Work Culture in the U.S.

- **Informality:** Address your boss, supervisor, manager, director, or even the president of the company with his/her first name. Do not call them "Boss", "Sir", or "Ma'am." (You address strangers "Sir" or "Ma'am," such as customer service professionals, police officers, etc. that you have no working relationship with). At the same time, regardless of the fact that all work colleagues (including your superiors) are addressed informally, always respect the work relationship hierarchy.

- **Meetings:** Meetings are common and may not be necessarily for making big decisions. Mostly they are held for talking about small decisions and planning. For most jobs, they are an important part of what will be expected of you. Sometimes you may find yourself in long meetings which may bore you, but it is important to maintain an appearance of interest, be a good listener, and not interrupt the person who is speaking. You will be given a chance to speak. Your input is valuable and necessary to making decisions. Make sure to ask for clarification if you don't understand something.

- **Dress Code:** This varies widely. Make sure you ask in advance about the dress code. Some workplaces have "casual Friday" where you can dress more casually on that day than on other days of the week. In general, note what your coworkers are wearing and match your formality of dress to theirs. If you are not sure, go with a slightly more formal style of dress until you are familiar with the expectations.

- **Work Hours:** Make sure to discuss the expectations with your supervisor. Some jobs have structured hours, and some are more unstructured and you are free to set your own hours as long as you are present when you are needed for meetings or teamwork (this is especially true if you are hired as a consultant). However, whether your hours will be structured or unstructured, the expectation for a full-time job is generally that you will work at least 40 hours per week. If you are a salaried employee, you will most likely not be paid for working more than 40 hours. If you are paid by the hour, you most likely will need your supervisor's permission in order to work and be paid for more than 40 hours, as this is considered "overtime." If you are working as a consultant, all of the conditions of your work and how you are paid for it will be set between you and your employer, so be sure that you are in agreement before you start working. You are generally not expected to work during the weekends, although there may be times when weekend work is needed if you are trying to get a big project done by a deadline.

- **Being on Time:** Time is seen as a valuable commodity in American culture. Events (such as meetings) are scheduled for a certain time period and are generally considered to be over when the time period ends. Generally, people are not expected to stay past the time for which something has been scheduled as it is expected they will have other things that they need to do to move on in their day. Along the same lines, it is considered important to be on time to scheduled events, and to report to work on time each day. Being chronically late, particularly when it affects the schedules of others, is seen as disrespectful.

- **Communication Style:** Some cultures will avoid telling you what exactly they think in order to "save face." In these cultures, there are specific ways to deliver negative feedback in order to avoid offending someone. However, in the U.S., it is considered important to offer an honest opinion and to communicate your point openly and directly. You should also be prepared to get direct feedback from your colleagues and supervisors. It is important to learn to accept constructive criticism without letting it affect you personally. It is not meant as an attack on your inner self, only as a suggestion on how your work performance can be improved.

- **Personal Communications While at Work:** Always do your best to limit personal communication while on work time. Some companies have very strict policies about using company resources (internet, phone, etc.) for personal use, while others are more relaxed. Either way, though, communication should be limited. Keep your cell phone off or in vibration mode while at work. If you need to have a personal cell phone conversation, keep the discussion short and speak quietly. Also, don't spend too much time surfing the internet for matters not relevant to your work.

- **Friendships and Relationships:** Personal friendships between coworkers are fairly common; however, romantic relationships between colleagues can become complicated, especially if the people are on different hierarchal levels. For these reasons, romantic relationships with coworkers are generally discouraged. If they do exist, they should be kept extremely discreet.
- **Social Events:** Many companies host social events like holiday parties, company picnics, retreats (meetings in a vacation spot like Florida or Las Vegas), or retirement celebrations. For some events, like birthdays or farewell parties, everyone contributes to buy a gift for the person. It is recommended that you participate in these events. It will help you to get to know more people socially.
- **Individualism and Privacy:** On the other hand, although attendance is encouraged at organized social events, Americans highly value individualism and being unique and special apart from everyone else. Consequently, they also value their privacy. They tend to guard their personal time carefully. Unless you are good friends with a coworker, you should not expect to be invited out for coffee or a weekend activity. Although it might appear that your coworkers are being "cold" to you, they are in fact probably just trying to respect your privacy and right to your own time when not at work.
- **Asking for Help:** If you are not sure about something at your work, do not bluff. Admit it honestly and refer to the right person. You are not expected to know everything right away in a new position and it is expected that you will have some questions. Don't pretend to know everything. Sooner or later people will figure it out, and that negatively affect how you are viewed. If your colleague needs help, you should help them to the best of your knowledge and ability, or refer them to someone else who can help them if you cannot. On the other hand, if you need help from a colleague, don't be shy or afraid to ask for help.
- **Goal-Setting:** In some countries, people place a lot of emphasis on luck or fate. In the U.S., though, people hold a strong sense that they can create their own success through their own hard work and dedication. Setting goals for yourself in the workplace and working toward them is a good way to ensure your best success and will earn you the respect of your colleagues.
- **Change:** Some cultures are very centered on tradition and stability, but American culture embraces change and considers it natural. Progress and innovation are seen as very important. In your work, you will need to be flexible and adjust to change, because it will be almost constant.

Suggestions pulled from the following websites:

http://www.immihelp.com/newcomer/work-culture-office-environment-usa.html

http://www.englishandculture.com/blog/bid/84665/Working-in-the-U-S-13-Things-You-Should-Know-About-Americans