Cultural awareness in business involves **preparing and learning** about the different cultures with which your business interacts. However, your business’s attitude toward cultural sensitivity should start at the top. Build the importance of cultural sensitivity into your company policy so that your employees know to show everyone the respect they deserve regardless of whether or not they are of different cultures. Establish consequences of not being culturally sensitive so that your employees understand the weight of this matter.

If your company does business with people from a particular country, for example, offer your employees training so that they can learn the cultural norms from that country. **Lead by example** and participate in the training.

If your customer service representatives frequently speak with people who have different native languages, consider learning a few key phrases in those languages together as a team. This shows your customers how much you value their business and shows your employees the importance of cultural sensitivity.

Reduce Communication Barriers

One of the biggest barriers to cross-cultural business dealings is communication. Your business stakeholders may speak a different language or dialect or use hyper-local phrases with which you aren’t familiar. Even though English is used as the international language of business, people have different levels of fluency.

In some parts of the world, speaking directly and plainly is common in business. In other parts, more nuanced phrasing is seen as proper business behavior. As a result, it’s critical to understand the way your business stakeholders communicate so you can ensure your message doesn’t get **lost in translation**.

Review Workplace Etiquette

Take time to figure out the workplace etiquette norms of your business stakeholders. Our cultures play a big role in how we use **body language** to communicate at work. In North America, making eye contact during a business transaction shows honesty and an effort to establish a connection.

However, in the Middle East, making sustained eye contact with a person of the opposite gender can be seen as inappropriate. In some parts of the world, frontline employees don’t make eye contact with their superiors because it’s considered rude. Lack of cultural awareness examples include making eye contact with people from cultures where it is frowned upon.

Sometimes, what is *not* said is also a cultural variation. In most Western countries, **silence** is seen as a problem. It signals that the person to whom you’re speaking is disinterested or not paying attention. On the other hand, silence can be used to show agreement in some Eastern countries. In some aboriginal cultures, it’s important to have a period of silence before answering a question.

Show Respect and Empathy

The key goal of being culturally sensitive is to show others respect. Make an effort to learn about the cultural **customs** your employees, customers and partners hold dear. Show them you value your relationship with them by sharing in their customs.

For example, if a Muslim colleague is celebrating Eid, a major religious holiday, bring a treat to enjoy together. If a customer is from a different country and celebrates a national holiday, wish him well on that day. Small acts of kindness can go a long way in showing others the importance of cultural sensitivity in business.