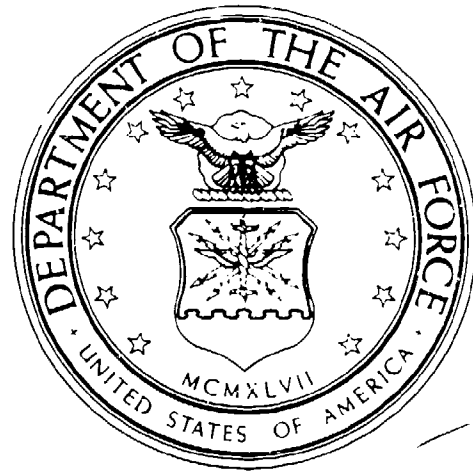


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INTRODUCTION TO UNDERSTANDING  
LATIN AMERICANS

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Army - Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict  
Langley Air Force Base, Virginia

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**INTRODUCTION TO UNDERSTANDING  
LATIN AMERICANS**

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## FOREWORD BY A-AF CLIC

Success in low-intensity conflict requires a sensitivity to cultural differences if we are to influence the behavior of foreign allies and adversaries. Understanding Latin Americans has become an important goal in view of recent political/military events occurring in Central and South America which will not subside in the near future. To assist in achieving this goal, the USAF Special Operations School conducts a Latin American Orientation Course. This course provides non-technical information, including cultural and political background, terrorist threat assessment, and personal protection techniques for personnel being assigned to, or having a professional interest in, Latin America. The course emphasis is on the countries to which the students are being assigned, or in which there is professional interest.

This paper was prepared by the USAF Special Operations School for use in their Latin American Orientation Course. It describes Latin America today in terms of the land, the people, economics, and politics. It explains cultural misconceptions and the roots of Latin culture. It then discusses Latin American values in terms of "personalismo" and Latin individualism, greetings, invitations, body language, world view, time, machismo, success, and manual labor. It explains teaching and training Latins in terms of the personal relationship, gifts, criticism and praise, reactions to misunderstandings, school scheduling, instructor status, language, lecture notes, group discussions, feedback, exams, and critiques. Finally, it includes a short Spanish language guide.

For more information concerning the Latin American Orientation Course, contact the USAF Special Operations School, Latin American Affairs Branch, Hurlburt Field, FL 32544-5000 (AUTOVON 579-7133, Commercial 904-884-7133).

## INTRODUCTION TO UNDERSTANDING LATIN AMERICANS

Latin Americans are . . . as complex "a people" as all the world they represent. There is a unique sameness that always makes communication between and with them an adventure that is both enchanting and exciting . . . and never less than challenging. This is so especially when you are one with them; and more particularly when you understand them.

--Explorings of Ideators--

### INTRODUCTION

Latin America is an area made up of 24 separate countries with vastly different cultures. The cultural differences between Bolivia and Chile alone are as diverse as those between Germany and India, and these ethnic and social differences make it very difficult to generalize about the area. Nevertheless, along with the variety in Latin American culture there are also similarities. Therefore, even though iron-clad rules cannot be made, there are some general guidelines for understanding Latin American culture that can be helpful.

### LATIN AMERICA TODAY

**The Land.** Most North Americans learned to call Latin America by the term South America, without realizing the continent is actually east as well as south of Florida, making the directional title of "Southeast" America more accurate. What we call Latin America consists of Central America, the main South American continent and the islands of the Caribbean settled by Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy. It covers one-sixth of the world's land mass with some 8 million square miles.

Almost all Latin American countries have tropical zones and at the same time many also have extensive mountains and deserts. Most of the people in Bolivia, for instance, live above 12,000 feet in a perpetually cold climate. Chile and Argentina have some of the finest ski areas in the world. Northern Chile also has one of the driest spots on earth, the Atacama desert, and Southern Chile looks like Scandinavia. In short, there is a great deal of variety in climate and geography in Latin America just as in the US.

**The People.** The people of Latin America also are as varied as North Americans. There are fewer and fewer people in Latin America who are, today, pureblooded Latins. Over 87% of the people of Mexico are of mixed descent, and 65% of Bolivians are full-blooded Indian who speak only their native languages of

Aymara and Quecha. Argentina has a population that is 97% Caucasian, many of whom are of Italian descent. In addition, many Japanese, Germans, Syrians, Dutch, Indonesians and Americans, who left the South after the Civil War, emigrated to Latin America and now identify with their adopted countries. So, racially, "Latin" does not really apply to our neighbors to the southeast.

**Economics.** Latin America presents a marked contrast between rich and poor, modern technology and the tradition of the agricultural lifestyle. Some of the most modern and beautiful cities of the world are Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Mexico City, yet only a short distance from them are villages that are much as they were hundreds of years ago. Latin America is in transition and is constantly expanding its markets and moving toward greater technological development.

**Politics.** Just as in the US, there is a wide range of political ideology in Latin America. Historically, Latin American governments tended to be authoritarian and conservative, many times directly or indirectly under the control of the military. Lately, however, there has been a trend towards more democratic forms of government with some countries overcoming fierce internal opposition to the democratization process, such as in El Salvador. Nonetheless, there are dictatorships still in being in Latin America that range from the extreme left (Cuba and Nicaragua) to the extreme right (Chile and Paraguay). Whatever the form of government in a particular country, the political scene is a busy one. Latin Americans are, generally, highly nationalistic and take a very serious and passionate interest in the political process. Political discussions, conventions, and elections are marked by a fervor (and sometimes violence) that many North Americans find exceedingly intense.

#### CULTURAL MISCONCEPTIONS

Skimpy sixth grade geography lessons and less-than-accurate television and film presentations have left many North Americans with bizarre images of Latin America, as far off the mark as their images of us, gotten from similar sources. Common pictures of Latin Americans are of the Cisco Kid, the Frito Bandito, and perhaps a beautifully fragile woman and hot-blooded, dark-eyed lover.

However, when North Americans finally meet Latin Americans they find they do not fit these images, and further, seem to be "much like us." Because the Latin American does not behave in strikingly different or exotic ways, the consequence of assuming he is "like us" is to treat him as any North American would be treated.

The result is ineffective communication and many misunderstandings. Quite often, being treated in alien ways and seemingly unfeelingly by his standards, especially if here in the US, the Latin American becomes despondent, enters culture shock, stops cooperating, and may even try to "get back" for perceived insults or injustices the North American was unaware of committing. Before long, each incorrectly attributes the other with a "personality problem" which creates even greater friction as mutual expectations continue unfulfilled. The real basis of the problem is cultural and the solution hinges upon the ability of each to recognize and adapt to each other's approach to life.

Just as we have cultural misconceptions, so do Latin Americans. Again, television and movies play an important role. It is easy to imagine the kind of picture they have of us by just a cursory glance at our current television or motion picture offerings overseas. The US appears overrun with crime, fast women, henpecked men and lost youth. Added to these impressions is a history of US military intervention in Latin America and economic exploitation by North American and multi-national corporations. They see us as wasteful materialists and imperialistic exploiters, as clever with technology but behind the curve on culture.

When the Latin American comes to the US, he finds that this country is not what he expected. Women are not as easy as he anticipated, and crime is not really as apparent as he expected. People seem to reject materialism or at least temper it with higher values. Yet, people do not take time to let go of cultural misperceptions and these continue to have a profound effect. The Latin American continues to have mixed feelings about the North American, feelings of both superiority and inferiority. On one hand, he admires our expertise and competence. He knows the North American is efficient and will get the job done, and done well. On the other hand, he sees North Americans as being cold, lacking social graces, and tied down by rules and regulations.

Overcoming cultural misconceptions is no easy task and certainly a delicate one that calls for the maximum of understanding and adaptability. Both sides must agree upon a goal for the relationship and be flexible in attempting to reach that goal. It is difficult sometimes, but not impossible.

#### ROOTS OF CULTURE

"The culture of a young people," Liberator Simon Bolivar once said of Latin America, and "a culture which has yet to reach maturity." Jose Vasconcellos, a Mexican author, described Latin America as a "cosmic race" and attributed this societal "immaturity" to the relatively recent fusion of the Spanish, Portuguese, African and Native American cultures.

The Spanish-Portuguese culture is probably the key to understanding Latin Americans. Both nations dominated colonial Latin America and social status could only be achieved by adapting to their standards. A comparison between North American and South American settling patterns is helpful in understanding differences that still exist, to one degree or another, today.

The settlers of North America came to the New World, fleeing oppression in the Old World, with their families. The Spanish and Portuguese came to explore, conquer, and exploit, and came alone. North Americans cleared small farms to support their families; the Spanish and Portuguese took vast tracts of land basically to achieve wealth and status, that is, to elevate themselves into the ranks of the nobility. Those in North America came to break free of the aristocratic traditions, establish practical and personal achievement as the key to status and, in general, to create a new way of life, keeping the best of the past and omitting what they believed to be the worst.

The Spanish and Portuguese brought their traditional system with them, and considered themselves still part of the mother country rather than colonizers. The social and economic systems they brought were transplants of the traditional, manorial life-style of Europe, a system where status is connected to birth and bloodlines, where loyalty is primarily to individuals rather than to laws or to the Constitution of the land. The wealth of the New World was exported. The Roman Catholic religion was imported and, in the 1700s, this religion viewed the world as a temporary residence with God's will alone, and not man's efforts, deciding all events, a basically anti-technological world view.

In addition, Latin America was settled between 1550 and 1650, or 100 years before the start of the Industrial Revolution. North America was colonized between 1650 and 1750 when the seeds of the Industrial Revolution were sown.

The result was that the North American, unlike the Spaniard or Portuguese, rejected European traditions and accepted technology willingly. The Latin system, by its very nature and earlier start, chose to ignore technology for centuries.

The second component of the "Cosmic Race," the Native American in what is now known as Latin America was very different from his North American counterpart. The Conquistadors found three large, highly organized, technologically proficient societies, the Incas, the Mayas, and the Aztecs, as well as a number of nomadic tribes. Where there was resistance, the Conquistadors killed many of the people. Where there was no resistance, the society was allowed to remain. Those that remained lived very similarly to the Spanish and Portuguese traditional life-style and the Conquistador needed only to co-opt the tribal leaders or eliminate them to control the tribes.

The traditional Native American social system is still very evident in some parts of Latin America and, in some cases, clashes with the Latin-style society of the Central government. At times these clashes have become violent, and they will likely be so again. While some groups of Native American descendants remain adamant in preserving their heritage, there is a great deal of cross-over from one culture to another. Because racial lines are not pure, but mixed, sometimes a change of clothing can "transform" a Native American into a Mestizo, who then mixes, unnoticed, with the mainstream of the "Latinized" society. Dealing with a Latin American who has a strong tie with the Native American culture can be doubly difficult for a North American because, while there are certain similarities between the Latin and Native American world views, there are significant differences in tone and emphasis. Complicating that is the question of which "set of clothes" the individual is wearing at any given time.

The third contribution to the "Cosmic Race" is the African. The Native American population was inadequate in number for the forced labor needs of the Spanish due to many deaths from imported "European" diseases and from the Conquest. The African slave was brought over to fill this void. Between 1790 and 1800 over 75,000 slaves a year were brought into Latin America to produce export crops of tobacco, sugar, and coffee. The Africans, unlike the Indians, readily adapted to the Latin culture and mixed freely with Native Americans, Spanish and Portuguese. The principal African influence on Latin American culture today is in the Caribbean area and is characterized by a musical way of talking and an apparently cavalier attitude toward life.

During colonial times the Spanish and Portuguese tried to prevent immigration from other European countries into Latin America. However, after independence, the small trickle of Italian and German merchants that managed to bypass the restriction became a flood. Some Latin American countries, principally Argentina and Chile, encouraged immigration, and others such as Mexico and Peru, continued the colonial restrictions. The resultant racial differences between countries are readily apparent. Although the newcomers changed the racial mix in some Latin American countries, most were eventually absorbed into the "Cosmic Race" and had little cultural impact.

The North American traveling in Latin America notices that, while there are whites, blacks and Indians, it is more difficult to define color lines than in the US. The race of an individual in Latin America is not defined by color but by cultural and social factors. These are based on education, occupation, ethnic background, language, world view, dress, and customs. So while the upper class is mostly white, a Mestizo can become a member if he acquires the traits of the upper class, not necessarily easy

without upper class advantages. Mulattos can "whiten" with money and Indians can become mestizos by changing their clothes. So the "Cosmic Race" of Jose Vasconcellos never really developed in Latin America. However the social race that evolved does make it easier to generalize about cultural traits. Moreover, the Latin American military is even easier to portray since it forms a caste within each country that tends to reflect upper or middle class values.

### LATIN AMERICAN VALUES

**"Personalismo" and "Latin Individualism."** Basic to understanding the psychological makeup of the Latin American is the concept of "personalism" or "Latin individualism." The Latin view of individualism is quite different from ours. We believe in the dignity and worth of the individual as defined by what he or she does in life. Because of our emphasis on the social equality of the individual, we expect broad similarities in behavior. Abnormal behavior or individual differences, if approved of, result in distinction. If not approved of, they bring about punishment or ostracism.

The Latin American holds the rights of man in high value verbally, but his emphasis is on the inherent uniqueness of the individual. The individual is valued simply because he is not exactly like anyone else. One is important not for what he does, but for who he is.

The emphasis on personalism and individualism has its roots in the Catholic religion and its emphasis on the soul, yet now it has lost its religious connotation. The results of this trait are that people in Latin America have a strong sense of "dignity." Man deserves respect because of his unique inner worth no matter what his position in life and despite social inequalities. Poorly chosen words and actions can be easily interpreted as insults to the individual's inner worth and are highly explosive in their effects. To promote harmony, Latin Americans have evolved a complicated system of etiquette and diplomacy for interpersonal relations.

**Greetings.** In the US, a greeting of "Hi!" or a grunt gives no offense. To a Latin American it is a put-down, rude, and impossible to do, much less to understand. The minimum Latin American courtesy is to say "Hello," to shake hands, and to ask about one's family. Anything less is an insult and provokes a deep emotional reaction. It is difficult to communicate effectively with clenched teeth.

If the North American bends a little toward the Latin American courtesy ritual, which doesn't really take very long, he sends a signal to the Latin American that he is respected as a person and matters as an individual. Often, as simple a gesture

as that will overcome the initial communication barrier and make it easier for each to better relate to the other.

**Invitations.** Hospitality is one of the cornerstones of Latin culture. Elaborate parties are common in their homeland which may even cost more than they can afford. There are some great differences between the two cultures here.

"Dutch" treat is not only not done, but is considered a put-down. If you invite someone to lunch with you, however casually, he expects you to pay and vice versa. People take turns, whether it is buying lunch, dinner, tickets to the movies, cigarettes, or rounds at the bar. If you try to divide the tab, unless they understand our system, they will think you are not only cheap but not interested in friendship or honestly working together. Drinking is an enjoyably accepted pastime for many Latin Americans (with Scotch the preferred drink in most cases) with the sharing/hosting etiquette being a very important ritual.

If you take a cigarette and put the pack back in your pocket without offering them, or leaving them out with a general offer, it will probably be misinterpreted as a rejection of the Latins personally or a definite lapse in manners and hospitality. Bring Your Own Bottle (BYOB) parties are a US custom, and it takes some getting used to for Latin Americans. In their homeland, to bring wine or liquor to someone's house tends to imply the host serves substandard quality.

North American women who make friends with Latin American women should be aware that, in some Latin countries, women visit most commonly in their bedrooms and only near-strangers are consigned to the living room. An explanation of our customs might help avoid embarrassments on either side.

**Body Language.** Whereas most North Americans stand at "arm's length" when talking face-to-face, the Latin American stands much closer. It is a common Latin complaint that North Americans are cold, they keep you at arm's length and don't want to get close.

Latin Americans of the same sex touch more than Americans of the same sex do. Young women will hold hands while walking. Men hug in greeting, while women commonly greet another woman with a light kiss on the cheek and always a handshake. Handshaking is softer than in the US. The firm, "frank," handshake is a hostile greeting in Latin America, while his soft handshake misleads Americans into thinking the person is a little less than honest and sincere.

Voice inflection, gestures, and emotion are important in any discussion for the Latin American, while we tend to consider softer tones, fewer gestures and less emotion as the sign of a poised individual. The expressiveness and emotion in talking is

again tied to the Latin concept on individuality and "Machismo." Discussions, wholehearted ones, on any subject from flying to philosophy are greatly enjoyed. They enjoy displaying their knowledge eloquently and humor, even off-colored, often appears in their private conversations.

There is no general rule about eye-contact, though some Latin Americans are taught it is respectful to look down, to lower your eyes, when with someone in authority, especially when you are "on the carpet." If this occurs it can look "shifty" to the North American who does not realize a cultural pattern of respect is operating.

When it comes to "girl watching" the Latin American does not consider it rude to stare, to visually sweep the length of the lady of interest, and to maintain an intense eye contact. North American women tend to find this a rude and uneducated characteristic.

**World View.** Every nation and culture has its own way of looking at the world and life. Sometimes differences in a few areas can create barriers to effective communication. Latin Americans are more apt to look at the whole than at the parts and pieces as technological people do. They are more apt to be present-oriented rather than future-oriented, with many things accepted as "just happening" rather than applying technological analysis and planning. In line with the "whole" approach, if a person has expertise in one area it transfers to all activities. Status also transfers and "counts" at all times and in all situations.

In learning, the Latin American will usually prefer theory first, application second, and will see abstract terms as real. There is less value in "doing" or practical application and more on "understanding" general terms and universal, philosophical truths. Learning patterns also emphasize memory.

At work the Latin American is less outcome-oriented than the technological North American. Work is not measured by what is done, but rather is an expressive function, an important part of life involving social networks and connections, which should be enjoyed. Being busy is work.

Therefore, the Latin American does not cut his day, or life, into separate pieces, time for work, time for socializing, time for sleep, but rather keeps the whole mixture going at all times, and is not used to a strict 8 to 5 schedule. He will commonly keep four or five tasks going at the same time, mixing, interrupting, socializing, and expects interruptions or multiple conversations as normal. Evening cocktail parties are often the background for major business deals. It took North Americans hundreds of years to move from a pattern similar to the Latin one

into the technological pattern of the schedules and separations needed to support technology.

**Time.** In the US and to some degree in all technological systems, time is important to measure precisely, every minute counts, and schedules keep the machines and system operating efficiently. The Latin American sees time as abstract. There is no sense of urgency in the traditional way of life, rooted in the seasons of agriculture. Urgency is not required, except in emergencies, to survive. To consider a 10 AM appointment as meaning roughly 10:30 or 11 AM is natural in Latin America and is prompt there. In the US, it is rudely late to arrive more than 2 or 3 minutes after 10 AM.

**Machismo.** The concept of "machismo" is widely known in the US, but little understood. Usually North Americans connect it to gender alone. In Latin America it is more the "essence of being masculine." The basic male outlook is involved, whether the man is tall, short, fat, skinny, ugly or handsome. A "Macho" is confident! He is a good talker, too, both eloquent and witty. He is a man of action for whom no task is impossible. In daily activities, "Macho" shows in a dislike of plans, schedules, and forms, and shows a preference for ad hoc decisions and for freewheeling.

While we tend to delegate authority to all levels of supervisors, a requirement of efficient technology, they have traditionally centralized, reserving almost all decisions for the high authority. Further, in the US, the practical, impersonal, and "rational" judgment is the preferred mode. The Latin American responds to charisma, and the "Macho," by definition, always has charisma. It is "Macho" that motivates every enlisted man and officer to want to finish first in all endeavors.

**Success.** Success for a Latin American is living happily and maintaining with a flair the position and status he was born into. In the US where birth status is basically a discarded tradition and can be detrimental to growth in technology, success is measured to a large degree by material possessions or money. When you do something well, you are paid well; therefore, money is an indicator of success and personal achievement.

**Manual Labor.** In the traditional life style, manual labor is associated with the poor and unskilled people. Proof of a higher position in life, of upward mobility, is in the degree to which you can avoid manual labor, using your hands. Middle and upper class Latin Americans have maids, never wash their own cars, polish their own shoes, or cut their own grass. To do so would be equal to a North American building an outhouse in an upper-middle class neighborhood. This accounts for the reluctance to clean quarters, as North Americans may be expected to, or to dirty their hands in hands-on work.

## TEACHING AND TRAINING

The following is presented specifically for North Americans who may find themselves in a position of training Latin Americans. Even though the examples relate directly to the classroom, the cultural trends that are evident will give the non-trainer a further insight into his dealings with Latin Americans. If throughout the teaching/training process, the North American remains cognizant of the Latin American world view as it relates to the classroom, then a delicate balance between technological process-orientation and the traditional, holistic approach to learning can be achieved. It is in the training process that the goals of both the North and Latin American are congruent from the start. That is, to learn what is taught, and this can be the foundation for a valuable education in both directions. Remembering that these are guidelines and not absolute rules, the following may prove helpful.

**The Personal Relationship.** As the Latin American cultures are still in transition and largely traditional cultures, personal relationships are the key to all functions. The "survival network" is still strong. People take priority over institutions and paper laws and regulations. The only way to get anything done in Latin America is through a "friend" or a "friend of a friend." When teaching Latin American students, this need for a personal relationship before anything can be accomplished becomes critical to training effectiveness.

When a Latin American student believes you care, you are trustworthy, and you sincerely wish to help him as an individual, he will do his best work. He will try to make you look good as his part of the relationship.

When it comes to traffic laws and other rules and regulations, you may find the Latin student regards them as impersonal and not applicable to him unless a known individual actually enforces them. A law or rule enforced upon a stranger is enforced to the smallest technicality. But where a "friend" or "friend of a cousin" is involved, the personal touch mitigates the law and may even bend it.

In the training situation you are apt to find your student asking you for favors, part of establishing a personal relationship. The very fact that he asks for a favor shows he feels a personal relationship is started and he expects you to produce. If you refuse bluntly to help, "No, I can't do that; there's a regulation . . .," the "friendship tie" is broken. You have indicated you do not want to be associated closely with him. And without a tie, there can be no learning.

One Latin American officer asked an American officer if he would get him a pair of flight gloves. The American officer quickly said, "Flight gloves are only issued to crew members and it's impossible to get them because of Air Force regs."

The Latin student saw this reply as a weak excuse. So what if the regulation prohibits issuing gloves! As an officer you should be able to get some through friends. If you won't, it means you don't care to be friends, and that is the real message.

The way to avoid this misunderstanding is to give a Latin "no." That is, to say "I'll see what I can do." It means you will try and you care. If he asks about it again, or indirectly brings up the subject, "I'm still trying," continues an indirect "no" without offense.

Being aware of the Latin American world view and taking time to invite a student to the Club for a drink or to your home for dinner will create a natural background for him to talk about his studies and difficulties, and to signal the personal touch so necessary for him to relax and learn. This, in turn, increases your training effectiveness.

**Gifts.** Gifts are part of the mutual obligations within any personal relationship in Latin America. Gifts cement the tie and ensure future obligations. A student who likes and respects an instructor will probably try to present him with a gift when he leaves, despite knowing it is against regulations. To refuse the gift is an insult, so accept and later check with your unit on the proper disposition of the gift. Some units display the more extravagant gifts in a unit display case, and some gifts may be kept. A gift of nominal value from instructor to student might also be appropriate.

**Criticism and Praise.** Criticism, to be effective, should always be done in private, very indirectly, and in as friendly and sociable way as possible. As with most people outside of the US, Latin Americans are extremely sensitive to criticism and praise. With a tradition of tact and subtlety, the Latin American picks up the slightest hint of error very quickly and finds our pattern of public "constructive" criticism a signal of utter failure and disgrace and the end of a relationship. It has been known for a Latin American student to leave training because of being publicly criticized when private and relaxed comments would have been as effective in getting the point across. Approaches such as, "It looks as if we better check over such-and-such next time before we . . . ." or "I recall when I was . . . same thing happened, but we can work it out together," will not only be more comfortable for the student, but will increase the instructor's effectiveness as it reinforces the personal relationship.

Praise in public, which is not excessive and insincere, can be highly motivating. An arm across the student's shoulder and a "Great job!" in front of others is high praise from an instructor. The praise should be earned, generous, and often.

**Reactions to Misunderstandings.** When a student feels insulted, it is apt to be hidden, leaving the North American unaware that he has unintentionally hurt or insulted his student. A direct, face-to-face, confrontation is equal to a North American punching someone in the face, therefore, "frank" discussions are not likely to occur when there is a misunderstanding. Usually the student will discuss with his other friends what has happened or will brood, a sign to start probing for a misunderstanding.

When the student feels he has really been unforgivably insulted, such as a public rakedown in front of his fellow countrymen, he may leave training abruptly. Or he may seek revenge by not performing well, by not working hard, by making mistakes that will frustrate the instructor or, in some other way, he will try to "get back" at the person for the injury he perceives.

Where you fail to spot the coyness and brooding which can mean a misunderstanding, training effectiveness can slide drastically. In one case, a North American unknowingly insulted several Latin students, who told their senior officer with the natural emotional embellishment characteristic of their culture. At the end of the course, the American's commander was informed that his instructor was incompetent with Latin students. The difficulty here is that few, if any, Latin students receive cultural communication information on American patterns, and it is a universal norm to assume your way is the "natural" way rather than a locally learned system.

**School Scheduling.** In training, the difference between technological and traditional time results in irritation and a feeling of insult on the US side that the students do not care or are lazy, and in confusion on the student's part when he does not see what all the fuss is about. A discussion between the US staff and the Latin students about the need for precise time when operating technology, so that their systems will function in a way they will be proud of, may help promote understanding and adjustment on both sides.

In Latin America, the military profession is sometimes only one of two professions. The military workday is generally short, mornings only. Therefore, you can expect less comprehension in afternoon sessions. Some appreciation should exist for the difficulty of being placed in a situation where activities never vary, have little breaks between them, and require constant, intense concentration. It is an extremely

stressful situation which takes time to adapt to. Where possible, morning schedules should be primary, with less demanding activities in the afternoon, and variety as well as acknowledging their effort to adjust, may help increase comprehension.

Latin American students tend to continually try to negotiate class times, test dates, break times, and other administrative matters. This is tied to seeking flexibility in rules through personal connections, instead of having the flexibility automatically in the rule. As they see the connection to the teacher or instructor as a personal one, to a degree, it is natural to negotiate away from technicalities here.

Where you can, show or grant flexibility. It is natural for them to assume that if a person of status cannot grant any flexibility, that person either does not really have much status or is rejecting them. In time, students may come to understand that technological approaches allow less flexibility or else the technological system becomes increasingly inefficient.

**Instructor Status.** Those who teach enjoy high status in Latin American societies. With the "whole" approach to life, there is a tendency to expect the teacher to know about things unrelated to his or her experience.

In the US, where specialization supports technology's demands, a reply such as, "I don't know, but I'll find out," is considered properly humble and appropriate. In Latin America it can destroy your status or lessen respect for you. For a US instructor the more indirect reply of, "Let me show you where to look it up," or "That will be covered next week," or "See me later on that," is more suitable to your position and more comfortable for the Latin American student until he comes to understand some of the US ways and their meaning in our life.

**Language.** Because your students are using a second or third language, a slow steady pace, with pauses, can increase your effectiveness during lectures. Generally, reading comprehension tends to be higher than spoken capabilities. In some universities and schools in Latin America, English textbooks are used, but exams and discussions are in Spanish, bringing reading comprehension to a higher level. Providing more time to read, reading material before lectures, and handouts to take along can greatly assist student comprehension.

**Lecture Notes.** Taking notes, as many US college and high school students have learned, involves a learned technique. Often the US school or training program assumes students know how. The average Latin student will try to take down every word the instructor says. Outlines or lecture texts passed out ahead of time will greatly improve comprehension and study sessions.

The most common approach in Latin countries is for the teacher, professor, or instructor to lecture from notes which the students are also reading and can later read again.

**Group Discussions.** Latin American students become frustrated, even angry, with instructors or teachers who use the US technique of asking leading questions. They prefer to follow their own, traditional pattern where the instructor gives them the material, and they give it back in the exam.

Being asked to answer questions before the class, to express their thoughts on a subject they are just learning, is very threatening to Latin students. Their status can be badly injured by failure or public correction, which equals public criticism. The instructor who wishes to gradually teach this technological method can ease the way by asking questions he is certain the student knows, or by removing the threat by saying, "What would your boss do back in your country, if . . .?"

Latin Americans tend to be deductive thinkers, preferring theory and generalizations, rather than inductive thinkers where specific examples lead to general conclusions. When examples are given, the student will probably not connect them and generalize into a conclusion, but will see each example as a whole unit, separate from others. The instructor, then, must emphasize the theory and then relate the connection to the examples, a sort of "back door" approach.

Rather than the "streamlined," objective, stay-to-the-point North American presentation, Latin students respond to and learn more quickly from someone who is not only eloquent, emotional, and able to relate personal experiences, but who is also able to display a depth of knowledge. The US style tends to bore them and lessen their attention span.

They prefer to reach for understanding rather than to have material obviously simplified. Requiring the student to reach implies the instructor's knowledge is high. Simplification implies instructors are substandard.

With military students the pattern has not been for the students to "brain storm" but to follow the group leader's choices. This ties to traditional patterns where a lower status person does not correct the higher status person openly, or brashly put forward conflicting ideas. Leadership of a group goes to the person with the status or rank in the military, not necessarily to the most knowledgeable. This is another instance of inherited or achieved status spreading to all situations.

**Feedback.** Do not expect the Latin American student to indicate when he does not understand, for this public admission is very damaging to his status and his character. Therefore, use

plain, clear English and avoid slang. Grant more time for reading. Asking the student to repeat what you said is one technique. If he hesitates, say, "The section, then, does usually measure 141 ft." Small tests after a lecture can also provide you feedback on whether to repeat or present information differently the next session.

**Exams.** In Latin America, exams are usually essay style and Latin students are very skilled with these types of tests. United States style, multiple choice, objective tests are strange and difficult, especially without any training in how to think through these types of questions. Questions phrased in the negative form are particularly difficult for anyone who has English as a foreign language. For example, "Which of the following is not a characteristic of . . . ." "Cooperating to graduate" with each other on exams, to help friends and fellow countrymen, is apt to occur unless there is personal supervision, which removes the "rules" from the impersonal to the personal.

As mentioned before, the average Latin American student does want to be at the top of the class, a natural motivator. At the same time, however, they will not overtly compete with their peers or against higher status individuals. This, again, is part of traditional values where personal harmony, at least on the surface, is more valuable than expediency. While you keep students informed of their grades, competition should be downplayed and, if possible, grades should not be publicly displayed by name. One instructor privately assigned "handles," (CB names) and the response seemed quite positive.

The most common Latin American study technique is group study, which can also produce very similar answers on exams. In the training situation, this can be to the instructor's advantage for more advanced students will help those just starting or having difficulties. Bringing the students together just prior to an exam and having a review has proven very helpful in raising test scores.

The Latin American system stresses memorizing material and the students can easily feel overloaded. More exams, covering less information than is normal for the US system, may be more effective.

**Critiques.** When critiquing students, keep in mind the previous comments discussed concerning avoiding public criticism.

## SUMMARY

The keys to effective communication with Latin American students, then, are primarily:

1. Where a genuine, personal relationship exists, the path will be much smoother despite any unintentional misunderstandings.
2. Friendship implies mutual obligations--favors, loans, help past red tape and regulations. There is a way to say "no" without offense.
3. Your status as a teacher or instructor is a strong advantage.

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## SPANISH LANGUAGE GUIDE

SPANISH	ENGLISH
<b>Greetings</b>	
Hola	Hello
Buenos dias	Good morning/good day
Buenas tardes	Good afternoon
Buenas noches	Good evening/good night
Como esta (usted)?	How are you? (formal)
Como estas?	How are you? (familiar)
Bien, gracias, y usted (tu)?	Well, thank you, and you
Adios	Good bye
Hasta luego	Until later
<b>Be Polite</b>	
Si, por favor	Yes, please
No, gracias	No, thank you
Con permiso	Excuse me (to get by someone)
Perdone me	Excuse me (attention/bumping)
Dispense me	Excuse me (mistake)
Lo siento (mucho)	I'm (very) sorry
De nada	You're welcome
Senor	Mr
Senora	Mrs/Ma'am
Senorita	Miss
<b>Language</b>	
Habla usted Ingles?	Do you speak English?
No hablo Espanol	I don't speak Spanish
No entiendo	I don't understand
No se	I don't know
Habla mas despacio, por favor	Speak slower, please
<b>Money</b>	
Puede cambiar dinero aqui?	Can you change money here?
Que es el precio?	What's the price?
Cuanto cuesta?	How much does it cost?
Caja de cambio	Exchange office
Caja de seguridad	Security box
La llave	The key
<b>Time</b>	
Que hora es?	What time is it?
Es la una	It is one o'clock
Son las dos	It is two o'clock
(Mas) Temprano	Early (earlier)

(Mas) Tarde  
Manana  
Manana por la manana  
Ayer

Late (later)  
Tomorrow  
Tomorrow morning  
Yesterday

### Driving

Alto/pare  
Parada (de auto bus)  
Ceda el paso  
Conserva su derecha  
Cuidado  
Peligro  
Espacio  
Una via  
Estacionamiento (prohibido)  
No hay paso  
Velocidad Maxima X KPH

Stop  
(bus) stop  
Yield right of way  
Keep right  
Warning  
Danger  
Slow  
One way  
Parking (prohibited)  
No thoroughfare  
Maximum speed X kilometers per  
hour  
Detour

Desvio

### Signs

Abierto  
Cerrado  
Entrada  
Salida  
Servicio/bano  
Senoras/Mujeres/Damas  
Senores/Hombres/Caballeros  
Prohibido fumar

Open  
Closed  
Entrance  
Exit  
Restroom/bath  
Women  
Men  
No smoking

### Eating

Pescado  
Pollo  
Salchicha/Chorizo  
Tocino  
Carne  
Ensalada  
Papa  
Frito  
Huevo/Blanquillo  
Manzana  
Bien cocido  
Muy sabroso  
Comida  
Desayuno  
Almuerzo  
Cena

Fish  
Chicken  
Sausage  
Bacon  
Meat  
Salad  
Potato  
Fried  
Eggs  
Apple  
Well done (well cooked)  
Very delicious  
Meal (food)  
Breakfast  
Lunch  
Dinner

## Drinking

Agua (purificada)  
Cafe  
Leche  
Jugo de Naranja  
Cerveza  
Vino

Water (purified)  
Coffee  
Milk  
Orange Juice  
Beer  
Wine

## Days

Domingo  
Lunes  
Martes  
Miercoles  
Jueves  
Viernes  
Sabado

Sunday  
Monday  
Tuesday  
Wednesday  
Thursday  
Friday  
Saturday

## Numbers

Uno  
Dos  
Tres  
Cuatro  
Cinco  
Seis  
Siete  
Ocho  
Nueve  
Diez  
Veinte  
Cincuenta  
Ciento (cien)  
Mil

One  
Two  
Three  
Four  
Five  
Six  
Seven  
Eight  
Nine  
Ten  
Twenty  
Fifty  
One Hundred  
Thousand

## Weights and Measures

Un centfmetro  
Un metro  
Un kilometro  
Un gramo  
Un kilogramo (un kilo)  
  
Un litro

One centimeter (.39 inch)  
One meter (39.37 inches)  
One kilometer (.62 miles)  
One gram (.035 ounce)  
One kilogram (one kilo) (2.2  
pounds)  
One liter (1.06 quarts)

## LATIN AMERICA ORIENTATION COURSE

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