

CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Settings

How to Communicate When Your Values are Different

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We've all had the experience of interacting with someone who has different values or beliefs. These differences can create communication problems, but there are several steps we can take to improve our relationships with people who have values different from our own:

1. **Focus on 'business issues' rather than 'personal issues'.** In my travels as a consultant, one of the most common causes of workplace conflict pertains to value differences. People have deeply held beliefs

about a variety of topics and sometimes, are happy to share those beliefs. Of course, conflict can occur with those who have different belief systems. These conflicts can often be prevented if people focus on work issues and not issues of a more personal nature. This is easier said than done because we bring who we are to our jobs. However, you can minimize conflict by limiting discussion of personal issues and by focusing your conversations on the business at hand.

2. **Clarify the value differ-**

ences. If the value differences you have with a colleague are having an impact on communication, clarify these differences and how they are affecting your interactions. In other words, be clear about how and why the value differences are creating problems. Come to a mutually satisfying agreement on how you will manage these differences by describing what each of you will do to improve the situation.

3. **Be empathetic and genuinely try to understand the other person.** When

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value differences arise, it is important that you make a sincere effort to understand where the other person is coming from. **Empathy** can be described as stepping into another person's shoes and experiencing the world from his or her perspective.

You don't have to agree with the other person's beliefs, but you should try to understand them (and help the person understand your beliefs as well).

4. **Be accepting of the other person.** Acceptance

refers to a willingness to support and validate the other person, to have positive regard, and to remain non-judgmental, even in circumstances where you do not agree. This is much easier said than done because we all have a tendency

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to judge others. And we often do so based on how much that person's values are similar to our own. This is the essence of ethnocentrism. The problem is, if you approach value differences in this way, you will be unsuccessful in addressing the issues you have with the other person. It is imperative that you are willing to accept another individual's right to be different. You don't have to agree with the person's way of thinking or doing things. Remember, acceptance does not mean agreement. It means you accept the individual's right to his or her own beliefs.

5. **Find some common ground between yourself and the other person.** A final step you can take to improve communication across value differences is to actively seek common ground between yourself and your speaking partner. We have a tendency to focus on our differences when more often than not, we have a great deal in common. Identify those similarities and use this common ground to enhance and develop your professional relationship. By connecting with the other person on this level, you will greatly increase your chances of effectively dealing with any value differences you may have.

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At Holmes Fitness Coaching, my primary focus is on your health, physical fitness and quality of life. Using my 4-phase *Fitness Coaching Process*, I will help you improve your health and fitness, lose weight, reduce stress, and learn how to create a better balance between your personal and professional life. I also work with organizations that want to improve employee health and fitness in ways that positively impact job performance. I offer a variety of services designed to help you enhance overall health including **Fitness Coaching, Health & Fitness Seminars, the Fitness Corner Newsletter and TIPS Booklets.** Seminar topics include:

1. Health, Fitness and Job Performance.
2. How to Beat Stress and Balance Your Life.
3. How to Start a Successful Exercise Program.
4. Children and Exercise: How to Create a Lifelong Connection.
5. Lose Weight and Keep it Off...Permanently.

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