What Is Cross-Cultural Communication?

We talked about people coming from different cultural backgrounds and using a variety of communication forms. That's where cross-cultural communication comes in. It is a process of recognizing the similarities and differences as well as sharing meaning among people of different cultures—all the ways in which people of different backgrounds adjust to improve communication with each other.

Why Is Cross-Cultural Communication Important?

More and more, the world is becoming globalized. Knowing that businesses are trying to keep with this pace by creating an increasingly diverse workforce. Having a diverse workforce means that the staff will comprise people of different backgrounds, and as such, the personnel will have to learn to embrace cultural differences. But why is cross-cultural communication important? Let's take a closer look at the reasons behind its importance.

Better communication

Every company or organization strives for a healthy work environment. However, this isn't always the case. Due to differences employees might have, they may not like each other, and as a result, the communication between them might not be the best. Howbeit, if efforts are made to embrace others' backgrounds, communication can start to improve. Though, one thing worth mentioning is that this is a two-way street, and as such, an effort is expected from two sides.

Increased productivity

One other benefit of cross-cultural communication gone well is that it leads to an increase in productivity. As a result, the return on investment from the workforce will be greater. The better the employee morale is, the higher the productivity will be.

Healthier relationships

When the communication between the staff and clients improves naturally, the relationship between them will strengthen. When a healthy relationship between people of different backgrounds is facilitated, the more they'll understand each other, and the better their time they spend together will be.

How to Improve Cross-Cultural Communication in the Workplace?

All businesses want to have a productive workforce. However, building and maintaining a productive workforce requires an environment that supports diversity while balancing time, cost, and management. When diversity is the feature that characterizes a team, the chances of miscommunication happening are higher.

So, how can cross-cultural communication in the workplace be improved? Let's find out.

Do your homework

When we say do your homework, what we mean is do your research before meeting new staff members. Many cultures expect a degree of formality at the beginning of the interaction. However, this level of formality isn't expressed in the same way across cultures. You, as an individual, should be aware of this and be ready to respect this.

Avoid slang

This tip mostly applies to the cases when the staff happens to be non-native English speakers. While they certainly are proficient in English, when it comes to understanding and using idioms, slang words, or even sayings, they may not understand the context in which they are used. That's why you should always be careful with the words you choose to use when communicating with them. Otherwise, you can end up confusing them, or in the worst-case scenario, offend them.

Become aware of the preconceptions and stereotypes

In one way or another, we all have absorbed some sort of stereotype and have a preconceived idea of something. These overgeneralized beliefs about a particular group of people don't always align with the actual reality. That's why we should stop seeing things in black and white or dividing things into good or bad without knowing the intent behind a behavior or an action. This will only benefit you and your staff by being seen as open-minded and facilitating a deeper relationship.

Speak comprehensively

Speaking in a comprehensive manner doesn't necessarily mean that you need to talk at a snail's pace, which by the way, can be another way to offend your peers. However, talking at the average conversational speed you have isn't a good idea too. It would be best for you to modulate your pace of speaking. In that way, you will communicate clearly and pronounce your words more appropriately, and your audience won't have problems with understanding what you're trying to say.

Be careful with the humor you use

For many cultures, business is business. They believe in behaving professionally and following protocol at all times. So, if you want to be funny and decide to make jokes make sure that they'll be understood and appreciated and not be offensive to people of other cultures. In this way, the cultural conflicts in the workplace will be reduced.

Practice active listening

When talking to someone, always try to listen to them actively. You can do so by summarizing what the other person has said and ask questions frequently. In this way, important information won't get misunderstood or missed, and it will help build rapport with your colleagues.

Don't make closed questions

It isn't acceptable to answer negatively in many cultures, so people of those cultures will always try to respond positively. However, you, as an individual, should avoid making closed questions. It's way better to phrase your questions like open-ended questions so that you get some sort of

information as a response. In that way, you won't force people to answer in a way they wouldn't normally.

Keep it simple

While at times, using big words might seem like the right thing to do, in certain circumstances, it's not. In cross-cultural communication, that would only make it harder for people to understand you. Anytime you might think of using those kinds of words, choose a more straightforward way of expressing them. Put understanding and simplicity over complexity.

Remember that communication isn't only verbal

We always tend to forget that the type of communication we use daily isn't just verbal. We often say too much about ourselves, without having the need to open our mouths. All this is done through nonverbal communication, i.e., gestures and facial expressions.

In a way, we should also be aware of the way we communicate without using words. We can send and receive non-verbal messages through eye contact, body language, and facial expressions we make.

Culturally learned behavioral differences can significantly affect workplace communication. However, following a list of the dos and don'ts can always get you on the right track. Following these tips, the workplace's cultural conflicts can be avoided, and the diversity and inclusion initiatives will improve.