

WIN 2 - The Integration Journey

Discussing Culture

Host:

Given the complexities that underlie our behaviours, we may find it quite challenging to discuss culture openly with each other. In her book, Gurwinder Gill refers to the “elephant in the room” as our discomfort in asking about cultural practices, values and beliefs that might be different from our own. We may be uncertain about how to begin this type of conversation. Have concerns that it might be perceived differently than we intend.

Gurwinder Gill, India:

I would encourage managers to ask questions, colleagues to ask questions, if they don't understand something about each other. But it has to be done in a very respectful way. There has to be some context provided, not only from a verbal communication perspective; the tone, the context setting, the relationship building, building trust - is so very important, but from a non-verbal communication perspective. And non-verbal communication is huge. And many people from different parts of the world actually focus more on the non-verbal communication piece than the actual verbal. So we've got to be careful how we're asking questions of our employees, knowing that there's a different type of style of communication that exists. So ask questions; ask the right questions; but ask them in a very respectful way.

Host:

For this lesson, we asked internationally-educated health professionals some questions about non-verbal communication. Keep them in mind as you reflect about your own non-verbal style in the exercises below.

Gurwinder Gill:

I think the eye contact thing is huge. You know, in my presentations when I talk here I typically ask the question of the audience: “So how many of you were brought up with your parents saying, ‘Look at me in the eye when I’m talking to you.’ And especially when they’re telling you off.” So I’ll see the majority of the hands go up because that’s what people have been brought up as. Then they’re surprised when I turn around and say, “Well I was

brought up the complete opposite. My parents actually told me, 'Don't you dare look at me in the eye when I'm talking to you' - because it's considered confrontational or a challenge."

Kenneth Cruz, The Philippines:

That's the same with other Asian nations. I think eye contact, especially when it's in a professional manner, it's used a lot. And then once there's something that's happened, like an error or something like that, they usually tend to look down.

Dr. Umberin Najeeb, Pakistan:

It's a British, or now a North American model of education back in Pakistan as well, depending upon where you were studying and what kind of resources you have. But eye contact is not considered inappropriate, yeah.

Dr. Amardeep Bhullar, India:

Actually when you meet your elders, you don't make an eye contact. When you meet - when you meet same age group, you make an eye contact. It's good. In professional, it's good, but in culture, it's not good.

Gurwinder Gill:

Out of respect, an employee may not look at the manager when they are talking to them, or when there's a meeting going on. And so if that isn't understood, that can lead to challenging thoughts on the part of the manager, let's say.

Kenneth Cruz:

I think Filipinos mind their personal space. So I think the distance of like what we have right now, maybe like three feet or something like that, should be - should be fine.

Dr. Amardeep Bhullar:

You know after five, 10 minutes it's okay to hug or to handshake, or anything else. But at first I think, and I think most of the population in India thinks, that keeping a distance is a good sign of respect, that you respect a person.

Dr. Mai Sherif:

Those things must be very much respected - big difference - no touching at all. You know, about also we have a very strong religious background that makes those things clear, that everybody respect about the male/female relation especially. They are more - more formal than female/female relation or male/male relation.

Dr. Umberin Najeeb:

So in Pakistan it's not considered appropriate for a man to touch women, and I don't think it has anything to do with their faith or religion; I think it's the culture. Like women are considered more respectable, and you need to respect them; you don't touch them without their permission.

The cultural norm is that women are supposed to carry themselves with more poise, so they would not be very open with their emotions, or they may not be openly showing their feeling as a man may be in any particular situation.

Dr. Mai Sherif:

We have now a very emotional way of talking; we are very expressive. Maybe it's different than here; when they talk, when they have a special occasion, everybody must know, you know? And we celebrate everything; we like celebrations. But anger - when expressing anger, this is not acceptable.

Kenneth Cruz:

Filipinos are known to be very, you know, open - like they really smile a lot. We are known as a happy nation, I would say. For anger - I don't think it's very often seen in public. I think it's more - it's more private when you see someone who's really angry and stuff like that. It's more like really happy, and very positive and optimistic about life.

Dr. Amardeep Bhullar:

In Canada, people they smile when you, you know, cross [paths with] them, walk by them, and I think that's the best thing. Smiling - it induces respect and affection. Once you smile at a person - I'm just big fan of that person who smiles at me, yeah.