability, American culture embraces change and considers it natural.

Progress and innovation are important and many Americans are often looking for the next best thing

I think this is one of the reasons that the U.S. has been a good place for entrepreneurs with big ideas in the past.

## **3) They view time as a commodity**

Time is valuable in the U.S. and it shouldn't be wasted.

Just take a look at the [expressions we use in American English](#) and you will understand that Americans are constantly thinking about how to save, not waste, gain, plan or fill their time.

Some cultures attend an event until it comes to a natural end.

Americans attend an event such as a meeting, until the clock indicates that the meeting is over and they move on to the next thing.

## **4) They value equality and fairness**

This is a bit ironic.

Although the U.S. has more than its share of problems with racism, homophobia, sexism, etc., the U.S. is a society that does not recognize hierarchies as much as other countries.

If you are a member of the upper class in your home country and you visit the U.S., you will most likely be spoken to just like everyone else by waiters in a restaurant, taxi drivers or hotel staff.

Fairness is a core value that is very important to many American people.

Speaking to you or treating you differently because you come from an upperclass family would go against what many Americans believe is right.

## **5) They want to be unique, different, individual**

From a young age, Americans from my generation (Generation Y) have been told that they are special and different from everyone else.

Americans believe that it is important to be unique and stand out from the group.

Some will express their opinions even if they disagree with the rest of the group.

Having a unique idea or doing things differently is praised. Conformity is looked down upon.

Because Americans value individualism, they also value their privacy. At your workplace, you may view your American colleagues as "cold" when they do not invite you for a coffee or out on the weekends. In reality, they might be respecting your privacy, something they consider extremely important.

## **6) They believe they can improve themselves**

Robert Kohls noted that there are 100 words that begin with the word "self" as a prefix in the English dictionary.

These include self-improvement, self-aware, self-conscious, etc.

Americans believe that they can and will make themselves successful by working on their skills and abilities and by improving their knowledge.

Being born into a wealthy family and remaining in the same place is not as admirable as being born into a poor family and working your way up the ladder to achieve success.

Just look at the narrative in so many American movies. There is often a "rags to riches" story.

Americans love to see this kind of story because this is what they aspire to and value.

## **7) They are competitive**

With the free market system, there is intense competition in every aspect of American life including education, athletics, business, art, and even hobbies.

Kids' sports events often become extremely competitive as parents can get heavily involved.

It is relatively easy to start a business as an entrepreneur in the United States.

With the internet today, the barriers to entry have been lowered and this has only increased competition as anyone with an idea can compete with large corporations.

## **8) They are more interested in the future than the past**

Many Americans tend to be constantly working toward the future.

For this reason, they sometimes miss what is happening in the present and they place little value on the past.

These days, parents start investing in their child's college savings funds before the child is even born.

Kids are taught that they need to achieve high grades as young as elementary school because college is down the road.

For Americans, it's all about the future.

## **9) They like to take action**

In the United States, taking any action is seen as better than doing nothing.

It is common for American kids to take part in tons of different hobbies and after-school activities like sports, music, dance or drama.

Because Americans value action, the American society has become very oriented toward "work".

A typical work week in many professions goes beyond 40 hours. Many professionals become "work-aholics" and identify themselves based on their career or the company that they work for.

## 10) They are casual and informal

In the workplace, many bosses or managers like to be addressed by their first name. However, you should wait until you are invited to do this.

The informality that is so common in American culture is probably related to their sense of equality, fairness and belief in treating everyone the same way.

Americans are also quite informal in the way they dress. In large U.S. cities, you might see Americans attending a famous play in blue jeans whereas in Europe, this might be unacceptable.

## 11) They are direct

While some cultures will avoid telling you exactly what they think in order to "save face", in the United States, many Americans believe that it is important to offer an honest opinion and to communicate your point directly and openly.

Are you from a country where there are very specific ways of delivering negative feedback to avoid offending someone?

If so, try not to be surprised if the Americans around you do not make an effort to "tone down" their feedback. Be prepared to get direct feedback from your colleagues or supervisors in the United States.

## 12) They are practical

In American culture, there is sometimes a rejection of things that are "overly theoretical" and are not immediately applicable or useful.

Academic fields like philosophy are not as valued as engineering. Social sciences like anthropology are looked at as being less valuable than a medical or law degree.

Being objective and less emotional is encouraged when forming an opinion about something.

## 13) They like to acquire material things

Although this might be changing in U.S. culture today due to the recent recession, the U.S., which values hard work, also values acquisition of material things as a reward for the hard work.

People buy cars every two to three years. Kohls argued that Americans place a higher priority on acquiring material wealth than on building interpersonal relationships and bonds with other people.

## So what does it all mean for you?

It is so easy to misunderstand people when we are living in a new culture.

As I mentioned above, an American's attempt to respect your privacy (a strong value in the U.S.), could appear to you as "cold" or "impersonal". This is only one example.

There are many more that you probably encounter in your everyday life. Now that you know the 13 American cultural values, see if you can use this knowledge to make your everyday life a little bit easier and perhaps more satisfying in the United States.