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The *Intercultural Skills* course taught me several important concepts to remove conflict and confusion handling situations with international co-workers. Each culture has a different approach to business; such as how to treat coworkers and supervisors, and communicate verbally and non-verbally with others. While following each concept closely and remaining open-minded helps prevent issues in any workplace, I personally believe that verbal communication skills and understanding are some of the most important aspects of cross-cultural interaction. Proper communication is not only important in a local business environment, but also in an international setting. Non-verbal communication is also vital, but not understanding cultural differences in speech can lead to conflicts and confusion.

Verbal communication is used to clarify matters and inform others of ideas. Incorrectly expressing or pitching an idea can lead to misconstrued thoughts, wrong actions being performed, or serious conflicts between business partners. Hence, the importance of articulating thoughts and ideas clearly is crucial, especially between international partners. While a specific communication style between likeminded employees can be successful, it could be problematic in cross-cultural communication. An example of this is politeness. In North America, people tend to be polite, but direct; however, in some countries, such as Japan, politeness can mean giving indirect yes or no responses to questions. This type of response may be misleading or uncomfortable for people used to a direct communication style.

Learning about verbal communication in different cultures gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own way of verbal communication. I soon began to realize that my conversations exhibited a direct, informal, and reserved style: common in North America. On the other hand, through my interactions with international students and employees, I noticed a big difference, especially in people with an Asian background. These co-workers and fellow students appear structured and serious. During study groups and meetings, they favour formality, politeness, and beginning work immediately with little or no small talk. Prior to taking the *Intercultural Skills* course, my understanding of this behaviour was limited and I preferred working with peers who were lighthearted and open to conversation. Conversations were awkward and I felt the tension between my North American-raised and Asian-raised colleagues.

Upon completing this course, I look forward to working with people from different cultures. Knowing now how verbal communication styles vary across the world, I realize that my Asian peers were not coldhearted as I had first assumed, but rather immersed in a different culture for most of their lives. My focus has shifted from finding a likeminded group of people who suit my definition of an ideal meeting environment, to staying open-minded and working with the cultural differences between my peers.