

Although originally written almost 10 years before Franco-American tensions over world politics became stronger than ever, the revised 3rd edition of *French or Foe?* comes very timely.

Polly Platt's book is great educational reading if you want to know what it is about the French that rubs Americans the wrong way (and vice versa). It will teach you how to handle private and business situations, and provides plenty of insight into concepts you'll want to be familiar with when doing business in France, from the role of space, time, and language to the high-context nature of French communication. Several of the book's chapter and section titles are quite telling, such as "Rudeness is in the eye of the beholder" or "What's logical to you may not be to me". Platt does a good job explaining the cultural characteristics behind them. Written for both the tourist and the business traveler, *French or Foe?* covers many everyday aspects of life in France, too.



What makes Platt's book fun to read are the countless examples and short stories she uses to illustrate her points. She includes interviews with several others, including many American and French executives, whose observations and insights add a broad perspective.

The flip side is that the book also has several shortcomings. It fails to paint a representative picture of the French society as a whole. Most of the observations seem overly focused on the culture in Paris, on professional academics, and on the very affluent. Platt has an often annoying urge for name-dropping as if everything there is to know about France could be learned from high-ranking officials, CEOs, and other members of the "rich and famous", largely ignoring the "ordinary" people. While France's Paris-centric political structure indeed gives the capitol a strongly influence over its culture, the book provides little insight into the more relaxed business atmosphere of some of the country's other regions.

The third edition of the book has received some welcome updates and additions. Platt examines how the computer and the Internet have changed the business culture over the last few years, comparing procedures in the work place today with those five years ago. She also (finally) added an index, making it much easier to look up specific topics.

While not without flaws, *French or Foe?* is a useful source for information about country and culture. And who knows, maybe it will even make you like the French a little better.



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A seasoned former executive of a Fortune 500 company, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world. These included many parts of Asia, e.g., China, India, and Japan. Originally from Germany, he has lived and worked both in the United States and in Europe.

