

BECOMING MORE CULTURALLY COMPETENT

Cultural competence requires an open mind and heart and the willingness to accept the views of others. It may mean setting aside your own beliefs in order to better serve others. Generally, we need to lower our defenses, take risks, and practice behaviors that may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar.

Self-Awareness. The first step toward being more culturally competent is self-awareness. To understand and appreciate the culture of others, we must first understand and appreciate our own culture. You might ask yourself, where do I come from? When did my ancestors migrate to this county? Why? Where did they first settle? What values do I have, and what culture or cultures do they come from?

Educate Yourself. There are several ways to learn about other cultures. First, find someone—a friend, neighbor, or colleague—who can serve as your “guide” to the culture. You can also study a culture by reading history, geography, poetry, biography, and fiction. In addition to reading or using a guide, you can participate in the daily routine of the culture you wish to learn about by celebrating their holidays, working on community projects, and attending worship. Finally, you can learn the language.

Source: Lynch, E. (1992). *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: A Guide for Working with Young Children and Their Families*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.

Awareness, Attitude, Knowledge & Skills

Awareness. Awareness is consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different. A police officer who recognizes that he profiles people who look like they are from Mexico as “illegal aliens” has cultural awareness of his reactions to this group of people.

Attitude. Paul Pedersen's multicultural competence model emphasized three components: awareness, knowledge and skills. DTUI added the attitude component in order to emphasize the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs and that gets participants to carefully examine their beliefs and values about cultural differences.

Knowledge. Social science research indicates that our values and beliefs about equality may be inconsistent with our behaviors, and we ironically may be unaware of it. Social psychologist Patricia Devine and her colleagues, for example, showed in their research that many people who score low on a prejudice test tend to do things in cross cultural encounters that exemplify prejudice (e.g., using outdated labels such as “illegal aliens”, “colored”, and “homosexual”). This makes the Knowledge component an important part of cultural competence development.

Skills. The Skills component focuses on practicing cultural competence to perfection. Communication is the fundamental tool by which people interact in organizations. This includes gestures and other non-verbal communication that tend to vary from culture to culture.

Source: Mercedes Martin & Billy Vaughn (2007). *Strategic Diversity & Inclusion Management* magazine, pp. 31-36. DTUI Publications Division: San Francisco, CA.

Cultural Competency: What is it?



“While a few individuals seem to be born with cultural competence, the rest of us have had to put considerable effort into developing it. This means examining our biases and prejudices, developing cross-cultural skills, searching for role models, and spending as much time as possible with other people who share a passion for cultural competence.”

What is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence is comprised of four components: (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview, (b) Attitude towards cultural differences, (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (d) Cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Source: Mercedes Martin & Billy Vaughn (2007). *Strategic Diversity & Inclusion Management* magazine, pp. 31-36. DTUI Publications Division: San Francisco, CA.



Overcoming the Golden Rule:

Sympathy and Empathy

The Golden Rule: Treat other people the way you would like to be treated yourself.

- **The Lead Rule:** Treat other people the way they deserve to be treated.
- **Sympathy:** The attempt to understand another person by imagining yourself in his or her position.

The Golden Rule and its communication strategy, sympathy, are based on the **assumption of similarity.**

The Platinum Rule: Treat other people the way they want to be treated (or at least be aware of what that is).

- **Empathy:** The attempt to understand another person by imagining his or her perspective.

The Platinum Rule and its communication strategy, empathy, are based on the **assumption of difference.**

Source: Bennett, M. J. "Overcoming the Golden Rule: Sympathy and Empathy." *Communication Yearbook 3*. Ed. D. Nimmo. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979. Reprinted in *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*. Ed. M.J. Bennett. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1998.

Legends, Myths & Downright lies about cultural competence

- Culture is a matter of ethnicity and race.
- Culture is possessed by the Other; the Other is/has the problem.
- Culture is an important variable in determining how people (consumers & providers) see and interpret (know) the world around them and the basis of how they make decisions.
- Addressing cultural issues in supervision is important primarily to people of color. Supervisors should not worry much about addressing cultural issues when working with White supervisors, but they should typically address cultural issues when working with supervisors of color.
- Racial and ethnic issues are the most important types of cultural issues to explore
- I'm a minority, I don't need to learn about cultural competence
- I have friends that are minorities and gay therefore I understand culture competence
- There isn't a problem now, why should I have to bother with it?
- I will never have to come across this issue, so why bother learning about it?



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