



CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Environments



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Removing The Barriers to Effective Multicultural Communication

In the previous edition of the CONNECTIONS newsletter, I introduced the Barriers to Effective Multicultural Communication. These barriers, which include *stereotyping*, *a lack of understanding* and *judgmental attitudes*, have the potential to cause significant communication problems in culturally diverse settings. Fortunately, there are specific steps that each of us can take to help remove these barriers:

1. **Enhance Your Self Awareness.** To reduce the impact that stereotyping has

on your interactions, you must increase your understanding of the biases and stereotypes you have. You must also understand the impact they have on your communication with others, especially those who are culturally different. Remember, stereotyping is a subtle, often unconscious process that can negatively impact the quality of your communication. The best way to increase your understanding of your stereotypes is to ask for both positive and constructive feedback from peo-

ple you trust and respect. You should include individuals that have had an opportunity to interact with you over a period of time. They can provide you with useful information regarding your behavior and performance in a variety of situations. Most importantly, they may see something in your behavior that you will not discover on your own.

2. **Increase Your Empathy.** Empathy can be defined as the ability to step into another person's shoes, and experience the world

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from his or her perspective. It is a cognitive and psychological state where you truly understand where another person is 'coming from'. **Empathy is the single most important element of multicultural communi-**

cation. Without it, there is no true connection between people, and there is no chance of removing communication barriers such as stereotyping and ethnocentrism. To increase your empathy, you must actively

work at getting to know culturally different people. You can do this by participating in social activities with culturally diverse individuals, attending cultural events, participating in programs specific to a cultural tradi-

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tion like Black History Month, attending worship services at churches, synagogues and mosques, visiting ethnic restaurants, participating in diversity workshops, reading books by and about members of different cultural groups, and joining cultural organizations.

3. **Suspend Judgment.** A final step that we have to take in order to remove the barriers is to reduce the extent to which we evaluate and judge others. Now this is very difficult for most of us. That's because we spend so much of our lives standing in judgment of others (e.g., managers evaluating job performance, teachers assessing student performance). The problem is the criteria we use to make those judgments. Most of us use our own values, styles and beliefs as the criteria for how we assess others (this is the essence of ethnocentrism). The more alike someone else is, the more positively we judge them. However, people from different cultures may be unlike us in terms of values, styles and beliefs. It is then that we must suspend our judgment and try to understand others as individuals. And we must attempt to gain this

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understanding from their cultural perspective, not from our own. The best way to do this is to be more accepting of others. Acceptance refers to a willingness to support and validate others even when you disagree with them. You can be totally accepting of a person while still disagreeing with their ideas or certain beliefs that they hold. You can demonstrate acceptance by actively listening to others, attempting to understand where they are coming from and trying to address whatever issues or concerns they raise. Remember that communication is always best when it supports and validates the other person.

Dr. Holmes' Upcoming Presentations and Publications

Evaluating Skills Based Diversity Training at the International Society for Performance Improvement's annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from April 12-15, 2005. Please visit the ISPI website for more information at www.ispi.org.

Value-Added Diversity Consulting - An article published in the 2005 Pfeiffer Annual: Volume Two - Consulting.

How to Connect Diversity to Performance - An article to be published in the May/June issue of ISPI's Performance Improvement journal.

Characteristics of a High Performance Work Team & How to Facilitate the Strategic Planning Process - Two articles that will be published in the 2005 Training and Development Sourcebook by the American Society for Training and Development.

