

How can cultural differences contribute to the success - or failure - of your international expansion? Listen to our interview with Lanie Denslow.

[“Understanding cultural differences is being aware of your cultural preferences, those of the people you are with, and how you can bridge the differences.” - Lanie Denslow Click To Tweet](#)

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Business leaders who have already expanded their companies globally often say that learning the ins and outs of local cultures is one of the first steps on the road to success. But what exactly is culture as it relates to international business?

“We’re talking about people’s behavior — their shared practices, beliefs, and common expectations for how people are going to do things and conduct their business,” says Lanie Denslow, an expert on how cultural differences shape business practices and protocols worldwide.

“For me, it’s about those shared expectations. You start to see some friction and disconnect when two people come together and don’t have the same expectations for how something’s supposed to be done.”

Lanie is a leading author, popular speaker, and advisor. She’s Founder & Principal at [World Wise Intercultural Training & Resources](#), where she works with clients to improve their global business communication skills.

Culture matters for companies large and small

Lanie argues that training international management teams on how to truly understand the unique cultural differences of their team, their partners, and their clients shows that

companies really care for their employees. This creates a culture of unity and dedication.

Educating your company on international cultures can also be financially smart “It’s expensive if you don’t,” says Denslow. She remembers how one of the largest U.S. supermarket chains failed to successfully expand to Germany.

“They went into the German market as if they were going to operate the way they do in Los Angeles or Dallas: greet everybody at the door. When it came to the groceries, they bag your groceries for you. They have a little chat with you. Well, for the Germans, that just didn’t work.”

Customers felt harassed. One seemingly minor cross-cultural miscommunication became a key factor behind the closure of 75 stores and a major financial loss.

Don’t let technology and distance dehumanize you

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues and remote work becomes standard, the opportunity to create meaningful connections with colleagues seems harder. How can you be aware of these cultural differences when working from home on virtual platforms like Slack and Zoom?

“You have to remember that human beings are human beings, even on a virtual platform,” says Denslow. “Normally, when you’re in an in-person meeting, you can use a few minutes at the beginning or end of the conversation to talk about appropriate personal topics like how the kids are and how your favorite soccer team is doing. But it’s harder to do that remotely, but it’s important to find a way to have those moments to connect with coworkers. However, it does require some thoughtful creativity.”

Denslow believes that every company, no matter the size or where it’s headquartered, can benefit from an emphasis on cultural inclusion. The sooner your team is aware of the relevance of cultural differences, the better.

“It starts with a company emphasizing cultural training and awareness. It would be best if

you had people at the top who believe that a global team is important supporting and training people from all over the world.”

Listen to the full episode [here](#).