

Six tips for connecting with others and making friends in a foreign country

Friendships are an important part of life that many of us may take for granted. For expatriate managers, it is especially important to establish relationships with local nationals and other expatriates. When you move to a new country, where you may be alone or know few people, it can become quickly apparent just how important friends are to your mental and emotional health. So do not let a language barrier or lack of familiarity with social customs stop you from making friends. Do your research, make an effort and then really put yourself out there. Here are six tips on how to connect with others and make friends more easily in a new country:

- 1. Acknowledge the importance of friendship.** Sometimes the thought of getting out and meeting people can feel overwhelming, especially in a foreign country. So if you put it off and hope that it will just happen in time, it may. But it may not happen as quickly as you would like, making loneliness and homesickness all too possible in your new life. Acknowledging the importance that establishing friendships has on your acclimation to the new location is the first step towards making new friends in a foreign land.
- 2. Research local customs and social norms.** Before becoming acclimated to your new country, you must first learn the local social customs and familiarize yourself with what is acceptable or unacceptable. It is not only the spoken word that may be different in other countries; body language may be as well. For example, while shaking hands is typical in western countries, it is entirely unacceptable in others. So find out what is culturally appropriate beforehand, so you do not offend others when trying to make friends.
- 3. Learn the language.** Learning even a few phrases like “please,” “thank you,” “hello” and “goodbye” in the local language demonstrates that you are making an effort and is often appreciated by local colleagues and people you meet. This is important when you are striving to connect with others in a meaningful way. Try to learn one or two new words and expressions every day, and use them when appropriate.
- 4. Be open-minded.** If you tend to be a picky eater, or only gravitate toward activities that you are either good at or very accustomed to, now is the time to try something new. Those who demonstrate reluctance to try new things in a new land can come across negatively. So be willing to embrace new experiences. People will notice and appreciate the effort, and will be more likely to include you in social activities.
- 5. Get involved.** As a manager, you have your job responsibilities in addition to your role of representing your organization outside of the work environment. Therefore it is especially important to do what you can to become familiar with local activities, and to determine what you might like to take part in. By going out into both the expatriate and local communities, you will show that you are willing and interested in socializing. Avoiding this or staying in will not only get old, but it can also lead to feelings of social isolation. So speak with colleagues and friends, read local magazines or newspapers about things to do (if they are available in English or your language), check social media sites like meetup.com for expatriates in your area, do a Google search to find out what is happening locally, or ask others for suggestions.
- 6. Be friendly.** Kindness, compassion, friendliness and graciousness are universal languages. So smile, try to be approachable, spend more time listening than talking, and be open and tolerant when encountering new experiences. Regardless of where you live, nice people make friends first.



HEALTHY WORKING

A workplace wellness update for managers abroad

They say “home is where the heart is,” so when you find yourself living in a new country, and cannot quite shake the feeling of being unsettled, do what you can to get out and meet others. Keep loneliness at bay by embracing your new life and making an effort to make new friends. You will be glad you did.

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