

Cross-Cultural Communication

We live in an interconnected world, a fact that has given rise to many changes in the ways that businesses and organizations operate. Workplaces are more diverse, employees on a team might be scattered or around the world, and businesses might expand their audience base to include consumers around the world. All of these factors have converged to make cross-cultural communication a vital part of organizational success.

Cross-cultural communication is the process of recognizing both differences and similarities among cultural groups in order to effectively engage within a given context. In other words, cross-cultural communication refers to the ways in which people from different cultural backgrounds adjust to improve communication with one another.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reports that cultural diversity contributes to success that “multi-cultural work forces also contribute to creativity and innovation thanks to diverse perspectives and experiences. The following tips can help one improve their communication across cultures:

- **Check your bias:** Take the time to develop self-awareness. Acknowledge your own implicit bias and analyze your interactions with others. Make a conscious effort to empathize with your peers.
- **Be as clear as possible:** Whether it is an expectation, emotion, question or other message, be very specific about what you are trying to express, especially when working in a situation where the team might be working virtually.
- **Step outside of your comfort zone:** Trying new methods to understand other perspectives can help you overcome fear of saying the wrong thing.
- **Be open minded:** On a personal and organizational level, close mindedness can be a barrier to cross-cultural communication. Exposure to new ideas and concepts and the effort in understanding them can inform your growth moving forward.
- **Engage meaningfully:** Connect with someone who has a different perspective than you and ask questions. Gain a deeper understanding through active listening and thank them for their time.
- **Refrain from judging or disagreeing:** When listening, aim to understand and don't interrupt.
- **Avoid criticizing, ridiculing, embarrassing, whining at or nagging:** Demonstrate that fair, constructive and open dialogue is the best way to settle differences.
- **Give each person in the discussion an equal say:** Be sure to include everyone and respect those who do not want to participate.
- **Avoid speaking on behalf of a co-worker unless asked to:** Let that person indicate his or her own preferences and opinions.

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.