

# Improve Your Multicultural Skills

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I was born in Brazil, lived in Argentina for a number of years, and immigrated to the United States as an adult. My profession has taken me to different countries and encouraged me to deal with people from all over the world. I would like to share with you three basic tips that may help you become a more effective cross-cultural communicator:

## See yourself as a product of your own culture

The word *culture* can be described as a set of instructions received from our family, friends, and society at large. Such instructions are seldom written or explained in detail. They are, nevertheless, the basis for many of our daily decisions. We all have values, beliefs, and behavior patterns inherited from our cultural background. There is nothing wrong with that – as long as we understand that these values and beliefs are *not universal*.

## When dealing with people from other cultures, understand that you *don't* understand... and ask questions

Because our basis for perceiving reality is our own cultural heritage, we may easily misinterpret certain events, gestures, or body language. It is best to recognize that in a different cultural environment, the *rules have changed*. When facing a situation that doesn't seem to make sense, we should stop and try to ask non-judgmental questions. For instance... “What does this gesture mean?” instead of “Why are you so aggressive?”

## Take the time to observe... and learn

It has become trite and obvious to say that we live in a global economy. It is part of our job to help our organizations be ready to reach out to the world. Take the time to read about other cultures. Participate in multicultural or international organizations and events. Try to learn at least the rudiments of a foreign language. Observe yourself and others around you and try to analyze your own biases and assumptions before acting. You will never know everything there is to know about intercultural relations, but don't worry... just the effort of *learning more* is half the battle!