

to “make the public aware” of the dangers of something and to induce people to take preventive or corrective action. Thus there are campaigns concerning tobacco, addictive drugs, alcohol, domestic abuse, handguns, and many specific diseases. Often these groups are started by someone who has either suffered personally from the problem or lost a loved one to it.

Self-help. Americans assume themselves to be improvable. We have already mentioned their participation in various educational and training programs. Mention has also been made of the array of “self-help” and “how-to” books Americans buy as well as of the number of group activities they join in order to make themselves “better.” Through things they read or groups they join, Americans can stop smoking, stop using alcohol, lose weight, improve their physical condition or memory or reading speed, manage their time and money more effectively, become better at their jobs, and seek to improve themselves in countless other ways.

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” U.S. Americans say. People who want to make things better can do so if only they have a strong enough motivation.

“Just do it!”—the Nike slogan—has an all-American sound.

TIME

For Americans, time is a resource that, like water or coal, can be used well or poorly. “Time is money,” they say. “You only get so much time in this life; you’d best use it wisely.” As Americans are trained to see things, the future will not be better than the past or the present unless people use their time for constructive, future-oriented activities. Thus, Americans admire a “well-organized” person, one who has a list of things to do—either on a piece of paper or in a personal digital assistant—and a schedule for doing them. The ideal person is punctual (that is, arrives at the scheduled time for a meeting or event) and is considerate of other people’s time (that is, does not “waste people’s time” with conversation or other activity that has no visible, beneficial outcome).

Early in his long and productive career, American anthropologist Edward T. Hall lived and worked on reservations belonging to two Native

American Indian groups, the Navajo and the Hopi. He discovered that the Native American's notion of time was very different from the one he learned growing up as a European American man. In describing his experience on the reservation, Hall later wrote,

During my five-year stay on the reservations, I found that, in general, the Indians believed that whites were crazy, although they didn't tell us that. We were always hurrying to get someplace when that place would still be there whenever we arrived. Whites had a kind of devil inside who seemed to drive them unmercifully. That devil's name was Time. (1992, 218)

The American attitude toward time is not necessarily shared by others, especially non-Europeans. Most people on our planet are more likely to conceive of time as something that is simply there, around them, not something to "use." One of the more difficult things many international businesspeople and students in the United States must adjust to is the notion that time must be saved whenever possible and used wisely every day.

In their efforts to use their time wisely, Americans are sometimes seen by international visitors as automatons, inhuman creatures who are so tied to their clocks, their schedules, and their daily planners that they cannot participate in or enjoy the human interactions that are necessary to a fulfilling life. "They are like little machines running around," one international visitor said.

The premium Americans place on efficiency is closely related to their concepts of the future, change, and time. To do something efficiently is to do it in the way that is quickest and requires the smallest expenditure of resources. This may be why e-mail and text messages have become such popular means of communication in American society. Students commonly correspond with their professors by e-mail or text message rather than waiting to talk with them during their office hours. Likewise, businesspeople frequently check their electronic mail not just while on the job but also before and after work, on weekends, and even while on vacation. Popular magazines offer suggestions for more efficient ways to shop, cook, clean house, do errands, raise children, tend the yard, and on and on. The Internet provides immediate access to all kinds of information and products. Americans have come to expect instant responses to phone calls, e-mails, text messages, faxes, and other forms of communication. Many quickly

become impatient if the responses aren't immediate, even when there is no apparent urgency.

In this context the "fast-food industry" is an excellent example of an American cultural product. McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, and other fast-food establishments prosper in a country where many people want to minimize the amount of time spent preparing and eating meals. The millions of Americans who take their meals at fast-food restaurants cannot be interested in lingering over their food while talking with friends, in the way millions of Europeans do. As McDonald's restaurants have spread around the world, they have come to symbolize American culture, bringing not just hamburgers but an emphasis on speed, efficiency, and shiny cleanliness. The typical American food, some observers argue, is fast food.

Also in this context, it will surprise many visitors from Europe or Japan to see that some of the newer electronic communications devices commonly used in their countries, such as wands to pay for purchases, are not widespread in the United States. Their admiration for technology and efficiency does not necessarily mean that U.S. Americans always have the most advanced technological devices at their disposal.

ACHIEVEMENT, ACTION, WORK, AND MATERIALISM

"He's a hard worker," one American might say in praise of another. Or, "She gets the job done." These expressions convey the typical U.S. American's admiration for a person who approaches a task conscientiously and persistently, seeing it through to a successful conclusion. More than that, these expressions convey an admiration for achievers, people whose lives center on accomplishing some physical, measurable task. Social psychologists use the term *achievement motivation* to describe people who place a high value on getting things done. Affiliation is another type of motivation, shown by people whose main intent is to establish and maintain relationships with other people. Obviously, the achievement motivation predominates in America.

Visitors from abroad commonly remark, "Americans work harder than I expected them to." (Perhaps these visitors have been excessively influenced