

MODULE APPROCHE CULTURELLE

DOING BUSINESS WITH AMERICANS

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III. MODULE APPROCHE CULTURELLE

III.1.DOING BUSINESS WITH AMERICANS

III.1.1. FICHE TECHNIQUE

- Adapté aux niveaux : -C2 (en priorité) - B2-C1
- Objectif : Ce module aborde les différences culturelles au sein de l'entreprise américaine. Il redéfinit la notion complexe d'interculturalité.
- Remarque : l'ensemble du cours est rédigé en anglais.
- Ce module se compose de cours, d'exercices de compréhension et de glossaires complémentaires.
- Il est préférable de commencer par l'étude du cours puis de tester ses connaissances à l'aide des exercices correspondants.

III.1.2. Cours – Présentation – Introduction

L'objectif de ce module est de vous permettre de vous familiariser à la façon dont les Américains perçoivent le monde des affaires. Pour cela, il est indispensable de savoir comment appréhender les différences culturelles, et se familiariser avec les méthodes de travail américaines.

Dans le module suivant nous vous invitons à étudier les différences culturelles, approcher les outils de compréhension appropriés à chaque culture et d'enrichir votre lexique professionnel.

Le but étant d'adopter des réflexes professionnels appropriés dans un milieu culturel américain.

Doing business

While the title “Doing Business with Americans” could make it seem that there is only one way to work with- or like- an American, such a simplistic and reductive view should be avoided at all costs. With over 300 million Americans- 151.5 million in the work force

(<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/us.html>)

- it is impossible to say that ALL Americans do business the same way. Someone from the North East of the country (New England or the upper Mid-Atlantic) will most likely not conduct business in the same fashion as someone from Arkansas who in turn will be very different from someone from Seattle or Sacramento. Moreover, business practices can vary as much between two companies in the same region as between regions. However, there are certain overriding elements that can generally be traced through many regular business situations with American counterparts. These generalities are the subject of the following document.

Additionally, this study is focused particularly on doing business within an American framework for French citizens. Since what is acceptable, or not acceptable, in business is dependent largely upon the dominate discourse of the home culture itself, the following document aims to highlight areas of culture shock or difficulty for Franco-French speakers doing business with Americans. While precautions have been taken to avoid stereotyping either side, stereotypes- a simplistic yet meaningful way to understand and categorize behaviors and images- are sometimes useful to help illustrate the point.

III.1.3. Cours – Americans with The USA

1. THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA POPULATION

Someone from the North East of the country (New England or the upper Mid-Atlantic) will most likely not conduct business in the same fashion as someone from Arkansas who in turn will be very different from someone from Seattle or Sacramento.

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2. The United States

Before getting started on the business aspect of the situation, a few important facts about the country in question, The United States, are worth pointing out.

The United States, with its 50 States and Federal Capital, is geographically a large country. It is about 17.5 times bigger than France (9,631,418 km² vs. 547,030 km²); France is roughly smaller than the state of Texas (695,622 km²).

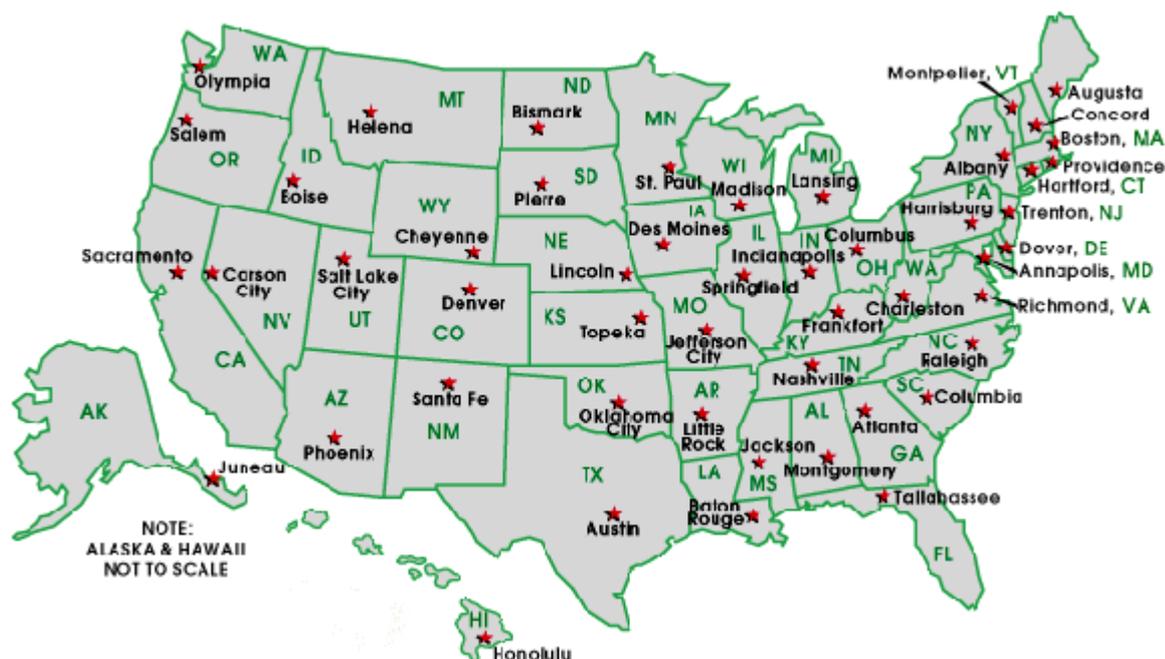


Figure 1 www.state-maps.com

While it is difficult to agree on geo-political subdivisions of the country, one of the possible ways of subdividing the country is the following:

Pacific: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington
 Mountain: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming
 West North Central: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota
 West South Central: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas
 East South Central: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee

East North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin
South Atlantic: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia

Middle Atlantic: Delaware Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania
New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

(Slight modification made to the classification available at Worldatlas.com
<http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/usstates/usaregb.htm>)

Others group Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma into a region known as the South-West, while calling the West North Central division (minus Minnesota) the Great Plains, or the agricultural Mid-West. The agricultural Mid-West should not to be confused with the Industrial Mid-West, which corresponds roughly to the East North Central (plus Minnesota) region.

The most heavily populated areas are along the Atlantic coast from Rhode Island down to Washington D.C., the industrial Mid-West area around the Great Lakes and California
(<http://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/thematic-maps/usa-population-map.html>)

According to the US Census Bureau, as of mid-October 2006 the population of the United States was officially at 300 million people, of which over 151 million are in the work force (including the over 4.5% of unemployed workers actively looking for a job).

Federal minimum wage (le SMIC) has been at \$5.15 since 1997 (or 3€5 with 1€= \$1.30 as of 23 January 2007; the French SMIC being 8€7, or \$10.80). It is, however, most likely that minimum wage will be raised in 2007 by the newly elected Democratic Congress (http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-02-01-senate-minimum-wage-hike_x.htm).

In 2005, only 1.9 million working Americans, or 1.5 % of the work force, reported earning minimum wage. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/minwage2005.htm> (compared to 15% of workers in France in 2004 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_wage#France).

Nonetheless, a non-negligible percentage of the US population earns between \$5.15 per hour (the current Federal minimum wage) and \$ 7.25 (the proposed increase).

Other than what could be considered as “broad laws,” from a French perspective, the American government, true to its laissez-faire politics, does not tell companies how to do business.

Other than the minimum wage and the 40-hour work week, the Federal government does have health and safety standards as outlined by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA <http://www.osha.gov/>) and minimum environment laws.

However, regarding vacation (congés payés), health care (sécurité sociale) or lay off (licenciements), American workers are much less protected than their French counterparts.

No company is obliged to provide its employees with health care. The current system is financed through private companies specialized in health care services. Health care is paid for in part by the employees in the form of pay roll taxes deducted from their pay and in part by employer contributions.

Currently over 46 million Americans have no health care insurance.

Additionally, there are no federal laws governing the amount of paid vacation. While the French salaried employee has 5 weeks of vacation guaranteed by the State, workers in the US are not legally entitled to any time off, unless the company decides to grant time off. Today, while many have little to no time off, the national average is between 13 to 16 days off

(Source: Economic Policy Institute World Almanac and A Los Angeles Times article from 2/06/00 based on a recent survey by the World Tourism Organization <http://www.timesizing.com/1vacatns.htm>).

Thus, many Americans do not have the opportunity to take long paid vacations. The lack of paid time off, coupled with the size of the country, the cost of international travel and the media system in the USA, may help explain why about only 18% to 34% (depending on the official numbers which seem hard to calculate) of the American population holds a passport (U.S. Office of Central Statistics).

Thus, without wishing to validate stereotypes about Americans, do not expect your American counterparts to know more than Paris is the capital of France. However, they

will expect you to be more versed in American geography, history, culture and English (see below in Culture).

Because of its more “business-friendly” policies, American companies are freer to hire and dismiss (lay off, or fire) employees according to the company’s needs than French companies.

If workers find themselves unemployed as a result of being laid off, providing that they qualify for Federal aid (guidelines are indicated in the Social Security Act of 1935 <http://www.ssa.gov/history/35actinx.html>), they may receive up to 26 weeks of federal funds which usually correspond to 1/3 of the former salary.

No special consideration is given for time spent in the work force or family size.

Even though American workers are more mobile (both within the company organization and between companies) compared to their French counterparts, they have paradoxically developed a greater attachment to their jobs than many people in France.

For Americans, it is not just a job; careers are often an integral part of someone’s identity. I am what I do!

Without work, an American is often, or at least very quickly, without money, paid time off and health care. Additionally, in an egalitarian society like the USA, a person’s worth is NOT a question of family, background, origins, diplomas or acquaintances. While these aspects may help or hurt a person’s chances to land a job, many Americans believe (right or wrong) that they are judged professionally by what they have done, can do and potentially will do.

This principle is known as performance and is a hot buzz word in business circles today, hence, the reason why many ambitious business people do not leave the office before 8pm. It is important to be seen doing something at all times, even if that means going over and beyond what you feel like doing.

Even if this system does have some merit, it can lead an outsider to wonder whether or not people are working or just being seen. After all, France, among all the member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, does boast the most productive worker rates for employees over 50 years old (<http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1672/>) regardless of the 2000 law regulating the 35-hour workweek.

III.1.4. Cours – Define culture – communication

DEFINE CULTURE

So, what is culture? According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary it is, among other definitions, "2. the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education...5a. the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon man's learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations."

Another possible way of understanding CULTURE is to see it as the ever-changing totality of learned and shared meanings, rituals, norms and traditions among the members of a society or organization.

These rituals, norms and traditions are established, learned and shared in any given society or organisation through language, or the means by which communication is expressed. Language is both verbal and non-verbal.

3. Language

As surprising as it may be, there is no official national language of the United States. As the law currently stands, the Federal government has no power to establish a national language. This power is delegated to the individual states (for a complete list of English as official language see

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/langleg.htm#State>.

However, with between 82% and 85% of the USA population speaking English (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States), English is for all intense and purposes the language of the USA.

4. The spoken Word

There is very little difference between standard American English and standard British English (or Australian or New Zealand). There are the obvious vocabulary differences e.g. elevator or truck (USA) vs. lift and lorry (UK).

There are pronunciation differences, but these should be no more problematic, in theory, than the differences among the divergences of British English and standard British English.

Within a very short period of time your ear should become accustomed to the particular version of American English you are working with. Slight grammatical differences also exist e.g. use of prepositions “ON the weekend” (USA) vs. “AT the weekend” (UK).

Use of the article “in THE hospital” (USA) vs. “in hospital” (UK); verb tenses “The best job I ever had” (USA) vs. “The best job I have ever had” (UK), but nothing that would keep the two English speakers from understanding one another (for further information, see the exercises at the end of this module).

A particularity of American business English is the frequent use of sporting or military terms. A quick stop in the business section of one of Paris’s leading English-speaking bookstores near Place de la Concorde proves this point. Books stocked on the shelves included:

Scoring Points by Clive Humbly, Terry Hunt and Tim Phillips, Disney War by James B. Stewart, Boeing versus Airbus by John Newhouse, Pitch Invasion by Barbara Smit, Winning by Jack Welch, Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants Jay Conrad Levinson and Michael W. McLaughlin, The Inner Gamer of Selling by Ron Willingham, and Sink or Swim by Thuy Sindell to cite just a few examples.

The fact that the expressions come from the very traditionally masculine spheres of athletics and war is not surprising. American business policies still tend to reflect the universe from which they come; it is still a man’s world. This does not mean that women are not represented in management. According to Robert Day, “In the USA you are far more likely than anywhere else to meet women, superior or not, in Middle and upper management positions” (Working the American Way p.166).

(For a list of sporting and military expressions often used in business, see the end of this module.)

III.1.5. Cours –Non verbal communication

NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Many French speakers, once having mastered enough English to do business with Americans, still find it difficult to communicate effectively. Their error is in thinking that all communication is verbal.

Certainly having a sound level of English in all four linguistic skills is important. It would be difficult to imagine working with Americans if you could not write an e-mail to them or speak to them during the video conference.

However, not all communication is verbal. A non-negligible part of communicating effectively is non-verbal. And just as the French language is not English, French gestures are not the same in the USA.

Below are some guidelines for non-verbal communication with Americans.

5. Proxemics, or the physical distance between people.

Because of the relatively large size of the country and space available in the USA, as well as the construction of “masculine” and ideas relating to sexual harassment, Americans are uncomfortable in business situations when someone is “in their space”. It is advised to remain at an arm-length distance from your interlocutor when dealing face to face with the person.

Oculesics-eye contact

Looking a business contact in the eye is very important for Americans. It is a generally held belief among Americans that if someone can not look you in the eye while speaking to you, the person probably is not telling the truth. Whether there is any objective truth to

this statement is not sure; Asians usually divert their eyes when dealing with older counterparts or someone who is more important in the company hierarchy.

However, what is true is that the perception creates the reality: look Americans in the eye while negotiating business with them.

6. Chronemics-timing of verbal exchange

Americans are generally uncomfortable with silence. While French counterparts may use silence as a way to show reflection upon an issue, their American counterparts may take this silence to mean that the others have nothing to say. If you find yourself in this position, it is best to repeat or rephrase the question out loud so the Americans can hear you thinking. Americans are generally more comfortable hearing “rough” brainstormed ideas than facing silence. Do not be afraid to advance ideas, even if they are just working drafts of what a final proposition may be.

The same phenomenon can be found in written communication. An American will expect that a phone call be returned promptly or that the e-mail sent this morning be answered as quickly as possible, within the same working day.

7. Haptics-touch

After learning that Americans are most comfortable with an arm-length distance between them in business situations, it should come as no surprise that they are ill at ease with the use of touch in business. Touch should be reserved for a firm, confident, yet not crushing, handshake the very first time you meet someone in a business setting- regardless of the interlocutor’s gender- and nothing else.

Unlike in French companies, it is not common place to shake hands with everyone on a daily basis. This ritual is usually used for introducing people to one another and when you see a former acquaintance whom you do not interact with on a regular basis.

Kissing member of the opposite sex is not common practice and could land you a sexual harassment suit. “La bise” should be avoided in professional situations.

8. Kinesics-gestures

The use of gestures to communicate is also very cultural. Ask any French citizen who uses gestures and the response is typically “The Spanish” or “Italians”. Yet for Americans, the French are a rather gesticulating people also.

The following familiar French gestures for: “On s’appelle,” or Call Me, “On se tire” or Let’s go, “La moue,” or The Pout, “Camembert” or Shut Up, “Les Boules” or Bad Luck, or “Ras le Bol” or Fed Up (<http://cestsoparis.com/attitude-game.php>) have NO meaning to an English speaker, including Americans.

Furthermore, some gestures change meaning from one culture to another. The “V for Victory” sign, as it is understood in France, would easily be misunderstood as a sign for peace in the United States (and a vulgar expression in the UK).

9. Paralinguistics

Other non-verbal elements fall under the heading “paralinguistics”. These elements are related to verbal communication but in a more indirect way. Such elements include accent, intonation and tone.

Many Americans understand better a sentence that is grammatically poorly expressed but which is delivered with little to no accent over a grammatically correct sentence pronounced by someone with a heavy accent. This said, many Americans, knowing that they lack the linguistic skills to communicate in a foreign language, make efforts to understand non-native speakers. However, do not expect them to make efforts to change their own speech patterns.

The quality of voice is also important for Americans. Americans are told from a very early age to “speak up” and make themselves heard. Accordingly, for an American, a booming voice, what may be considered as speaking in a loud manner by their French counterparts, is seen as a sign of assurance and confidence.

10. Appearances

Even if the “Friday wear” concept is well-known in France, most business attire (manner of dressing) in American companies remains fairly traditional.

Men are advised to wear a dark suit (black, blue, grey) in the autumn and winter months with a tie and a solid-colored, long-sleeved shirt. Lighter colored suits are acceptable in the spring and summer months, still accompanied with a shirt and tie. Many men will wear a short-sleeved shirt in the summer.

Under the dress shirt a white t-shirt is usually worn. This t-shirt should not be seen; attention to the neck line, or sleeves if wearing a short-sleeved shirt. The t-shirt is an essential element for keeping a “clean” look; it absorbs any perspiration and prevents “sweat rings” from forming underneath a man’s arms. In many circumstances, these “sweat rings” are considered dirty and not aesthetic. Regardless of whether the shirt is short or long-sleeved, it should be neatly ironed. While many novelty ties are sold in the USA, for business purposes, it is best to avoid them: it is hard to take someone wearing a Bart Simpson tie very seriously.

Exceptions to this rule are often allowed during the end of the year Christmas celebrations when even the most serious business men wear a holiday themed tie. Dark socks, blue, grey, black or dark brown, are to be worn with dark suits; tan or beige are acceptable in the warmer weather.

In business situations, neither white athletic socks, nor socks with “cartoon” characters are considered professional. The ensemble is topped off with “dress” shoes that are regularly polished. Remember to keep the laces, if there are any, in good condition.

Other features such as grooming usually follow the company’s corporate culture. In general, men usually have short hair that is washed and styled into place on a daily basis. Finger nails are kept cut short and cleaned. Facial hair does not always present a problem in American businesses. However, beards and moustaches should be kept neatly trimmed and care should be taken to shave the “untidy” growth past the demarcation lines.

Santa Claus may be one of the most loved legends in the USA, but he would never get a serious business job these days with his long, unkept flowing beard. Unlike facial hair,

facial piercings should be taken out for business men. Whether or not to remove earrings is still a topic of debate. In general, you can not be wrong in doing so. Tattoos should remain covered. Any body art on the forearm should remain under a long-sleeved shirt regardless of the temperature outside or the calendar month. Jewellery should be limited.

As for women, both pants suits and skirt suits are acceptable in today's business world. Dresses are usually reserved for office parties, business dinners and other special occasions. While the rules for women are less stringent than for men, a woman should always wear hose with a skirt, unlike in France where a bare leg more commonly accompanies a skirted woman. Women may wear blouses, a woman's dress shirt, or collarless shirts, something that is not an option for her male counterparts.

However, trying to pass off a t-shirt as professional is difficult and should be avoided. If the dress code is slightly less formal, it still is a good idea to avoid t-shirts or any thin-strapped top. Shoes may be heels or flats, but athletic shoes are not acceptable for the office.

Personal grooming for business women in the USA also follows certain rules. Hair is often dyed, or weaved with color. However, brassy colors (*d'une couleur cuivrée artificielle*) should be avoided. In the USA, hair styles often have more volume than what is typical in France. They may seem more intricate and time consuming. This is a cultural difference between French and Americans. Hair length is of little importance provided that it is kept clean and styled.

Many business women with longer hair tend to wear it up as opposed to letting it hang on their shoulders. Make up should be used to compliment a woman's natural features not call attention to her. Business women commonly wear foundation, mascara, blush and lip stick all of more neutral tones and colors; blue mascara and orange eye shadow, while complimentary colors, are not examples of professional make up.

Facial piercing are no more acceptable in business for women than for men. However, single pierced, possibly double pierced ears providing that the second piercing is a stud or ball, are acceptable. The earrings should not be large hoops or dangle low. Other jewellery should be discreet; one or two bracelets is acceptable, more than 3 and it could be considered too much for the business environment.

11. Olfaction

Americans are highly sensitive to odors in a way that many French are not. Americans in business situations not only bathe every day, but they use deodorants, if not anti-perspirants. These are not optional toiletries. Additionally, clothes are washed or dry cleaned regularly.

Likewise, mouth odors also bother Americans. To avoid “coffee breath”, “garlic breath» or smelling of cigarettes, many Americans keep mints on them. Chewing gum is an option, but before interacting with someone else, not during the interaction.

Wearing a scent (perfume for women and cologne for men- not perfume) is generally acceptable. However, today many Americans have developed sensitivities to chemical odors and have according established rules about scents in the office place. Not knowing if this is the case with your interlocutors, light, discreet fragrances that do not linger are the best choices.

III.1.6. Cours – High context versus low context

High context versus low context

The high-low context refers to the degree which a verbal statement is able to give the complete message. Low-context cultures are those in which what is said is exactly what is meant.

The oral exchange carries the whole meaning of what was said. High-context cultures not only take the oral exchange into consideration, but they also consider the source of the message, the source’s standing within the society (or here business organizations), the source’s expertise, body language, tone of voice.

When looking at a comprehensive list of world nations, both France and the United States could be seen as low-context cultures. However, when compared to one another, the United States can be considered a lower-context culture than France.

This means that in addition to being regularly conducted on paper in contract form, business is also done electronically and virtually in the United States. While some aspects are changing, it is still preferred to get the closing signature rather than get to know the person signing.

This low-context cultural element may lead people to see American business tactics as cold, distant or impersonal. It should never be forgotten that time is money in this context.

III.1.7. Cours – Time orientation

Time orientation

The way that individuals see time in relation to work is known as time orientation. The French do not see time in the same way as Americans. This lack of a common temporal view can lead to problems in the business world.

Comparatively speaking, Americans are rather monochronic. This means that they generally complete one business transaction at a time and in chronological order. Business schedules are important to plan in advance. Once planned, there is little to no deviation from the plan. Lateness and absenteeism are to be avoided. Deadlines are not approximate guidelines, but end dates that must be respected.

Moreover, an eight o'clock meeting begins at 8 o'clock. You do not arrive at 8 o'clock but are **READY** to begin at 8 o'clock. Likewise, when the meeting is scheduled to end at a specific time, it ends on time. Since people often have other responsibilities that had been planned in advance, they cannot afford to allow meetings to run over and keep them from being on time elsewhere.

Being on time and respecting time limits and deadlines is a matter of respect when working with Americans. Additionally, work is about business and not socializing. Tasks come before people. For Americans, time is linear. The French tend to be more polychronic in their approach to time. For the French, time is more fluid, people work on several business tasks at the same time and not necessarily in chronological order. Furthermore, people come before tasks.

III.1.8. Cours – Religion

Religion

For French citizens doing business with Americans, the topic of religion may seem like an unlikely topic to discuss. However, understanding Americans' cultural approach to religion and the historic reasons for this are keys to working successfully cross-culturally.

The United States is the most religious Western country. In a private survey conducted in 2001 and mentioned in the Census Bureau's Statistical Abstract of the United States, 76.7% of American adults identified themselves as Christian. This fact should not be surprising.

In the 17th century many Europeans left “the old world” for one of two reasons. Those who settled in Virginia and the South had gone to the colonies for economic reasons. Those who settled in Massachusetts and the North went to escape religious persecution and build the new Zion. While it could be argued today that the South is now more religious than the North and the North more economically prosperous than the South (The Great Divide by John Spearing; PoliPoint Press, 2004, p.16), religion is to be found through out the country.

While around a quarter of the American population describes itself as Roman Catholic, the United States is clearly a Protestant country. With over 50% of the Christians affiliated with a Protestant denomination, the national identity has been accordingly shaped by Protestant values.

No other religious value merits deeper analysis than the “Protestant work ethic”.

Simply put, the Protestant work ethic is the following:

- If I work hard I will succeed. If I succeed it is because God wants me to. If I succeed I will make money. If I talk about money there is no problem because God wants me to have it.

While this summary is slightly reductive, the protestant work ethic does promote hard work and self-discipline and states that the rewards associated with such a lifestyle are

reaped because God approves of such a way of life. Being successful and having material wealth are signs of God's approval.

This idea is still an integral part of American business philosophy today. Even the Muslim, Catholic or Jewish businesses in the USA have adopted this "Protestant" way of seeing things (*Sacrés Américains* by Ted Stanger; Editions Michalon p.103).

Accordingly, since material success is a combination of hard work and divine providence, there is no taboo in discussing money. Americans openly discuss their salaries, the prices paid for their houses, cars or vacations, or how much money they have saved. This aspect can make French people, who regardless of their religious affiliation have a more "Catholic" approach to money, uncomfortable. Know that when an American talks about money, it is meant to be a sign of success, not necessarily a sign of inflated self-worth. Remember, for Americans, they are what they do.

The other overriding religious idea in American business is the idea of free will, also related to mainstream Protestantism.

According to this philosophy, the world is divided into two binary camps: good-bad, right-wrong, black-white, and we are free to choose our path. This way of thinking is illustrated in the rhetoric of the Bush administration.

It is of note to remember that Bush is the first American president to hold a Master's of Business Administration degree, and that this "right versus wrong" idea that is common in business has spilled over into political life as well as the general way many Americans see life. Thus, if we choose the wrong path, it was our own fault and we should not look to society to help us out of the bad situation that we created for ourselves. This outlook helps to understand the weak social net that has been established by the American system.

The last traces of religion's direct impact on business concern business hours. While most commercial shopping areas are open on Sundays, businesses and administrative offices usually are not. Traditional office hours are Monday through Friday 9 to 5 (remember, in the English-speaking world, we use the 12-hour clock and not the 24-hour clock).

Perhaps surprisingly, religious observances do not affect business operations through out the year.

III.1.9. Cours – Socializing

Socializing

Since many people devote so much time to their jobs, creating and keeping a “friendly” yet professional atmosphere in the office is very important. For Americans, this means socializing with colleagues and hierarchical superiors off the clock on weekends or in the evening. Seeing people you work with outside of work is commonly referred to as “making an appearance,” or “having to be seen”.

To facilitate this friendly environment, companies regularly organize office parties, dinners or picnics through out the year and may even offer employees a small gift of appreciation for their birthdays

These company sponsored events are also ideal occasions for the company to recommunicate its values and corporate culture to employees. This phenomenon often centers around the company’s history and “success story”. It is not unusual for the company to develop a sort of “cult of personality” around its founder and/or “mythic CEO”.

One of the best examples of this “cult of personality” and “mythic CEO” is the case of Wal-Mart where the CEO, Lee Scott, is greeted by cheering employees as if he were a Hollywood star at company conventions. The fervor climaxes when Scott speaks about company profits and its deceased founder Sam Walton, who is almost venerated like a god

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/walmart/view/> click on chapter 1, “Wal-Mart’s Revolutionary Power”)

At work, colleagues regularly call each other, as well as their boss, by their first names. This phenomenon adds to the sense of belonging and team building which is essential for the success of any business project in today’s competitive world.

However altruistic this tactic may seem, managers take this approach for more productive reasons. Employees are often more willing to work later, take work home or put in an extra effort for a friend (note that where French has several terms i.e. copain/e, ami/e and connaissance, English has only 2: friend, acquaintance with the latter not being correct to

speak of a colleague. Furthermore, having been replaced by “friend,” acquaintance is not longer used on a regular basis).

In addition to “being seen” by all the right people within their company, business people looking to change career fields or companies often socialize with the employees of other companies in order to establish as many professional contacts as possible.

This business phenomenon is known as networking. Networking gives you the possibility to get leads and follow them up in companies that might be interested in your experience and skills. Networking is an informal and fast way to learn all the latest news about, and business possibilities with, a company. Networking is an important social skill in business.

III.1.10. Cours - British English versus American English

British English versus American English

There are not many striking differences between British English and American English. A British office worker can easily communicate and understand her American counterpart and vice versa. This said, there are major differences in pronunciation.

However, there are just as many divergent accents within British (or American) English as there are between what we tend to call “British” or “American,” i.e. a British speaker with a strong cockney accent or someone from Glasgow is as divergent from standard “British” pronunciation as a standard speaker of “American” is from “British”.

In the United States, we can distinguish 3 main accents. There is the “Northern” accent, the “Standard” accent and the “Southern” accent.

The “Northern” accent is to be found in most of New England, parts of New York and in the large industrial cities of the north: Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, and Buffalo. It is marked by a more nasal pronunciation of vowel sounds and words with the consonants “m” or “n”.

The standard accent is often considered the purest form of American English (Sacrés Américains by Ted Stanger, Editions Michalon p.141) and is spoken in parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois and spreads out to the upper plains states.

In theory, this is the easiest American English to understand, although not every speaker from this part of the country speaks “standard American”.

The “Southern” accent is present from Virginia down to Florida, and from the upper panhandle of Florida over to the western side of Texas. It can be traced as far north as Cincinnati, Ohio and as far west as Kansas.

This accent is marked by slower speech patterns and an emphasis and a drawing out of the vowel sounds.

Spelling has been simplified in American English:

- e.g. –our (colour) has been simplified to –or (color), -re (centre) is written –er (center), -ise (organize) has been changed to –ize (organize), and some double consonants have been eliminated –ll- in travelling (Br) is written traveling (Am) or cancelled to canceled.

Furthermore, some verbs have been regularized in American English:

- e.g. learn-learned-learned (learnt in British), burn-burned-burned (burnt) in British.

Elsewhere, American English has kept forms abandoned by British English:

- e.g. to get-got-gotten (got in British).

Grammatically, the two are very close. An American will systematically use the auxiliary verb “do” to negate sentences and not “haven’t got”:

- e.g. I do not have a car (Am) versus I haven’t got a car (Br).

There are various differences in the use of some prepositions:

- e.g. at the weekend (Br), on the weekend (Am) and articles - going to University (Br), going to the university (Am), but nothing prevents mutual comprehension.

Furthermore, the difference in the use of the past simple where the British speaker uses a present perfect does not pose any confusion:

- e.g. It was the hardest job I ever did (Am) versus It was the hardest job I have ever done (Br) or I already signed the contract (Am), I have already signed the contract (Br).

Although British speakers are more grammatically correct, there has been a change in the concept of time (see time orientation) and Americans conceive temporal space differently than British speakers and thus use the past simple in these cases and not the present perfect.

12. Differences in vocabulary

The most challenging difference between British and American English is the differences in vocabulary. Below is a list of some of the most common vocabulary differences that you may encounter.

American	British
Vacation	Holiday
(National or Public) holiday	Bank holiday
Round trip	return
One-way	single
Parking lot	Car park
Line	Queue
Crosswalk	zebra crossing
Truck	Lorry
Gasoline	Petrol
Freeway/highway	motorway
Subway	underground
Elevator	Lift
Eraser	Rubber
Apartment	Flat
Faucet	Tap
Cookie	Biscuit
Candy	Sweets
Garbage	Rubbish
Diaper	Nappy
Vest	waist coat

Pants	trousers
Underwear	pants
t-shirt-	vest
Check	bill
Bill	note
Stove	cooker
Skillet	frying pan
Bathroom	WC/toilet
Cart	trolley

Other expressions that are typically British include: lovely, fine, brilliant, and marvellous. An American would prefer nice, cool, sure or wonderful. Neither English makes much contemporary use of “keen on” in the affirmative, while British English uses it more in the negative form than American English does.

III.1.11. Exercices – Sporting & military expressions 1

Various Sporting & Military expressions in American Business English

Faites correspondre les expressions de la colonne A avec les expressions de la colonne B

Colonne A

1. to be in a difficult situation
2. to make the right decisions
3. to make the first steps of progress

4. to make the decisions for a team
5. to make a mistake
6. to have done something successfully
7. to have a big success
8. to fail at something

9. to do business
10. to decide to do something after having thought about it for some time
11. to change the rules of the negotiations
12. to begin too soon
13. to begin a project
14. to be wrong
15. to be very successful
16. to be the one who has to make a decision
17. to be successful
18. to be normal or typical in a situation

19. to be making reference to something completely different
20. to be important in a certain sector
21. to be honest
22. to be difficult in business or negotiations
23. to be at equal
24. to be approximately

Colonne B

- a) The chips are down (cards)
- b) To play your cards right (cards)
- c) To lay your cards on the table (cards)

- d) To jump the gun (track and field)
- e) To take the/a plunge (swimming)
- f) To start the ball rolling (soccer)
- g) To be par for the course (golf)
- h) To have the ball in your court (tennis)
- i) To be neck and neck (horse racing)
- j) To play ball (baseball)

- k) To be in the ballpark (baseball)
- l) To strike out (baseball)
- m) To hit a home run (baseball)
- n) To make it to first base (baseball)
- o) To be off base (baseball)
- p) To play or be a whole new ballgame (baseball, football)
- q) To drop the ball (football, baseball)
- r) To be a major player (football, basketball, baseball)
- s) To play hardball (any game involving a ball)
- t) To quarterback (football)
- u) To move the goalposts (football)
- v) To score a touchdown (football)

- w) 2 points! (basketball)
- x) A slam dunk (basketball)

III.1.12. Solutions - Exercices – Sporting & military expressions 1

Various Sporting & Military expressions in American Business English

The chips are down (cards)	to be in a difficult situation
To play your cards right (cards)	to make the right decisions
To lay your cards on the table (cards)	to be honest
To jump the gun (track and field)	to begin too soon
To take the/a plunge (swimming)	to decide to do something after having thought about it for some time
To start the ball rolling (soccer)	to begin a project
To be par for the course (golf)	to be normal or typical in a situation
To have the ball in your court (tennis)	to be the one who has to make a decision
To be neck and neck (horse racing)	to be at equal
To play ball (baseball)	to do business
To be in the ballpark (baseball)	to be approximately
To strike out (baseball)	to fail at something
To hit a home run (baseball)	to have a big success
To make it to first base (baseball)	to make the first steps of progress
To be off base (baseball)	to be wrong
To play or be a whole new ballgame (baseball, football)	to be making reference to something completely different
To drop the ball (football, baseball)	to make a mistake
To be a major player (football, basketball, baseball)	to be important in a certain sector
To play hardball (any game involving a ball)	to be difficult in business or negotiations
To quarterback (football)	to make the decisions for a team
To move the goalposts (football)	to change the rules of the negotiations
To score a touchdown (football)	to be very successful

2 points! (basketball)	to have done something successfully
A slam dunk (basketball)	to be successful
To hit or be below the belt (boxing)	to commit an act or say something that is not polite
To be a heavyweight (boxing)	to be important in a certain sector
To be down for the count (boxing)	to be on the verge of being eliminated from something
To be on the ropes (boxing)	to be in a difficult situation
To learn the ropes (boxing)	to learn the rules through daily experience
To throw in the towel (boxing)	to stop or give up doing something
To bite the bullet (military)	to decide to do something after long though that may be difficult or unpleasant
To have an axe to grind (military)	to have a problem with someone else
To fight a losing battle (military)	to be engaged in a losing project
To call the shots (military)	to make the decisions
To have a shot at something (military)	to try something
To be in the line of fire (military)	to be directly concerned by something
To be up in arms (military)	to be angry about something
To be your own worst enemy (military)	to do/make/or day self-defeating actions or remarks

III.1.13. Exercices – Sporting & military expressions 2

Exercice d'application

Complétez les phrases suivantes avec une expression de la liste intitulée « Various Sporting & Military expressions ».

1. Arnaud was in charge of organizing the Congress, but he _____ and forgot to contact the key note speaker. Needless to say, the Congress wasn't very interesting.
2. Things look pretty good right now for my company. I have expanded into three new markets and if I _____ I may be able to open branches in 2 more major market cities by the end of the year.
3. Although Aleta knows how to do the book keeping and doesn't really have the money to hire an account, she needs the extra time that she currently spends on administrative work to handle customer accounts. Last week, she _____ and decided to pay someone else to do all the paper work.
4. It is not clear which candidate is going to get the job. Right now, they _____. Each one has his or her positive aspects. It could be either one of them.
5. The company has already overspent the budget by 15%. If you think we can afford to deviate further from the agreed upon plans, you _____.
6. Katrina is a really quick learner. She _____ at her new job in less than a month and, as surprising as it seems, she is now a _____ in the direction of the company.
7. With sales down by over 35%, the CEO has some important answers to give if he wants to keep his job. Right now he is really _____.

8. The Union leader left the negotiations table after accusing the boss of _____. He claims that the boss had already agreed to a “cost of living” wage increase. However, the boss said that no such deal had been prearranged.

9. Even if Lisa knew that both sides were looking for a “win-win” situation, she was currently working on closing the most difficult deal of her career. She had to admit that her counterpart really knew how to _____.

10. When I got hired for this job, I was given 10 days of paid vacation, which is _____ in this company. Only the CEO has more.

11. Eli was sure that the merger was going to be official this week. But, he _____ when he prematurely announced the news to his employees before the paperwork was signed.

12. If we want the company’s annual report to be print on time, we had better _____. We only have a month to get everything validated and to the printers.

13. Pako Co. can no longer compete against low-cost companies. Although it has not _____, it is _____. It will have to stop production with the next 6 months.

13. Solutions - Exercices – Sporting & military expressions 2

1. Arnaud was in charge of organizing the Congress, but he **DROPPED THE BALL** and forgot to contact the key note speaker. Needless to say, the Congress wasn't very interesting.

2. Things look pretty good right now for my company. I have expanded into three new markets and if I **PLAY MY CARDS RIGHT**, I may be able to open branches in 2 more major market cities by the end of the year.

3. Although Aleta knows how to do the book keeping and doesn't really have the money to hire an account, she needs the extra time that she currently spends on administrative work to handle customer accounts. Last week, she **BIT THE BULLET** and decided to pay someone else to do all the paper work.

4. It is not clear which candidate is going to get the job. Right now, they **ARE NECK AND NECK**. Each one has his or her positive aspects. It could be either one of them.

5. The company has already overspent the budget by 15%. If you think we can afford to deviate further from the agreed upon plans, you **ARE OFF BASE**.

6. Katrina is a really quick learner. She **LEARNED/HAS LEARNED THE ROPES** at her new job in less than a month and, as surprising as it seems, she is now a **MAJOR PLAYER OR HEAVYWEIGHT** in the direction of the company.

7. With sales down by over 35%, the CEO has some important answers to give if he wants to keep his job. Right now he is really **IN THE LINE OF FIRE**.

8. The Union leader left the negotiations table after accusing the boss of **HAVING MOVED THE GOALPOSTS**. He claims that the boss had already agreed to a "cost of living" wage increase. However, the boss said that no such deal had been prearranged.

9. Even if Lisa knew that both sides were looking for a “win-win” situation, she was currently working on closing the most difficult deal of her career. She had to admit that her counterpart really knew how to **PLAY HARDBALL**.

10. When I got hired for this job, I was given 10 days of paid vacation, which is **PAR FOR THE COURSE** in this company. Only the CEO has more.

11. Eli was sure that the merger was going to be official this week. But, he **JUMPED THE GUN** when he prematurely announced the news to his employees before the paperwork was signed.

12. If we want the company’s annual report to be print on time, we had better **START/GET THE BALL ROLLING**. We only have a month to get everything validated and to the printers.

13. Pako Co. can no longer compete against low-cost companies. Although it has not **THROWN IN THE TOWEL**, it is **FIGHTING A LOSING BATTLE**. It will have to stop production with the next 6 months.

III.1.14. Exercices – British English versus American English

Faites correspondre les termes de la colonne A avec les termes de la colonne B

Colonne A		Colonne B
American		British
1 Vacation	a	zebra crossing
2 (National or Public) holiday	b	waist coat
3 Round trip	c	underground
4 One-way	d	trousers
5 Parking lot	e	Tap
6 Line	f	Sweets
7 Crosswalk	g	single
8 Truck	h	Rubbish
9 Gasoline	i	Rubber
10 Freeway/highway	j	return
11 Subway	k	Queue
12 Elevator	l	Petrol
13 Eraser	m	pants
14 Apartment	n	Nappy
15 Faucet	o	motorway
16 Cookie	p	Lorry
17 Candy	q	Lift
18 Garbage	r	Holiday
19 Diaper	s	Flat
20 Vest	t	Car park
21 Pants	u	Biscuit

22 Underwear	v	Bank holiday
23 t-shirt-	w	WC/toilet
24 Check	x	vest
25 Bill	y	trolley
26 Stove	z	note
27 Skillet	za	frying pan
28 Bathroom	zb	cooker
29 Cart	zc	bill

14. Solutions - Exercices – British English versus American English

British English versus American English

Differences in vocabulary

American	British
Vacation	Holiday
(National or Public) holiday	Bank holiday
Round trip	return
One-way	single
Parking lot	Car park
Line	Queue
Crosswalk	zebra crossing
Truck	Lorry
Gasoline	Petrol
Freeway/highway	motorway
Subway	underground
Elevator	Lift
Eraser	Rubber
Apartment	Flat
Faucet	Tap

Cookie	Biscuit
Candy	Sweets
Garbage	Rubbish
Diaper	Nappy
Vest	waist coat
Pants	trousers
Underwear	pants
t-shirt-	vest
Check	bill
Bill	note
Stove	cooker
Skillet	frying pan
Bathroom	WC/toilet
Cart	trolley

III.1.15. Ressources supplémentaires

15. Word list Sporting & military expressions

Various Sporting & Military expressions in American Business English

The chips are down (cards)	to be in a difficult situation
To play your cards right (cards)	to make the right decisions
To lay your cards on the table (cards)	to be honest
To jump the gun (track and field)	to begin too soon
To take the/a plunge (swimming)	to decide to do something after having thought about it for some time
To start the ball rolling (soccer)	to begin a project
To be par for the course (golf)	to be normal or typical in a situation
To have the ball in your court (tennis)	to be the one who has to make a decision
To be neck and neck (horse racing)	to be at equal
To play ball (baseball)	to do business
To be in the ballpark (baseball)	to be approximately
To strike out (baseball)	to fail at something
To hit a home run (baseball)	to have a big success
To make it to first base (baseball)	to make the first steps of progress
To be off base (baseball)	to be wrong
To play or be a whole new ballgame (baseball, football)	to be making reference to something completely different
To drop the ball (football, baseball)	to make a mistake
To be a major player (football, basketball, baseball)	to be important in a certain sector
To play hardball (any game involving a ball)	to be difficult in business or negotiations
To quarterback (football)	to make the decisions for a team
To move the goalposts (football)	to change the rules of the negotiations

To score a touchdown (football)	to be very successful
2 points! (basketball)	to have done something successfully
A slam dunk (basketball)	to be successful
To hit or be below the belt (boxing)	to commit an act or say something that is not polite
To be a heavyweight (boxing)	to be important in a certain sector
To be down for the count (boxing)	to be on the verge of being eliminated from something
To be on the ropes (boxing)	to be in a difficult situation
To learn the ropes (boxing)	to learn the rules through daily experience
To throw in the towel (boxing)	to stop or give up doing something
To bite the bullet (military)	to decide to do something after long thought that may be difficult or unpleasant
To have an axe to grind (military)	to have a problem with someone else
To fight a losing battle (military)	to be engaged in a losing project
To call the shots (military)	to make the decisions
To have a shot at something (military)	to try something
To be in the line of fire (military)	to be directly concerned by something
To be up in arms (military)	to be angry about something
To be your own worst enemy (military)	to do/make/or say self-defeating actions or remarks

16. Word list British English versus American English

Differences in vocabulary .

The most challenging difference between British and American English is the differences in vocabulary. Below is a list of some of the most common vocabulary differences that you may encounter.

American	British
Vacation	Holiday
(National or Public) holiday	Bank holiday
Round trip	return
One-way	single
Parking lot	Car park
Line	Queue
Crosswalk	zebra crossing
Truck	Lorry
Gasoline	Petrol
Freeway/highway	motorway
Subway	underground
Elevator	Lift
Eraser	Rubber
Apartment	Flat
Faucet	Tap
Cookie	Biscuit
Candy	Sweets
Garbage	Rubbish
Diaper	Nappy
Vest	waist coat
Pants	trousers
Underwear	pants

t-shirt-	vest
Check	bill
Bill	note
Stove	cooker
Skillet	frying pan
Bathroom	WC/toilet
Cart	trolley

III.1.16. Liens Internet

17. THE UNITED STATES - DATA

- <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/us.html>
- <http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/usstates/usaregb.htm>)
- <http://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/thematic-maps/usa-population-map.html>)
- http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-02-01-senate-minimum-wage-hike_x.htm
- <http://www.bls.gov/cps/minwage2005.htm>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimum_wage#France
- <http://www.osha.gov/>
- <http://www.timesizing.com/1vacatns.htm>
- <http://www.ssa.gov/history/35actinx.html>
- <http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1672/>

18. DEFINE CULTURE – LANGUAGE

- <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/langleg.htm#State>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States

19. NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION - Kinesics-gestures

- <http://cestsoparis.com/attitude-game.php>

20. Religion

- <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>
- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2006/03/24/madeleine-albright-good_n_17832.html

21. Socializing

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/walmart/view/>