

Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, is also known as the giant of Africa. The country accounts for about one sixth of African population. Nigeria is known for its rich cultural diversity due to the variety of customs, traditions, and its 521 languages and ethnic groups. The three main languages in Nigeria are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Persons of different language background commonly communicates in English as it is being used as the lingua franca for Schools, business, work and any social event.

Many religions are followed in Nigeria, as the constitution guarantees religious freedom. Christians predominantly lives in the south of the country, while the Muslims predominantly live in the north. Many Muslims and Christians commonly marry their beliefs with more unorthodox indigenous ones, which explain why the celebration of Christmas and Easter are recognized as national holidays.

Nigeria is considered a superpower in the African continent. Nigerians are generally proud of their country. It is a country endowed with vast quantities of natural resources. It is the Sixth largest oil-producing nation and has a well educated and industrious society. They are fond of the expression that if Nigeria sneezes, the rest of the African nations catch cold.

Extended families are in fact the backbone of the social system. Grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers and in-laws all work as a unit through life. Family relationships are guided by hierarchy and seniority. Social standing and recognition is achieved through extended families. Similarly a family's honour is influenced by the actions of its members. Individuals turn to members of the extended family for financial aid and guidance, and the family is expected to provide for the welfare of every member. Although the role of the extended family is diminishing somewhat in urban areas, there remains a strong tradition of mutual caring and responsibility among the members.

Nigeria is a hierarchical society. Age and position earns, and even demands respect. Age is believed to confer wisdom so older people are granted respect. The oldest person in a group is revered and honoured. In a social situation, they are greeted and served first. In return the most senior person has the responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group.

Nigerian Communication Style:

Due to the ethnic make-up of the country, communication styles vary. In the southwest, where the people are from the Yoruba tribe, people's communication employs proverbs, sayings and even songs to enrich the meaning of what they say. This is especially true when speaking their native language, although many of the same characteristics have been carried into their English language usage. The Yoruba often use humour to prevent boredom during long meetings or serious discussions. They believe that embedding humour in their message guarantees that what they say is not readily forgotten.

Nigerians living in the south of the country tend to speak more directly. You may also find their tone slightly louder than elsewhere. They may raise their voices even more and become emotionally excited when they feel passionately about a topic. At the same time, a harsh tone is considered unwelcoming and even hostile. Nigerians prefer facial expressions that imply empathy and believe an indifferent facial expression indicates that a person is ignorant or obnoxious.

Generally speaking, Nigerians are outgoing and friendly. Communication commences with polite inquiries into the welfare of the person and his family. Such social niceties go a long way. Therefore, foreigners who take the time to get to know the Nigerian way as a person are considered friends and welcomed into a Nigerian's inner circle of family and close friends.

Nigerian communication can also be indirect and may rely on non-verbal cues. Many use gestures when communicating. They may smile to mask their true feelings, especially when disappointed or confused. Many employ indirect eye contact to demonstrate their respect for the other person. It is common to gaze at the forehead or shoulders of someone they do not know well. Very direct eye contact may be interpreted as being intrusive unless there is a longstanding personal relationship.

At the same time, there are some Nigerians who are extremely direct communicators and have no difficulty stating what is on their minds. Therefore, it is a good idea to observe the situation carefully before determining what behaviour is appropriate.

In general, Nigerians start with the general idea and slowly move into the specific, often using a somewhat circuitous route. Their logic is often contextual. They look for the rationale behind behaviour and attempt to understand the context. They tend to examine behaviour in its total context, not merely what they have observed.

Business Meetings:

Nigerians prefer to develop personal relationships prior to conducting business. Therefore, if this is the first time you are meeting with a Nigerian company, you should expect to devote a decent period of time to getting to know people on a personal level. This may take as long as two hours for an initial meeting. Any attempt to bypass this protocol will hamper your business success.

Expect the first few meetings to be somewhat formal as your Nigerian counterparts continue to become comfortable with you as a person. It is a good idea to maintain a polite and somewhat reserved manner until the person you are meeting drops some of his formality. Try to avoid using hyperbole or making exaggerated claims when presenting a business case as Nigerians are naturally suspicious of a deal that sounds too good to be true. Team members should present a united front at meetings. Any disagreement between members will be interpreted as meaning that you are not relaying the entire story and that they should proceed cautiously.

If you plan to work from an agenda, it is a good idea to send it in advance of the meeting. Nigerians will generally follow the agenda point by point and may want to consult with key stakeholders who will not be present prior to the meeting.