



Change Agent Strategies: Cross-Cultural Competencies

Promoting Race Awareness and Equality

Cross-cultural competence is a set of motivations, practices and processes that come together amongst our communities. These competencies help us to live, work and learn effectively in cross-cultural situations. The term “culture” implies an interconnected pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group.¹ These are some strategies for promoting racial equality through inclusion, sensitivity and communication in a cross-culturally competent way.

Practicing Inclusion: Fully and respectfully involving people in the work and community activities of the organization, school, church or group to which each of you belong.

- Make a conscious effort to get to know people who are of different races, ethnicities, cultures and faiths.
- Support institutions (schools, clubs, charities, businesses) that promote racial inclusion in personnel hiring and practices, as well as subcontracting.
- Identify, question and challenge systemic hiring and promotion practices in your organization (this means that if most of the people we work with look and sound the same as us, our organisation is likely practicing some form of institutional discrimination- voice a concern!).
- Partner with people who are different from you to work on organizational development projects that have both generalist objectives and advocate racial inclusion.

¹ Source: *Becoming Culturally Competent*, Carlos Vidal, Stony Brook University, 2004.

- Encourage people of colour to celebrate parts of their heritage or culture without belittling, hiding or disowning parts of themselves.
- Encourage people to feel comfortable enough to “be themselves” in the environment that you are responsible for or a part of.
- Speak up and speak out on discrimination. Avoidance or silence are forms of collusion. When a person remains silent about an act or series of acts of discrimination (and exclusion) they are colluding with the person or institution inflicting such behaviors.
- Advocate for the histories of a group of people to be told in a way that balances perspectives and the experience of all participants at that time (i.e. drawing from stories of celebration as well as suffering).

Practicing Sensitivity: Being aware of, and attending to the needs, attitudes, emotions and feelings of others.

- Examine the intent and the effect of your words and actions.
- Accept that racism is a part of life and the world. As much as we would all like to believe that “things like that just doesn’t happen here”, a more viable line of questioning would be “how does it happen here?” or “how am I supporting racism through my actions or inactions?”
- Look inward; examine your personal feelings, beliefs and perspectives about people who are different from you.

- If you are in a position of privilege, i.e. white, wealthy, male, etc., acknowledge and own that position of privilege. Use your position to promote and advocate for change.
- Actively challenge the “myths” and “myth-makers” about racial difference and the ingrained bias beneath them.
- Become informed about people from other races, cultures and ethnicities.
- Discuss issues of racism – with the underlying assumption of asking **how** it exists, not **if** it exists- in your system or organization.
- Go beyond the food! Despite its size Bermuda has a diverse and rich community. Visit areas of Bermuda that allow you to experience Bermuda’s diversity.
- If you hold a position of privilege, use your position to promote and advocate for change, rather than maintain an unearned status and the status quo.
- Insist that institutions teach us about our community, accurately, and reflect the diversity of our country and varied histories within Bermudian society.
- Learn more about “white privilege” and its parallels to “black oppression”; these references to race can be substituted for gender, culture, ethnicity, age and other areas of difference.
- Take responsibility for starting an open and frank conversation on race; and be courageous about staying in that conversation even in moments of discomfort.
- Interracial/biracial & multi-racial individuals and families are often marginal in discussions of equality, sensitivity and inclusion; yet, people of mixed heritage are people of color with unique concerns and stories – learn about their stories.
- The majority of the population experience the world through sensory experiences; hearing, smell, taste, touch and indeed sight. We deprive a person of their obvious identity and human natures when we say we, “don’t see colour”. Be open to exploring what these identities mean; ensure that your actions are based on knowledge and understanding of culture, rather than inaccurate stereotypes.
- Personal stories can often serve as bridges between people. Be willing to share parts of your story and let it be an opportunity of growth for you and the person with whom you are interacting.
- Be curious about how colleagues and friends perceive barriers and experiences related to race.
- Become a part of dialogue circles and other informal discussion groups on race.
- Society, media and stereotypes create images, perceptions and expectations of different people. Challenge stereotypes and subtle, inaccurate messages sent through the media about racial groups.
- Practice and use good communication and conflict resolution skills (listening, reflecting, paraphrasing, summarizing) to promote the best possible understandings.

Exploring Human Stories; Efforts to improve race relations are largely enhanced when we highlight the significance of our life histories and those of the people with whom we interact. Tell of, and listen for the richness of people’s life stories.

• We each possess perceptions, biases, and assumptions. These are shaped by early learning from our parents, schools, places of worship and personal experiences. Be aware of your biases and perceptions and acknowledge where they may have originated. Acknowledge your personal story.



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