

## Cases

### **July 4th in Manhattan** - *Topic: Communication*

Bob lives with his German-born wife, Katarina, and their two children in Manhattan. When the holidays approach Katarina often invites over a few German ex-patriate friends - Ingrid, as well as Heinz and Petra. Bob invites his sister, Ann, as well as an old college friend, Larry and his wife, Mary.

All highly educated and informed people, conversation naturally gravitates towards current events, politics and society. The last time they were all together, however, the atmosphere became a little tense, turning into a competition of opinions. Larry and Mary felt uncomfortable and left early. Katarina and Bob argued in front of their guests. Ingrid and Heinz found the Americans a bit too sensitive.

July 4th is coming up. Bob and Katarina want to have another party and again invite their American and German friends. But this time they decided to take a new approach, sending out invitations, with Bob providing insight for their German guests about how Americans communicate, and Katarina doing the same for their American guests about how Germans communicate. They wrote it in a humorous fashion: *"Everything you always wanted to know about those crazy Americans ... crazy Germans."*

What would you write about how your culture communicates in such a situation?

**"Who forgot to order the nails?" - Topic: Agreements**

You're quite the handyman. As a teenager you built your own tree fort. You're an adult now, married, three young children, just moved into a home built in the 1950s, offering all sorts of opportunities to apply your natural talent.

You decide to build an outdoor deck. The spring is approaching and you simply can't wait to get started. However, time is limited. The project's success will depend on farsighted planning and disciplined execution.

You'll need an architect. Fortunately, your sister-in-law has an architect neighbor who designs houses and will create the plan. Because you're particular about materials you want to purchase them from a specialty supplier.

Thirdly, you'll need some help. A few of the college-aged young men will be back in the neighborhood at the end of May. You'll line them up as helpers. Lastly, you want your wife to keep the children away from the action so that folks can work without distraction.

So, you have more than a handful of things to organize and then to coordinate. And this means entering into and monitoring individual agreements with different kinds of people: the architect, the materials suppliers, the neighborhood college-guys, your wife. And all of this on a daily basis over several weeks.

In your culture what is key to entering into and managing those agreements?

**"Well, I'd present it like this." - *Topic: Persuasion***

You, an American, work in a transatlantic team which has come up with a creative approach to a difficult technical problem within the company. But, you need some serious funding. Your German team lead, Uwe, will present the solution to very senior management in the U.S.

You have a good sense for how these American managers think. At the same time, you have listened to dozens of German presentations, and are quite familiar with how Uwe lines up his arguments. There is the potential for a disconnect. You hint at this to Uwe. He is open to your advice.

Place yourself in your home culture. Your team lead is non-native. What advice do you give to him/her before making that key presentation?

**"Tommy needs a car."** - *Topic: Decision Making*

The summer is just around the corner. You and your spouse don't want to continue driving your son, Tommy (age 18), and his two younger sisters around town to their various activities. Since Tommy has a driver's license and drives responsibly, the two of you will sit down together on Sunday evening and plan your search for a reliable, safe and economical used car.

Put yourself in the shoes of Tommy's parents. In your culture. Map out your decision-making process.

**"Effective leadership means . . . ." - Topic: Leadership**

You and your other German colleagues have a new boss, Susan Steel. Some of you know of Susan, a few have met her at company conferences, but none have worked directly with or for her. Next week Susan arrives in Germany as a long-term delegate and to begin her work. Because she wants to quickly get oriented, Susan has invited each of her German direct reports for a one-to-one talk. She would like to understand the expectations of her as the team lead, but also communicate her views about the optimal working relationship between team lead and team.

You're in your home culture. In a similar situation. You want to help Susan to understand what makes for an optimal working relationship between a team lead and team. Describe that relationship.

**A walk with your daughter.** - *Topic: Feedback*

Your twelve-year old daughter, Emma, walks off the soccer field, her head hanging low. Her team just lost a 2-1 heartbreaker. Emma plays goaltender. Giving up two goals is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, she blocked at least four shots on goal, two of which would have gone in against a less capable goaltender. On the other side, had Emma positioned herself better, she could have blocked one of the two goals scored against her team.

So, all in all Emma played well. But your young girl is ambitious. She wants to win and, like you, is overly self-critical. You know that giving her feedback after the game is not the right approach. You wait until after dinner later in the week, when the two of you take your young dog, Rex, a Weimaraner, out for a walk after dinner. It's still summer. The days are long.

You're in this kind of a situation. How would you give your daughter feedback?

**"Turn down that noise!" - Topic: Conflict**

Our courts in the U.S. are so full of disputes between neighbors that community mediators are being asked to resolve the conflicts. A member of the major's staff in your town has asked you to get involved.

You've lived in the town for many years, are respected and involved in various activities. You go through the two-day training, then are given your first case. Apparently, the teenaged Johnson boys and their heavy metal rock band have been hitting ever higher decibel levels in their basement studio.

Louise (63) and Richard Moser (65), next door neighbors to the Johnsons, have called the police a half dozen times and are threatening now with a lawyer. It's a nice neighborhood. Folks get along fairly well. The Johnson boys are good kids, but a bit high-energy. Their parents, both working, are busy. Maybe they don't have their boys under control. Who knows? The Mosers, solid citizens even if at times overly critical, moved into one of the first homes on the block decades ago and raised three children of their own. The Johnsons moved in just a few years ago.

Image this or a similar situation in your culture. Your task is to resolve the dispute. What will be your approach? Describe the steps, their sequence, and what is critical to success.

**Technology and History - Topic: Product**

You've been selected to advise the director of the new Museum of German Industry in Stuttgart, generously financed by large German corporations.

Although you were trained as a mechanical engineer at the Universität Aachen, and have over twenty years of experience in product development, you also think as a historian. History was your favorite subject at your Gymnasium in Düsseldorf, and your mother was a professor for Modern German History at the Universität Köln (Cologne).

You were chosen to advise the director because your concept for the museum recommended a comparative approach. Over the years you've worked closely with U.S. companies and are very aware of how different the German and American product philosophies are.

You have been asked to design the first major exhibit communicating the essentials of your culture's fundamental product philosophy.

What are those essentials? What products exemplify them? What would the exhibit look like?



**A Little Process Handbook** - *Topic: Process*

You're a high-level attorney, a single parent raising two girls: Marie 15, Anna 12. You and your girls live in a lovely home in the Washington, D.C. suburbs with almost half an acre of land. The summers are hot, humid, often rainy. The grass needs to be cut once a week.

It's time for Marie to take over mowing the lawn. It's a little tricky, though. Tree roots pop up in unexpected spots. There is lots of mowing around bushes. The winds at night leave twigs strewn across the lawn. Tiny stones can shoot off like bullets into all sorts of directions. And the powerful mower is to be handled carefully. You need to explain to Marie how to cut the lawn efficiently, and without injuring herself or anyone else.

Put yourself in the same or similar situation. In your home culture. Because you can type fast, you pull out your laptop in order to describe the process for Marie. What will that little process handbook look like: chapters, sequence, length, depth, etc.?

**Dr. Mommsen's Book - Topic: Customer**

Dr. Dirk Mommsen is a well-known business consultant and author. His upcoming book is about how companies establish and maintain long-term business relationships in a fast-paced, global economy.

One of the chapters will compare cultural approaches. You've agreed to be interviewed by Dr. Mommsen because you manage your company's most critical collaborative business relationships.

He asks you: "In your culture how are business relationships built and maintained?" How would you reply.