



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Navigating Cross Culture Communication with Michael Gates

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:00:02]:

Hello, everybody. This is Susan Heatonwright and Nick Simon from the Superstar Communicator podcast and live stream. We welcome people here today who are listening in And if you feel that you want to make a comment or ask a question, please feel free to do that. I'm absolutely delighted to be speaking to Michael Gates who is a leading authority on culture and understanding different cultures. I'm going to read what he says. Michael Gates is the owner of Michael Gates Cross Culture and an associate fellow at the Sayed Business School, University of Oxford. He's been in the field of cross culture for more than 30 years following 5 years in radio in Manchester and a couple of years teaching communication skills. So welcome, Michael.

Michael Gates [00:01:08]:

Thank you very much. It's an absolute pleasure to be to be with you today.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:01:13]:

And we first met actually in Manchester, although you were dialing in to conference that I was speaking at, and we subsequently kept in touch and have had a couple of, of lovely meetings.

Michael Gates [00:01:28]:

That's right. And, you know, it's been a real pleasure to find out more about what you do and your background. So, thank thank you so much for inviting me today.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:01:37]:

One of the reasons why I thought it would be of value to our listeners would be to have a discussion about culture and how this impacts with how we communicate with people all over the world. Now it's really, really easy to stereotype people, isn't it?

Michael Gates [00:02:01]:

It is. Yeah. And, you have to be careful about it because the way in which people communicate across cultures is not Only referring to national culture, there are many other cultural layers such as regional. I mean, if you think about just the UK, I think most Brits would agree that people from the North of England and the South of England are rather



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

different in in some ways. And then it can also be within companies, communication between, for example, research and development and marketing, Very different backgrounds.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:02:37]:

And finance.

Michael Gates [00:02:39]:

Well, exactly. Yeah.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:02:42]:

But also that there is, based on education and certainly in the United Kingdom, you have to the class system, which whether you like it or not, is still there.

Michael Gates [00:02:54]:

Yeah. I mean, you know, I pronounce the word class like that, class. A lot of my colleagues at Oxford pronounce it class, and, there you have it.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:03:06]:

And do you find that that has a negative impact for you? Do people still respect you because you say class and castle?

Michael Gates [00:03:14]:

I think things have changed. I remember, I studied English literature at University of Oxford, and, in my 1st ever class, which was over 40 years ago. 1 guy was reading out his essay, and he was from the north from, near Wigan. And, one of the girls in the group, left after about 5 minutes of him reading his essay. And when we saw her in the evening at the bar and asked, you know, why did you leave? She said, I had to go and vomit because I couldn't bear listening to that northern working class accent, Well, she probably said class accent. Yes. I think things have got better since then.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:03:54]:

I mean, certainly, I I was at Durham University and there were times that I felt that I that there were people like that that thought I was a social experiment.

Michael Gates [00:04:07]:



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Yeah. I've, I've heard that said. In fact, there was, a girl in the year above me who's actually become a well known novelist, Jeanette Winterson. Oh, yes. Yeah. And she was the class the year above me. And her tutor, who I actually got him very well with, called his working class experiment, which is never forgiven or

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:04:31]:

forgotten. No. Absolutely and quite rightly. But we are talking about about mainly international

Michael Gates [00:04:39]:

culture. That's right. And most of my work is with organizations who either have to sell their products abroad or buy products from abroad, or, increasingly these days, work in multicultural

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:04:57]:

teams. You know, what is a cultural what is cross cultural communication based on either selling products or working in an international team?

Michael Gates [00:05:08]:

Well, I think, first of all, you know, how do you define culture? And the most famous definition of culture was, by a Dutch cross culturalist called Gerd Hochschdeller and he said that culture is the collective programming of the mind Which distinguishes one group of people from another. A much simpler definition is the way we do things around here, And it's based on, our experiences probably up till about the age of 7. It's very powerful. And, you know, How our parents brought us up, what we were taught was the right way of doing things or the wrong way of doing things. And if you go back 1000 of years, it's based on different Climates, different histories, language, religion. Those are things which, form a culture or a national culture.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:06:02]:

And how oh, sorry.

Nick Simon [00:06:03]:

So can I, just add to add to that? How would you say the, the more modern technology, the Internet and Social media have affected cultural

Michael Gates [00:06:15]:



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

merging. I think there are, 2 types culture that you could define. There's what you'd call microculture and then macroculture. And microculture is all the stuff which is Becoming more globalized. I mean, if you picture cultures in iceberg, globalization's a little bit like the sun melting the surface. And I remember some years ago, one of my sons came running down from upstairs really angry, and he said, You can't, trust people from Thailand. And I said, what do you mean? He said, well, I've tried to buy something from someone in Thailand, and it's not arrived, and it doesn't look like they're going to send it. So we can't base it on that.

Michael Gates [00:06:56]:

So in some ways, technology brings us together, But then in other ways, it can draw us apart because we get to meet people we wouldn't have other met otherwise met.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:07:06]:

Do you think that people are triggered by, previous experiences or what they've heard from other people about, say, as you said, about Thailand?

Michael Gates [00:07:18]:

I do. And one of the dangers I mean, if you tackle this subject of stereotyping or generalization, One of the dangers is that the very people who say you can't generalize, they start generalizing from very limited personal experience. So I was teaching in a British group about India not long ago, and I said, before I start, tell me, all of you, The first thing that comes to mind when you think about Indians, and 1 guy was very keen. He said, oh, they're very pessimistic. And I said, well, I'm really surprised. You know, I've Worked in India for for years, and I find them extremely optimistic. And, you know, international surveys have India as one of the most optimistic Countries in the world. I said, how many Indians have you known? He said, one, and he was really miserable.

Michael Gates [00:08:07]:

So and and, of course, people are very eager to rely on their personal experiences or Experiences of others that they know well, but that experience can be quite limited, I would say. And, And so one way of breaking stereotypes is actually sometimes having to fight against someone's personal experience if it wasn't a very extensive experience.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:08:34]:

So within the context of cross cultural communication, Could you give some examples of when it goes wrong or when it goes right?

Michael Gates [00:08:49]:



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Absolutely. I mean, if you wanted to divide communication into 2 major types, I'd say there are cultures who are very direct And, you know, call a spade a spade. And there are other cultures that are rather indirect. So an example of very direct Cultures would be, for instance, the Germans, the Dutch, Israelis, very indirect cultures, Japanese, For instance, Koreans most of the time until they're under real pressure, then they suddenly explode, and then they come Crawling back again, apologizing. And and a lot of Brits are quite indirect, particularly from the south of

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:09:30]:

England. Yes.

Michael Gates [00:09:32]:

Yeah. And then there were cultures who in communication are what we call quite low context. So they are basically interested in narrow point of view based on the facts and figures, and they're not so bothered about anything outside that. For example, Americans would tend to be rather low context communicators. High context communicators are not so interested in the actual message. They're interested in who you are. Can you make decisions? What's your tone like? Is it friendly and polite, or is it Sounding a little bit rude on trust. And, you know, where are we having this discussion? Is it In an official meeting, or is it, in the evening over karaoke or, at a at a banquet? So that's the sort of breakdown of Communication.

Michael Gates [00:10:20]:

Where it's I'll give you 2 examples where it's gone wrong and where it's gone right. I was once on a and both of them are from airplanes. I have a lot of, examples from air travel because I do a lot of it. And once I was sitting on a plane, a Lufthansa flight, and, we were just texting towards the runway in Helsinki for a flight to Munich. And suddenly the plane stopped, and the pilot came on and said, you know, we've had to delay the flight by 2 hours because of bad weather in Munich. Okay. And in front of me, there was a Russian lady, and, she called the hostess over. The, the flight attendant Got her to come over and wanted her to get closer than this German lady was comfortable with, and then she sort of whispered to us.

Michael Gates [00:11:10]:

She said, the pilot just said that The flight's delayed because of bad weather in Munich. She said, what's the real reason? And now as a Russian, what she was doing was Really saying both of us know that you can't trust any authorities, and so tell me the true story. I trust you as a person. But the host that misunderstood stood back and said in a loud voice so everyone could hear, are you calling me a liar? Because for her as a German, what she says,



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

what the pilot says, what Lufthansa says is all the same. It's consistent. So that was an example of, you know, bad communication. Particularly, I would say, on On, because for the flight attendant, if she'd understood Russians better, she would have understood the situation. The 2nd story, is also Lufthansa, and it went went really well.

Michael Gates [00:12:05]:

And this time I was in a flight which hit Really bad turbulence. And, of course, you could almost use a plane flight as a metaphor for a business project because you've got to plan beforehand, And it's, you know, hopefully, everyone wants to go to the same destination. And then you have a leader and you could have a crisis and, you know, communication in a crisis is obviously Really important. So we hit this turbulence, and I speak German, so I understood what the pilot was saying. And he came on and he said, well, we've hit this turbulence. It's caused by wind speeds of, I don't know. 237 kilometers an hour. This is very high in this, area, but I want to reassure you that we have a very powerful set of Pratt and Whitney Engines.

Michael Gates [00:12:46]:

And he gave the horsepower, and then he talked about the Airbus frame and what pressure it will withstand. And Germans tend to want to know what's gonna happen next. So he said, I'm going down by 7,000 feet. The reasons are x, y, and zed. If that doesn't work, I'll do a, b, and c. And you could see the Germans calming down because we are getting a very thorough explanation, and thoroughness is very important for the Germans. They call it. And, and, also, you know, you obviously got, master of the technology.

Michael Gates [00:13:17]:

I, as a Brit, was just thinking, All I want to know is are we okay? And there are quite a few Americans on the plane, and I thought, What's he gonna do? How's he gonna do it for Americans? And you spoke in a perfect sort of New York accent. And instead of this long explanation, All he said was, well, as you can see, we're on a bit of a roller coaster. So just sit back, tighten your seat belts, and enjoy the ride. Totally different, but very well adapted.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:13:47]:

Oh, that's amazing. But Sort of moving on from that, what happens if you've got a team perhaps with Germans, French, Brits, Italians, because certainly I was working, I was delivering a series of master to classes not on culture because that's not my area of expertise, but it was on career acceleration. And there was 1 lady there, an Italian, and she was a project manager and felt that she was constantly being derided because she was Italian and could not be a good project manager.

Michael Gates [00:14:28]:



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Yeah. And this is a problem where people in an international team project onto other cultures what The stereotype of that culture is and then they notice only the things about them which, confirm the evidence That they've got from hearsay and from, you know, watching the movies, etcetera. So what I do if I'm working with a team like that is, I put them through a cultural assessment, which I initiated years ago over here, and then it's developed over the years. It's a questionnaire on the web, And, people answer about their own values and beliefs and their own personal style in communication. But then the next stage is where I get everyone in the team. It's gotta be a fairly small team to do a mini assessment on each of their colleagues, and then we compare What the differences are? Sometimes, the 2 things are fairly close, but quite often, there can be a big difference. And I was working with a team recently, And, they had a French leader, and, the rest of the team were all different nationalities. And On the topic of listening and speaking in the assessment, he came out as, I listen most of the time.

Michael Gates [00:15:45]:

So when we looked at what the team thought of him, they said he talks most of the time. Well, this was quite useful for everyone to know. And but then you have to dig deeper. And He asked them, you know, why do you think that I'm not a good listener? And they said, well, you multitask. So in that important meeting the other day, When I was trying to talk to you, you were sending text messages and looking at your computer screen. He said, oh, no. But I I was listening. They said, well, that's not our impression.

Michael Gates [00:16:13]:

So these perceptions are extremely important to work with.

Nick Simon [00:16:18]:

And then going on from the, the kind of I did different, cultures communicating. Can you group cultures to make it easier to shift between them?

Michael Gates [00:16:32]:

Yeah. And there are various cultural theories, and sometimes people say, well, why have a theory? Well, theories, they're sort of like a ladder which lead you to a different perspective. But then once you've got that perspective, you can kick the ladder away. You know, don't get too hung up on them. A lot of the theories, Fairly complicated having, like, 5 or 7 dimensions on a sliding scale. The one which we came up with with my former boss, Richard Lewis, He came up with a a a division of cultures into 3 main types. The first type is what he call linear active, And it sort of does what it says on the box. Linear actives tend to do things in a linear fashion.



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Michael Gates [00:17:14]:

They tend to be tied to facts and figures. They're fairly, well, very time oriented, wanting to complete things quickly, quite structured and very interested in processes. And, culturally, You could put the Germanic, the Nordic, the Anglo Saxon cultures in that blue linear active, corner. Multi active cultures on the other hand, they're very people oriented. We we color multi actives, that, Part of our cultural triangle, we color it red. And they're quite warm, emotional, quite talkative. It can be a little bit rash sometimes. And, they would tend to be Southern Europeans, South America, a lot of African cultures, Middle East, to a degree, India.

Michael Gates [00:18:04]:

Well, I didn't mention professions. I mean, linear professions tend not to engineers, surgeons, pilots, accountants. Multi active professions in business tend to be in sales and marketing very often. A lot of leaders Globally, no matter where they're from, they're quite multi active. And I think if you think about leadership and, the strengths of multi actives, they're quite good at persuading people emotionally. As politicians, they're very good at winning elections, but when they get there, maybe they're a little bit disorganized and rash and break the rules Without naming any names. And, and then Reactives, we'd group them as cultures that are Listening a lot of the time that when they do speak, they're very keen to promote a sense of harmony. Harmony is very important in in the Far East, in China, Japan, etcetera, it's a confusion.

Michael Gates [00:19:02]:

And They tend to be those, quite a lot of those far eastern cultures. Where I live in Finland, it's quite an anomaly among European cultures Because it's a mixture of linear and, reactive. They've got qualities. And the Brits have a little bit of reactivity in This indirect communication style. You know, I remember seeing an interview with John Lennon from shortly after he married Yoko, and He said, you know, I've discovered that Japanese and British culture have quite a lot in common.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:19:39]:

So interesting. If you were able to give 3 top tips to a Brit, a British person moving to the Far East to work. What 3 tips would you give them for communication?

Michael Gates [00:19:59]:

Well, first of all, understand yourself and your own way of communicating. The, As I mentioned, there are some commonalities in indirectness between the Brits and people in the Far East. But the, the indirectness there, you know, for example, in Japan or China can be a lot more than British indirectness. Be curious. Really listen to them. You know, listening is



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

so important In the reactive far eastern cultures. In fact, the Chinese symbol for listening is called Ting, and it's made up of, 3 or 4 pictograms Illustrating not just the ears, but the eyes and the heart and the spirit. And, so listening is a complex thing for them And, give them a space.

Michael Gates [00:20:53]:

I was recently in, Southeast Asia giving a a a training session, And I I had a group of about 70, and I put them in small groups to discuss what is most understood or misunderstood about your region. And they said people from the west often think that we don't have any ideas or few ideas Yeah. Because we but the reason is that we're thinking and listening. And then as soon as we're just about to come out with something, they despair and think we're not gonna say anything, so they interrupt. And then we stopped speaking. So, for a Brit in the area, don't speak too much And, you know, get into their gear, their pace of communication, which can be slower with bigger, bigger pauses. And I think particularly for Brits, modify your language and keep it simple. A lot of Brits will, not make many concessions.

Michael Gates [00:21:53]:

So they speak far too quickly. They use a lot of idioms, and, You know you know, we're batting off a sticky wicket, for example. Well, who and a not even an American would understand that.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:22:07]:

Most women wouldn't understand that.

Michael Gates [00:22:09]:

Not exactly. Yeah. I mean, I had, 1 lady once. She was German, and she was working for the Tony Blair Foundation in the Middle And, she said she had her 1st meeting with Tony Blair, and she'd given him a report to read. And, he sort of put it on the desk, said, yeah, I've read it. He said it's a no brainer. Anyway, she went back and cried all night And then a British, colleague at breakfast said, you know, what's the matter? She said, well, Tony Blair thinks I'm an idiot. I said she he said, well, what did he say? She said when he gave me the report back, she said it's a no he said it's a no brainer.

Michael Gates [00:22:46]:

She thought it meant that he thought she had no brain. Yes. Be very careful with, with idioms, and keep it slow. Keep it slow in in the far east. And and, of course, Yeah. You may be dealing with someone who has a lot of Western experience. Well, then don't keep it slow if you notice them speeding up. You know, use your Common sense to mirror and adapt to the way in which they're communicating.



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:23:12]:

Question from Michelle Connolly, and if anybody is listening and you would like to comment or add a question, please feel free to. So Michelle is over in Canada. She works for one of the global pharmaceutical companies. She said, What types of actions and examples could you take to ensure others know what they are doing to expand their internal network and mentoring. And what can they do to show that they have accomplished this?

Michael Gates [00:23:46]:

Gosh. That's a

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:23:48]:

It is. Yeah. It's quite a question, isn't it?

Michael Gates [00:23:50]:

Then yeah. I mean, I wonder if you could Break it down a little more because

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:23:55]:

there's quite a

Michael Gates [00:23:56]:

few elements to it.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:23:57]:

Yeah. Okay. So if we do the first bit, what types of actions and examples could you take to ensure others know what they are doing to expand their internal network?

Michael Gates [00:24:14]:

Well, I think you've gotta start by, Helping people to understand each other first. And, you know, I would say some sort of events, Like, without pushing myself too much, but a cross cultural workshop or some other workshop aimed at teams and Increasing understanding between individuals about themselves and and other people in the team, it could be really useful because everything's based on, in the end on trusting relationships, you know, how do you build the trust? And the 3 cultural types build trust in different ways. So, I would say that would be the starting point to build trusting relationships through, Looking at the process of communication, not just at the Plunging straight into the task. I mean, a lot of



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

international teams, when they aren't so successful, They've gone straight into the task without thinking about the process and how do we communicate, how are we Different. And, you know, as far as, even getting information in organizations goes, I remember once speaking with a a German who worked for the Spanish telephone company Telefonica, and he said it was quite difficult at first Because when he wants to do something new, he'd ask, you know, where where is it documented? And the answer would be, oh, well, Carlos Working in, in, in in, Argentina is our expert internally on this. I can Make you an introduction to Carlos, and he'll explain it. And then he said, but where is it written down? They said, well, well, it isn't written down. So it's all built on relationships.

Michael Gates [00:26:06]:

And he said he now understood the benefits both of documentation and personal relationships. So, You know, it's a long winded way of answering the question. I'm not sure if I've quite answered it, but I would say, think about what do you mean by network, what do you mean about, Communication internally and how do we do it in different

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:26:28]:

ways. Well, thank you for that. I've got a question from Loretta and she says I'm Michael. I'm glad you mentioned Richard Lewis. His book When Cultures Collide saved my career and myself personally many times. On a different note, are there any interesting studies of eclectic cultures coming from cross cross cultural marriages and teens and their typology.

Michael Gates [00:27:00]:

We're getting some very, you know

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:27:02]:

I know. You we've got them. We're keep bringing them in. Let's get Michael to really think. You see his great

Michael Gates [00:27:11]:

answer. Well, there's certainly books on Cross cultural marriages and I helped with one of them some years ago. I can't for the life of me remember what the name was now or who wrote it. But, I mean, if you, Google, you know, books on cross cultural marriages, I'm sure you'd find something on that. And and then, you know, moving away from corporations, a big topic, which the many books on is third country kids. So kids who are born to parents maybe from 2 different cultures being brought up in a 3rd culture and or maybe a succession of cultures. So There are lots of, lots of cultural material on the personal as well as the business



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:27:54]:

side. Does that answer your question, Loretta, or do you want to comment on that? It'd be lovely to hear. Nick, do you have any questions?

Nick Simon [00:28:03]:

Yeah. I was, thinking from the Effective of, a new kind of content creation, particularly on, younger generation, Short format creations like, on TikTok or that those kind of minute videos. How would you say, culture being portrayed in this short kind of consumable form, how do you think that would affect people's Perception of, different cultures in a in a kind of content condensed consumer based form.

Michael Gates [00:28:38]:

Well, I'm all for it. I mean, I have worked on quite a few programs that are, Like Mini MOOCs. You know, a MOOC is a hyphen and sets m o o c. Never remember what it stands for. But, anyway, I've worked on a few of those, Both specific clients like, about India. Very short. I mean, maybe not as short as TikTok, but Couple to 3 minutes long. So, you know, a little bit longer than that.

Michael Gates [00:29:09]:

And then, I worked on a couple of programs for a British company, Video Arts. I think it was last year or the year before. I don't know if you know Video Arts. They were started by John Cleese In the 19 seventies. And the idea was, and originally they want VHS tape, it was to look at a business challenge from a humorous point of view where someone gets it all wrong, and then you learn what should have been done. So that's been the format for many years. And we did 1 on, remote working, and then the other 1 was on cross cultural communication. Both of them won awards, so they were Quite interesting.

Michael Gates [00:29:50]:

And they're in fairly short term bites, not as short as that. I mean, the thing that really interests me at the moment, Is and it has done for some years is using artificial intelligence to give people short answers Intercultural questions. I mean, if you Google something, you get so much information that you can get lost in it. But if you can ask something, a very simple question, then get a short answer and then keep asking it questions. And I've experimented quite a bit with chat GPT, and that works Fairly well for it, but it's not, purely a cultural program. So it would be like a niche Type of chat GPT for culture. And, I mean, I started working on some ideas for this about 10 years ago, but At the time, computers weren't quite as advanced with natural language, and so it was Probably too abstract a topic. I think the time is sort of right now, except, you know, I've got a lack of time, and, And,



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

also, you'd need a pretty big investment in it, but the idea is still going around in my mind daily about, how to do that.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:31:07]:

I suppose AI, say if you were to use chat chat GP, it there is so much bias in that anyway that it could be dangerous to go down that route of culture.

Michael Gates [00:31:23]:

Yeah. I think you've got to be very careful with it. And, you know, another area, which is also AI, which has fascinated me is where AI, has to make ethical decisions. So, for example, in a driverless car, you know, what happens if the car is in a situation where if it does nothing, people are gonna get harmed. If it does something, maybe fewer people will be harmed. It's the old, philosophical trolleybus Question. But who makes those decisions, and are those ethical decisions, culturally attuned or not? And, and so, yeah, that's just one example, but I think there's many other instances where The the ethics within the program is only going to reflect the ethics of whoever programmed it. Yeah.

Michael Gates [00:32:20]:

That might be culturally biased.

Nick Simon [00:32:23]:

And from, a a translation point of view, Do you think, AI will affect, or be affected by that kind of cultural, That language communication that you mentioned before about the different ways Germans or Americans, portray their language, do you think, an AI could be used to write or translate books, or the those kind of things into other cultures?

Michael Gates [00:32:55]:

Potentially, and I've been working a little bit with Someone from an Italian university on exactly this

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:33:03]:

question.

Michael Gates [00:33:03]:

Alright. The language program that is culturally attuned. But I think it's not going to be easy, and we found it when our assessment, we have got it in about a dozen languages now. And some languages were more difficult than others to translate into, and we weren't doing it



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

through AI. It was through translators. I mean, I'll tell you the 2 most difficult were probably Japanese and French for very different reasons. Yeah. The the Japanese one is because, For example, if you have a term like face, which is at the core of Japanese culture, then It's quite hard to phrase questions which would allow people to answer in different ways, in Japanese because the Japanese word for face is so powerful that, you know, you would find it very difficult to Get anyone to answer that.

Michael Gates [00:33:58]:

It maybe wasn't as important for them as others. So that was quite hard. The reason French was so difficult, And we've still not finalized it after years is because the French are so precise and concerned about their language And they have the Academie Francaise, which police its French language, that you get a translator to translate it, and then we always Give it to another translator to check. You give it to the French translator, and they say it's absolute rubbish, the translation. Terrible. So I say, well, you know, you correct it and you correct it, then you give it to a 3rd French translator who says, it's appalling. It's awful. And you can't get anyone to agree easily on what is a good translation into French.

Michael Gates [00:34:42]:

So it's very different reason, but it's this, Very, very strong feelings about language in

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:34:51]:

France. Really interesting. Before we go, are there some useful for universals regarding communication which work in any culture?

Michael Gates [00:35:02]:

I think, keep it simple. And, Brits, as I mentioned before, very often When you hear them communicating with someone from another culture, they they don't make enough concessions. I mean, I've been working just recently with, quite a lot of Chinese students and with a Chinese interpreter, And, we've had quite a lot of trainers on the courses, but most of them haven't worked as much as I have with other cultures. And the interpreter came up to me and said, you speak in a very interpreter friendly way, which I was quite pleased about. And what I think she meant was that some of the other Brits just were speaking as they normally do. So I think keep it keep it simple. Avoid idioms. Adjust to the pace and style of the other party.

Michael Gates [00:36:07]:

And in fact, there was a report published in the Harvard Business Review about 2 years ago, which was some research on what they called mirroring. And although this was in purely in an American context, the researchers created a computer program that analyzed language in



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

terms of its Sentence length, tone, vocabulary, etcetera, and studied 25,000,000 words of exchanges between Lawyers and judges in American patent law cases. And they found that where the language of the lawyers Fairly closely mirrored the style of the language of the judges. They had double the chance of winning their case. Oh. Quite, You know, quite a big thing. So I think this mirroring can be extremely helpful.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:36:59]:

That's really interesting, isn't it? And I would imagine that would be very very interesting if you are selling or pitching, if you're mirroring some of the language that you are pitching to. And I know that there's somebody that's listening who hasn't I haven't seen your your posts, your your questions, Ben. They're not coming up, but Ben Affia is an expert in written communication. So I'm sure, you know, if you've got a comment about that it would be really interesting to hear, Ben. And Loretta said, yes. I like the 3rd country kids concept. We'll look into that. Thank you.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:37:43]:

I'm sure you have 3rd country kids, don't you? Before we finish, what are your 3 top tips for the audience?

Michael Gates [00:37:54]:

Well, number 1, it I mean, it was written above the Delphic Oracle in Greece, know yourself, And that can be quite tricky, quite difficult. Like the French guy who thought that he was a very good listener, but other people didn't think he was a good Listen. So often to know yourself, you have to get feedback from other people, because you may have a distorted picture of who you are. Curiosity is extremely important when you're thinking about other cultures. Really listen to them and observe how they are behaving. And, again, I'd bring in that mirroring, That a little bit of mirroring can go a long way. And then actually do something about it. I mean, I'll give you the last example.

Michael Gates [00:38:48]:

When I first came to Finland in 1987, I hadn't been, in the cultural field before. I'd been in radio in Manchester, and I was coming over as a communication skills trainer. And I went for my first ever Sales meeting because I was selling as well as delivering. And there was a Finnish guy called Pekka, there. And, Anyway, Peker, was giving very little, reaction to what I was saying. You know, he wasn't even making eye contact. He was looking at his shoes. I mean, they say that you can tell the difference between a Finnish introvert and an extrovert.

Michael Gates [00:39:24]:



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Because if you're talking to an introvert, he looks at his shoes. If you're talking to an Roberti looks at your shoes. Anyway, after about 20 minutes, I thought I'd better tell him the price. And so I said to you, this How much of training is going to cost you a 100,000 fin marks? And there was silence. And after about 10 seconds, I cracked, and I dropped it to 95,000. Still silent, so I dropped to 90,000. Eventually, I said, look, 85,000 is my final offer. And after a long silence, he said, okay.

Michael Gates [00:39:53]:

Anyway, things went quite well, and we got more business. And then one day, we went for a sauna, and he was a little bit more talkative. And he said, I said to him, you know, you're a very good negotiator. He said, no. I wasn't negotiating back then. I said, well, what were you doing? He said, I was thinking When you said a 100,000. I said, what what were you thinking? He said, I was thinking a 100,000 was a very fair and reasonable offer. So I said, well, why didn't you say that? He said, I just told you.

Michael Gates [00:40:18]:

I was thinking. And then I got out of him that he was thinking that he'd like to say he'd be very interested for the proposal. And then he thought again, for interested of, interested about. And he said before I remember the preposition after interested is in, you said 95,000. So I thought of it, I'll wait a little longer. And when he said 85,000, well, I felt sorry for you. So why didn't he want to speak? Because He didn't want to make a mistake because in his his culture, people really don't like you losing face, and making grammatical mistake would have Made him lose face. So what did that teach me? That certainly if I'm dealing with Finns, I can wait as long as it takes these days.

Michael Gates [00:41:04]:

Now my rule for other cultures, I mean, I work a lot with India, would be, you know, to talk a lot and talk quickly. With things, it's Tolerating long silences. So it does vary between cultures. So know yourself, you know, know that I'm very talkative to you generally. Listen and observe. Well, I observed the way in which he behaved, and then adapt. The adaptation for me was actually not to do anything, just to To tolerate the silence and feel emotionally comfortable with that, not stressed because they're not feeling stressed. Anyway, that's just an example.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:41:42]:

This is brilliant. We could go on all day and I know how busy you are and I know that the listeners have really been enjoying this. That there's a lot of love for you here, including from Mike Slater who says well done, Michael. I endorse

Michael Gates [00:41:59]:



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Mike. I know Mike.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:42:02]:

Yeah. He said I endorse a lot of what you've said, A lot, not all of it. What's going on, Mike? Oh, thank you so much. And I know that Loretta has shared your, crossculture.com product, When Cultures Collide. I will make sure that other people can see that and also the, LinkedIn article that you did on this. How can people contact you if they want to carry on this discussion? I'm pleased to have you back again.

Michael Gates [00:42:36]:

The the best way is via LinkedIn. And even if you've lost the link, then you just put in my name and culture and I'll come up. Yeah.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:42:45]:

Brilliant. You anything that you want to share before we

Michael Gates [00:42:49]:

finish? No. I think, I'm well, What do I want to share? I've gotta go and pick my son up, so I'd better look.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:42:58]:

Okay. It's been Absolutely brilliant and thank you very much for everybody who's been involved in the discussion or quietly listening in the background. We are going to be celebrating Black History Month so we have Trisha on as a, as a guest in a couple of weeks time so I'll Post that up, start inviting people. But remember if you connect with me, and say that you want me to let you know when the next session is, then I will automatically invite you. And Esther, another message of love, Esther Van Merkle. Hi, Michael. Interesting as

Michael Gates [00:43:42]:

usual. I know Esther very well as well.

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:43:45]:

Oh, great. So until next time, thank you very much, Michael. Oh, gosh. We've got sorry. I I I mustn't finish. Rima says thank you very much, Schmeichel Rima, Rimsayat. Do you know oh, okay. Rima.



SuperStar Communicator Podcast

Susan Heaton-Wright [00:44:05]:

So thank you very much everybody. Until next time, this is the Superstar Communicator podcast with Nick Simon and Susan Heaton Wright with our special guest, Michael Gates. Thanks for listening.

Michael Gates [00:44:19]:

Bye bye. Bye bye.

We create this podcast to empower others to speak and communicate with impact. We self fund. If you value our content, we would be so grateful if you could 'buy us a coffee'

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/superstarcomms>



Why not grab our Ten Top Tips to Being a SuperStar Communicator [here](#)

[Buy the SuperStar Communicator 30 Day Plan here](#)

SuperStar Communicator deliver a range of speeches, masterclasses, facilitated workshops and coaching for emerging leaders. We focus on empowering emerging talent to speak and communicate with clarity, confidence and credibility. If you would like more details please email us at hello@superstarcommunicator.com or why not [book a call](#).

You can listen to all episodes of the SuperStar Communicator podcast and subscribe [here](#).