

## **What Do I Know About Culture, Communication and Language?**

**Directions: Circle A for each statement with which you agree or D for each statement with which you disagree.**

1. One's culture and one's race are usually one and the same.      A      D
2. Culture consists exclusively of a group's art, music, dance, food, language and dress.      A      D
3. Cultural groups are generally mutually exclusive of one another.      A      D
4. Cultural traits tend to have a genetic base.      A      D
5. In general, people who speak the same language are members of the same cultural group.      A      D
6. People are usually aware of all of the rules of their culture.      A      D
7. Culture is expressed exclusively by one's verbal behavior.      A      D
8. The only significant components of one's oral language are vocabulary and rules on pronunciation and grammar.      A      D
9. Standard English is the correct way to speak at all times.      A      D
10. There are universal norms for acceptable communicative behavior within the United States.      A      D
11. If a student violates the school's cultural or communicative norms, it is almost always an act of defiance.      A      D
12. In general, speaking a nonstandard dialect suggests low cognitive development.      A      D
13. Standard English has more and better structures than other varieties of English.      A      D
14. Most standardized tests are based on rules of English used by individuals in all linguistic groups.      A      D
15. Standard English is the English of Anglo/European Americans.      A      D
16. In general, students from poor families do not communicate as well as those from middle-class families.      A      D



## **Answers**

**Each statement reflects a common myth or stereotype pertaining to communication or culture. Therefore, you should have disagreed with each one.**

### **Different Cultures and Languages**

Use model reference behaviors to overcome barriers.

#### **Communicating with All Patrons**

Show concern for the patrons of different cultures by letting them know you are trying to help. Methods for communicating with patrons from other cultures or those who speak another language include the following:

- § Speak in brief, simple sentences rather than long, compound or complex ones. Try not to use professional jargon.
- § If you don't understand, ask questions; but keep questions short.
- § Don't ask "either/or" questions; pose two questions instead.
- § Don't ask negative questions which can be misinterpreted easily; for example, "Don't you like mysteries?"
- § Speak slowly and articulate distinctly.
- § Avoid idioms and metaphors, e.g., "That's cool."

#### **Things to Try**

- § If necessary, write the question down or ask the patron to write it down. However, be especially sensitive to patrons who may not be able to write in English yet.
- § If the patron does not understand you, try different words or phrases. The ones you used first may not have been mastered yet.
- § Don't be afraid to use a dictionary.
- § If you see that a patron has misunderstood your direction after the person has left your station, don't assume that the patron will eventually discover the error. Follow through with whatever assistance you can give.

## **Different Customs**

- § Recognize that people from some cultures are not demonstrative. Smiling may hide emotions such as frustration or confusion.
- § From patrons of some cultures, silence should not be construed as misunderstanding or rudeness. Some other possible reasons are (1) respect for your authority, (2) full agreement with what you are saying or doing, or (3) fear of being judged by how he or she speaks English.
- § Don't expect verbal reinforcement such as "I see" or "Uh-huh" when you are explaining something to a patron. Watch for non-verbal communication. If you want an acknowledgment, ask "Do you understand?" or watch for a nod.
- § Remember that in some cultures it is considered polite to avoid eye contact.
- § Realize that name order may be different for some cultures. Ask for "family name" instead of "last name." Women from some cultures may retain their maiden names after marriage, e.g., Vietnamese.

## **Positive Attitude**

- § Remember that saving face is important in many cultures. Your attitude is very important. Always show mutual respect.
- § Allow time for the patron to translate mentally what you have said.
- § Be patient.
- § Keep smiling.
- § Don't raise your voice; this may be perceived as anger.
- § Allow time for patrons to accomplish what they came for, even when you are busy.

## **Get Help**

- § Remember that word of mouth is more important than the written word when people are new to this country.
- § When possible, get help to complete a communication transaction. Use contacts who understand the language when possible, and encourage personal contact.

- § Know and use the expertise of staff members in your library or library system who can help translate. Identify other patrons in your community who may be willing to help translate.

**Major Point: Concern for the individual can help overcome cultural barriers.**

**Good customer service requires sensitivity to the diversity of customer backgrounds. Consider learning styles, cultural background, personality traits, disabilities, library experience, technology skills, professional expertise, and education.**

**Handling Challenges**

**The “dissatisfied customer”**

"Most customers have expectations about service, though sometimes those expectations are unrealistic or unreasonable...The customer is not always right, but they do have a right to express their opinions..." Occasionally a customer will exercise the right to express an opinion in a threatening or offensive way. Maintaining a positive attitude, attempting to understand the customer's viewpoint, and trying to turn the situation around may not work. What can you do?

**Crisis prevention**

The following "10 tips for Crisis Prevention" were adapted by Yale University Libraries from those provided by the National Crisis Prevention Institute:

**Remain calm and be empathetic.**

- Try to show respect.
- Do not be judgmental.

**Clarify messages.**

- Make sure you understand what is being said.
- Repeat your request if necessary.

**Respect personal space.**

- Don't stand too close for comfort.

**Be aware of body position.**

- Don't stand straight in front of another person or appear to block his/her avenue of escape.
- Keep your nonverbal cues non-threatening.
- The more an individual loses control, the less the person listens to your actual words.

### **Permit verbal venting where possible.**

- Let the angry person blow off steam.

### **Set and enforce reasonable limits.**

- State what you will permit.
- Offer a choice of actions or alternatives if you can.

### **Avoid overreacting.**

- Strive to remain calm, rational and professional.
- Avoid the use of humor, sarcasm or personal remarks.

### **Avoid using physical techniques (pushing, grabbing, etc.) except when personal safety is at risk.**

- Physical techniques can only make things worse, and may lead to subsequent lawsuits.

### **Ignore challenging questions.**

- Do not respond to challenges to your authority, training, intelligence, policy, etc.
- Do not argue with outrageous statements.

### **Be a team member when confronting a disturbed patron.**

- Get help and do not try to handle the situation alone.
- Give support to another staff member who has had to confront a disturbed patron.
- Alert other staff members when strange behavior occurs.

### **Be aware of techniques for coping in a crisis situation. Be calm, empathetic, and respectful of personal space. Set limits, ignore outrageous statements, and let the customer vent. Request help and give support to co-workers.**

## How do I handle angry or dissatisfied customers?

Here's a list of suggested actions when dealing with a dissatisfied or angry customers.

- **Take ownership.** The customer wants someone to take personal responsibility for resolving their problem. If you have the authority and responsibility, then take personal ownership. If not, then quickly identify and secure someone (manager) who can.
- **Listen.** The angry or dissatisfied customer wants to tell someone about their problem and to vent their frustration. Allow them to do that. Apply the skills of active listening.
- **Apologize.** This will open the door to problem resolution.
- **Empathize.** Let the customer know that you understand why they are upset. Then work to separate the problem from the emotion.
- **Identify the problem.** What, specifically, has caused the customer to be angry or dissatisfied?
- **Identify points of agreement.** Then, you can work toward a common and mutually satisfactory solution.
- **Determine what solution(s) the customer wants.**
- **Provide solution options** that satisfy the customer's needs and the policies of your organization.
- **If you can't satisfy the customer** tell them so, why, and what you can do.
- **Ask if you can provide additional service and if the customer is satisfied.**

**Exceed expectations.** Provide additional services above and beyond the problem resolution the customer expects. This simple act, resolving the problem at the 110% level, is among the most potent ways to earn long-term customer satisfaction.