

10-9-2016

## Individual Disregard in Japan

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### Recommended Citation

Bowden, Sean, "Individual Disregard in Japan" (2016). *2016-17 Field Notes*. Essay. Submission 2.  
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Yokohama, Japan

October 9, 2016

### Individual Disregard

Japanese culture varies greatly from that of the United States of America. This interview was conducted with my host father, Makoto Kaneko. We discussed why it is important to take one's shoes off before entering the home – because there are outside shoes and inside shoes, both are entirely different – and how it is part of everyday life to say “Itadakemasu” before beginning to eat a meal. Aside from these very popular and well-known cultural differences, there are a few more that are more obscure. One of which is the culture around customer service. In America, there is the saying, “The customer is always right.” At least in Oregon, this is a pretty successful saying and customer service is satisfactory. In Japan, though, they have a different saying: “Treat the customer like a god.” At first this may seem intimidating for foreigners, this level of extreme elevation, but it produces an atmosphere relaxation. This level of servitude is reflected outside of the customer service sphere as well.

As Makoto said, “Japanese people are very kind and will go a long way to make sure requests are met satisfactory.” In America, if someone said, “I want to go to Starbucks,” but no one else wanted to, it is likely the group would disregard the comment due to the inconvenience. From my personal experience in Japan, though, it is very different here. I made an off-handed comment on how I wanted some coffee and before I knew it, we walked a whole mile out-the-way to get to the nearest coffee shop. I was shocked. When I told my host father about the experience, he laughed and said that sort of thing happens a lot with exchange

students. There is a negative aspect to this, though. In Japanese culture, it is very disrespectful to express unhappy or displeased emotions in the public sphere. For instance, if someone is wearing something unflattering, or if someone's Japanese is deplorable, people will still compliment their outfit and give praise to their Japanese abilities. Contrast this to America where people much more frequently speak their mind. During the last part of the interview, my host mother, Miki Kaneko, joined in and agreed with her husband. She added, "It is very rude to disrespect someone in public in front of other people. If something is wrong or is not satisfactory, then it is talked about behind closed doors and away from unwanted ears."