

Security Briefs 24 – Strategic Intercultural Relations Part 6

Introduction

In recent episodes of *Security Briefs*, we've explored Strategic Intercultural Relations—or SIR. In this episode, we'll see how **Respect** builds on **Legitimacy** and **Awareness**, and why that matters.

Respect doesn't happen by accident. It must be cultivated intentionally, and when it is, it helps you build a reputation as an honorable, trusted person in your community.

At its heart, SIR is about building **intentional, respectful relationships**. Acting honorably—consistently—can open doors that would otherwise remain closed.

As we discuss Respect, you may notice overlap with your intercultural communication training. That's by design. When we live incarnationally, reflecting the love of Christ to those we serve, we increase both our ministry impact **and** our personal security.

So let's talk about how to pursue respectful, strategic relationships—on purpose.

There are three types of relationships we should intentionally pursue:

1. **Proximity relationships**
2. **Facilitative relationships**
3. **Strategic relationships**

Today, we'll focus on **Proximity Relationships**.

Proximity Relationships

These are the people who live or work near you—neighbors, coworkers, shopkeepers, security guards, or anyone you regularly encounter.

These relationships should be loving and authentic. Learn names. Show kindness. Listen well. And most of all, **treat people with genuine respect**.

Let me take a moment to give you two key reminders:

First, these relationships must be real. We're not talking about "friendship evangelism" as a tactic—we're talking about treating people as **true friends**, regardless of outcomes.

Second, respect means respecting everyone. My wife Kim and I had long-term relationships in every place we served. We shared our faith early, openly, and often. Most didn't become believers—but that didn't change how we treated them. We loved them as friends.

Now, a word of caution: **know what your actions are communicating**—especially across gender lines. For instance, in some cultures, a smile can be seen as a romantic advance. In others, not smiling can seem arrogant or cold. Awareness matters.

Also, be intentional about building relationships even with those considered the “lowest” in society. In Gospel work, **those are often the most important connections you'll make.**

Let me give you an example. Kim and I had a close relationship with a woman who delivered milk in our neighborhood. In that society, her status was very low. But we considered her a friend.

What we didn't realize at first was how much she had our back. She defended us to others, calling us “godly people who pray” rather than infidels. She also passed along what she heard in the community—giving us insight into attitudes toward foreigners like us.

Her respect and friendship became a vital part of our security.

On the flip side, poor proximity relationships can damage your standing. People may view you as rude or arrogant. And in tense moments, they may not stand up for you—they may even join in harmful plans, despite being outwardly polite.

Conclusion

Now you know: proximity relationships are more than just neighbors and acquaintances. They're your first line of connection—and often, your first line of defense.

In our next episode, we'll talk about **Facilitative Relationships**. See you then.