

Top Ten Reentry Tips

Being aware of the reentry process and following some advice from those who have already returned can facilitate your reentry. First, say goodbye. Then:

Mentally prepare for the adjustment process before you leave

The more you consider your alternatives, think about what is to come, and know about why returning home is both similar to and different from going abroad, the easier the transition will be. Anticipating is useful.

Allow yourself time

Reentry is a process that will take time, just as adjusting to a new foreign culture required a period of acculturation. Give yourself time to relax and reflect upon what is going on around you, how you are reacting to it, and what you might like to change. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.

Understand that the familiar will seem different

You will have changed, home has changed, and you will be seeing familiar people, places, and behaviors from new perspectives. Some things will seem strange, perhaps even unsettling. Expect to have some new emotional and psychological responses to being home. Everyone does.

There will be some "cultural catching up" to do

Some linguistic, social, political, economic, entertainment, and current event topics may be unfamiliar to you. New academic programs or regulations, slang expressions, popular culture references, recent events, and even major social changes may have emerged since you left. You may have some learning to do about your own culture.

Reserve judgments

Just as you had to keep an open mind when first encountering the culture of a new foreign country, try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgments about people and behaviors once back home. Mood swings are common at first, and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place after allowing some time for thorough reflection.

Respond thoughtfully and slowly

Quick answers and impulsive reactions often characterize returnees. Frustration, disorientation, and boredom in the returnee can lead to behavior that is incomprehensible to family and friends. Take some time to rehearse what you want to say and how you will respond to predictable questions and situations; prepare to greet those that are less predictable with a calm, thoughtful approach.

Cultivate sensitivity

Showing an interest in what others have been doing while you have been on your adventure overseas is a sure way to reestablish rapport. Much annoyance with returnees results from the perception that returnees are so anxious to tell their stories and share their experiences that they are not interested in what happened to those who stayed at home. This is ironic because one of the most common frustrations reported by returnees is that those at home only ask superficial questions (e.g., So how was it?) and want short answers. Returnees see this as a lack of opportunity to express their feelings fully. In such circumstances, being as good a listener as a talker is a key ingredient in mutual sharing and you may need to practice those skills upon return.

Beware of comparisons

Making comparisons between cultures and nations is natural, particularly after residence abroad. However, a person must be careful not to be seen as too critical of home or too lavish in praise of things foreign. A balance of good and bad features is probably more accurate and certainly less threatening to others.

Remain flexible

Keeping as many options open as possible is an essential aspect of a successful return home. Attempting to re-socialize totally into old patterns and networks can be difficult, but remaining aloof is isolating and counterproductive. What you want to achieve is a balance between resuming and maintaining earlier patterns and enhancing your social and intellectual life with new friends and interests.

Seek support networks

There are lots of people back home who have gone through their own reentry process and both understand and empathize with a returnee's concerns. Returnees may find it useful to seek out people with international living experience such as academic faculty, exchange students, Peace Corps volunteers, international development staff, diplomatic or military personnel, church mission officials, and those doing business internationally. University study abroad and international student offices may also be places where returnees can find support and empathy as they go through the reentry process.

Adapted from materials originally developed by Dr. Bruce La Brack, School of International Studies, University of the Pacific for the Institute of International Education, San Francisco. What's Up With Culture: <http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>

I went through a similar reverse culture shock myself when I returned to my campus from a semester in Costa Rica, and I know just how trying that semester was. I even considered transferring just to rid myself of the feeling that I didn't belong on campus anymore. It was through the support of a woman in our off-campus study office that I was able to gradually feel at home on my own campus again, and her assistance was invaluable. Ellen Doble (Admissions)