

CONNECTIONS

Communicating in Culturally Diverse Settings

SELF-AWARENESS

The First Competency of Diversity

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Most of us are familiar with **competencies**, the skills or abilities needed to perform specific tasks. What might surprise you is the existence of **diversity competencies**. Just as there are specific skill sets when it comes to performing well as a doctor, lawyer, engineer, accountant and teacher, there are a specific set of competences that allow us to perform well in culturally diverse settings. These competencies include **Self-Awareness, Diversity Knowledge, Multicultural Communication, Conflict Management, Empowering Environments** and **Professional Development**. I will discuss Self Awareness here and review the other competencies in subsequent issues.

Perhaps the greatest knowledge one can possess is knowledge of self. To truly be in touch with our feelings, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, strengths and weak-

nesses represents a cognitive, psychological and spiritual state relatively few of us ever attain. But to perform at our highest level, we must be in close connection with who we are as human beings and how we impact others. Culturally competent individuals value diversity, respect differences and attempt to learn about the culturally different. Such individuals are keenly aware of their biases and prejudices, and are committed to reducing them. Specifically, self-aware individuals:

1. Are cognizant of their values, beliefs, communication styles and work style preferences, and how these can impact interactions with others.
2. Are aware of their biases, prejudices and stereotypes and how these impact their interactions with others, especially those who are culturally different.

3. Value diversity and respect cultural differences as assets in the group, team, organization and community.

4. Respect and learn from what others have to say, even when it goes against their values, beliefs or ideas.

5. Truly accept the fact that not everyone has to think, act or look a certain way to be valuable or successful in the organization.

6. Regularly evaluate their strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the diversity competencies and create plans for self-improvement.

So how do we improve self-awareness? There are several steps you can take:

1. **Clarify your cultural identity, values and preferences, and how these impact your interactions with others.** You can do this in a class or workshop on topics such as diversity, multicultural communication,

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and conflict resolution. Such classes often have self-assessment inventories that can help you better understand your style or behavior (e.g., communication style, work style preferences).

2. **Formally seek feedback on your performance and develop a plan for addressing problem areas.** This is one of the best ways to enhance your self-awareness. Just make sure you solicit feedback from someone you trust that has had a chance to observe your behavior. You can also participate in a 360-degree feedback process, which will provide you with structured feedback from a variety of individuals.

3. **Identify your biases/stereotypes and create a plan for reducing them.** This is not easy for most of us to do. No one wants to think of themselves as biased, but the fact is we all have biases and stereotypes. The first step in reducing their impact is to be honest with yourself about it. Identify your biases/stereotypes and try to understand where they come from. You should also try to clarify how they impact your interactions with others (e.g., colleagues, customers, employees). There is a very helpful tool for identifying hidden bias called the Implicit Association Test. These tests are designed to help

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us identify biases that we are unaware of, but still impact our interactions with others. You can learn more about these confidential tests and actually take one online by visiting Project Implicit at www.implicit.harvard.edu.

4. **Pay close attention to your daily actions and ask yourself, “How does my behavior impact the people around me?”** This is probably the easiest step but also one of the most important you can take on an ongoing basis. Always strive to understand how you are impacting those around you. And remember, **the best way to gain this understanding is to be empathetic and try to understand others!**

My Fitness Corner Blog

I have a weblog entitled, **The Fitness Corner**. Through this blog, I provide you with specific tips, tools and resources you can use to lose weight, improve your health and fitness, and enhance your work-life balance. I cover a wide array of topics including:

- Developing a *Fitness Lifestyle*.
- Improving your eating habits.
- Losing weight **WITHOUT** dieting.
- Reducing stress in your life.
- Improving your work/life balance.
- Developing an exercise program.
- Exercising without exercise.
- And much more!

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About the Author

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