

The American Way

There is a contradiction in how Americans view themselves and how they are perceived around the world. Certainly when asked, people all over the planet use words like “rich”, “powerful”, and “big” to describe America. Yet when asked to describe Americans, the very same people often use terms like “naïve”, “square”, and even “stupid”. Clearly the inconsistency between “rich and powerful” and “naïve and stupid” is so enormous that the question begging an answer is “why doesn’t the world understand us”?

Certainly some of the negative image comes from jealousy insofar as it is en vogue to speak poorly of Americans and eases some of the envy one might feel at all the U.S. affords its citizens. Also true is that arrogance drives some of the negativity because people who see themselves as smarter than others need a way to explain how others (Americans) seem to be achieving so much more than they are.

While these two causal factors provide some insight for the bad image, it does not give us the understanding we need to counter it or neutralize it. The fact remains that the par between how people around the world view America and Americans is a function of what we are as a country and who we are as individuals.

As a nation, the United States has dominated the world economically (and other ways) because we were the first nation to truly recognize all that can be gained by encouraging and enabling people to pursue not “making a living” but rather wealth. The U.S. is a nation where many people do not look for jobs, but rather devote thought and energy in figuring out how they can become rich. This has led to innovations, global expansion, and the sophisticated views of business as a science the world has ever known.

As individuals, Americans genuinely try to pursue wealth while (most of the time) staying within the ethical and moral boundaries our society has embraced. While there are certainly abuses and cases of excess greed and deceit, the fact remains that most Americans adhere to the code of proper business behavior that has been developed as a central component of the American approach to business as a science. While this may be another reason other people around the world view Americans as “square”, it is also a primary source of American business power.