

# Case Study

## Chapter 3

Tina works in marketing for a large post-secondary institution that is trying to recruit more international students from China. She travels to Beijing to meet with a government representative Yan who works with students wanting to study abroad. Before she leaves for China, Tina communicates with Yan several times over email. The email messages are professional and respectful. Yan writes very well in English.

Tina has never been to China before and is looking forward to her two-week visit. Tina spends a lot of time making travel arrangements, preparing her materials, and even learning some Mandarin phrases.

When she meets Yan at her office in Beijing, Yan is cold and distant, not smiling and not making eye contact even when Tina, smiling, greets her in Mandarin. When Tina shares her ideas, Yan nods, looks down and does not offer any input. Tina returns to her hotel, dejected, not sure what to do before tomorrow's meeting with Yan and her associates. Tina hopes that Yan will be more friendly and communicative.

- 1. What should Tina do before the next meeting?**
- 2. How should Tina handle Yan's behaviour?**
- 3. Tina hopes that Yan will be more friendly and communicative. Are these reasonable expectations? Why or why not?**
- 4. What could Tina have done differently before travelling to China?**
- 5. What responsibility do companies and employees have when dealing with others from a different culture?**

### Sample Answers:

1. Tina should research Chinese culture and ways of communicating. If she does so, she will quickly realize that in China direct eye contact can be considered rude, especially when first meeting someone, and that smiling can be construed as too familiar. Tina would also understand that disagreeing with someone's ideas is considered disrespectful and dishonourable, which is why Yan did not say anything when Tina was sharing her ideas.
2. Tina should approach Yan with a sense of cultural relativism, defined in the text as "the principle that a culture and its beliefs and values should be viewed from the standpoint of that culture itself, not another culture" rather than ethnocentrism, defined in the text as "the tendency to use one's own culture as a basis for evaluating other cultures." She could also encourage Yan to share her ideas first or even through email since this communication method worked for them in the past and allows one-way communication without fear of disrespecting or embarrassing the communicator who is sharing ideas.
3. These are not reasonable expectations as this behaviour would not be considered culturally appropriate in China. Instead, Tina should make an effort to understand Yan's culture and adjust her own behaviour accordingly, especially since she is the one visiting, and she will be meeting several other people in Beijing.
4. Tina could have researched Chinese culture in order to understand the communication style and cultural norms. She could have also checked with her institution's International Centre or Human Resources to see if they had any material she could review. If not, she could recommend creating materials for future visitors, as well as staff and faculty so they have a better understanding of international students from this country.

5. Companies and employees are increasingly interacting with people from other cultures, both here in Canada and abroad. Therefore, they have a responsibility to respect cultural diversity and interact with others in a sensitive and respectful manner. Companies should provide employees with cultural diversity training and resources; employees should request this if it's not currently available.