

Diversity Made Simple

***3 ESSENTIAL STEPS
TO INCREASING YOUR
MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE***



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About the Author



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Lambers has a strong desire to help counseling professionals in various fields feel more comfortable, competent and confident in their ability meet the needs of whomever they have the opportunity to serve.

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Introduction

Over the years, in my professional therapeutic efforts to help others overcome personal and relational struggles, I have gained a very good understanding of not only the many similarities and differences there are between people, but also of the many cultural misunderstandings that can hinder healthy interactions – either through unintentional offenses or the avoidance of important issues all together.

Unfortunately, many professionals admit that they do not feel comfortable addressing cultural issues in their personal lives or in the workplace. That is why I have created an encouraging seminar designed to equip professionals with the skills to communicate more confidently with and regarding individuals from various cultural backgrounds – including differences in ethnicity, gender, age, religion and much more. This can be accomplished by learning strategies for increasing one’s cultural self-awareness, reducing the frequency of unintentional offenses, and repairing relationships damaged by the offenses when they occur. These skills are practical and beneficial for any professional interested in improving interactions with colleagues, customers, and their community.

One of the most common reasons people have for avoiding interactions with people from differing backgrounds is the fear of ignorance – and the potential that their lack of sufficient cultural knowledge could lead to unintentional cultural offenses. Simply put, many conclude that they don't know enough, others must know more than they do, and thus its best if they just say nothing at all and leave the conversations addressing differing cultural needs to the experts. Unfortunately, since so many people feel this way, few conversations occur, and thus many needs go unmet. I don't believe this needs to be the case. Without knowing everything about everyone, you can still contribute to conversations addressing cultural needs around you while reducing the risk of unintentional offenses.

To do this, I recommend you consider my three step strategy for addressing the fear of ignorance regarding cultural issues which you can use immediately to get off the sidelines and into cultural conversations addressing cultural needs in your workplace and improve interactions with colleagues, customers, and your community.

Step 1: Accept the Limitations of Your Knowledge

It's not about accepting one's lack of knowledge as "good," but accepting a certain lack of knowledge as understandable based on your unique personal experiences and the opportunities that you have and have not had to learn about the experiences of others.

In practice, it's one thing to personally acknowledge that you don't know everything. It's another to openly do so in a way that conveys confidence and encourages others to still value the experiences and perspective that you do have to contribute.

You can do this by always be willing to be corrected or clarified, without resentment or hurt feelings. As if to convey the message that you welcome the correction, not out of judgment, but because you see clarification and correction as opportunities to increase knowledge and reduce the likelihood of repeating the same error in the future.

Also, remember that no matter what you know about a group of people, each individual is still the expert on their own personal experiences. So, if you share your thoughts or beliefs about others and are corrected, choose to reduce the tendency to defend your beliefs based on your experience; because while your thoughts and beliefs may have been influenced by true experiences for someone similar to the person you're currently interacting with and others like them, there may still be differences within the individual which you could benefit from understanding and broadening your perspective more thoroughly.

Step 2: Value the Knowledge That You Have

Maybe you have been tempted, like many others before you, to conclude that because you don't know everything about others, that you know nothing about their experiences. One of the benefits of accepting the limitations of your knowledge, is that you can stop wasting time genuinely and sincerely feeling bad about the knowledge that you do not have and begin to learn to value the knowledge that you do have.

After all, while there are many individuals in this world who have had experiences different from yours – which you could benefit from learning more about – you have had experiences that are different from theirs – which they can similarly benefit from learning about. Your experiences, and lessons learned from those experiences, matter just as much as someone else's.

In your professional efforts, I encourage you to use the knowledge that you have gained from personal and professional experiences as a starting point, reassuring others that while you may have things to learn, they don't

have to teach you everything. Acknowledging what you already know makes your openness to learning new information more sincere. They can then focus their efforts on clarifying which things do not apply to them or were misunderstood, and sharing the new things that are most applicable and important to them personally.

Step 3: Intentionally Seek New Knowledge

After establishing a solid foundation of accepting the limitations of your knowledge and valuing the knowledge that you have, you can build on that foundation by making the most of every opportunity that you have to intentionally seek new knowledge.

Simplifying Diversity

A common challenge hindering one's effort to increase multicultural competence and diversity awareness is that we often have a limited view of what diversity is. Although people often use the word diversity to refer specifically to ethnic minority, diverse simply means to be different, and there are many ways in which we can be different from one another. Consider these common considerations related to diversity:

- Race / Ethnicity
- National Origin
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Mental/Physical Ability
- Political Beliefs
- Family Roles

- Language Skills
- Organizational Roles
- Socioeconomic Status
- Religious / Faith Beliefs
- Education Status
- Work Experience
- & More

In your effort to intentionally seek more knowledge, be sure to broaden your interest beyond ethnicity. There are several aspects of one's identity in which we can benefit from increased awareness, as well as understanding. With no minimum necessary, the more we learn, the more effective we can be in our cultural competence growth efforts.

Simplifying Competence

Similarly, gaining new knowledge itself is only one way in which you can grow and increase your multicultural competence. In the effort to define what areas of growth are necessary in order to increase cultural competence, here are some considerations:

- Knowledge
- Attitudes
- Skills
- Beliefs
- Practice
- Understanding
- Social Justice
- Awareness
- Self-Awareness
- Self Confidence

Each of these areas describe a way in which we can grow in our understanding of ourselves and the diverse experiences of others. Realizing that we all have things we can grow and learn about others is what makes this growth challenge attainable. Even those who you consider to be proficient or experts in one or more of these areas have ways in which they can grow in other areas. I have yet to meet the person who is strong in every area equally.

I encourage you to personally and honestly explore these competence criteria, acknowledging where you are strong as well as where you could focus your growth efforts. Keep your eyes open for learning and growth opportunities. Whether from similar personal and professional experiences, or the experiences of others around you, always be on the lookout for ways to learn, practice, and relate to others different than oneself more effectively.

A Guiding Principle

As with many things in life, multicultural competence is a *journey*, not a destination. As such, the question is not “Have you arrived?” or “How far away from the final destination are you?” Rather, the question is:

“Are you **ON THE ROAD** to Cultural Competence?”



A realistic goal is competence, not expertise. As you practice accepting what you don’t know, valuing what you know, and learning more along the way, my hope is that if someone asks you, “Are you a multiculturally competent professional?” you will feel confident enough to answer:

“Yes, I am making intentional efforts to become more and more culturally competent every day.”

Summary

Accept what you don't know!

Value what you know!

Learn more!

No matter how much you feel you know or don't know about others, remember that you don't need to know everything about everyone in order to have a positive impact on someone.

The more people who appreciate these practical principles, the more people there will be who are contributing to healthier multicultural awareness and diversity related conversations. This will result in more intentional efforts being made to both learn more about others with an increased value for the benefits of increased understanding of other' experiences, as well as humbly sharing their experiences with others for mutual learning and growth.

From the cautious novice to the professed expert, we can all benefit from this same strategy, and use what we do know to improve healthy interactions with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

Challenge

*What changes
can you make immediately,
in thought or action,
in your daily professional life,
to be more culturally aware
and considerate of
others' experiences?*

Opportunity

If you have found this information personally or professionally beneficial and are interested in more practical strategies that you can use to help you increase your multicultural awareness, competence and confidence immediately, then I welcome you consider attending one of my live seminars in a city near you. I can also bring my live seminar to your organization for a more personalized learning experience. You can also consider registering for my online course:

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- **Business Leaders**
- **Religious Leaders**
- **& More**



Anyone in a helping profession can benefit from the concepts and strategies explored in this course. It is my hope that after this course, you will be better equipped to reduce cultural barriers, misunderstandings and offenses, and consequently provide better services to whomever has needs you endeavor to meet.

I look forward to the chance to help you make a greater contribution in cultural conversations in your workplace and improve your personal and professional interactions with a greater variety of colleagues, customers, and those in your community. Thank you.

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