More Cultural Concepts and Why They are Crucial

On November 7th at the Michigan Festivals & Events Association Convention, the conversation about our state's globalizing landscape and its impact on our festivals and events will culminate in 7C Lingo's session entitled *Ethnic Diversity.* In this session, we will be addressing a crucial question: *How do we genuinely welcome new global populations, while also continuing to define the authentic local culture of Michigan?* Learning to effectively balance these responsibilities within a diversifying landscape is critical to our future success, but this success will not be apparent unless we first do some true personal and organizational introspection. The assignment that is of the utmost importance for each one of us as we engage in further cross-cultural development is to focus inward and understand our own subconscious hard-wirings, and the effects that they have on the way we think, lead, plan, and manage.

So what are these hard-wirings? In order to fully understand this concept and the significant impacts that it can have on our success in working with people of various cultural backgrounds, we must understand the concept of bias. Bias is the tendency to believe that some people, ideas, ways of life, etc. are superior to others—which usually results in unjust treatment. If your initial reaction to these concepts is: *I'm not biased, I'm a good person!*—then you're not alone. But the truth is, everyone is biased and this bias is not always bad. The subconscious judgments that happen before we make conscious assessments about out situations trigger responses even as simple as blinking an eye to avoid what may or may not be something harmful coming towards it—and these judgments play an important role in protecting us from danger and helping us make other "gut feeling" type of decisions.

However, despite its helpful effects bias can also have a damaging impact on our actions and relationships, and unfortunately not in a way that is commonly understood. In fact, if you're still thinking *I'm not biased, I'm a good person!* then it's possible that bias is playing an invisible role in your life that could be damaging to your personal and professional engagements. Imagine you have worked with multiple colleagues of Asian origin in planning your festival or event over the course of the past few years, and each of them had a similar strength and interest in assisting with managing the funding and finances for the event. Recently, you identified a need for an additional person to assist in this capacity, and around the same time a new person expressed interest in contributing to your organization who also identifies strongly with an Asian regional cultural background. Therefore, you ask them if they would be interested in joining the funding & finance committee.

Now, this seems like a perfectly logical offer to make, and after all they always have the opportunity to decline this offer, but there was one flaw with this approach. The typical process for deciding the best fit for a new team member includes first providing an overview of *every* committee and its duties and then asking which one the new person feels best-suited to join, rather than describing the committee that you feel they would contribute to best. There doesn't appear to be a dramatic difference in these two approaches, but let's just assume that this particular person agrees to the financial role because they understand that that is where the needs is, and you go the next 5 years never knowing that that person is actually a social media guru. What you've just done through a slight deviation in protocol based on your experiences with a particular culture has unintentionally led someone to a role where they are contributing positively but not to their maximum capacity. While this placement isn't likely to harm your organization, it sheds light on a key aspect of success in a diverse landscape.

This concept is called inclusion, which is a dynamic end goal of cross-cultural understanding and growth, and a factor that will be examined further on November 7th in our conversation about Ethnic Diversity. Inclusion is valuing and respecting everyone for their unique perspectives. It is what allows you to fully empower all of the characteristics and experiences that make up a new volunteer or committee member, not just the most visible ones. It is what allows you to realize that it's not about what you lost by having a social media guru stuck in the finance committee, but about what you *could have gained*—perhaps in the form of their ability to engage a new multicultural segment of festival/event supporters through an online strategy that speaks to them. It is about what enables you to identify and enable your own individual interests and capabilities that may or may not align with the role that you've traditionally held, but most of all it is about what will enable you to set your team up to be the best that it can be for the greater success of all.

Article written by:

Caleigh Nowlin – Cross-cultural Specialist, CTA
Office: (517) 337-2700 Fax: (517) 337-6491
217 S. Grand Ave. 2nd floor, Lansing, MI 48933

YOUR GLOBAL LINK
w w w . 7 c l i n g o . c o m