

UNIT 9

EXERCISE 10

Assumptions

This unit deals with personal awareness of diversity issues, especially in understanding **stereotypes**, **assumptions** and **mental models** having to do with how you see people who are different from yourself. Several exercises at the end of this section focus on how becoming more aware of others and their world views actually helps us to effectively communicate across cultures.

Assumptions Activity

Introduction: As we begin the process of understanding the concepts of valuing and managing diversity, we must spend time exploring our own biases and stereotypes that we carry as individuals. When we spend time thinking about how quickly we determine whether or not we will allow ourselves to have a working relationship with another person, we realize that we make up our minds very quickly. This exercise demonstrates just how quickly we make a decision about another person and what that person represents.

- Objectives:**
1. To demonstrate how we make assumptions/judgments about people based on ethnicity, gender, dress, body language and other factors that are a result of our learning and conditioning.
 2. Show how we identify with people who we assume are most like ourselves.

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Chart paper and markers for the facilitator; handout with the various "assumptions" listed.

A room large enough to move around to accommodate the group.

Procedures:

1. Discuss the objectives and give a brief overview of the activity.
2. Introduce yourself and ask participants to make assumptions about you as a facilitator. Sample assumptions can include:
 - College graduate/degree in what area/favorite subject.
 - Kind of car/year/color.
 - Where living.
 - Where born.
 - What school attended/private or public.
 - Married/single/a significant other.
 - Children/number of children.

- Religious/religious affiliation.
 - Ancestry.
 - Ethnicity.
 - Languages spoken.
 - Hobbies.
 - Person most admire.
 - Favorite vacation spot.
 - Profession/if could choose, what would it be.
 - Family size/only child, oldest.
3. Record responses on flipchart.
 4. Instruct participants to find someone they least know and without talking to them, spend about 5-7 minutes looking them over, making and recording assumptions about that individual.
 5. Instruct participants to remain in pairs. Facilitator: Review the correct and incorrect assumptions made about you by participants. Add up the percentages and score the class. Probe to determine where assumptions originated.
 6. Instruct participants to share with each other the assumptions they made about each other for 10 to 15 minutes.
 7. Discuss how many pairs made correct assumptions and what percentage the group as a whole made correct assumptions (100 percent, 75 percent, 50 percent, less than 50 percent).

Debrief:

Facilitator says: "We all make assumptions. It is often necessary because we need to fill in the blanks, be efficient, use time wisely, minimize asking lots of questions." You can expect that participants will be shocked and surprised that they made so many wrong assumptions, particularly about people they say they know. You can expect that participants will fully understand how assumptions impact work relationships.

1. Ask participants to discuss how they came up with the assumptions that they made: clothes, general appearance, age, their cultural background, and etc..
2. Ask participants how often they made assumptions based on their personal choices.
3. As facilitator, acknowledge the fact that we very quickly make assumptions and judgments about another individual and that more than 50 percent of the time we are wrong. If we are wrong, how does that impact the individual, the work team and the organization as a whole regarding productivity, creativity, morale, customer service and competitiveness?

4. **Note:** Facilitator should share a time when she/he has made assumptions. (i.e., I hated escargot. My background was with garden snails and I could not fathom eating raw fish. There was an occasion where I traveled to Japan and everyone else was eating them, so I tried them. Now raw fish is my "favorite" appetizer.) Facilitator can use his/her personal story to illustrate the concepts of being open to differences.

Variation:

1. Prepare a list of correct assumptions about each participant prior to training. Ask participants to match assumptions with each individual in the training. Discuss correct/incorrect assumptions about a particular "group."

Facilitator's Notes:

The audience typically enjoys this activity. Participants are surprised by the realization that they often made the assumptions based on their own biases. This is a non-threatening activity that works well to get participants stimulated and thinking about culture, stereotypes, biases, values and prejudice. Facilitator must be prepared to discuss these various concepts as they are presented by participants. On a rare occasion, a participant may indicate he/she does not make assumptions, that he/she "treats everyone the same." Facilitator must be prepared to give an opinion regarding this statement, i.e., we all make assumptions and why.

The comments of treating everyone the same can be used as an excellent example to illustrate that valuing and managing diversity are about understanding the uniqueness that each person brings to the workplace. Some participants may feel they do not make assumptions about these lands of things in the workplace. Facilitator must be prepared to discuss which assumptions individuals do and do not make in the workplace. The facilitator should acknowledge that the assumptions in this exercise may be "less serious" but that they can be used to demonstrate that all people make assumptions; assumptions lead to stereotypes.

SOURCE: Adapted and Contributed by Ronita Johnson, Ronita Johnson & Associates, 1446 Parkhaven Drive, Pleasanthill, CA 84523.

UNIT 9

EXERCISE 11

Diffusing Stereotypes

- Objectives:**
1. To minimize stereotypical thinking through a combination of awareness and skills.
 2. To help participants realize, first, what it feels like to be stereotyped and, second, that we all are capable of forming erroneous stereotypes about others.

Time: 15-20 minutes for the break-out groups.
5-10 minutes if they are working as individuals.

Procedures:

1. Divide the group into groups of five to six participants, and invite them to designate a leader who will be the group spokesperson during the debriefing section. The exercise can be done in pairs or by individuals.
2. Give each small group the task of generating the following examples from their own experience. First, two examples of times when individuals within the group were stereotyped incorrectly because of their ethnicity, race, gender, age, etc. Second, two examples of times when individuals within the group stereotyped someone else incorrectly because of the other person's ethnicity, race, gender or age.
3. Call the group back together and invite group leaders to share the examples of times when individuals in the group had been incorrectly stereotyped by others. Ask those who had this experience to share how it made them feel. Common responses will be "diminished," "negated," "unappreciated," "like I wasn't really there." Point out that this is exactly how others feel when we apply stereotypes to them and how important it is to remember the negative emotion so as to be more careful not to cause others to feel the same way.
4. Next, ask for examples of times when participants had stereotyped others incorrectly. After listening to several instances, point out how easy it is for even aware and sophisticated people to fall into the habit of generalizing about members of the group.

Learning Point: An awareness of what we do wrong is the first step toward changing that behavior. The same applies to thought processes such as stereotypical thinking. This exercise goes far toward creating that awareness by, first, helping participants to understand what it feels like to be stereotyped and, second, by making them aware of their own stereotypical thought patterns.

Facilitator's Notes: The challenge with this exercise is getting people to voice times when they have stereotyped others. People might admit to having stereotyped a doctor or lawyer, but never to having done so with someone of a different race or ethnicity.

Make it clear that stereotyping does not mean that the person is racist, but simply that we all tend to stereotype as a way of sorting out a complex multicultural environment. Point out that awareness of our stereotypes makes it possible to shove them aside when they come to mind and therefore be able to see people for who they are as individuals.

Finally, point out that stereotyping is a habit, a habit that can be broken. Invite participants to continue to think of stereotypes that they hold. Tell them to watch for the first thought or image that comes into their mind and to get into the habit of shoving that thought aside long enough to see the other person for who he/she is. As this routine becomes habitual, the person will begin to see people more accurately and the stereotype will fade.

Doing the exercise in break-out groups with leaders who report back without naming the individual can be helpful. This challenge can also be overcome by sharing times when you yourself have stereotyped others. Your own candor and obvious lack of embarrassment can model the type of openness that this exercise demands.

SOURCE: Adapted and Contributed by Sondra Thiedeman, Ph.D., Cross-Cultural Communications, 4585 48th Street, San Diego, CA 92115.