

***This intercultural skill set --- even at the most basic level of awareness -- does not yet come naturally to humankind. We inevitably approach others with our own cultural lens and may not even recognize the ways in which a particular interaction is intercultural.*** We may just plunge forward as we would otherwise --- assuming both people have the same cultural lens or perspective -- and not be aware when a miscommunication has happened.

The simple act of greeting someone lends itself to an intercultural misfire. Consider how much is packed into a greeting: language, gestures, personal space, concepts of time, beliefs and values, hierarchy and power dynamics. For many cultures, there may be different words used for a greeting depending upon the ages, level of familiarity, and stature of the two people greeting each other. The gestures typically used for a greeting will vary with some cultures preferring handshakes, others bows, others kisses on the cheeks, others hugs, etc. In some cultures these gestures may also vary depending upon the gender, age and stature of the two people greeting each other. The comfortable distance between people following the greeting will also vary depending upon the concepts of personal space with those from densely populated places more likely to stand closer to others than those from wide open expansive places. How long one engages in the act of greeting each other will likely vary depending upon concepts of time and values as those who are very time oriented may be much briefer with their greeting and then ready to move along whereas those who value relationships over time may linger longer in asking about family or colleagues. Volumes could be written about intercultural misfires, and those that have been written always include guidance on greetings across culture.

***Those of us who have developed enough awareness to recognize the intercultural nature of a potential interaction -- but are not equipped to work through this interaction -- may do what we can to avoid the interaction.*** Language is perhaps the most complex barrier and source of avoidance behavior. While it's very unlikely any of us can learn all of the first languages of the people we come across on a daily basis, those of us who speak English as a first language are notorious in not making an effort. The assumption has become that everyone will use English. If the person with whom we are engaging is not able to greet us with ease in English -- especially if we are in an English speaking country -- many other assumptions follow about the intelligence, educational level, socio-economic class and status of that individual. If they can afford an entourage including an effective linguistic and cultural interpreter then many of these assumptions can be quickly overcome, otherwise, the conversation is very likely to be brief if it takes place at all. It's no wonder that you find people who speak the same language clustering together in sub-communities for ease, support and comfort of engagement.

Personal space is another multi-dimensional, complex barrier. Personal space can vary both across and within cultures depending in part upon whether people come from collective or individualistic cultures and reside in densely populated urban or sparsely populated rural areas. We can think of personal space on an individual level or communal level. How people move through and make use of public transportation offers an interesting illustration of both. In Tokyo, for example, the Japanese who have a comparatively small circle of personal space needs have become accustomed to being literally jammed by "pushers" into the subway trains during the Tokyo rush hour. New Yorkers, may at times also find themselves crammed into subway trains

but it would be culturally inconceivable that there would be a person hired to push more people into a given train. Those who visit New York or Tokyo from the wide open spaces of the western US can feel claustrophobic and anxious crammed in so tightly and may fold in upon themselves to try and retain some personal space. Those who can afford to stay above ground and take a taxi will do so to avoid the crowded subway trains that invade their personal space.

Considered on another level, luxury condominium complexes in urban areas and gated communities in more suburban areas offer extreme illustrations of personal space avoidance strategies. For those who can not afford the luxury condominiums or gated communities, neighborhood segregation by socio-economic, racial and or cultural affinities offers other illustrations of how people in the US and increasingly in other regions of the world avoid the discomfort of 24-7 regular engagement with those who are different from them. While their work environments and movement through public spaces during their days may require some level of intercultural engagement, they can at least retire back home into the comfort of being with others more like them in their home environments.

***A third option to oblivious intercultural engagement or avoidance of intercultural engagement is overt destructive intercultural engagement.*** The history of the United States of America presents all too many examples of such destructive engagement.

This is particularly obvious when you revisit this history from the perspective of the indigenous people who inhabited these lands prior to the arrival of European colonialists. The majority of people in the US celebrate examples of early European colonialists' productive intercultural engagement with the indigenous peoples they encountered on "Thanksgiving" holiday. Contemporary efforts to revisit and rename the federal "Columbus" holiday reflects another intercultural dynamic that was less productive but readily present in the formation of the US. This intercultural dynamic was amplified through the later policies of "Manifest Destiny," treaty making and breaking and the "Trail of Tears." A reading of *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz highlights this narrative. What the primarily European settlers experienced as opportunities to go west into the frontiers to create new lives with "righteous" protection by U.S. military forces, the indigenous peoples experienced as occupations, resistance, displacement and genocide. For European-Americans and Indigenous peoples to have authentic intercultural engagement in contemporary times, we will need the humility to hear truths, the courage to speak truths and openness to change.

The internment of Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor as the US entered World War II offers another illustration of overt destructive engagement. Once rationalized by the Japanese military bombing of Pearl Harbor and US military concerns about espionage, the narratives of those taken from their homes, their families and their communities reveals other perspectives. A small history museum and memorial on Bainbridge Island, Washington offers testimonies as well as opportunities for healing and reconciliation. On the walls of the museum we see pictures and read testimonies of the individuals who were led away on the dock to board boats. From the Japanese-American docents who were among the children in the pictures, we hear stories both of their departure and of how many of them were received back into the community. This

example further illustrates how productive intercultural engagement in contemporary times necessarily involves revisiting US history with the courage to speak truths, the humility to hear truths, attentiveness to healing and persistence from all parties with reconciliation.

Our history books and contemporary media are full of illustrations of power relations, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and intercultural disconnects that yield violence and conflict. However, there are also examples like the one illustrated at the Bainbridge Island history museum of resolution and reconciliation that offer glimmers of hope. This handbook is crafted by those who hold a core belief that destructive relations are not inevitable. ***We affirm through our Global Intercultural Circle work that we are not hopelessly unaware or in denial of the intercultural dynamics within our personal relationships and our communities.***

