

## ADAPT VERSUS INCLUDE ACTIVITY

*Adapted from activity presented by Executive Diversity Services at a 2006 “Train-the-Trainer” workshop and Appendix D of 52 Activities for Exploring Values Differences, Donna Stringer and Patricia Cassidy (2003)*

This activity is better done after participants have been on a trip for a few days.

**Define “culture”:** “Culture includes the knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, morals, customs, habits, and behaviors that you acquire that: (a) you share with a certain group (family or community); (b) has been passed onto you from a previous generation; (c) shapes your behaviors and structures your perceptions; and (d) is constantly, but slowly changing between generations.”

**Say:** “Aspects of your culture may include your body language when you communicate (eye contact?), eating mannerisms, and communication styles within your family. Often when there is a cultural behavior/habit that annoys you about someone, it is more of a pet peeve than a behavior that actually makes a difference. So when a cultural behavior bothers you, ask, ‘is it a difference that makes a difference?’ Specifically, ask the following questions:”

1. “Is it affecting the cost (course schedule, logistics, gear activities)?”
2. “Is it affecting productivity (achievement, learning, good participant outcomes)?”
3. “Is it affecting safety (per Risk Management protocol)?”
4. “Is it legal (violates laws of the jurisdiction or your organization’s policies)?”
5. “Is it service of our diversity, equity, and inclusion statement?”

If the answer is NO to all of these questions then the difference should not be viewed negatively—it should be embraced. If the answer is YES to any of these questions, figure out if there is a potential work-around that honors the behavior while ensuring it is not a difference that makes a difference.”

Go over some examples of situations where participants would ask these questions and run through the 4 questions above:

- Your tentmate reads the Bible every night for an hour by headlamp while you are going to sleep. Is it a difference that makes a difference? (Initial answer may be yes, but a work-around could be asking the reader to go outside or use the red headlight setting)
- Your cook group has someone who needs to eat kosher foods. Is it a difference that makes a difference? (No!)
- One participant doesn’t have a linear concept of time, grew up in a family that didn’t have watches or look at clocks, and is always late to meetings and classes during the course. Is it a difference that makes a difference? (Initial answer is yes, but is there anything we can do to make the answer ‘no?’ When this issue came up with participants from an Indian tribe, NOLS decided the best work-around was to customize a course so there was more base camping and therefore no need to move every day, and to shorten the course to emphasize the leadership curriculum and de-emphasize the technical outdoor skills)

**Now, break out the class into groups and have groups discuss the following:**

- What is a cultural behavior or practice you grew up with that is very different from (and maybe even conflicts with) a behavior or practice that is part of the this organization’s culture?
- For each of these “conflicts” in culture, when is appropriate for this organization to honor your cultural behavior/practice, and when is it appropriate for you to adapt to this organization’s culture? Ask if it is a difference that makes a difference and run through the 4 questions.

Have participants report out and draw two columns with arrows indicating when it is appropriate to adapt to the organization’s culture, and when the organization should honor their culture. The final list might look like this.

	<b>YOU</b>	<b>Adapt (→) or Include (←)</b>	<b>This organization</b>
<b>Feedback</b>	Not brought up in a family that gave feedback	→	Feedback is integral to good communication/leadership
<b>Formality</b>	Brought up in a formal culture where you called your teacher “Ms.” Or “Mr.” or “Ma’am”	←	Super informal where instructors go by first name.
<b>Physical contact</b>	Not a person who likes to be hugged or physically touched during communication	←	Touchy feely huggy culture
<b>Punctuality</b>	Laid back with no sense of urgency on time (never wore a watch and doesn’t care to)	→	Timeliness/punctuality are essential to participant outcomes and course schedule.
<b>Clothing</b>	Dress conservatively and don’t like to expose arms and legs	←	Non-conservative dress (tank tops, shorts) and sometimes participants bathe and swim in underwear

**Conclude:** “Inclusion doesn’t mean that we need to welcome any and all types of behavior. There are some instances when we’re going to have to ask participants to adapt, and there are some instances when this organization can and should still honor your cultural needs. We just need to talk about it.”