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Tailoring Your Talk

On entering the global market, one of the first things any organization does is to train its workforce to communicate with globally diverse customers apart from one another. So much has been said and written about the importance of communication, especially across cultures, that most organizations know how exactly to conduct communications training. Or do they? In a recent survey, researchers discovered that most organizations ignore the essence of communications training- understanding individual style differences.

Nailing success

The key to effective cross-cultural communication no longer lies in understanding broad cultural differences. It is at least as, if not more, important to understand that failure to recognize individual style differences creates more communication bottlenecks than even language barriers.

Training employees to communicate effectively must therefore begin with the knowledge that most cross-cultural communication challenges stem from the failure to appreciate individual style differences.

An effective communicator is one who appreciates and manages the impact of individual style differences on the communication process. Therefore, the basic objective of training should be to help employees understand and respect the unique styles of their colleagues and customers. Such employees combat the problems of diversity better.

Levels to communicate better

In addition to inculcating such understanding, cross-cultural communication training helps employees appreciate different 'engagement' levels. Three in all, these levels cover the essentials of cross-cultural communication.

Level One

Level one covers the general rules of appropriate communication and relationships and applies to everyone regardless of their cultural differences. These rules include simple things such as following up on customer requests, being punctual for appointments, and answering the telephone politely. Employees are also taught to acknowledge the broad differences in customs and traditions.

Level two

Having covered the broad cultural differences in level one, the next level deals with regional communication differences where the rules no longer apply across the population. Training helps employees understand subtle regional differences and teaches them to apply their communication skills more discreetly. For instance, a manager must learn that he cannot treat a customer from different parts of the country similarly.



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Most employees are aware of broad cultural differences. The second level of engagement too may not require any intensive training. However, it is the third level of engagement that poses a training challenge. This is because most trainers seldom consider it important to introduce this level of engagement to their workforce. As a result, most employees are incapable of handling one-to-one interactions with individuals from diverse cultures.

Level three

This level deals with individual rules of personal engagement. Training employees in this level helps them understand that acknowledging different individual styles is the best way to figure out what others need. An employee who learns to appreciate individual style differences can respond better to the needs of the people he meets.

The rules of level three are unwritten and differ with each individual. However, organizations that recognize the importance of taking their employees into this level face lesser communication barriers. An employee who understands and applies the rules of personal engagement will definitely communicate better than someone who has not progressed beyond level two.

There is nothing challenging about cluing into another's personal style. All that is required is an understanding of the other person without bias. For example, a team leader who steps back and observes his team members will soon realize that every individual has a different way of doing a job. While one member may take down information in bullet points, another may prefer details. An individual's culture or nationality has little bearing on such style differences.

The importance of self evaluations

Experts recommend self-assessments as part of communication training. They believe that when an individual evaluates the impact that his behavior has on the communication process, he will handle cultural, regional and individual styles differences better. Self-assessments help employees determine the degree to which they should improve or alter their communication skills.

As effective cross-cultural communicator is one who can move beyond apparent cultural differences. Giving credence to regional and individual style differences while interacting distinguishes a good communicator.