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Sixty Second Insight #16: The Role of Culture

by Dave Arch

The Wealthy Culture

- ☐ **1.** I can read a menu in French, English, and another language.
- ☐ **2.** I have several favorite restaurants in different countries of the world.
- ☐ **3.** During the holidays,. I know how to hire a decorator to identify the appropriate themes and items with which to decorate the house.
- ☐ **4.** I know who my preferred financial advisor, legal service, designer, domestic-employment service, and hairdresser are.
- ☐ **5.** I have at least two residences that are staffed and maintained.
- ☐ **6.** I know how to ensure confidentiality and loyalty from my domestic staff.
- ☐ **7.** I have at least two or three "screens" that keep people whom I do not wish to see away from me.
- ☐ **8.** I fly in my own plane or the company plane.
- ☐ **9.** I know how to enroll my children in the preferred private schools.
- ☐ **10.** I know how to host the parties that "key"people attend.
- ☐ **11.** I am on the boards of at least two charities.
- ☐ **12.** I know the hidden rules of the Junior League.
- ☐ **13.** I support or buy the work of a particular artist.
- ☐ **14.** I know how to read a corporate financial statement and analyze my own financial statements.

From the book A Framework for Understanding Poverty by Ruby K. Payne and Dan Shenk and Jesse Conrad

The Middle Class Culture

- ☐ **1.** I know how to get my children into Little League, piano lessons, soccer, etc.
- ☐ **2.** I know how to set a table properly.
- ☐ **3.** I know which stores are most likely to carry the clothing brands my family wears.
- ☐ **4.** My children know the best name brands in clothing.
- ☐ **5.** I know how to order in a nice restaurant.
- ☐ **6.** I know how to use a credit card, checking account, and savings account, and I understand an annuity. I understand term life insurance, disability insurance, and 20/80 medical insurance policy, as well as house insurance, flood insurance, and replacement insurance.
- ☐ **7.** I talk to my children about going to college.
- ☐ **8.** I know how to get one of the best interest rates on my new-car loan.
- ☐ **9.** I understand the difference among the principal, interest, and escrow statements on my house payment.
- ☐ **10.** I know how to help my children with their homework and do not hesitate to call the school if I need additional information.
- ☐ **11.** I know how to decorate the house for the different holidays.
- ☐ **12.** I know how to get a library card.
- ☐ **13.** I know how to use most of the tools in the garage.
- ☐ **14.** I repair items in my house almost immediately when they break or know a repair service and call it.

From the book A Framework for Understanding Poverty by Ruby K. Payne and Dan Shenk and Jesse Conrad

The Poverty Culture

- ☐ **1.** I know which churches and sections of town have the best rummage sales.
- ☐ **2.** I know which rummage sales have “bag sales” and when.
- ☐ **3.** I know which grocery stores’ garbage bins can be accessed for thrown-away food.
- ☐ **4.** I know how to get someone out of jail.
- ☐ **5.** I know how to physically fight and defend myself physically.
- ☐ **6.** I know how to get a gun, even if I have a police record.
- ☐ **7.** I know how to keep my clothes from being stolen at the Laundromat.
- ☐ **8.** I know what problems to look for in a used car.
- ☐ **9.** I know how to live without a checking account.
- ☐ **10.** I know how to live without electricity and a phone.
- ☐ **11.** I know how to use a knife as scissors.
- ☐ **12.** I can entertain a group of friends with my personality and my stories.
- ☐ **13.** I know what to do when I don’t have money to pay the bills.
- ☐ **14.** I know how to move in half a day.
- ☐ **15.** I know how to get and use food stamps or an electronic card for benefits.
- ☐ **16.** I know where the free medical clinics are.
- ☐ **17.** I am very good at trading and bartering.
- ☐ **18.** I can get by without a car.

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Effective leaders are aware of the power inherent within an organization’s culture. In the above series of graphics, you get a sense for the varying cultures of the wealthy, middle class, and poor. How difficult it would be to achieve success in one of the cultures to which you were unaccustomed.

Sometimes I'll have a mentor think about culture like writing a book entitled ***My Organization: How It Really Works***. I ask them to give titles to ten chapters that would appear in the book for a newcomer to read upon entering the organization. What does the organization value? What are the unwritten rules of the culture? What are its taboos? What are its dysfunctions?

If a business person wanted to be successful in Japan, s/he would study the Japanese culture. S/he would learn that bowing upon meeting another person is very common. They might deem it unnecessary or even a silly practice. However, if they wanted to be successful, they would bow when meeting someone. They would adjust to the culture in which they wanted to achieve success.

A leader is aware of the culture in which s/he is trying to be successful and is explicit about explaining that culture to his/her followers as well.
