

# Cultures Connecting



Addressing Race Relations in the 21st Century

Friday, September 21, 2012

## **10 Qualities of Culturally Competent Leaders**

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Culturally competent leaders can come from all levels of an organization or community. While leaders have the responsibility to move their organization towards positive change, it is important they recognize they are also learning along the way. Becoming culturally competent is a journey not an event and no one person has all the answers. The best leaders are those who are intentional about developing their cultural competence through practice with others and by learning from their mistakes.

### 10 qualities of culturally competent leaders for our workshop *Learning and Leading in a Multicultural World*.

#### **1. Learners**

No one is ever culturally competent in every way with everyone, no matter how much work they do to grow in their awareness, knowledge, and skills. Culturally competent leaders acknowledge they are learning and are always in the process of becoming more skilled.

Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Openly admit and critically reflect on mistakes they make
- Share what they are learning
- Take risks to try new things
- Engage in culturally relevant professional development (CRPD)
- Seek consultation
- Acknowledge and continually try to surface and address their own biases, stereotypes, privilege and power

#### **2. Courageous**

Culturally competent leaders are bold. They are not driven by the fear of making mistakes or the need to be liked by everyone. They know their work involves making difficult choices and as a

result not everyone will be pleased with the decisions they make. If decisions they make to stand against oppression draw negative public attention, they stick to their core values regardless. Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Are grounded in their core values
- Try things that haven't been done before
- Are willing to make executive decisions
- Accept and embrace the discomfort that comes with learning
- Engage in courageous conversations about racism and privilege
- Speak the unspoken

### 3. Data Driven

Culturally competent leaders think about a situation from multiple perspectives and explore what impact their decisions will have on different people. They then make the best decision based on that information.

Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Seek input from different people at different levels of the organization, clients and/or community
- Use data to inform their decisions (qualitative and quantitative)
- Research and collaborate with other organizations that are working to address institutionalized racism
- Hold people in the organization accountable, e.g., cultural competence in evaluations
- Survey staff and clients to assess their experiences, thoughts, attitudes, etc.
- Continually assess progress, celebrate successes, and change course as needed

### 4. Transparent

Culturally competent leaders communicate frequently with the rest of the organization. This includes what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it relates to their mission and vision of what is yet to come.

Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Post information on their website to inform the community
- Hold community meetings
- Share meeting minutes about equity plans publicly
- Take time during staff meetings to inform, answer questions, etc.
- Engage their Board, President and/or Executive Leadership

### 5. Inclusive

Being a culturally competent leader means getting other people within the organization involved in the decision making process. The more diverse perspectives you gain, the more likely you are to meet the needs of the staff and clients you serve.

Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Involve people from different levels of the organization to help make decisions
- Provide other people in the organization with opportunities to lead conversations about equity
- Clearly communicate when they are making collaborative decisions versus when they are seeking input but will make the final decision alone
- Recognize cultural competence work is greater than them
- Identify diverse perspectives missing from important decisions and find ways to recruit or include these viewpoints, i.e., Who is not in the room that needs to be here?
- Actively listen to and engage resistance

## 6. Sensitive

Culturally competent leaders understand they inherit the history of the organization with regards to institutional racism. This includes the attitudes, beliefs, and feelings clients and staff have towards the organization and/or cultural competency work as a result of past experiences. They don't try to minimize or invalidate these experiences with a "new day" attitude. Instead, they approach their work through a lens of understanding.

Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Research the history of the organization with regards to racism and culture
- Operate with a historical understanding, not a blank slate mentality
- Recognize and adapt their approach to issues that touch on past relationships or identities
- Know when a technical approach is appropriate
- Look for root causes of barriers or resistance to change

## 7. Connected

Culturally competent leaders run the risk of burning out quickly. Their work is demanding and presents many challenges. They can often feel isolated as a result and so must stay connected to people who are also engaged in social justice work to help keep them energized and focused. Culturally competent leaders see themselves as servants of their community. They are out in their communities, growing in their understanding of the needs of the clients they serve.

Culturally Competent Leaders...

- Get involved in their community
- Live in the communities they serve
- Seek community input to identify the most pressing needs, particularly from those who are most impacted by the decisions
- Work *with* rather than *do for* community members
- Participate in action and advocacy efforts beyond their workplace
- Attend social justice conferences to learn and share new ideas
- Meet with other equity leaders for critical support and strategizing
- Organize groups of people for on-going reflective action when none currently exist

## 8. Strategic

Culturally competent leaders think things through to figure out the best approach for undoing institutional racism, understanding the urgency but knowing that it can't be done well when rushed. They are not impulsive and don't respond whimsically to every request or new exciting idea.

Culturally competent leaders...

- Are not quick to do something for the sake of checking a box
- Work with a team to develop a strategic plan
- Ensure that the mission and vision of the organization is inclusive
- Allocate resources to support social justice initiatives
- Provide culturally relevant professional development for staff to ensure everyone is considering their job through an equity lens
- Review policy and practice e.g., H.R. hiring practices
- Are thoughtful about when to push and when to hold back
- Identify and engage gatekeepers
- Consider the organizational culture, hierarchy, and other dynamics in decision-making

## 9. Enthusiastic

Culturally competent leaders know how to energize others around the work they are doing. They get people excited about the possibilities and create an atmosphere where people want to be a part of the change.

Culturally competent leaders...

- Have a hopeful attitude about the possibilities without being naive
- Believe things can be better
- Inspire others to be a part of the work
- Share why this work is important to them personally and professionally
- Celebrate accomplishments, even small wins
- Motivate rather than shame or blame

## 10. Realistic

While culturally competent leaders might get excited about the change that is on its way, they know changing systems takes time.

Culturally competent leaders...

- Understand change doesn't happen over night
- Don't try to do everything at once
- Stay engaged for the long-term
- Recognize they are teaching people how to fish vs. doing it for them
- Don't give up

***Are you in the process of becoming a culturally competent leader? Which of these qualities of culturally competent leadership can you say are true about you most of the time? What would you add to the list?***

***What do you need to do to augment, support, or add to your cultural toolbox?***