

# THE VALUES AMERICANS LIVE BY

Americans like people from other cultures live with personal values that may or may not reflect the whole of that culture. Below is a generalization of American Cultural values. It is meant to gain understanding for both Americans who are involved in cross cultural relationships and for Internationals who desire to understand their American friends.

## 1. Personal Control over their Environment

Americans believe people can/should control nature, their own environment and destiny; future is not left to fate.

Result: Energetic, goal-oriented society

## 2. Change/Mobility

Change, for the most part, is seen as positive, good, meaning progress, improvement and growth.

Result: Transient society, geographically, economically and socially

## 3. Time and Its Control

Time is considered valuable and limited – achievement of goals depends on productive use of time.

Result: efficiency and progress often at expense of interpersonal relationships

## 4. Equality/Egalitarianism

Americans general believe people have equal opportunities; people are important as individuals, for who they are, not from which family they come from

Result: Little deference shown on status acknowledged

## 5. Individualism, Independence and Privacy

People are seen as separate individuals (not group members) with individual needs. Individual rights outweigh the desires of a group. People need time to be alone and to be themselves.

Result: Americans seen as self-centered and sometimes isolated and lonely

6. Self-Help

Americans take pride in own accomplishments, not in name.

Result: Respect is given for achievements not accident or birth.

7. Competition and Free Enterprise

Americans believe competition brings out best in people and free enterprise produces most progress and success.

Result: Less emphasis on cooperation than competition

8. Future Orientation/ Optimism

Americans believe that, regardless of past or present, the future will be better, happier.

Result: Less value on past; constant looking ahead to tomorrow

9. Action and Work Orientation

Americans believe that work is morally right; that it is immoral to waste time.

Result: More emphasis on “doing” rather than “being;” Pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude toward life

10: Informality

Americans believe that formality is “un-American” and a show of arrogance and superiority.

Result: Casual, egalitarian attitude between people and in their relationships.

11. Directness, Openness, Honesty

One can only trust people who “look you in the eye,” and “tell it like it is.” Truth is function of reality not circumstance.

Result: People tend to tell the “truth” and not worry about saving the other person’s “face” or “honor.”

12. Practicality/Efficiency

Practicality is usually the most important consideration when decisions are to be made.

Result: Less emphasis on the subjective, aesthetic, emotional or on consensual decisions

13. Materialism/Acquisitiveness

Material goods are seen as the just rewards of hard work – evidence of “God’s favor.”

Result: Americans are seen as caring more for things than people or relationships

Adapted from:  
“The Values Americans Live By”  
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