

Cultural Awareness

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

In this track, we'll discuss cultural awareness, and discover how being culturally aware enables us to communicate with people more effectively, as well as to respond to and interact with the cultures of others.

To begin with, let us look at the meaning of culture itself. Culture is notoriously difficult to define. You've probably heard someone referred to as 'cultured' when they're knowledgeable about "special intellectual or artistic endeavors or products, what today we might call 'high culture.'" But that's not what cultural awareness is about. The type of culture we're focusing on today is "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next."

Examples of "culture" can vary from the different foods consumed in different nations or regions, to which side of town you grew up in. As people, we all have our differences, what we were taught when we were growing up, what we believe to be normal, and what we believe to be outside of our normal views on society. But everyone will have lived a different life both in life experience and in belief systems.

That leads us directly to cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is the understanding that our culture means different things to different people and the appreciation of cultures that differ from our own. Being culturally aware enables us to communicate with people more effectively, beyond words and grammar.

It is our ability to look at different ways of life with an open, empathetic mind that underpins the essence of what it means to be culturally aware.

In his insightful talk, *Cultural Awareness in a Globalized World* Ralph Strozza breaks down the makeup of culture into three categories: language, religion, and values. Let's

together tackle each of these and see how aware we truly are, and what we can do to improve our ability to be culturally aware!

Language is one of the biggest barriers to understanding different cultures. Speaking together in a common language is comfortable and allows us to express our culture in a way that only our native language can. Areas of culture like literature and music, that cater to a specific language only, can be impossible to fully appreciate. After all, how many Portuguese, Vietnamese, or Russian language songs have reached the top of the charts in the UK or the US?

So what can we do in day-to-day life when presented with a language barrier? As our world becomes more multicultural and internationalized, you will meet more non-native English speakers. There are several things you can do to remove barriers to effective communication. First, avoid slang. Most slang is localized, and unlikely to be familiar to non-native speakers (as well as some natives!). Next, make sure to speak clearly and modulate your pace. Native English speakers often develop habits like dropping 't's' or combining words (like using *wanna* rather than *want to*). These diverse habits won't be familiar to non-native speakers, so adapting will be of great help. It will also demonstrate you're accounting for difficulties they may face in understanding, and lead to less miscommunication and a better relationship in the long run. Use clear and easy language to help bridge any cultural gap and show you're willing to communicate in a way that best serves everyone's needs.

Our method of adapting to language barriers can go hand in hand with how we approach religious differences. 31% of the global population is Christian, and 25% is Muslim. With over half of the planet believing in these two religions alone, it's essential that you display the ability to promote and foster a culture of mutual respect - potentially in spite of opposing views. It's a crucial part of building relationships in the workplace. So how can we best approach this from a cultural awareness perspective? Well, opening yourself to new and differing views is an amazing way to grow personally. But showing an active interest in something central to another's way of life can also do wonders for your relationship with them. Remember, the more you share with others, the more they are likely to share with you. Much as taking the time to learn about another country's culture can lead you to its history and what it is famous for, understanding the way of life and different belief systems will help to boost your levels of cultural awareness. Making sure to respect others' religious identities, and their spiritual practices will help to foster an environment of comfort in and outside of the workplace.

Now, let's move on to values, which can be a little harder for us to pinpoint and define. Dr. Steven Mintz defines values as the personal qualities that embody and guide our actions, and provide the general guidelines for how we conduct ourselves on a day-to-day basis. More specifically, cultural values are the core principles and ideals upon which an entire community exists, and which they protect, and rely upon for existence and harmonious relationships. How a certain cultural group holds its values

is hard to generalize. What we can attempt to do together though is look at some of the different types of value systems different cultural groups hold, and in understanding them we can aim to interact with these cultural groups with a little more understanding and care.

Firstly, we have individualism and collectivism. As you may infer from the name, individualist societies value independence, individuality, and their own success. This can lead to a higher proportion of people from these cultures being more introverted and less open to group social interaction. Collectivist societies however are more about groups, cohesive relationships with others, and succeeding together. There are key benefits to either of these in the right circumstances: for example, in your workplace, there may be an expectation for you to complete tasks both alone, or in groups. Being able to identify the right time to implement different values can be a great way to be comfortable in either scenario.

It is also important to understand that other cultures may not hold the beliefs that you do. Some societies may place added importance on respecting those older than you, regardless of your respective levels of experience. Whilst you may not hold the same beliefs yourself, being culturally aware is about not letting these differences get in the way of learning who they are, being able to work together, and being able to foster relationships. Being culturally sensitive, avoiding stereotyping, and making sure to not take a person's approach to talk to you as rude when that may be how they're used to speaking to one another in their culture, are all important aspects that you should adopt in your approach to other cultures.

If there's anything you can take away from today, perhaps it should be that the world is huge and diverse. There are so many ways in which people are different and how lives are lived. Treat people how you'd wish to be treated, as remember, to them your culture may also be something that they want to learn about. So go out there with an open mind, with curiosity, and see what you can learn!

Reading List

- [Video] [Cultural Awareness in Globalized World](#), Ralph Strozza.
- [Article] [Overcoming language barriers](#), Culturoosity.
- [Article] [Religious acceptance](#), Aspiring to Include.
- [Statistics] [Religious statistics](#), Word Population Review.
- [Article] [What Are Values?](#), Ethics Sage.
- [Article] [Nine Cultural Value Differences You Need to Know](#), Include, Empower.