

CULTURE 101: **EMBRACING** **CULTURAL** **DIFFERENCES**



THE SALVATION ARMY
INTERCULTURAL MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT
USA CENTRAL TERRITORY
WWW.MULTICULTURALMINISTRIESCENTRAL.ORG

CULTURE 101:

EMBRACING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Let's say that you're traveling for a short term mission trip to a country where you don't speak the language. You forgot to pick up a dictionary or a book of common phrases, and you got separated from your group and the translator while you went wandering around a nearby market. So, you've only got hand gestures to communicate. No problem, right? You're hungry, so you decide to visit one of the local food vendors for a bite to eat. Not a lot of choices, so it should be easy. You make your decision and wait to place your order. While you wait you look at the people around you. You smile and nod at them. But, nobody looks you in the eye. And they don't smile back at you. When your time comes, you place your order by pointing at the food that you want and give her an "OK" sign. But, what she brings you is not what you ordered. You shake your head "No." But, the vendor seems annoyed and you're becoming frustrated. You thought you were communicating clearly. What gives?



We may think that the gestures we use to communicate across cultures are universal and what we mean when we use them, shared. But, they're not. And these are just a few of the differences we might encounter when interacting with people from cultures other than our own.

Welcome to Culture 101: Embracing Cultural Differences.

INTRODUCTION

Hi, my name is Karen Young.

And my name is Alfredo Martinez and we are from The Multicultural Ministries Department of the Central Territory.

We are pleased to present the first of a series of Cultural Intelligence resources that could be very useful for you as you try to gain more cultural competence in your ministry. This resource could be used at the local, Divisional and Territorial levels. And it can be used with soldiers, staff, volunteers, and officers.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The face of America is changing; the demographics in the United States are transforming the landscape. We just need to look around and see this happening everywhere: at the grocery stores, at our schools, in our neighborhoods, with the people we serve in our community centers, social service facilities, workplaces, and Corps.

As Dr. David Henricks says: "The world is coming to us." According to recent projections from the US Census Bureau, by the year 2050 there will be no cultural or racial majority.



- 50% of the American population is expected to be made up of racial and ethnic minorities by 2050.
- The United States is the most multicultural nation in the world.
- Three out of ten people in America are members of minority groups.

- Asians are expected to grow to 25 million by 2025 and are currently the fastest growing minority group.
- The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world.
- 150 languages are spoken in United States public schools, with over one third of students speaking a language other than English.
- Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States.

How do we react to these changes in our communities? Do we panic? Do we hide? Or, do we embrace people with the love of Jesus Christ?

Acts 17:26 states "From one ancestor [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live. (NRSV)

OTHERS



It has been said that the Army's mission can be summarized into a single word: "OTHERS." Since its beginnings, The Salvation Army has had a special concern for the marginalized, the displaced, the wounded, and the forgotten. Our mission has been to "preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in [Christ's] name without discrimination."

I wonder if General William Booth was alive today, would he consider immigrants coming to America as "Others?" Would he be concerned with those who were involved in human trafficking and those who were displaced by violence and war? Would gaining cultural competence--the knowledge and cross-cultural skills for effective outreach--be a priority for him in



order to reach the ethnic, cultural, and generational diversity of the United States?

For these next few minutes, our hope is that you can develop cultural awareness and cultural competence to better fulfill the mission: “to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.”

EMBRACING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

In this module we will focus on being aware and respectful of people from different backgrounds.

HERITAGE

Our heritage influences who we are as people.

Heritage refers to:

- Ethnicity
- Ancestry
- Religion
- Culture

Our heritage influences everything from what we **value** and **believe** to how we think, communicate with and behave towards others.

The three objectives for this module are:

- To identify how culture influences attitudes and behaviors.
- To discuss the importance of respecting cultural differences.
- To select a few ways to demonstrate cultural sensitivity.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is a common way to define people. There is even a song called "What Color is God's skin? It's black, brown it's yellow, it's red, it's white. Everyone is the same in the good Lord's sight."

While there are many ethnic groups, the six that are most identified are:

- Black or African Americans
- Asians
- White
- Latinos or Hispanics;
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander

Within a particular ethnic group there can be many differences. For example, Latino or Hispanic people may represent more than 20 different countries. These include:

- Mexican Americans
- Puerto Ricans
- Cubans
- Those in the Dominican Republic
- South or Central Americans

Or Asians, who in the Central Territory, comprise people from:

- Laos
- The Philippines
- Burma
- South Korea
- India
- Pakistan
- Vietnam

PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION



Please pause to discuss your awareness and sensitivity to the cultural differences within your corps/church and community:

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

- Who are the different ethnic groups represented in your community?
- What are some of the customs, celebrations, values or beliefs expressed by them?
- How might your outlook on life, beliefs and values differ from theirs?
- What customs, values or beliefs do you share in common?
- In what ways do you show acceptance of those who are of a different heritage or background? Those who have an accent or difficulty with English?

Other factors which help define who we are as people include:

ANCESTRY

Ancestry. This reflects where our family members came from when they arrived in the United States. For example, people may be descendants of German, Irish, Israel, Russian or other ancestries.

RELIGION

Religion is another factor. This refers to a belief system based on God or a higher power, and may include groups that are Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Protestant and Muslim.

CULTURE

And, there is also culture. Culture represents shared values, learned beliefs and behaviors that cut across ethnicity, ancestry, and religious lines. For example, people with disabilities, similar socio-economics status, and even sexual orientation represent different cultures within the United States.

In terms of culture, did you know?

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness involves having an understanding of ourselves and others?

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

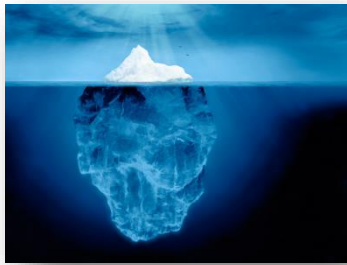
And cultural sensitivity involves withholding value judgments, and includes curiosity, empathy and respect.

A “*one size fits all*” approach just doesn’t work with our differences.

THE FIVE FAVES

Our first awareness of cultural differences often comes through our senses – what we can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch--sometimes called “The Five Faves.” These include things like foods, festivals (with music, dance, and celebrations); faces (the physical characteristics of people, what they look like); fashions (a people’s cultural dress); and flags or folklore (the stories people share around events that are important to them).

But, this is just the beginning, just the gateway into understanding cultural differences, just the “tip of the iceberg.” Beneath the surface are the values and beliefs that give these things meaning and importance.



There is so much more to learn about the cultures of others that it would take a lifetime to understand.

BEING CULTURALLY SENSITIVE

Being culturally sensitive is important for many reasons. The United States has become more generationally and ethnically diverse. Sensitivity reduces the potential to think that one culture is superior to another. That is called ethnocentrism. Instead, we are different from each other. And how we see and understand those differences determines whether we can benefit as a community from them.

RESPONSES TO DIFFERENCES

When individuals from different cultures interact, their responses to this diversity can vary significantly. These responses include:

XENOPHOBIA

This refers to the fear of another culture. This fear could be rooted in a number of causes, and has been evidenced in racism, hate groups and crimes.

ETHNOCENTRISM

This is the belief that one's own culture, race or ethnicity is the best. This is not the same as self-esteem or feeling good about who you are, but rather a belief in one's superiority to others. Ethnocentrism may show itself in patronizing or stereotyping other cultures and in seeing others as "tokens." As tokens, people may be invited to participate, but not in any important way.

FORCED ASSIMILATION

Forced Assimilation is a step away from ethnocentrism, but still closely related to it. At its root is the belief that "my" culture is the best; therefore, everyone should be "like me." Other cultures are welcomed, as long as they assimilate. In other words, "They can be on my team if they play just like I do."

SEGREGATION

Those who hold this position believe that different races and culture groups should remain separate from each other. This was a popular view prior to the civil rights movement when "separate but equal" was revealed to be separate but not equal.

ACCEPTANCE

With acceptance, people are willing to co-exist, to accommodate and to build relationships across cultures. Acceptance is the recognition that all cultures are equal and should be respected. Businesses and community organizations often advocate acceptance and tolerance. And while this is a worthy goal, God calls us to do more.



CELEBRATION

Celebration is characterized as valuing other cultures because God created us as cultural beings. There is diversity in all of creation. We appreciate mutuality in our relationships and desire for multicultural experiences and relationships. Celebration goes beyond accepting and tolerating to valuing and embracing. --Source: *Beginners Guide to Crossing Cultures*, Patty Lane.

PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION



Pause now to discuss the responses to the cultural differences you see around you.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- What are some of the cultural differences you see in your corps/church or community?
- What are some of the ways people respond to the cultural differences they see in others?
- How do these cultural differences contribute to your corps/church or community?
- What obstacles might there be to building relationships across culture?
- What advantages might there be to building relationships across cultures?
- How do you build relationships across differences?

We have found that understanding the values, beliefs and complexity of our own culture goes a long way in understanding the complexity and the uniqueness of the different cultures within our communities. -- *From CQ Knowledge, Cultural Intelligence Center*

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION

Communication is key in learning about and benefitting from our differences. Rev. Eric Law, of the Kaleidoscope Institute, lays out 7 basic guidelines for having communication that is safe and respectful. He calls them the Respectful Communication Guidelines.

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.
E = use EMPATHETIC listening.
S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.
P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.
E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.
C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY.
T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Communication is one of the most important elements in understanding differences and building relationships across culture. Did you know that “people of different backgrounds bring with them different communication styles? For example, every culture interprets body language, gestures, touch, volume and tone of voice, or eye contact differently. Sometimes these differences can cause misunderstanding – even conflicts-- and we aren’t exactly sure why! Our first encounters with cultural differences can be confusing, even awkward.



Communication, like a “dance”, can be challenging, especially when we’re first learning the cultural cues, or the “new steps” of another culture. But, with the

help of someone who understands these differences, say, a culture coach, we can begin to understand and even appreciate those cultural differences.

We are conditioned by our society, in general, and by our culture, specifically, to communicate in certain ways. We may react to others who are different with negative attitudes, put-downs, judgments or dismissal because we don't understand these differences. **The Respectful Communication Guidelines** help us to make space so that all can feel safe as we explore this new territory together.

CIRCLES OF MY MULTICULTURAL SELF

HANDOUT – ACTIVITY

We hope you are becoming more aware of some of the differences of those around you and the complexities that each of us brings to any interaction.

Now, for a moment, we'd like for you to shift your focus from the culture of others to your own. Have you ever considered that you have a multicultural self?



This next activity is called "Circles of My Multicultural Self" and it highlights the many dimensions of our identities. It addresses the relationship between our desires to self-define our identities, and the social constructions that label us regardless of how we define ourselves. You will be given a handout to write your responses.

HANDOUT

First, place your name in the center circle of the structure.

Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the satellite circles -- an identifier or descriptor that you feel is important in defining you. This can include anything: Asian American, female, mother, athlete, educator, scout troop leader, Christian, scientist, musician, or any descriptor with which you identify.

Now with another person or in a small group:

1. Share a story of a time you were especially proud to identify with one of the descriptors you used above.
2. Share a story about a time it was especially painful to be identified with one of your identifiers or descriptors.
3. Name a stereotype associated with one of the groups with which you most closely identify, but that is not consistent with who you are. Fill in the following sentence (see the examples below):

I am (a/an) _____ but I am NOT (a/an)_____.

EXAMPLES:

I am an African American male, but I am NOT athletic.

I am a New Yorker, but I am NOT a crazy driver.

I am an Asian American, but I am NOT a math whiz.

Not being aware of our own or others' identities can be the cause of miscommunication.

So, what we once knew to be true about ourselves and others can change over time. For this reason, we should make every attempt to suspend judgment, ask questions of others, and talk with those different from us as much as possible.

What we know through our interaction with cultural diversity is that there are "differences that make a difference."

What we know through our interaction with cultural diversity is that there are "differences that make a difference." To ignore them, to not explore them, to not place ourselves in a position where we can learn from them, is to be at a disadvantage.

Being more sensitive to people who are different from us, can help us care more and support them in ways that are consistent with their values, beliefs and preferences. To better understand and be more sensitive to others, hear what people have to say:

SPEAKER #1

In people's attempts to be culturally sensitive, it seems like we are becoming less sensitive. If I hear one more person tell me they see me and not my skin color, I am going to scream.

SPEAKER #2

Don't impose your values and beliefs on me, because mine may be quite different than yours. My values and beliefs reflect my heritage and the way I was raised.



SPEAKER #3

Our differences may be minor. For example, if I were to sneeze you might say 'Bless you'. On the other hand, I say 'Gesundheit'. Also, if you offer a prayer before a meal, instead of saying 'Jesus' why not use the word 'God' or 'Lord' instead. If you have a question about my values or the customs of my people, it is okay to ask me. I'd rather you ask me than offend me by something you say or do, even if it is unintentional.

So, to say the least, being sensitive to each other and respecting cultural norms is important in cross-cultural interactions. For example, what is and isn't okay in terms of personal space, physical touch, eye contact and hand gestures varies. If you're not sure what may be okay, ask people for input, watch for clues and follow their lead. Not being respectful of cultural norms can cause embarrassment, be considered rude and be hurtful.

While eye contact is common in face-to-face interactions, consider these differences:

- European Americans typically use direct eye contact when speaking with people.
- Some Native Americans consider direct eye-contact impolite or disrespectful.
- Latinos may view eye contact as a sign of aggression.
- And many Asians consider eye contact inappropriate between men and women.

The following are examples of Asian etiquette.

Generally, Asian cultures believe:

- Older people are to be respected, revered and honored.
- Younger people typically bow when greeting their elders.
- Adult children are expected to take care of their parents as they age.



The eye-contact example is just one of the many things we need to be sensitive to. Can you think of other examples of cultural norms in your own culture or a different one?

Cultural or social norms are those rules a group holds in common about how people should behave. Examples would be shaking hands when you meet someone or saying "Please" when asking for something or not cutting in line.

We encourage you to take the time to learn about the customs and values of the people you interact with the most.

THE PLATINUM RULE

Hopefully, we see that being culturally aware and understanding of the diversity among people can make us more sensitive.

Chances are you know the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as *you would have them do unto you*." But, have you heard of the Platinum Rule? "Do unto others as *they would want done* to them."

Platinum Rule

Treat others the way they want to be treated

The Platinum Rule is not what WE think they want, but what THEY actually want.

A.W.A.R.E. MODEL

We've shared a lot of information, but, the **A.W.A.R.E.** model can help us to develop cultural sensitivity.

A. is for **ACCEPT**. Accept the other person's behavior without judging it based on what that behavior means in your culture.

W. is for **WONDER**. Wonder what the other person's behavior means in his or her culture, rather than what it means in your culture.

A. is for **ASK**. Ask what the behavior means to the person, showing a respectful interest.

R. is for **RESEARCH**. Research and read about the other person's culture so you are able to place their behavior in the context of their cultural world view.

E. is for **EXPLAIN**. Explain what their behavior means in your culture. Demonstrate or describe the behavior in your culture that would express similar feelings or meanings. Exchange information that will help you both gain understanding and learn the behaviors that will help you function in a cross-cultural setting.

PAUSE FOR DISCUSSION



Now, take a moment to share the A.W.A.R.E. model with another person or in your small group.

QUESTION TO DISCUSS:

- How might you use this model with an individual or apply it to an ethnic or cultural group that is different from yours and with whom you interact?

HOW DO YOU LEARN ABOUT OTHER CULTURES?

How do you learn about other cultures?

Every day provides an opportunity to learn about people from different cultures. The more you learn from and about those with whom you interact, the more sensitive you will become.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Read books written by authors from other countries or cultures
2. Visit a museum and focus on the art or history of a specific country or culture.

3. Look out for multicultural events in your community
4. Participate in a short term missions project
5. Be an ESL volunteer
6. Go to a movie that highlights a culture other than your own. Discuss with someone of that culture, or a culture coach, whether the culture is shown accurately.
7. Explore restaurants that feature authentic foods from a variety of countries.
8. Learn a new language and interact with people who are native speakers of that language.
9. Attend a church or house of worship different than your own.
10. Develop relationships with people of other cultures.

EMBRACING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Here are some things to remember about embracing cultural differences ...

- ▶ Trying to be funny by making 'jokes' or comments about others can be hurtful and offensive. It is insensitive to engage in such behavior.
- ▶ Being sensitive to generational and cultural differences involves empathy or "walking a mile in another's shoes." Your values, beliefs, attitudes and experiences may be quite different than other person's. Let's be sensitive to how we interact with and respect others. Each of us has the responsibility for learning about the different groups of people with whom we interact.
- ▶ Be aware of and recognize differences. A "one-size fits all" approach does not respect and appreciate diversity.
- ▶ People feel respected when asked their opinions. Simply asking "what do you think?" may open up a whole world of understanding and appreciation. Sharing stories is a great way to connect with others and



discover similarities, regardless of differences.

To build your knowledge, skills, and comfort level working with people from diverse backgrounds, consider a few general tips:

1. Examine your own assumptions and cultural perspectives.
2. Seek a basis for understanding, rather than judging.
3. Learn about communication patterns of various cultures and racial/ethnic groups.
4. Express respect for practices, values, and beliefs different from your own.
5. Be willing to acquire new behaviors and perspectives.

CLOSING

This concludes our Culture 101: Embracing Cultural Differences.

We hope this presentation has helped you to develop cultural awareness and skills for cross-cultural encounters. But, before we go, here are a few final comments to consider:

***“When we make an effort to understand other cultures, we add new perspectives to those we already bring from our own culture. And we show that we care.*”**

We may learn about God.

“He has not revealed all of his knowledge and wisdom to the Western cultures alone or to any one culture. But each culture can make a significant contribution to our understanding about who God is and how he works in this world.”

We honor God.

God gives us additional insight and wisdom as we gain knowledge from others.

And we fit together more completely.

This material was adapted from "Look Closer See Me" generational diversity and sensitivity materials, with permission of the University of Cincinnati, College of Nursing Center for Aging with Dignity.

CIRCLES OF MY MULTICULTURAL SELF

"Circles of My Multicultural Self" highlights the many dimensions of our identities. It addresses the relationship between our desires to self-define our identities, and the social constructions that label us regardless of how we define ourselves.

HANDOUT

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Adapted from <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html>.

CIRCLES OF MY MULTICULTURAL SELF

HANDOUT

