

Communication with Foreigners

English is seen by many in Vietnam as a gateway to a wider world of information, opportunities, and relationships. Yet the ability to communicate is not merely a matter of crossing a language barrier, but also of understanding one's audience. Cultural differences can cause particular problems. For example, mentioning "the carp leaping over the dragon's gate" is immediately meaningful to a Vietnamese person – a graphic shorthand for courage and perseverance leading to success – but a foreigner may react to it with puzzlement because they have never heard the popular story from which the phrase comes. It must then be explained before the phrase makes sense, which can delay understanding and even undermine the function of using the phrase in the first place.

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A lack of common ground can create frustration – or make a colleague instantly feel like an outsider, creating a sense of separation. The reverse is true, of course, and so in addition to learning the language, one must also learn some of the history and culture of others, have respect for different customs, be very patient, and be prepared to shrug at misunderstandings and smile a lot!

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What does "the carp leaping over the dragon's gate" mean?

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Why might a foreigner not understand that meaning?

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What is the best way to deal with misunderstandings?