

WHAT SOUTH AFRICANS CAN TEACH THE AMERICANS.

To quote Julian Aires, "Welcome to America" experiences are those occurrences that cause newly-arrived South Africans to shake their heads in wonder or disbelief. Like the exigencies involved in buying a car, through cable TV channels. Everything is so utterly advanced and futuristic here insignificant as a grain of sand on the great Californian beach-scape.

But it's time to fight back.

There are some things we know more about than them. Here's a list of some of them.

1. CURRENCY

Any South African living abroad is an expert on such things as rates of exchange, legal and illegal foreign exchange limits, and the rate of interest on fixed deposits in the funny countries like Singapore, Guernsey, Bermuda, Jersey etc. They can tell you how to get bank statements mailed to any address via any number of third party countries and through a maze of false names. Everyone is familiar with the mechanics of offshore bearer trusts, mezzanine dividend repatriation stripping, flow-pass withholding tax pyramids. I'm sure there are lots of us who could tie Alan Greenspan in a knot.

Related to this the shadowy code-speak, via which two total strangers can communicate on the phone about matters of questionable finance deals and foreign investment, and make it sound like they're talking about flowers in England or chocolates in Switzerland.

2. NEGOTIATING WORK SCHEDULE DETAILS WITH LIVE-IN MAIDS.

Ever spoken to a live-in who works for an American? You'll be shocked to hear what's expected of them compared to what your maid does for you. Nuff said, except for a small piece of advice, don't let them meet.

3. COPING WITH DROUGHTS

Water saving and/or rationing has a different meaning to us than to Californians. Anyone remember the tragedy of Durban some years ago? When you were only allowed 200 litres (50 gallons) of water per day per FAMILY? And anyone who transgressed had their taps shut off. In the Transvaal we learnt to wash our cars with bathwater, to plant artificial flowers and cacti in the garden, and shower with a friend. Here in the severe droughtland of Southern Cal they talk of raising the price of water 5%!! We can also teach them that if they raise the price of water too high then worse problems will arise because the water company will lose profits due to lower consumption.

4. THE BENEFITS TO BUSINESS OF REFUSING TO ACCEPT RETURNED MERCHANDISE ONCE IT HAS BEEN PAID FOR.

This point is so obvious that it is unnecessary to explain. Why take back a dress that has been eight times? Or a Nintendo game that some kid has mastered? If one retailer had the guts to put his foot down then all the others would follow like sheep. Jus think how much cheaper everything would be if the extra ten percent for returns was not built into the price of merchandise.

5. BRAAIS.

Before you argue with me, let me postulate that the most expensive Weber gas barbeque available in Cal cannot hold a candle to Safari Sosaties cooked on Mopani wood from the Northern Transvaal. How about stamp mealies and gravy, hard white non-sweet mealies, or banana fritters? Do you honestly want me to believe that frozen half pound 100% beef burger bought from the Price Club can compare with Oom Jakkals' corriander frikkadels? Please!!

6. HOOLIGANISM AT RUGBY MATCHES.

It is my inalienable right to scream at spectators supporting opposition teams, to threaten imbeciles who stand up in front of me during critical five metre scrums, and be amused by colatorial entertainment in the form of Boere throwing naartjies. Furthermore, I uphold the right to inject my spanspek with brandy, and carve a swear word on the wooden bench.

7. EDUCATION REGARDING WHAT IS DISPOSIBLE AND WHAT IS NOT.

In seriousness, I think that it is a disgrace that so much good and re-usable stuff is thrown away and wased. In the home remodelling game we throw away old-fashioned bath-tubs, sinks, cupboards, mirrors, carpeting and a host of other items that work perfectly and do not look so nice. We take them to the landfill where they are crushed by large earthmoving machines. Either there are no poor people in this land, or else nobody is getting to them and telling them to come and get perfectly good household items, including stoves, sofas etc for free. The doors we throw away would make luxury homes for the underpriveledged poor of Africa.

The American culture also provides for things to be thrown away because they are cheap. Thus plastic manufactures produce beautiful cutlery etc that is thrown away because it' cheaper to replace than clean.

It is also a sad indictment that so few charities will accept old clothing.

8. HOW TO PUSH INTO THE FRONT OF A MOVIE LINE.

Since Americans refuse to use a system like Computicket, no self-respecting South African would dream of joining the back of a queue to a movie.

9. HOW TO IRRITATE TAX-PAYING CITIZENS WITH BILINGUALISM.

We are so used to the hassles associated with forced bilingualism on Tv, adverts, bottle labels etc. that we really can teach Americans how to do it well. For instance, we can teach them how to fold the instruction leaflets in medicine packages that weave in and out of Afrikaans, making them impossible to read. Or how to double the aggravation value of announcements at the airport which have to be repeated in the other official language. And how to waste money on translators, printing copy checkers etc. etc.

Don't laugh, you're in for a real deja vu with the Spanish language, now that you have escaped Afrikaans.

10. CENSORSHIP.

Boy, if any South Afrikan knows about one thing it has to be be censorship. Also, by the way, how to get illegal magazines, political books, and other contraband on the grey market.

11. THE METRIC SYSTEM.

Besides the point that forty nine millimetres is so much easier to use than one inch and one hundred and seventeen one hundred and twenty eighths there are other more subtle benefits to consider : to say you ran sixteen kilometres sounds much more impressive than ten miles.

12. BEER.

LION LAGER, CASTLE LAGER, OLLSENS. Need I say more????