# Code Switching

Code-switching - it's not a term you hear very often in the business world. It's used a lot more often in schools, especially those in low-income areas. The best way to define it might be to provide an example of it.

A few years ago I was driving from Florida to New Hampshire and came to a place where there was an on-ramp to the interstate. I was already on the interstate and another car was coming down the ramp to merge onto it. Since we were parallel to each other my time in the South taught me to slow down so they could merge smoothly into the flow of traffic. They were from the North though and the concept of someone not hurrying to be first in line was alien to them (I can say this without someone stones at me because I grew up in New England). The more I slowed down the more they slowed down. It never occurred to them that I might be deliberately slowing down to let them in. Since they were running out of lane pretty fast I code-switched to the Northern way of thinking and hit the gas to I'd be well in front of them.

Knowing what code-switching was, and how to use it in the real world, prevented an accident.

Now in the world of business people frequently change jobs and many times end up in a culture they're not accustomed to. More than once I've heard a VP start cursing at someone, a controller for example, during a meeting. Believe it or not this is acceptable in some cultures and you wouldn't gain any respect in them if you didn't curse right back. In other cultures the VP could get a harassment complaint lodged again him or her, or the controller could be fired for insubordination if they did the exact same thing (especially in right-to-work states where no reason has to be given when you fire someone). It happens at lower levels too. Some people go around swearing up a storm not realizing they're in a different culture now and need to code-switch if they want to keep their jobs.