



Cultural differences and diverse environments Implications for farm owner-farm worker relationships

The following is a list of cultural and environmental observations of Latinos migrant workers in Vermont that may or may not apply to the Latino workers on your farm. Each individual comes from a unique home and cultural environment. The following information is to provide some insight into how culture may impact the workplace. Additionally, this information may assist employers with decisions when working with a Latino workforce.

Respect of authority and hierarchy

- There is a high regard granted to people in authoritative roles and power positions, such as bosses and managers
- Expectation that work delegation and decisions are made by the boss
- The business owner has final say (worker might request meeting with owner rather than manager)
- Family hierarchy is important – youth are taught to respect their elders. An older brother may take on authoritative role if parents are absent
- Conflict may arise due to co-workers or others not viewed as supervisors giving orders or correcting work methods

Examples:

- Pedro does what is asked of him without questioning why and doesn't complain.
- Daniel asks for a meeting to clarify some issue with the owner even though there is a manager that has been put in charge of the Latino workers
- Marcos, though more experienced, defers to the instructions or opinions of his older brother.
- Hugo decides to leave because Pablo, who has been there the longest, tells him what to do all the time. Hugo says that if the boss didn't like how he worked the boss would tell Hugo himself.

Recommendations

- ✓ Co-worker/boss/supervisor roles should be clearly defined
- ✓ Communication should be directed to all workers or individual worker in question rather than utilizing the best Latino English speaker
- ✓ Training should be done by owner and/or manager rather than another worker especially if the new worker is not family
- ✓ If another worker is expected to train, the owner/manager should speak with both new and old worker (s) to clarify that the boss is delegating training responsibilities to the experienced worker.
- ✓ Use an interpreter whenever possible to ensure communication is understood and consider taking a Spanish class to allow better

communication.

Machismo and women in the work place

- Women and men have distinct societal roles
- Traditionally, men provide for the family and women are in charge of home
- Women may look to their husband/boyfriend to make decisions
- A woman supervisor might have more difficulty managing male employees. Male co-workers might delegate responsibilities to female co-workers but a female co-worker might not delegate responsibilities to a male co-worker.

Examples:

- Dora and Jorge have the same job and work the same number of hours. Dora speaks more English than Jorge. When you ask Dora a question in front of Jorge, Dora looks at Jorge before he answers or gives her permission to talk.
- You notice that Alex often tells Maria to do certain things at work for him but she never tells him what to do.
- Sara is the farm owner and manager. She is in charge of making sure all the work gets done correctly in the parlor. You notice that your male employees call you and listen to your instructions more readily than Sara's.

Recommendations

- ✓ Clearly define women co-workers as equal and women supervisors as authoritative figure (decision maker)
- ✓ Be aware of role conflict between married couples due to both partners working. Recognize that a female employee might be responsible not only for working all of her hours but to cook and clean.
- ✓ If boss needs information directly from the woman worker, approaching her directly without presence of her husband/ male co-workers might be more successful. HOWEVER, it is not recommended that a male supervisor or co-worker be alone in a room with a female employee.
- ✓ Use an interpreter whenever possible to ensure communication is understood
- ✓ Consider taking a Spanish class to allow better communication

Living standards & gender roles

- Many Latino workers in Vermont come from rural living environments – basic house structure, outhouse, different sanitary conditions
- Workers may not have used microwaves, dishwashers, ovens, indoor plumbing, indoor heat before coming to the US
- Women are traditionally assigned all household chores, cleaning, and cooking in addition to jobs outside of the home. Mothers often take care of their sons until they marry – at which point their wives take over the mother's role.

Examples:

- You notice that the wash settings are on delicate and cold water. You ask if this is how he usually washes his clothes and Juan says that he just

- turns the dial until he hears water starting to fill up the washer.
- Poncho asks for a different kind of coffee. He says that the Folgers that he has been using is really grainy. After investigating further you realize that Poncho has been trying to prepare ground coffee as if it were instant.
 - Sofia and Eli work the same number of hours but you notice that Sofia does all the cooking and cleaning not only for Eli but for the rest of the workers as well.
 - Your workers throw their toilet paper in the trash bag or on the floor instead of flushing it.
 - The heat in the house is always turned up really high.

Recommendations

- ✓ Provide a clear explanation of appliance use if they have not used them before
- ✓ House and appliance safety considerations
- ✓ Explain use of and safety for unfamiliar cleaning products
- ✓ Clearly define house maintenance expectations
- ✓ Explain housing and maintenance costs especially heat and water usage
- ✓ Give clear directions if there are guidelines on how you would like heat and water to be used
- ✓ Do monthly housing inspections to make sure guidelines are being followed and to follow up with employees on any questions or concerns there are about appliance use and house upkeep.
- ✓ Use an interpreter whenever possible to ensure communication is understood
- ✓ Consider taking a Spanish class to allow better communication.

Family values/community relationships

- Sacrifice to come to the USA – Choice made to support family
- Close-knit family in Mexico – workers provide moral and economic support to family and community who are far away
- Workers struggle with loneliness, nostalgia, and the heavy sense of responsibility
- Machismo – a strong or exaggerated sense of manliness, may prevent male workers from expressing their emotions

Examples:

- Sergio traveled over 5000 miles by land and now lives in remote Vermont. He hasn't left the farm in over a year.
- Juanita buys \$100 of phone cards every week to call her family in Mexico.
- Abel sends 90% of his earnings home to his parents to support their everyday expenses and to send his little sister to high school.
- Pedro usually sings in the parlor while milking but Sunday nights he is always a bit quiet after phone calls home to Mexico. If you ask how he is, however, he always says he's fine.
- Marta is pregnant but does not want her family in Mexico to know because she is ashamed that she will no longer be able to work to support them.

Recommendations

- ✓ Support farm visits from community members to help combat loneliness
- ✓ Facilitate recreational and social activities

- ✓ If a worker seems down but says he is ok, continue trying to connect with him periodically as he might just not be expressing his emotions.
- ✓ Hire family members and community members, allow workers to self-replace or be involved in hiring process when possible
- ✓ Facilitation of communication and money transfer (cell phones, land lines, international phone cards, Western Union)

Religion

- Many Latinos have close ties to religious institutions
- Catholic and Evangelical are the primary religions They have differing practices but dedication to religious observances and participation in religious community is important
- Inability to attend place of worship, celebrate holidays, mourn in traditional ways increases feelings of isolation

Examples:

- Fermin has been working for you for 2 years. The only thing hanging on his walls is a picture of the Virgin de Guadalupe.
- In many parts of Latin America, an overnight wake is held at the home of the deceased. Family, friends, and neighbors arrive at the house to mourn the loss, view the body, and support the surviving family members.
- Attending a Sunday service in Latin America is a large part of many communities.

Recommendations

- ✓ Identify worker religion
- ✓ Support religious farm visits if workers want them
- ✓ Support workers in attending church services if possible
- ✓ Acknowledge and respect mourning traditions in case of loss
- ✓ Consider taking Spanish classes to allow for better communication

Conflict/discomfort avoidance

- Cultural desire to promote positive relationships and avoid conflict or disharmony (Avoiding conflict sometimes results in overnight departure)
- May indicate understanding of instructions despite confusion
- May agree to something despite no intention of follow through

Examples

- You explain to Jose that you want him to scrape the alley ways once a day from here on out. You ask if he understands and he says yes. A few days later you notice that the alley ways haven't been scraped since your conversation with Jose.
- Miguel tells you he is leaving the following day because he has decided to go back to Mexico. You find out later that he is working on a neighboring farm.
- You ask Arturo if he would like to go to your house for dinner. He says yes but then never shows up.

Recommendations

- ✓ Clarification of plans or requests
- ✓ Be aware of body language indicating discomfort
- ✓ Confirm understanding of instructions

- ✓ Follow-up with workers if there was no follow through
- ✓ Use an interpreter whenever possible to ensure communication is understood
- ✓ Consider taking Spanish classes to allow better communication

Language/Education

- Educational systems in rural Latin America are at lower standards than the US
- The average worker attends 6 years of school
- Illiteracy is a concern especially with older workers and workers from rural Guatemala
- Spanish may be a second language
- Due to difficulty understanding English, workers frequently depend on both positive and negative body language for clarification

Examples:

- You ask Edgar to fill out the W-4 form in Spanish. He gives it back as says he would rather you fill it out.
- When you listen to Javier and Jose speak you don't recognize any words despite having studied Command Spanish.
- You give Lorenzo a dictionary and try to show him how to use it but it doesn't seem like he understands.
- You hear from the farm interpreter that Martin is worried that you are angry with him. He told her that you walked by looking really upset. A pin for the tractor had just broken so you were angry but not at him.

Recommendations

- ✓ Know workers language abilities and limitations
- ✓ Provide training in Spanish
- ✓ Use visual aids if worker is illiterate
- ✓ Recognize that your body language even when you are not talking to an employee could be interpreted positively or negatively
- ✓ Be aware of what body language conveys- if language abilities vary reiterate instructions to worker in private rather than highlight limitations in a group
- ✓ Use an outside interpreter for training, clarifying worker responsibilities, and resolving conflict to avoid disharmony among workers
- ✓ Consider taking Spanish classes to improve communication

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