



American Business Culture & Communication

**Columbia University Individual
Development Plan Program**

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General Qualities & Values

Mainstream culture

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Americans are...

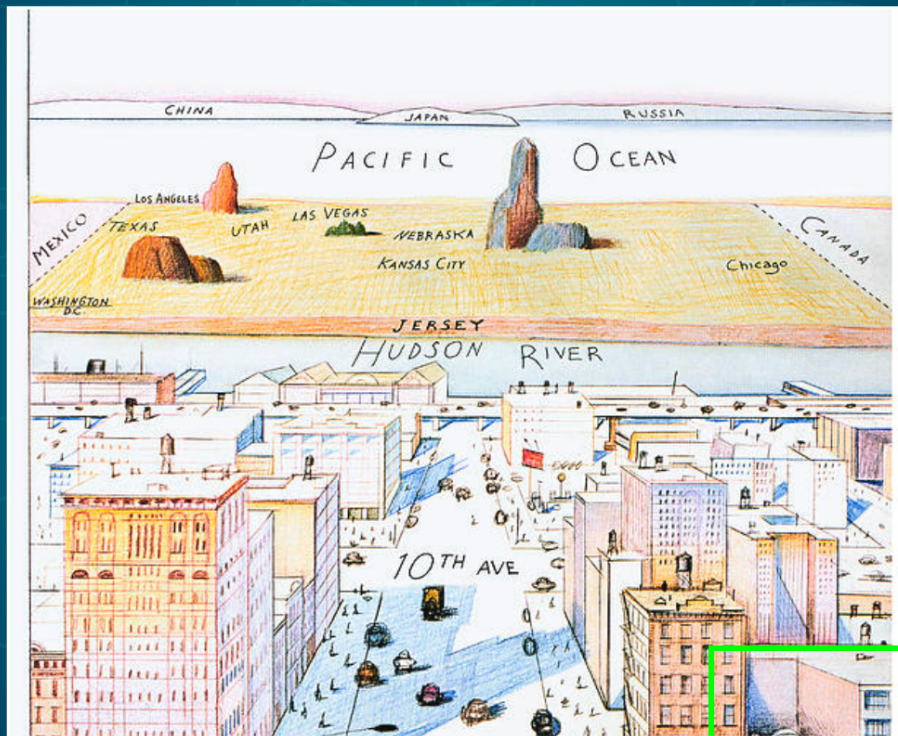
- Individualistic
- Entrepreneurial
- Competitive
- Welcoming (1:1), egalitarian
- Litigious/combatative
- Youth-oriented
- Religious
- Optimistic (until recently)
- Ethnocentric, meaning...



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Saul Steinberg's New Yorker cover, 1976



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American Views of Business

Corporations set the tone

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"The Business of America is Business"

President Calvin Coolidge, 1925 (paraphrased)

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Americans Believe...

- Businesses operate in good faith
- The best/most talented/hardest working people will get ahead ("Meritocracy")
- People in a business share common values and goals
- Those goals involve doing good for their communities and the world

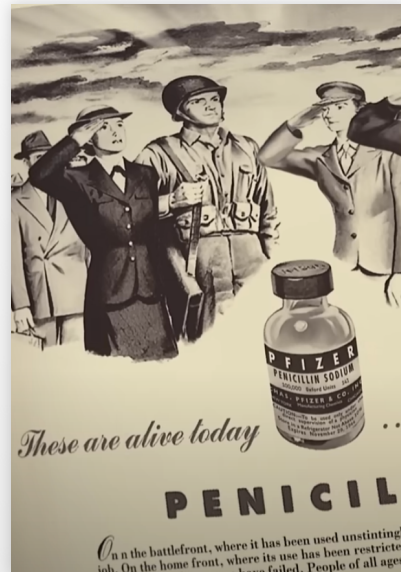


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Corporations Believe...

- L'Oréal: "Because you're worth it."
- Microsoft: "Empowering people to achieve more."
- Pfizer: "Breakthroughs that change patient's lives."
- ExxonMobil: "Energy lives here"
 - "Be honest and ethical"
 - "Do what is right"



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Specific Behaviors

How do these attitudes translate?

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Time

- Time is **scarce**; it shouldn't be wasted on rituals, relationship-building, long-winded discussions, etc.
- **"Time is money"**
- Business is negotiated **quickly**
- Response times are **short**
- **Promptness** is valued
- Americans **jump right in** to business, using first names, etc.

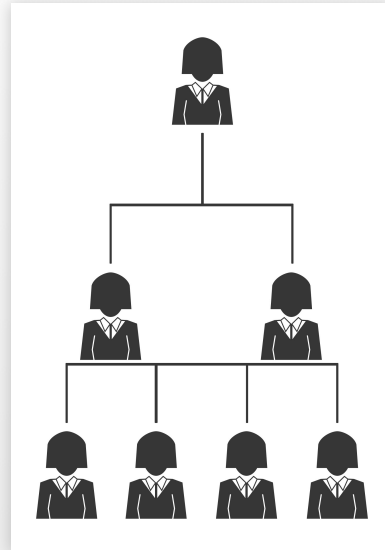


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Hierarchy

- **Positions** have more/less status, not people. Senior leaders may:
 - Ask your opinion
 - Expect to be “first named”
 - Make themselves available for mentoring conversations
- **On the other hand**
 - When there are problems or conflicts, **observe the chain of command** (at least initially)



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Valued Communications Are...

- **Concise** (get right to the point)
- **Fact-based** (have evidence for your point of view)
- **Decisive** (confidence is key)
- **Solutions-oriented** (don't raise a problem without some thoughts on how to solve it)
- **Relevant** (to **your organization**)



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Business Friendships

- **Situational** (people are thrown together)
- **Transactional** (mutual aid or interests)
- Sometimes progress to “real” friendships; often, they don’t
- “Warm on the outside, cold on the inside” (or pragmatic)



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“Meet and Greet” Scenarios

OK to talk about:

- Work (“What do you do?”)
- Sports
- Travel
- Music
- Movies, books, TV shows
- Food (and dieting)
- Exercise (and dieting)

NOT OK to talk about:

- Money
- Religion
- Politics
- Race
- Abortion
- Discrimination
- Sexuality/gender

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To Sum it Up

- The purpose of every American business is to make ***as much money*** as possible ***as quickly*** as possible. Other values and aspirations are secondary.
- Americans are generally casual, friendly, and egalitarian. This ***does not equate*** to a deep commitment to you, or to your friendship.
- Our ***history, geography*** and ***cultural dominance*** have encouraged ethnocentricity and ignorance about other cultures. We are not good at adapting to others.

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Skills Assessment

What skills will help you
succeed in American business?

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Questions?

Jezra Kaye

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