

## Learning - While in Rome do as Romans do

Except this write up is not about Rome but USA!

As per Google, culture is “the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.” Will revisit this statement towards the end of my experiences.

The culture of a nation is primarily made up by (among other things) its people, its food and (more importantly) in the US context, its sports. And these will be the focus of the challenges I faced during my initial days here in USA.

Let me begin with the first one - food.

When I first landed in USA, I liked the city, the surroundings, the people, the weather – almost everything seemed perfect. The biggest challenge I faced was around the food habits, compared to what I had in my home nation. I was out grocery shopping at Walmart on day one. At one point, I hungrily made my way towards the in-store McDonald. I scanned the menu and ordered the cheeseburger - going literally by its meaning – Cheese-burger! (Did I tell you that I do not eat beef!).

I was skeptical when I found something in the burger that did not look like cheese! – walked back to the counter and said, “I only wanted a **cheese-burger** with veggies”. The person looked equally confused at this ask. Nevertheless, he went back in – added some veggies to the burger and handed it right back to me!

And that is when I found out what Cheeseburgers really are.

I believe that there is a learning in anything and everything one’s experiences. And so, I (along with my family members) diligently started looking up menus and ingredients before ordering food at restaurants (or even while making grocery purchases). Food habits have also evolved, and nowadays it is a lot easier to find vegetarian / vegan options.

Now onto sports which can prove to be an even more difficult cultural challenge. Typically, discussions with friends at work or with family revolved around sports. And I would draw a blank at these discussions.

I had to open a bank account and one of the only branches open on a Sunday was a US bank (again inside a Walmart). The lady at the bank counter had run out of Packers cards – and so asked if I would be okay with a Vikings card! To me, new to US and someone who knew nothing about football, let alone team names, Packers and Vikings were as alien as the game of Cricket is to Americans!

I nodded a quick yes and got my account opened. No sooner did I use my card at the checkout register, I realized my mistake – A Vikings supporter in Wisconsin. How could you! I tried correcting my mistake by applying for a new card – but unfortunately, I got another brand-new Vikings card. Needless to say, I now keep that card in the safe confines of my home and do not use it at all!

Over a period, I learnt the rules of the sport, the teams involved etc. In fact, my son tried his hand at football for a year. I now eagerly look forward to the football games each weekend. Hopefully, I will get to see the Packers at Superbowl this year!

And so, here finally comes the analysis of the Google definition. Culture evolves over a period. When one has spent a greater part of his life (40 to be exact) in a different land with a different culture, it definitely takes time to adjust to the new people, new food habits, new sports and to sum it up , its culture – what that means is I now get to keep up with both football and cricket!

I guess my son, who came to US at an early age, is doing much better at assimilating with the American culture. I do quite a bit of learning from him these days.

Whether it is greeting others with hugs, wearing of shoes inside houses, being more upfront in communication, I can keep writing about cultural challenges - but you know what, I cannot write about all that – because I need to submit this on time. (that is also a cultural challenge in itself!)