BREAKING DOWN CROSS CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BARRIERS

Intercultural (or cross-cultural) competency is now the term being used to describe the ability to work, communicate and share information, across cultures through understanding of cultures or religious practices on a general level.

The 10 Benefits of Intercultural Competence:

There are numerous benefits to cross cultural competency at WIC. Some of the most critical ones include:

1. Self-Awareness: People learn about their own strengths, weaknesses, prejudices and preconceptions, when they interact with diverse cultures.

2. Builds Confidence: Cultural competency promotes self-confidence through empowerment.

3. Breaks down Barriers: It demystifies 'the other' and creates awareness.

4. Builds Trust: Awareness leads to dialogue which leads to understanding which results in trust.

5. Motivates: Through self-analysis people begin to recognize areas in which they need to improve and become motivated to develop.

6. Opens Horizons: Cultural competency helps people think outside the box.

7. Develops Skills: to begin to deal with people with sensitivity and empathy.

8. Develops Listening Skills: By becoming good listeners, we become good communicators.

9. Using Common Ground: Rather than focus on differences we move towards creating a shared space.

10. Career Development: Enhances one's skills and therefore current or future employment

Seven Potential Hot Spots in Cross Cultural Communication

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but when working or counseling with other people it may pay to be more conscious of the following:

1. Opening and Closing Conversations:  Different cultures may have different customs around who addresses whom, when and how, and who has the right, or even the duty, to speak first, and what is the proper way to conclude a conversation.

2. Taking Turns During Conversations:  In some cultures, it is more appropriate to take turns in an interactive way, and in others, it is more important to listen thoroughly and without comment, without immediate response, lest a response be taken as a challenge or a humiliation, particularly depending on the context of the conversation,

3. Interrupting:   In some cultures, interruption, vocal, emotional expression, etc. are considered to be the default conversational style, particularly among those considered to be equals, or among men.

4. Use of Silence:  In some forms of communication, silence is to be expected before a response, as a sign of thoughtfulness and deference to the original speaker, yet at other times, silence may be experienced as a sign of hostility.

5. Appropriate Topics of Conversation:  In some places, it is considered vulgar to speak openly about money, for example, let alone about the kinds of intimate family issues that commonly form the basis of afternoon television “talk” shows in the West.

6. Use of Humor:  In the West, we often try to build immediate rapport through humor, but of course, this is not universally seen to be appropriate in all contexts.  The use of laughter can be experienced as a sign of disrespect by some, and so it is important to understand that this is another area where misunderstandings can be very likely to occur.

7. Knowing How Much to Say:  In some places, less is definitely more, whereas in other places, it is more valued to wrap a rather small point up in a longer preamble, followed by an extended wrap-up.  This can be maddening, as some of us tend to value speaking directly and to the point.