









# WORKING WITH PEOPLE FROM LATIN AMERICAN CULTURES

The pace of life – and of business transactions – is often very different in Latin American as compared to the United States. The people who live in these countries may have a different approach to life and a different way of thinking about the world based upon their cultural heritage and traditions. Some of their fundamental values may be different – family and relationships may be more important than business. A handshake may be worth more than a stack of contracts; a slow, deliberate pace and a flexible schedule may be the norm, not the rapid pace and rigid schedules often associated with the United States business world.

REALTORS® and other business people are well-served to remember that clients and customers who came from these countries – or whose parents came from these countries – may continue to hold some of these values and observe some of these customs in their daily lives. Certainly every individual is different in their way of thinking, conducting business and the degree to which they honor the customs and traditions of their ancestors. Some may purposefully choose to honor the traditions and values of their homeland while other may change their perspective and adopt the mannerisms and lifestyle of the United States. For others, cultural characteristics and beliefs may be a blend of the past and the present and may gradually change over time.

When working with persons from Latin American cultures, it is helpful to be aware of some general characteristics and tendencies that may be present. For more specific cultural information, see the individual country cultural summaries that review additional information that may be useful during business dealings.

-  Family and strong personal relationships are very important. It may be necessary to establish a personal or business friendship before a successful business relationship can be forged.
-  Friendly, confident handshakes are expected. It is a personal, physical gesture of goodwill and friendship
-  Physical contact such as arm touching or shoulder patting is common. Once a rapport is established, the physical contact may increase and you may receive an embrace.
-  Conversation is conducted in close proximity – up close and personal. You may offend if you back away. Eye contact should be unflinching.
-  Don't rush negotiations. The pace is slow and flexible. Be on time, but expect to be kept waiting.
-  Conservative, quality business attire is worn by those serious about conducting business.
-  The predominant language is Spanish, except in Brazil where the official language is Portuguese.
-  The predominant religion is Roman Catholic, perhaps partially accounting for an emphasis upon family.

## **HELPFUL TIPS:**

- Consider having your business card translated in Spanish on the opposite side of the card.
- Always be polite, friendly and open.
- People are impressed if you know a little bit about their culture.
- Saying “no” is impolite, so you may be told, “I’ll try” or “we’ll see” when the real answer is “no.”
- Age and rank are held in high esteem.

## **Terminology & Cultural Identity**

- “Spanish people” correctly refers only to the native people of Spain.
- “Hispanic” refers to people with a lineage or cultural heritage originating in Spain, not to all persons who speak Spanish. The term is controversial and may mean different things to different people; it may even be offensive to some. Other Latinos may see no difference between the terms Hispanic and Latino.
- “Latino” refers to people with a lineage or cultural heritage originating in Latin America.
- “Mexican” is the nationality of the people of Mexico. United States citizens who are descendants of Mexicans may be referred to as “Mexican-Americans.”
- “Hispano” is a term mostly used in the U.S. Southwest to refer to descendants of Spanish settlers.
- “Chicano” is a term that has had a derogatory, discriminatory connotation; it is used to refer to Mexican descendants.

Hispanic and Latino really don’t refer to one ethnic group or culture, but rather a group of subcultures where the common denominator usually is the Spanish language.

Puerto Ricans do not want to be called Mexicans. The name Fernandez is of Spanish origin and the name Hernandez is Mexican.

A national survey of Latinos in 2002 reports that more than half of Latinos identify themselves with their country of origin, ¼ said they are Hispanic or Latino, and 1/5 said they are American. But the children of Latino immigrants are English-speakers and are closer to the American mainstream. 82% said that they are blocked from success by discrimination, and a majority said there was Latino discrimination against other Latinos. Those born in the USA are much more likely to have a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality while foreign-born Spanish-speakers are likely to have less faith in that ethic.

## **Latino Business Culture**

Cold-calling and conventional advertisements are a waste of time.

Latino business culture has a warm, friendly atmosphere and operates at a slower and more thoughtful pace. Inquire about their family and remember what they told you the last time you met. A great deal of time and thought may go into decision-making. Latinos value personal relations and prefer to do business with people they know or someone referred by an acquaintance. Give them references of other families you’ve helped into homeownership.

Give Hispanic clients intelligent and personalized advice. The key word here is HELP—share your knowledge of the real estate market. Buying a home can be a scary process, so they may need some handholding. Keep in mind that they may distrust banking.

Take them in your car, give them personal phone numbers, give them a gift (such as a plant) when they move in, and furnish a list of service people if they are used to being renters.

### **The Hispanic population has increased by more than 50 percent since 1990**

The United States 2000 Census states, “The Hispanic population increased by 57.9 percent, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000, compared with an increase of 13.2 percent for the total U.S. population. Population growth varied by group. Mexicans increased by 52.9 percent, from 13.5 million to 20.6 million. Puerto Ricans increased by 24.9 percent, from 2.7 million to 3.4 million. Cubans increased by 18.9 percent, from 1.0 million to 1.2 million. Hispanics who reported other origins increased by 96.9 percent, from 5.1 million to 10.0 million.” For further information from the 2000 Census, see “The Hispanic Population, Census 2000 Brief,” at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-3.pdf>.

According to projections by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Latino/Hispanic population will triple from 35 million in 2000 to 98.2 million in 2050. Under this scenario, the total percentage of Latinos and Hispanics in the total population will rise from 12% to 24% over this period. By 2005 they would become the nation's largest minority group.

Latino/Hispanic households are more likely to consist of married couples with children than are non-Hispanic households. Children are included in more than half (52 percent) of the 8.2 million Latino/Hispanic households. Nearly 2/3 of all US Latinos are of Mexican origin.