



Ten Tips for Cross-Cultural Communication

Here are some simple tips to help you improve your cross-cultural communication skills:

Slow Down

Even when English is the common language in a cross-cultural situation, this does not mean you should speak at normal speed. Slow down, speak clearly and ensure your pronunciation is intelligible.

Separate Questions

Try not to ask double questions such as, "Do you want to carry on or shall we stop here?" In a cross-cultural situation only the first or second question may have been comprehended. Let your listener answer one question at a time.

Avoid Negative Questions

Many cross-cultural communication misunderstandings have been caused by the use of negative questions and answers. In English we answer 'yes' if the answer is affirmative and 'no' if it is negative. In other cultures, a 'yes' or 'no' may only be indicating whether the questioner is right or wrong. For example, the response to "Are you not coming?" may be 'yes', meaning 'Yes, I am not coming.'

Take Turns

Cross-cultural communication is enhanced through taking turns to talk, making a point and then listening to the response.

Write it Down

If you are unsure whether something has been understood write it down and check.

Be Supportive

Effective cross-cultural communication is in essence about being comfortable. Giving encouragement to those with weak English gives them confidence, support and a trust in you.

Check Meanings

When communicating across cultures never assume the other party has understood. Be an active listener. Summarize what has been said in order to verify it. This is a very effective way of ensuring accurate cross-cultural communication has taken place.

Avoid Slang

Even the most well educated foreigner will not have a complete knowledge of slang, idioms and sayings. The danger is that the words will be understood but the meaning missed.

Watch the humour

Many cultures may not understand the use of humour and jokes. When using humour think whether it will be understood in the other culture. Many cultures have certain etiquette when communicating. It is always a good idea to undertake some cross-cultural awareness training or at least do some research on the target culture.

Cross-cultural communication is about dealing with people from other cultures in a way that minimizes misunderstandings and maximizes your potential to create strong cross-cultural relationships.

The above tips should be seen as a starting point to greater cross-cultural awareness.