

How cultural directness shapes your impact in international business

You speak English well.

You're clear, structured, and efficient — and still, sometimes, your international colleagues seem a bit distant.

They don't continue the conversation, or they react more defensively than you expected.

What's happening?

It's rarely your English.



It's the **way your communication habits meet another culture's expectations** — especially when it comes to *directness*.

1. What “direct” means across cultures

Directness is often seen as a sign of honesty and efficiency — especially in low-context cultures like Germany, Austria, or the Netherlands.

In other business cultures, however, the same style can feel *too strong*, *too fast*, or *too personal*.

Example:

-  “Your price is too high.”
-  “I wonder if there's a bit of movement on the price.”

The first version gets straight to the point.

The second keeps the relationship in mind.

Neither is right or wrong — but the *impact* differs.

In English, polite phrasing and indirect language often protect the flow of communication and maintain face.

2. How cultural context changes communication

Every message carries two layers: the words and the relationship.

In **low-context communication**, words do most of the work — clarity is the priority.

In **high-context communication**, relationships and shared understanding play a bigger role — politeness protects harmony.

So when you give very clear instructions, you may think you're helping.

But for someone from a high-context culture, your clarity can sound like *distrust* or *micromanagement*.

What feels professional to you can feel impolite to someone else.

This doesn't mean you need to change who you are.
But it helps to know how others *hear* your clarity.

3. Adjusting your communication without losing authenticity

You don't need to "speak British" or hide your opinion.
You just need to make small, intentional adjustments — so your clarity is perceived as confidence, not criticism.

Here are a few practical ways:

Situation	Typical phrasing	Alternative that keeps your message, but adds diplomacy
Giving feedback	"You missed the deadline."	"It might be good to make sure the deadline works next time."
Disagreeing	"That's wrong."	"I see it a bit differently."
Making requests	"Do this again."	"Could you take another look at this?"
Negotiating	"Your offer is too expensive."	"I wonder if there's any flexibility on the price."

The message stays the same — but the tone changes everything.

4. Reflection: What shapes your communication style?

Our communication style is often invisible to us — it's how we were trained to think.
We value what our culture values: clarity, politeness, harmony, efficiency.

Take a moment to reflect:

- What does "being professional" mean to you?
- How do you show respect when you disagree?
- When you want to be efficient, how do others experience your speed or tone?

These questions help you move from *automatic language* to *intentional communication*.

Takeaway

Communicating across cultures isn't about speaking perfect English.
It's about understanding **how your words create impact** — in the minds, and emotions, of others.

The more awareness you build, the more flexibility you gain.
And with that, your international communication becomes clearer, kinder, and more effective.

Awareness is what turns clarity into connection.

Next Step

Would you like to discover how your own communication habits shape your English?
Take the **Business Communication Check** — a short self-assessment to help you understand your communication style and how to use it more effectively.

👉 [Start your free Business Communication Check](#)