

Bridging the Divide:

Developing Culture Competency

In a multi-cultural, multi-generational and multi-faceted world what could be more strategic than developing a capacity to relate to people of different beliefs, backgrounds and experiences? In order to truly succeed in our interactions with others, it is critical to understand how someone else might think or behave so we can maximize our outcomes with those individuals. These are not necessarily skills that come naturally but once they are learned and practiced – the result is increased personal success, increased engagement and increased performance.

The Culture Competency Workshops are customized learning modules that are tailored to meet specific needs and create greater understanding around various identity groups. For example, sessions have been created to address issues like:

- ✓ Generational differences
- ✓ Sexual Orientation
- ✓ Ethnic differences
- ✓ Gender differences
- ✓ Religious differences

These programs examine a natural tendency to assess other identity groups by our own standards – which will often result in less-than-desirable outcomes. The learning experience is designed to correct those tendencies with knowledge and competencies aimed at improving connections with those who are different from us.

Introduction: The Importance of Being a Bridge Builder

The stage is set for mutual understanding as an imperative and fundamental “life skill” to ensure personal and academic success.

I. Hearing the Other Side

- An opportunity is provided for participants to voice perspectives, concerns and challenges as representatives of their particular identity group. This allows each individual to express their opinions in a safe and structured way in the framework of building better connections and stronger relationships.

II. Identifying Differences

- Group Norms and Cultural Tendencies are discussed from the perspective of archetypal data that is carefully presented as information describing the general patterns of a particular

identity group (as it might apply to age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, etc.). There is also explicit acknowledgement that not everyone follows the norm.

- Various cultural dimensions are explored in the different workshops such as:
 - ✓ Different Communication Styles Based On Gender
 - ✓ Different Beliefs Based On Religion
 - ✓ Different Perspectives Based on Sexual Orientation
 - ✓ Different Customs Based on Ethnicity
 - ✓ Different Learning Styles Based on Age

III. Hot Buttons Explored

- Participants are divided into respective groups and asked to make a list of ways they might feel misunderstood. Specifically, they are asked to identify comments or behaviors that they would consider challenging and to locate their groups “hot buttons” – with the aim of helping other groups understand why these items are challenging for them.

IV. Retention Issues Surrounding Various Identity Groups

- Discussion of Recruiting Practices in reference to particular identity groups
- Discussion of Development Plans in reference to particular identity groups
- Giving and Receiving Feedback in reference to particular identity groups
- Recognition and Rewards in reference to particular identity groups

V. Marketing Issues Surrounding Various Identity Groups

- Marketing Efforts as they apply to particular identity groups
- Offerings as they apply to particular identity groups
- Community Involvement as it applies to particular identity groups
- Overall Service as it applies to particular identity groups

Conclusion: Bridging the Gap

A discussion of specific action plans to close the gender, ethnic, religious, lifestyle and generational gaps are developed by the participants from both a personal and school-wide perspective. Also, additional resources for continued learning and growth are recommended.