

## Security Briefs 20 – Strategic Intercultural Relations Part 2

Last episode we discussed that security environments can change rapidly and with little advance warning. And we talked about a security strategy that can help you in your local interactions with people called Strategic Intercultural Relations or S. I. R. This strategy is both a sound theological doctrine and good security strategy – whether you are in a high-risk environment or a lower risk one.

S. I. R. is built around the three core elements of Legitimacy, Awareness, and Respect. In this episode we will begin to talk about Legitimacy.

### Legitimacy

Legitimacy is broadly defined as the quality of being legal, reasonable, acceptable, fair, and honest. It is something that I hope we strive for as workers. When we are seen as *illegitimate*, it increases unwanted scrutiny of our activity and is a poor reflection on our character and Christ's character.

Part of being legitimate is never denying or being afraid of acknowledging our spirituality. This should go without saying, but sometimes people wrongly compromise this important principle. We should acknowledge our relationship with Christ, but we should do so in a wise, respectful, and culturally appropriate manner.

The area where many expats struggle is the very first part of legitimacy. That is answering the simple question, "What are you doing here?" This is asked by everyone from government officials – including at passport control when you first enter the country – to your friends, neighbors, and random people on the street. How you answer this question will go a long way toward how you are received and treated in a country or community.

### Problems

We generally run into problems in the following areas:

1. We are too forthcoming. We tell people everything and go into much greater detail than we need to.
2. We are unprofessional in our behavior, or our conduct doesn't match the stated reason we are in a country.
3. We are inconsistent in how we answer this question which can lead to rumors or intense unwanted scrutiny.
4. We outright lie about our reason for being in a country. Dishonesty and half-truths both lack integrity *and* are easily exposed in today's connected world.

All of these create an air of illegitimacy that will do harm both to our witness and our security environment.

I recall a missionary who ministered in a rural area of a country. He would travel from village to village sharing his testimony. But he thought it would be a good security strategy to change his story about who he was and what he was doing in the region from one village to the next. Sometimes he would even give them a different name from one village to the next.

Eventually he was arrested and charged with being a spy for the US government. Obviously, he was not a spy, but his behavior was highly suspicious. He had to fight these charges all the way to the supreme court of the country and was eventually acquitted, but his witness was destroyed, and he left the country never to return. His lawyer gave him some advice after the final acquittal. He told him, "You are not a spy. So please, stop acting like one."

People's perception of his behavior was that he was not legitimate. This caused both a security problem and a witness problem.

Now you know.

In the next episode we'll give you a simple tool for establishing the baseline of your legitimacy in a country.