

5 Important Attitudes for Moving to a New Culture

Some days, it feels like we have been here for a long time. I have to remind myself to be patient—we have only been here for seven weeks! You can't just build a new life in seven weeks! That's 49 days...

When we, as immigrants and cross-cultural workers move to a new place, there are several things that we need to do and attitudes that we need to adopt when we hit the ground.

1. **Go as a learner!** In my opinion, this is the absolute, without a doubt, Number One thing we MUST do. We are NOT the experts when it comes to this new culture and it's people. We must maintain a posture of learner every day, all day long. Always ready to learn, always asking questions, always willing to forget your preconceived ideas and forget what you thought would be the case... ready to adopt and adapt new ideas and allow local / national friends to teach you the ways of the culture and the people.

2. **Try new things.** Everything is suddenly new and foreign. Foods, clothes, money, driving, housing. It can be overwhelming. Try anyway. When we first got here, I was a little fearful of getting too far from the house without a map or knowing exactly where I was going. I didn't have a 'mental map' of the town layout and where each road went. I wanted to stick to the roads I knew (which wasn't every many). But I was letting my fear win. And it was a little irrational, really. I mean, how lost could I get in a town like Antequera? And, I have phone numbers of people who would help me if I was lost. So what's the harm in just going out with no idea where this road might lead? It is easy to say that now that I am over it, but it was hard at first. In trying new roads and walking new directions and seeing different streets and perspectives, I began to GAIN perspective and direction! Usually it is in the trying of new things that we really begin to blossom and learn and grow.

3. **Be patient with yourself.** The grocery store is organized in a completely new manner than we are accustomed to and we can't find anything where we think it should be. The money and the exchange rate is different and my mind isn't doing the math as quickly as I want it to. The language is fast and the accent is different... how could Spanish be so different here from Peru? I keep having to remind myself (and Billy reminds me daily!) that I need to be patient and give myself some space to learn. It will come. I need to remember to add that tiny 3-letter word into my vocabulary and my thought process... "YET". I can't figure out the exchange rate YET. I can't follow the conversation YET. I can't find my way around town YET. I don't understand the education system of my 9 year old daughter YET. The key



5 Important Attitudes...

is “yet”... It’s a little word that signifies that there is light at the end of the tunnel and it will happen one day, just maybe not today.

4. **Observation is key.** Listen more than you speak. Watch everything. Keep your eyes open. It is amazing what you can learn by just watching and listening! We walked in town to do some errands one day and ended up sitting and watching people. Pretty soon, we were able to formulate some cultural learning about clothing based on our observations... women and men don’t wear tennis shoes unless they are in shorts/track suits and are exercising or walking the dog; kids change out of their school clothes as soon as they get home; jeans are very casual clothing and not the norm in downtown except in the under 35 crowd; when people do wear jeans, they are dark denim and crisp—no worn out or faded looks on ‘adults’, etc. As for listening, we do a lot of listening to language. We pick up the nuances of vocabulary and the rhythm of sentences as we listen. We mentally take notes and discuss our observations later. We have had to replace a lot of vocabulary words between Peru and Spain.
5. **Don’t ask “why?”** In cultural learning, we just can’t ask “why?” There usually isn’t an answer, or at least not one that anyone knows. For example, you just can’t ask “Why do they do it like that?” They don’t know... they just do. “Why do you have a 2 hour break at mid-day? Why do you eat dinner



at 10:30 or 11 p.m.? Why do you celebrate this holiday?” The answer is usually, “I don’t know, we just do. We always have. It’s just the way it is.” We have to train ourselves to not ask why. It is hard for us, since we are science teachers and since we come from a culture that is inquisitive and always wants proof. Imagine if someone asked you, “Why do you eat stuffing in your turkey for Thanksgiving?” Your answer might be something like, “Because it is our tradition.” Which is followed by the next question, “Why? Where did this tradition come from? Did the Pilgrims eat stuffing?” You might be able to find some idea of where this tradition came from if you Googled it, but really, do you know why you do everything that you do? Probably not, you just do it because you do. Because it is habit. Because it is cultural. Because your mom did it that way, and her mom did it that way, and so on and so on. “Why” just isn’t a question we can ask in cultural learning with our new neighbors. We learn to accept things for what they are and go with the flow.

Cultural learning is a job in and of itself. It takes time, lots of time. It is our most important job right now, because if we don’t do this well and we don’t learn these lessons well, we won’t ever fit in. We won’t ever be able to go deeper in relationships. We will forever be “outsiders” and “immigrants” who just don’t get it. Our goal is to be **acceptable transplants**. We’ll never be true Spaniards. We were never true Peruvians. But we were acceptable transplants in the eyes of our community. We were Peruvian in our ‘new hearts’ and we were loved for it. That is our goal here... to be acceptable, to be Spaniards in our ‘new hearts’, and to find love and relationship here among our new neighbors.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations.”

Matthew 24:14

Praises that Sarah is doing well in school, despite the unexpected jump in grade level and difficulty! She is making good grades and LOTS of friends—a HUGE answer to prayer!

Praises that Laurie is recovering from her ruptured calf muscle injury! According to all ‘experts’, she should still be in lots of pain and be recuperating very slowly, but HALLELUJAH, she is doing well and is walking again. Pray for continued healing and for her to be back to normal soon so she can get out and about and back to learning about the community and the people here.

Pray for us to continue to build relationships and lay the groundwork for ministry here in Spain. Little by little, we are learning about the culture and the people here.

Praises — Big, big praises! Our visas are ready! Well, sort of. Laurie and Billy’s visas are approved and are waiting for us to pick them up and re-enter Spain to validate them as RESIDENTS! One minor glitch... Sarah’s was separated from ours and is not yet approved. We had a meeting today with the Office of Foreigners and they reviewed her case. They say it is in-process and should finalize next week. Once that is done, we are told that she will be approved and her visa will be ready, too. Pray for everything to finally be approved and for the visa process to finally be over after nine + months of paperwork and waiting!

Our little cultural mistake...

Soon after moving to Spain, we began to look for a puppy to complete the void in our home. We had hoped to bring our dog from Texas, but the cost of flying her here was exorbitant and we had to resolve ourselves to the fact that she would be staying back in Bryan/College Station with Granny and Miles. Thus began the Great Puppy Search. We had wanted a Spanish Water Dog and asked around about puppies for sale, but we couldn't find any that were ready. Some litters were yet to be born, some were not weaned, and some were too old for what we wanted. Then we found a mixed breed puppy with the cutest face ever... he looked just like Benji from the movies of my childhood! Sarah fell in love the minute she saw him and "Buddy" came home to live with us.

Now for the interesting cultural mistake...

Several days after getting Buddy, we walked past the kiosk on the corner in our neighborhood. The guy who owns the kiosk (he sells candy) yells out and says, "Hey. I have your puppy here today. Here he is, right here behind my store." He proceeds to pull out a little bitty Spanish Water Dog! We had asked him the previous week if he knew where we could buy a puppy. We thought he might know since he has three of the same breed. He had told us that he knew someone who had some puppies, but they weren't ready to leave the mom yet. They wouldn't be ready for a couple of weeks or so. And he talked them up, telling us about how high pedigree they were and they were very costly (way more than we wanted to pay for a puppy!). We politely listened to their whole sales pitch, then said we would maybe think about it. He had told us that when the pups were weaned, he would bring them to town and we could see them. We smiled and said *we would think about it and we might like to see them*, then we went home. That was last week. Now, less than a week has passed and here he is shoving a puppy in our faces and saying that this one is ours. We told him that we had already found a mixed breed puppy, but thanks for remembering us. (This is where the non-verbal cues that are so important to culture come in... the irritated, angry face, the clipped speech, then the awkward silence.)

Our problem became evident to us quickly... 1) this guy was under the impression that we wanted his puppy, 2) "maybe" and politely saying "we'll think about it" usually means **no** in the USA and it seems to mean **yes** here, 3) this guy is of a gypsy sub-culture which has its own set of cultural rules, and 4) we have to walk by this guy's corner kiosk about 6 times a day, every day. Without too much discussion, we decided it was best to go back and buy this puppy and dig ourselves out of this cultural soup! So, in our very best effort to smooth the waters / stop an international incident / save face / and keep the peace in the neighborhood, we went back and bought the tiny Spanish Water Dog.

So now... two puppies... I'm thinking that our old dog's airfare is looking like it was probably worth it... we should have just dug deep and shelled out the cash to the evil air cargo empire. Two puppies... what were we thinking!?



DEAR BILLY AND LAURIE,

- I will pray for you.
- As God provides, I plan to partner with you by giving \$ _____ Per month / quarter / year for _____ years.
- I would like to donate a one-time gift of \$ _____



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*"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among
all the peoples!" ~1 Chronicles 16:24*

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