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MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

**Cross-Cultural
Understanding**

Parenting from the Heart
Teaching children about world cultures

Because We Can

CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR

3

The Bag Lady

4

Cross-Cultural Understanding

7

Guidelines for Multicultural Collaboration

8

Parenting from the Heart
Teaching children about world cultures

10

Because We Can

11

People Are Good

12

Notable Quotes
Tolerance

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Culture is a concept with many different definitions, but simply put, one of the ways we can describe “culture” is the shared beliefs or values of a group or community we belong to that shape the way we understand the world. It can include groups that we are born into, but also groups we become part of or join.

As people from different cultural groups take on the exciting challenge of interacting and working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. We can misunderstand each other, and “culture” is often at the root of communication challenges. Just think how often we hear things like, “He just doesn’t get it,” or “She didn’t really understand what I was trying to say.”

If we were asked to make a list of our hopes and fears in relating to people of a group different from our own, we most likely would include fears of being misjudged, miscommunication, and unintentionally patronizing or hurting others. Our hopes might include the possibility of dialogue, learning something new, developing friendships, and understanding different points of view. People in the group different from ours may carry a similar list of hopes and fears in their back pocket.

The need for better cross-cultural communication and understanding in this age of diversity is greater than ever. We hope the articles in this issue of *Motivated* will be a positive contribution to building a more harmonious world, and foster kindness, respect, tolerance, and acceptance of the people we meet each day—regardless of nationality, culture, or social standing.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

The Bag Lady

Adapted from
Let Me Tell You a Story,
by Tony Campolo



Tony Campolo told a story about an experience that motivated a friend of his to see people differently.

This friend liked to go holiday shopping at a prestigious and expensive department store. She didn't spend much there, but she enjoyed looking, as most women do.

When looking at some of the finest—and most expensive—dresses in the store, she noticed a poor woman get out of the elevator. Her clothes were dirty, her stockings rolled down to her ankles. She held a gym bag in her hand. It was obvious that this bag lady was out of place and that she would not be able to buy anything. Most of the dresses were in the thousand dollar price range, and this woman seemed in no way like the kind of person who would have that kind of money.

Tony's friend expected a security guard to arrive at any moment and usher the bag lady out of the store, but a stately saleswoman came over to her instead and asked, "May I help you, madam?"

The bag lady said, "Yeah, I want to buy a dress."

"What kind of dress?" the saleswoman asked in a polite and dignified way.

"A party dress."

"You've come to the right place. Follow me. I think we have some of the finest party dresses available."

The saleswoman spent more than ten minutes matching dresses with the woman's eye color and helping her

ascertain which dress would go best with her complexion and preferred taste. After selecting three dresses that they together decided would be good choices, she took the woman into the dressing room.

Tony's friend, watching this exchange in amazement, hurried into the dressing room also and entered the adjoining booth, so she could hear what was going on.

After about ten minutes of trying on the dresses with the saleswoman's help, the bag woman said abruptly, "I've changed my mind. I'm not going to buy a dress today."

"That's all right," the saleswoman said gently, "but here's my card. Should you come back to our department store, I do hope that you will ask for me. I would consider it a privilege to wait on you again."

We too often slip into automatically making judgments according to outward appearances, but the saleswoman, with the greatest of professional standards, continued to carry out her job to the best of her ability, not letting the appearance of the customer influence her behavior. On top of that, she left the door open for future interaction.

She may not have looked like it, but that bag woman deserved the same respect and opportunity as any human being, because everyone has potential. Sometimes it's just a matter of time. ◆

Cross-Cultural Understanding

Adapted from *Cultural Intelligence* by Brooks Peterson

The ability to work with people from other cultures is becoming increasingly necessary in our global work environment. Even if we never travel abroad, it's important to be ready to mix with other cultures as each year the number of immigrants is increasing. Likewise, the number of interpersonal exchanges at the global level via video and teleconferences is becoming more frequent. How can we handle these situations effectively? How do we avoid personalizing our differences into likes and dislikes? Is there a way to understand and respect our differences and use them to build relationships that are stronger and more flexible than before?

Most people with little cultural understanding struggle with the differences they experience relating to others from another culture. Deep inside many of us is a belief that relating to a person from another culture should be easy. When it isn't easy and the differences are pronounced, our reaction is often impatience and even hostility.

However, belittling another culture or considering another culture difficult or ridiculous is like the turtle with its hard shell looking at the hummingbird with its long beak and tiny wings and

calling the hummingbird ridiculous for how fast it moves. Both the turtle and the hummingbird exist for very specific reasons, and we would not be at all successful trying to force one to become like the other.

It's better to seek to understand the cultural differences at a deep level, improving our cultural intelligence and our ability to relate successfully.

In most Western cultures, people are groomed from an early age to think independently and take risk and initiative. They are encouraged to be an individual and follow their own path, to show creativity in their classroom assignments, and they often see themselves as equal to authority.

Countries like Japan and France contrast strongly to this Western model. For example, rather than promoting individual stardom, the Japanese have an expression, "The goose that honks gets shot." Their focus is not to call attention to themselves, but instead, promote harmony and group cohesiveness. Put two people representing these different cultures in the same room together with no cultural understanding, and there will be many misunderstandings resulting from their interaction.

Stereotype vs. Generalization

We have to be very careful as we explore cultures to understand the difference between stereotype and generalization. Stereotype is usually a negative statement or description when we apply one negative perception to an entire group of people.

Brooks Peterson, in the book *Cultural Intelligence*, likens culture to an iceberg. There is the part you can see—the tip of the iceberg—which represents the behaviors and obvious characteristics such as language, food, population, music, clothing, pace of life, gestures, eye contact, and leisure activities. Then there is the part of the iceberg under water that we can't see: opinions, attitudes, philosophies, values, and convictions. These most frequently include notions of time, rules about relationships, importance of work, motivations for achievement, tolerance for change, communication styles, and preferences.

Task vs. Relationship

The common myth in cross-cultural understanding is that if we just act ourselves, then we'll get along just fine. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Another way to look at this dimension is whether people focus on “what you do” or “who you are.” A task-oriented culture will begin discussion with a new person by asking “What do you do?” Many people in this type of culture form their identity based on what they do as a profession. Relationship cultures, on the other hand, focus on who they are. They might share their interest in art history, literature, or music. They place more importance on leisure time than work time (work to live, not live to work).



Risk vs. Caution

Some cultures thrive on change and welcome risk. New countries that have only been in existence for a few hundred years or less have had to take risks to build themselves from nothing. In contrast to this, older, more established cultures prefer caution and know they can afford to take their time.

Risk-oriented people prefer to make decisions quickly with little information, focus on the present and the future, are less cautious, change quickly without fear of risks, try new and innovative ways of doing things, use new methods for solving problems, have fewer rules, regulations, guidelines and directions, and are comfortable changing plans at the last minute.

Caution-oriented cultures, on the other hand, prefer to collect considerable information before making a decision, and are more cautious in a “ready, aim, aim, aim, fire” way, change slowly, and avoid risks. They tend to want more rules, regulations, guidelines and directions, refer to past precedents of what works and what doesn’t, stick to proven methods for solving problems, and dislike changing plans at the last minute.

While the examples above may seem extremely simplistic, they are a useful generalization to help us understand the differences between cultures, even if they are not accurate for every single country or situation.

The process of increasing cultural awareness is just that, a process. It can often feel like two steps forward and one step back. However, with the right attitude, it can be fascinating to try to understand different cultures we encounter and practice new ways to get to know each other and get along. This may be as simple as practicing how and what to write in an email or the more complex requirements of a difficult negotiation. This exercise will require personal characteristics of empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and an outgoing personality.

Those who take the plunge and make the effort to talk with and explore other people and cultures will always be more successful in bridging any gaps—even with a few mistakes—than those who hold back to avoid feeling uncomfortable. ♦

Guidelines for Multicultural Collaboration



Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as we set to work on multicultural collaboration in our communities:

- ⇒ Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, "write off," or oversimplify your ideas about another person. The best use of a generalization is to add it to your storehouse of knowledge so that you better understand and appreciate other interesting, multi-faceted human beings.
- ⇒ Practice, practice, practice. That's the first rule, because it's in the doing that we actually get better at cross-cultural communication.
- ⇒ Keep questioning your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate, and don't assume that there is only one right way (yours!).
- ⇒ Search for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the breakdown. Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because other people are on the wrong track. Listen actively and empathetically.
- ⇒ Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Especially when another person's perceptions or ideas are very different from your own, you might need to operate at the edge of your own comfort zone.
- ⇒ Be prepared for a discussion of the past. Use this as an opportunity to develop an understanding from "the other's" point of view, rather than getting defensive or impatient. Acknowledge historical events that have taken place. Be open to learning more.
- ⇒ Awareness of current imbalances—and an openness to hearing each other's perceptions of those imbalances—is also necessary for understanding each other and working together.
- ⇒ Ask questions if you are uncertain what someone means, and remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behavior of any particular individual. We all are shaped by many factors—our ethnic background, our family, our education, our personalities—and are more complicated than any cultural norm could suggest. ◆

Teaching Children about World Cultures

By Apryl Duncan, *About.com Guide*, adapted

Teaching kids about world cultures helps them appreciate the differences in people and their traditions. Let's put down the textbooks and travel around the globe without ever needing a suitcase, and use our imagination to teach children about the diversities in our world.

Create a passport

International travel requires a passport, so start this foreign adventure by creating a passport. Show your children the reasons we use a passport and what they look like. Next, help them make a small booklet to serve as their passport. They can later draw, use a sticker, or glue a picture of the country's flag to "stamp" the pages of their passport as they "travel" from country to country.



Map it

Now that they have their passports, they're ready to travel the world. Print a world map and use pushpins to illustrate where countries are located. Every time you learn about a new country, use another pushpin on your world map.



Study the weather

Kids who live in Ohio won't have to worry about tropical storms. But where will you find these conditions? How's the weather in Dubai or Pakistan today? Weather is more than the basics of sun, rain, wind, and snow. Learn about the weather in other countries to give them the full experience of what it's like for other kids who live there.



Get crafty

Create or wear the types of crafts you would find in different countries. Beadwork, clothing, pottery, origami—the possibilities are endless.



Go shopping

In Bangkok shopping centers, you can buy everything from religious amulets to pet squirrels. Search for jade or haggle for high-tech electronics in Hong Kong's markets. Look for the horse drawn delivery carts when shopping in Ireland. Use online resources and find pictures and articles to learn about each country's marketplace.



Cook authentic recipes

What does Japanese or Arab food taste like? What types of food would you find on a typical menu in Germany? Cook authentic recipes together. Find what foods are popular in the country you are studying.



Learn cultural etiquette

What we might do in our home country isn't necessarily appropriate in other countries. Learning about each culture's etiquette can be enlightening for everyone. Pointing your feet in Thailand is offensive. Your left hand is considered unclean in Pakistan and India, so pass all food or objects to other people with your right. Learn about cultural etiquette with your child.



Teach the language

Learning a foreign language is fun for kids. Fortunately, we don't have to know how to speak every single language to teach our kids. Study a country's official language. Learn basic words in both written and spoken form. Not sure how to pronounce the words? Visit the About.com language labs to hear correct pronunciations.



Celebrate holidays

Teach your children about the history of holidays observed in other countries. When did it begin? Why? How has it changed over the years? For example, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom observe Boxing Day. Countries in the Middle East celebrate Eid. These holidays' traditions include giving money and charitable donations to organizations and people in need. ◆



BECAUSE WE CAN

By Marianne Ross, Indonesia

**THE GOOD YOU DO TODAY,
PEOPLE WILL OFTEN FORGET
TOMORROW. DO GOOD ANYWAY.**

The first time I read these words, I remember thinking they didn't make sense. That was going to change.

My mom and I had gotten on a bus, and as we walked down the aisle looking for two empty seats together, I noticed a young mother with a toddler and a baby. The toddler was obviously bored, and his mother was struggling to keep him seated while also trying to make her baby more comfortable.

We took seats directly behind them, and I selected a playlist on my MP3 player, hoping to tune out the distraction and enjoy the ride. Soon the baby's whimpers turned to loud crying. I was getting annoyed.

The young mother looked stressed and embarrassed, but was that any of my business? No one else on the bus seemed to think it was any of theirs—except for my mom, who went and sat next to the struggling mother.

They had been talking for a few minutes when the woman turned in her seat. Tears were streaming down her cheek. I turned off my MP3 player and leaned in closer to hear what she was saying.

She was making the three-hour bus ride with her children in order to visit her husband, who was in the hospital. She was out of money and hadn't been able to buy milk for the baby or lunch for herself and her son. I wondered if Mom believed her. Some people will say anything for a handout.

Mom reached into her purse and produced an apple, which she handed to the little boy. Then she pressed some money into the woman's hand.

"Marianne," she said, turning to me, "these people are changing buses at the same station as we are. Can you help the little boy?"

I looked at his dirty hair and stained clothes. Couldn't he just follow on his own? Then another line from that poem came to me:

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

The bus stopped, and I bent down and scooped the little boy into my arms. It might not mean anything to him, but I could still choose to do good. I could show love anyway.

"Thanks," the little fellow said, laying his head on my shoulder. We saw them to their next bus and waved as they pulled out.

Now I understand. Love gives because it can. ♦



People Are Good

By Ramona Bailey

I've known Alex for four years. He is 24 years old, has cerebral palsy, and is one of our Women's Club food delivery recipients. Each time I deliver food, we spend an hour or so talking. "If you could go anywhere in the world," I asked him several times, "where would you go?" His answer was always the same: St. Petersburg, Russia.

Last year he graduated from university with honors. For his extraordinary achievement he received plane tickets for two to St. Petersburg—a gift from a family that had heard about him through the food delivery program.

Alex was beside himself with happiness—so much so that he couldn't sleep at night. Neither could his mother, who worried about where the money for all of the other trip expenses would come from. Four days in St. Petersburg could cost as much as several months at

home, and she didn't have that kind of savings.

They were looking into shared-accommodation possibilities when the manager of the St. Petersburg Marriott Hotel heard about Alex and offered them a complimentary room for their entire stay, breakfast included, as well as transfers to and from the airport.

A director at my husband's company organized and paid for a private tour of the city, as well as visits to the Hermitage Museum, one of the finest art museums in the world, and Peterhoff, the summer palace of Peter the Great. Memories for a lifetime!

People are good. People want to do good. If a few individuals who didn't even know each other could make such a difference to Alex, how much more can we do when we unite with the clear purpose of making a difference and influencing lives for the better? ♦

Tolerance

NOTABLE
QUOTES



The human family is very diverse. Many conflicts in our world are caused when people are intolerant of the ways that others see the world. Learning tolerance is an important cornerstone to creating a better world.

—Robert Alan

Respect your fellow human beings, treat them fairly, disagree with them honestly, enjoy their friendship, explore your thoughts about one another candidly, work together for a common goal and help one another achieve it. No destructive lies. No ridiculous fears. No debilitating anger.

—Bill Bradley (b. 1943)

When you find peace within yourself, you become the kind of person who can live at peace with others.

—Peace Pilgrim (1908–1981)

Our inner strengths, experiences, and truths cannot be lost, destroyed, or taken away. Every person has an inborn worth and can contribute to the human community. We all can treat one another with dignity and respect, provide opportunities to grow toward our fullest lives and help one another discover and develop our unique gifts. We each deserve this and we all can extend it to others.—Author Unknown

We need to promote greater tolerance and understanding among the peoples of the world. Nothing can be more dangerous to our efforts to build peace and development than a world divided along religious, ethnic, or cultural lines. In each nation, and among all nations, we must work to promote unity based on our shared humanity.

—Kofi Annan (b. 1938)

If you judge people you have no time to love them.

—Mother Teresa (1910–1997)

