

Intercultural Communication Tips

Working across cultures is a new experience for many people. Intercultural communication can be a dynamic and creative affair but occasionally due to the inability to interpret people correctly it can be a challenge. Building an understanding of other people's cultures, their communication styles and behaviors can go a long way in improving relationships and being more successful in an intercultural environment.

Even without trawling through lots of books, articles or even taking part in an intercultural communication workshop it is possible to implement some basic principles to help improve one's intercultural communication skills.

The following intercultural communication tips are provided to help people working in international and multicultural environments get some basic insight into dealing more effectively with people and not letting culture become an issue.

1. **Be Patient:** Working in an intercultural environment can be a frustrating affair. Things may not get done when expected, communication can be tiresome and behavior may be inappropriate. Patience with yourself and others helps move beyond such issues and address how to avoid similar incidents in the future.
2. **Establish Rules:** Sometimes if working in a truly intercultural team it may be necessary for all to take a step back and set down some ground rules. i.e. how do we approach punctuality, meetings, communication, emails, disagreements, etc? It is always a good idea to try and develop the rules as a group rather than have them imposed.
3. **Ask Questions:** When you don't understand something or want to know why someone has behaved in a certain way, simply ask. Asking questions stops you making assumptions, shows the questioned you did not understand them and helps build up your bank of intercultural knowledge.
4. **Respect:** The foundation of all intercultural communication is respect. By demonstrating respect you earn respect and help create more open and fruitful relationships.
5. **The Written Word:** Sometimes people who do not have English as their mother tongue will read more proficiently than they speak. It is a good idea to always write things down as a back up.
6. **Time:** Not everyone in the world thinks, "time is money". Understand that for many people work is low down on the priority list with things like

family taking a much higher precedence. Do not expect people to sacrifice their own time to meet deadlines. It is good practice to always leave a bit of spare time when considering deadlines.

7. Humour: In an intercultural environment one man's joke is another's insult. Be wary of differences in the sense of humour and also the acceptability of banter and the like in a business environment.

8. Always Check: The easiest way of minimizing the negative impact of intercultural communication is to check and double check. Whether agreeing something or giving instructions, a minute spent double checking all parties are 'reading from the same sheet' saves hours of work later on down the line.

9. Be Positive: When faced with incidents of an intercultural nature steer clear of blame and conflict. Stay positive, analyze the problem areas and work as a team to build strategies and solutions to ensure the same never occurs again.

10. Self-Reflect: A good intercultural communicator not only looks outwards but also inwards. Take time to reflect on your own communication, management or motivation style and see where you can improve as an individual.

Research into the area of intercultural communication and working in a multicultural environment continues to show that the culturally diverse team is usually the most inventive and vibrant. However, unless businesses and individuals start to address the area of intercultural communication as a serious business issue, this potential will not be realized.