

# SEVEN WAYS TO IMPROVE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUES

## 1. DON'T ASSUME WE ARE ALL THE SAME

When you go abroad or meet people from cultures, try to entertain the notion that they might be very different from you. If it turns out they aren't, all the better; and if it turns out they are, score one for your side.

## 2. WHAT YOU THINK OF AS NORMAL OR HUMAN BEHAVIOR MAY ONLY BE CULTURAL

A lot of behavior is universal, of course, and doesn't differ from country to country, but not all. Before you think you understand everything about other cultures, consider that you might be mistaken.

## 3. FAMILIAR BEHAVIOR MAY HAVE DIFFERENT MEANINGS

The same behavior—saying yes, for example—can exist in different cultures and not mean the same thing. Just because you've *recognized* a given behavior, don't assume you have therefore *understood* it.

## 4. DON'T ASSUME THAT WHAT YOU MEANT IS WHAT WAS UNDERSTOOD

You can be sure of what you mean when you say something, but you can't be sure how this is understood by someone else. Check for signs that the other person did or did not understand you.

## 5. DON'T ASSUME THAT WHAT YOU UNDERSTOOD IS WHAT WAS MEANT

Your understanding is based on your experience of the world. If the other has very different life experiences, you may not share the same meaning.

## 6. YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIKE OR ACCEPT "DIFFERENT" BEHAVIOR, BUT IT HELPS TO UNDERSTAND WHERE IT COMES FROM

You may never get used to some of the things your guests do (even as they are occasionally puzzled by you), but it can't hurt to try to figure out why they behave in the ways they do.

## 7. MOST PEOPLE DO BEHAVE RATIONALLY; YOU JUST HAVE TO DISCOVER THE RATIONALE

People of good will from other countries will do things that simply make no sense to us. The fun is the "translation" of the intent.

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\*Adapted from *Cross-Cultural Dialogues*. Craig Storti. Yarmouth, Me: Intercultural Press, 1994.