Cultural Awareness, Sensitivity, & Competence

Culture affects all aspects of who we are: food, clothing, conversation, manners, and social interactions, among others. When we understand why others do things the way they do, it becomes less confusing, less different, and less fearful.

When we understand each other, we are not afraid of each other. We understand why someone behaves as they do, speaks as they do, dresses as they do, and behaves as they do.

Our culture:

Provides us with our identity, beliefs, values, and behavior.

Is learned as a part of the natural process of growing up in a family and community and from participating in societal institutions.

Is the conscious and unconscious content that a group learns, shares, and transmits from generation to generation that organizes life and helps interpret existence.

It is a filter through which people process their experiences and events of their lives.

It influences people’s values, actions, and expectations of themselves.

It impacts people’s perceptions, assumptions, and expectations of others.

Culture is not just being from a different culture. It is anyone with experiences that cause them to have shared history with those of similar experiences, such as war veterans or those who lost a child.

Cultures considered by this company include:

* race
* color
* sex
* sexual orientation
* gender identity and/or expression
* religion
* age
* national or ethnic origin
* political beliefs
* marital status
* medical condition
* genetic information
* veteran status
* disability

Cultural competence is increasingly important as our means of communication and collaboration in working environments evolve. Learning how to respect, communicate and collaborate with an increasingly diverse work culture is crucial to optimizing a company’s efficiency and productivity.

Cultural competence is achieved through cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is achieved through education, training, and experience. The more understanding and awareness an employee develops, the more sensitive that employee will be to coworkers and customers of different cultures. Cultural sensitivity refers to the willingness and ability to understand people with different backgrounds.

**Cultural knowledge *-*** means that you know facts and have had first had experiences about the cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another cultural group.

**Cultural awareness *–*** to be aware is to recognize and utilize the knowledge you have obtained about different cultures.

**Cultural sensitivity *-*** is knowing that differences exist between cultures, but not assigning values to the differences. Then being willing to exercise such behaviors, words, and actions that acknowledge and respect those differences.

**Cultural competence *-*** A culturally competent organization has the capacity to provide services, products, and support to customers while also demonstrating knowledge and awareness of that customer’s culture, and being sensitive to that customer’s culture by speaking, behaving, and taking actions that show respect and consideration for that customer’s culture.

Benefits of a cultural competent workplace can include:

* **Increased understanding and appreciation for different perspectives**
* **Broader and more diversified ideas**
* **Improved coworker and customer relations**
* **Improved listening skills**
* **Increased empathy and adaptability**

Without cultural competence there is:

* Cultural fear
* Culture shock
* Language barriers
* Failure to serve
* Presumptions, stereotypes, and prejudice

Ways to be cultural awareness:

* Engage with others different from you
* Be open to people not doing things they way you do
* Recognize and accept that not everyone believes the same things you do
* Ponder what you can learn from others who view things differently than you

America is a melting pot. It is arguably the most diverse nation in the world. It allows for creativity, inspiration, and expression. However, for first generation immigrants bringing their culture to America, the English language can be a challenge.

Language challenges include:

* Language translation
* Language grammar
* Language phrasing

Learning a new language is not simply about learning the words. It’s about context, phrasing, and implication. These are things that are a challenge in learning a new language when you do not fully understand the culture, the culturally acceptable behaviors, and the social interactions.

Fortunately, the are numerous apps, such as Google Translate, that can help you through challenging exchanges caused by a language barrier.

Nonverbal behaviors are a major part of understanding a culture and becoming culturally aware. Common nonverbal behaviors:

* Touch
* Gestures
* Eye Contact
* Personal Space
* Facial Expressions
* Posture
* Body angle
* Pitch and tone of language
* Order of speaking/answering

Cultural Sensitivity – Having built awareness and understanding of different cultures allows you to become sensitive the needs of other cultures. It allows you to know how to treat, engage with, and speak with customers of a different culture.

When you are sensitive to a customer’s culture, they feel welcomed, safe, and valued. This breeds loyalty and inspires them to tell others that our company is a place where their culture is welcomed. And that’s good for business.

When you are culturally educated, you become culturally aware, which allows you to become culturally sensitive. When you are educated, aware, and sensitive, you become competent.

To be culturally competent is the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon the ethnic, social, cultural, and linguistic diversity of others.

To be culturally competent is having the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaningful, relevant, and productive ways.

To be culturally competent is having ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served.

Cultural Quotient

One’s ability to function and integrate effectively in various cultural circumstances, adapt to cultural changes, and resolve problems encountered in different cultures.

Benefits of Cultural Quotients:

* With widespread globalization, people of different cultures today live together everywhere in the world.
* There are more opportunities to interact with those of different cultures in many aspects (e.g., domestically, business, and work).
* One would need to know the customs of other cultures, especially the taboos and behaviors that could risk offending people of that culture.
* People with a higher CQ are able to interact with people from other cultures easily and more effectively.

We’re all on this journey together. The more we can rely on each other for support and understanding, the easier it will be for all of us.