

Seven Lessons Toward Cross-Cultural Understanding

1. Don't assume everyone is the same.
2. Familiar behaviors 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've understood it.
3. What you think of as normal behavior may only be cultural. A lot of behavior is universal, but certainly not all. Before you project your norms on the human race consider that you might be wrong.
4. Don't assume that what you meant is what was understood. You can be sure of what you meant 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 indeed understand you.
5. Don't assume that what you understood is what was meant. You are obliged to hear what others say through the medium of your own culture and experience. You know what those words mean to you, but what do they mean to the person speaking them? Always double check!
6. You don't have to like "different" behavior, but understanding where it comes from may help you respond with more sensitivity.
7. Most people do behave rationally; you just have to discover the rationale!

Storti, Craig. Cross-Cultural Dialogues: 74 Brief Encounters with Cultural Difference, Intercultural Press, 1994.