

Andrés T. Tapia



The Obama Era
and the Transformation
of Global Diversity

THE INCLUSION PARADOX:
The Obama Era and the Transformation of Global Diversity

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By Russ Fradin, Chairman and CEO, Hewitt Associates xix

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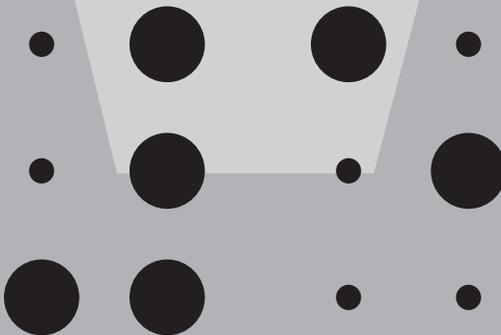
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Chapter 5

Are You Evil, a Moron, or Just Plain Incompetent?

Lori and I had been married only a short time when we decided to throw a party. In her German-American Midwestern way, Lori pulled out a note pad and said, “Okay, let’s make an invite list.” Quickly, we came up with about 25 friends and coworkers.

After we completed that task, Lori went on to deal with all the specific details for party planning — menu selection, music and entertainment, house preparation, and so on. Plans for the party were well under way. The following week, as I ran into friends and colleagues on the train, at work, or in the neighborhood, I would inevitably say, “Hey, Mark — we’re having a party two weeks from Saturday. Here’s my address. Be sure to come. And pass the word on!” When I mentioned to Lori that I’d invited Mark, Melinda, and Fareed, I got the look. “Are they on the invitation list?” she asked frostily. “Well, no. But hey, that was just to get us started.” “Oh, *really?*” was her reply.

To Lori’s way of thinking, the 25 names on the list represented the sum total of people who would attend our celebration. To *my* way of thinking, the invitation list was only the starting point for all the people who could possibly attend. *Todo el mundo* (“the whole world”) is a phrase that frequently comes up in communal Latin America when discussing who’s invited to a party or other social event. Rather than limiting an invitation list, as would be customary in the more

individualistic United States, in Latin America, it's about expanding it. What Lori and I had was one invitation list, 25 names, and two culturally different ways of interpreting it. What started as a party for 25 turned into a whirlwind celebration of more than one hundred.

And so it has gone — navigating the deep waters of cultural differences, running aground in the shoals of cultural friction. As we found out quickly and painfully, cultural differences can seriously derail personal relationships, not only with one's spouse, but also with friends and coworkers.

Here's where it all begins to either fall apart or create something new. When someone does something different from what we've been trained to believe is the norm, we can only assume they are either incompetent or bad people. Why else would they do it that way? When we think about cultural misunderstandings with those close to us, don't we often end up being furious at their insensitivity? Steamed about their moronic behavior? Outraged at their selfishness?

Dianne Hofner-Saphiere, a crosscultural consultant with vast global experience, explains, "The most challenging thing is to get people to understand that their common sense *isn't common*. Common sense is really cultural sense. It's what you're expecting."

I Discovered My Latin Soul in Washington's Wheat Fields

My dad, Fernando Andrés Tapia Mendieta — the son of two school teachers from the fishing town of Pisco in Peru — earned his doctorate of medicine at San Marcos University in Lima. He came to the Cleveland Clinic to do his first residency as a cardiologist. My mom came from the small town of Harrington, Washington, 50 miles west of Spokane. She had always dreamt of getting out of small-town America, so she enrolled herself in an electrocardiogram technician certification program, also in Cleveland. So, between the heartbeats, the cardiologist and the EKG technician met, married, and moved to Chicago, where my father completed his second residency at Edgewater Hospital, where I was born.

When I was 1 year old, my parents got into their green Comet, drove to the port of San Francisco, hopped on a cargo ship, and sailed to the port of Callao off the coast of Lima, where I grew up.

Spanish was our first language at home, with English a close second. This bilingualism was interwoven with biculturalism. One night, we'd be having *arroz con pollo*, the next night meat loaf and potatoes. We celebrated Peruvian Inde-

pendence Day *and* American Thanksgiving, complete with turkey and stuffing — though cranberry sauce was impossible to get since no one knew what my mom was talking about when she asked for it at the store. She told us about Halloween, so my siblings and I dressed up as goblins and cowboys and knocked on people's doors and called out, "*Treekohtree!*" (our butchered version of "trick or treat"). People had no idea why there were goblins and cowboys at their doorstep, but since we looked so cute, they gave us money. We quickly learned that the bigger the house, the more money we got. We pulled in quite a haul — my first inkling that becoming crossculturally adept could be profitable!

I first discovered differences when, as a third grader, I went to visit my American grandparents in my mom's hometown of Harrington over summer break. Coming to the United States from Peru was already loaded with major culture shock differences, which were compounded by the contrast between Lima, a city of 6 million at the time, and Harrington, population 500. Then there were the urban/rural differences of pace, noise, animals, and occupations — just to name a few.

I stood out immediately. Though I'm not that dark-skinned, I was the darkest person there. I spoke with a heavy Spanish accent, and when they threw a ball at me, I would kick it. During this visit, I experienced both the underside and the upside of being different. There were taunts and mean-spirited jests about my foreignness. But there was also the genuine interest, on the part of the town folk, in this son of a native daughter — Jackie Kay Graham, my mom. And so I was invited to ride on the combine during wheat harvest season, to give a slide show on Peru at the Methodist church potluck, and to play Little League baseball for the first time.

It was in Washington's Lincoln County wheat fields that I discovered my Latinness. Until I was out of the culture I had grown up in and immersed in another, I had little appreciation for the many ways in which my identity was outlined by the *absence* of the familiar cultural icons and customs of my upbringing. Surrounded by people who didn't look or speak like I did made me aware of the unique ways I looked and spoke. Here is where I realized I was a Latin American from Peru and started to get an inkling of what that meant.

Returning to Lima, I continued my education in a parochial school run by American nuns. I then prepared to go to college by getting a Peruvian and American high school diploma at the American High School of Lima. In Roosevelt's classrooms I discovered the life-sustaining literature of Poe, Faulkner, and Melville along with that of Borges, Vargas Llosa, and Neruda. I learned about George

Washington's defiance of the British in his Christmas crossing of the Delaware in one class period, and about Tupac Amaru's rebellion in Cusco against the Spaniards in the next.

Every few years, I went back to Harrington, this time with my three younger sisters, to visit my grandparents, Brownie and Frieda. I played flag football, earned five bucks an hour pulling rye from a wheat field for a farmer who had mixed up his seeds, and watched the *Sba Na Na* show with my grandpa while munching on M&Ms. In turn, I taught my classmates where Peru was on a map, how to get by with a few choice Spanish phrases, and that when I threw a ball at them — to kick it. I told them stories of going to bullfights, professional soccer games, and political demonstrations.

By the time I arrived at Northwestern University to study journalism, I believed I was ready. I had even worked on my accent using my mom's voice as my internalized language tape. I would hear myself speak in an accented way and then repeat the same word ten times to match how she would say it.

But I was far from ready. So much of my preparation was tip-of-the-iceberg stuff — necessary, but only a beginning. I was soon to discover that most of my cultural differences were below the waterline. With icebergs, it's what's below the waterline that sinks *ships*. With culture, it's what's below the waterline that sinks *relationships*.

I've already shared my story of the differences between the Latin-American and European-American interpretation of time, but there were many other profound differences. As I relate these other stories, some of you may sheepishly recognize yourself in them because you've tripped the crosscultural wire in similar ways. Or you may end up scratching your head, asking, "Why would he do *that*?" And that is the point. We must come to appreciate the power of our differences and, as crazy (asinine, dumb, rude, weird may come to mind as well) as they may sound to us, understand that our ways can seem just as strange to others as theirs do to us. By sharing our stories, we can begin to forge new understandings where we can relate in more inclusive ways with one another.

Yeah, Right

As a student at Northwestern, there was a problem paying my tuition every month. I had financial aid, but my dad still had to pay a portion. Now, keep in mind that my dad was in Peru. The country was undergoing hyperinflation and terrorism, and there were restrictions on transferring money out of the country.

Are You Evil, a Moron, or Just Plain Incompetent?

To get around these multiple issues, Dad had to send cash with people he trusted who were flying from Peru to the States. I was depending on these flights to receive the money Dad sent for my tuition. But they weren't just flying to Chicago. They might be flying to Miami or Los Angeles. The money eventually came, but it could be two, four, even eight weeks late.

Tuition was due on the 15th of the month, with a \$50 late fee applied on the 16th. So, on the 15th, I'd go to the Bursar's office, where students made tuition payments, and say, "My money isn't in yet." Every month, the clerk would say, "There's a \$50 fine for being late." I would explain, "The money is on its way. It's coming from Peru. There's inflation, terrorism, restrictions on dollars. Can't you make an exception?" The university's response, from a Universalist point of view, was always the same: "If we make an exception for *you*, we'd have to make an exception for *everyone*." Exasperated, I would retort in true Particularistic fashion, "How many students do you have who come from a country 6,000 kilometers away where there is a 15,000 percent cumulative hyperinflation rate, a growing terrorist movement igniting car bombs in the Capitol, and restrictions for getting dollars out of the country?!"

So what was fair? One rule applied to everyone equally or taking into account that people's experiences could be very different? Every month, I fought with the administrator at the Bursar's office, and every month, I lost. The Universalist university system had no way to accommodate me. And so round and round we went as the Bursar and I drove each other crazy.

My parents sure had not prepared me for *this*.

Yours, Mine, and Ours

In the meantime, I was also driving my roommate, Leroy, crazy.

As someone coming from a communal culture, I had no problem borrowing people's things. My operating assumption was it was okay for me to borrow from others without asking, even if they weren't around.

I had come to school quite unprepared. Having not visited the campus beforehand due to cost and distance, I hadn't known what to bring. So I borrowed a slew of things like staplers, scissors, shampoo, and tennis rackets. Through various awkward moments, I eventually figured out I should not borrow without asking. It was important in American culture to ask permission. Ah! Okay, I got it. But there was a part two to the borrowing rule I was clueless about. Now I

was asking, but I was doing it too often. It took me a while to figure out that one should only borrow sparingly and apologetically. “Why don’t you have your own things? Get your own!” I started to hear in response as I applied part one of the borrowing lesson. I was so puzzled. “Why should I get my own if you’re not using it? And this goes both ways. You can use anything I own — it actually would make me happy.” But it didn’t work that way. Coming from a developing country, I had a lot less that he would want to borrow — and he simply did not feel comfortable doing it.

When I became a homeowner many years later, I had to relearn the borrowing lessons. One neighbor had a lawnmower, another had an extension ladder, and a third had a snow blower. I had stuff, too, like an oil change drip pan, a shovel, and a rake. It took some time to figure out that even though I kept borrowing things from them, no one was borrowing from me. I just couldn’t figure out why each household should have one of everything when these tools sat idle 95 percent of the time.

Since college, the crosscultural experiences have continued unabated, whether in the publishing and corporate worlds or on working trips to Kenya, India, Canada, the United Kingdom and throughout Latin America. Each time, there are new and surprising things to discover about myself, my friends, and colleagues in our close encounters of a cultural kind. Each time, there is a lesson to be gleaned to smooth out crosscultural interpersonal clashes. Such encounters also sharpen our insights into how differences make a difference in relationships and organizations — from how we work together to how we design human resource programs to how we market and deliver products and services.

I’m Not Okay. You’re Not Okay.

My first job was at a magazine called *U. Magazine*, a publication geared toward college students of the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship in Downers Grove, Illinois. I was one of only two minorities in an office of about 55 people.

They were a caring group. I learned a lot during that time and made some lifelong friends. But boy, did I feel the differences. I was a communal, particularistic, synchronous, expressive, externally-controlled Latino guy in the midst of an individualistic, universalist, sequential, emotionally-neutral, internally-controlled culture. To those who are familiar with Myers-Briggs personality tool, I was an ENFP in an ISTJ milieu.¹ To compound the differences, I had grown up in a non-

air-conditioned world and loved the heat, so I often felt cold in U.S. office buildings. Every summer, I would close my office door, open my window, and create a tropical oasis in my workspace. No one could stand being in my office. Even my packed lunch with the previous night's leftovers was problematic with its strong aromatic smells wafting in the small lunchroom as I heated it in the microwave.

The very things that worked for the majority didn't work for me and vice versa. They got the benefit of richer reporting due to a greater diversity of sources and an alternative way of looking at things. I had to learn to create a detailed project plan. I perfected my English grammar syntax and adopted more of a storytelling approach. I changed to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the office lunch room, and my colleagues came with me to ethnic restaurants.

Crosscultural interpersonal lesson: It's all about mutual adaptation. To trigger a good reciprocal and virtuous cycle, the one in the minority often needs to be the first mover — whether an American in Lima or a Peruvian in Downers Grove — not just through assimilation but also through adaptation. In response, those from the majority culture need to be welcoming of those who are different, show genuine interest in who they are and what they have to offer, and adapt in return.

Out of Africa

This mutual adaptation often comes about through a process of trial and error. As we get to know each other and our different cultural norms and practices, we begin to understand where the other person is coming from. Through this process, we tailor our respective approaches and eventually come together. I experienced this shortly after college during my first trip to Africa with my wife, Lori, who was doing field study in ethnomusicology. As if dealing with crosscultural issues in the United States weren't tough enough, they were exponentially harder in Kenya, yet I attribute this experience for contributing to the growth of my own crosscultural competence.

That summer, Lori and I spent time in Nairobi, Mombassa, and Malindi. But for most of our stay, we were with the Sabaot people in Mount Elgon on the Kenya-Uganda border, where people lived in mud huts insulated with cow dung and covered with thatch roofs.

As a passionate soccer fan and player, I always brought my soccer ball with me. Through my many travels, I had often been able to make connections by kicking the ball with people who spoke different languages and had different

customs — whether with Cape Verdeans in Boston, Quechuas in the Peruvian Andes, or tots in kindergarten in Highland Park.

The day we caught the train to Mount Elgon from Nairobi, I forgot my soccer ball. Given how much emotional investment I had in my making-cultural-bridges-through-my-soccer-ball plan, I was devastated. I had counted on it being my lifeline to bridge cultural gaps. It was also my cultural prop. I only knew a smattering of words in Swahili, and those didn't go much further than *Asante* and even fewer in Sabaot. I had no family links in Kenya, and I'd never been this far from home. I felt very vulnerable.

The Land Rover picked us up at the train station and made steep climbs up the mountain around gigantic craters and through lush vegetation teeming with baboons, cows, donkeys, and elephants. I felt exhilaration and dread at the same time. Soon, Lori got invited to various ceremonies to record the music of such milestone events as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.

Wherever we went, the Sabaot were hospitable and welcoming — not to mention complimentary of my gum boots and jeans, to which I always said “thank you,” only to discover they were more communal than my Latin self. I was perceived as rude and materialistic because when people complimented something I had, I was supposed to give it to them. And here I thought they were just being nice! The community was poor, and even though we were only three years out of college, we were viewed as wealthy. But it was not just an income difference at play. Communally, I was expected to reciprocate their appreciation for my gum boots with a gift of that very footwear. I came to understand that, thanks to the help of one of my Sabaot friends, Christopher. When we left the mountain and were done slogging through the mud, I gave him my gum boots and jeans.

Another time, a large group of our newfound friends took us on a two-day hike to the top of a mountain, which was really a dormant volcano. On the way up, we stopped to meet one of our Sabaot friend's nearly 100-year-old grandmother. The greetings were formal, hierarchical, and full of symbolic meaning. The Sabaot subsisted on farming, and rain was both essential and capricious. When offering one's hand in greeting, the elder person spits on it as a blessing. One responds in kind. Since we were a large delegation of visitors, our friend's elderly grandmother worked her way through blessing each one of us. I was the last one. By the time she got to me, my salivary glands were so worked up and ready that, well, let's just say I *really* blessed her.

Are You Evil, a Moron, or Just Plain Incompetent?

Halfway through our time there, Lori was recording a children's song with some girls next to where the just-harvested corn was being husked. Suddenly, a small, round object rolled by my feet. It was about eight-inches in diameter and made of balled-up plastic bags held together by twine. I looked in the direction of where it had come from. There, I saw a group of boys and men playing a game I knew very well. I picked up their soccer ball and drop-kicked it over to them. They waved me over to join them. *Yes!*

Interpersonal lesson: No matter how much you prepare ahead of time, there is no way to avoid mistakes. You will embarrass yourself, but your good intentions go a long way. It's all in the recovery, as you work it through the necessary, trusted cultural informant. To call out differences constructively, find points of commonality — though they will likely be on *their* terms, not yours.

India: My Polite Is Impolite

Prasheel and I had a great day together in the crosscultural train-the-trainer in our Hewitt offices in Gurgaon. Along with 25 of our colleagues, we had experienced exhilaration — of facing perplexing cultural dilemmas, discovering the breakthrough insights of what was going on, and having that understanding enable our ability to work together. To celebrate that successful first day, Prasheel took a group of us to an Indian restaurant for dinner. I worked my way through plates of this, that, and the other. We shared many laughs and learned much from each other that day and over dinner.

When it came time to say good night, Prasheel walked me to the outside of the restaurant so we could hail a taxi. As one was pulling up, I reached out my hand, and he took it. But when I said, "Thank you, Prasheel," I could see him visibly pull back. The smile on his face disappeared, and a grave formality descended between the two of us. I knew something had gone amiss, but I didn't know what.

"Anything the matter?" I asked him.

"Um..."

Sensing the awkwardness, I decided to lean into our crosscultural work of the day.

"No need to answer now if you don't know. But given how we talked today about calling out differences and how we need to do that as they come up, rather than assuming similarity, this may be one of those times."

By now, the cab had pulled up and the door was open, waiting for me to get

in. I did, and a lively day came to a close in a less than ideal way.

The next morning, Prasheel jovially came up to me as soon he saw me.

“Good morning, Andrés. I hope you had a good night’s sleep. And by the way, I think I know what transpired last night.”

“Yes?”

“It was the moment you said, ‘thank you.’”

“‘Thank you?’ What’s wrong with that?”

“Well, it can be seen as rude or inconsiderate.”

“Yikes! Back in the United States, it would be rude and inconsiderate to not say it! Please explain.”

“For us, ‘thank you’ implies that someone did something for you that they would not have wanted to do. It is said in response to someone doing things out of an obligation. When you said ‘thank you,’ to my Indian ears, it sounded like a dismissal of our newly evolving professional relationship and friendship. Taking you out to dinner was something I wanted to do for you in appreciation. You made me feel like it was done out of duty, a must-do.”

“Ayayay!” I replied. After explaining the Spanish meaning of this expression — “Wow and my God” rolled into one — I said, “This is so helpful. Now I understand why Americans often think Indians are rude because they don’t say ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ But I still need more help. Because gratitude is clearly something you value here in India, as you have clearly stated that your taking me out to dinner was a way of showing that, how do I demonstrate my gratitude in return if I can’t say ‘thank you?’”

“When I’m up in Chicago next month, take me out to dinner.”

Which, you can bet, I did!

Interpersonal lesson: We often have the same value, but a different interpretation. Gratitude was the shared value, but we clearly had different interpretations of how to show it. Our ways of showing gratitude were considered ungrateful, the very opposite in our respective cultures! If we had not established a protocol and assumption of the need to call out differences, that awkward exchange outside the restaurant would have remained unspoken for the rest of our relationship. This is just one example of awkward, unexplainable, can’t-put-your-finger-on-it-but-it-didn’t-feel-right kinds of comments that infest crosscultural relationships. By being able to respectfully call out the differences, we were able to discover where our relationship veered off the path of trust and get back on it.

**In the Corporate World:
The Power of Teamwork Using Differences**

As you become more crossculturally competent as an individual, the next challenge is to create and nurture a crossculturally competent team with healthy interpersonal relationships. This does not mean these relationships won't be without friction. In fact, the more diverse the team, the more *guaranteed* the friction.

As has been an underlying premise of the Inclusion Paradox, diversity is more complex to manage than homogeneity. That said, diversity is not only a demographic inevitability, but also a requirement for innovation. The innovative, creative combustion of a diverse team can either lead to destructive explosions or generative bursts. As in one-on-one interactions, team relationships across cultural divides require shared knowledge and understanding of crosscultural issues. Also needed are skills to manage these differences and a commitment to doing so. This intentionality channels the friction in ways that move the work forward.

Here's a panoramic snapshot of what happens on my diversity and inclusion team at Hewitt:

Tyronne Stoudemire, Global D&I Director, and Susan McCuistion, Global D&I Operational Leader, are two very different people in more ways than just gender diversity. At the tip of the iceberg, Tyronne is an African-American from Detroit and Susan is a biracial white/Native American (Oneida tribe) from Las Vegas. Below the waterline, the differences only get magnified.

When Tyronne and Susan worked on my team, they were both responsible for operationalizing strategies, though in different spheres of responsibility. Susan was very task-oriented, while Tyronne was very relationship-oriented. Our project-related interactions sound something like this:

“Hey, Susan! I have an idea for a new strategic initiative. I want to get your thoughts on whether we can get it done by mid-June.”

After I would explain it, Susan immediately would start sketching out the tasks, sub-tasks and sub-sub-tasks. She would figure out how many days each one would take, factoring in holidays, workloads, slippage, vacations, *and* the probability of sick days. Then, Susan would map out the timeline, along with project details, and say:

“Andrés, I know that you want it mid-June, but because of these other issues, I'll need an extra two weeks. So let's plan on the first week of July for a final completion date.”

The Inclusion Paradox

Contrast Susan’s response with Tyronne’s:

“Hey, Tyronne! I have an idea for a new strategic initiative. I want to get your thoughts on whether we can get it done by mid-June.”

After I explained it, Tyronne immediately would start verbally brainstorming:

“I know so-and-so is going to be in town at a conference ... maybe I can bring him in. I don’t know anybody in this other area, but I know someone who knows someone in that particular area. I know that you want to have this done by mid-June, but if we plan on doing it early in July, we can piggyback on another conference when one of the speakers will already be in town.”

Same end date, but approached in an entirely different way.

Given these two disparate approaches, Tyronne and Susan sometimes drove each other a little crazy. Both were very effective, but their processes differed in nuanced ways. They operated on completely different systems. Susan’s anxiety rose when she didn’t see a written plan. Tyronne’s anxiety rose when he didn’t see a list of the right people who would be contacted and drawn into the process.

Tyronne’s cell phone was his baton for directing his project orchestra. Susan’s project plan was hers. Each made music in their own way. Check out the table below for the harmonic and discordant notes of their styles as they worked together:

	TYRONNE	SUSAN
Focus is getting the job done through	Relationships	Tasks
Mantra	Seize the day!	Plan ahead!
Highest priority	Front stage	Back stage
Leads work team’s symphony with	His cell phone	Her project plan
Shortcuts	Know the right people	Cut back scope
Sounds the alarm	We don’t know the right people!	We don’t have enough time or resources!
Source of anxiety in working with the other	Her structure	His spontaneity
Source of learning in working with the other #1	Her structure	His spontaneity
Source of learning in working with the other #2	Leverage project tools to structure fluid working relationships	Leverage relationships to lubricate rigid tasks

Are You Evil, a Moron, or Just Plain Incompetent?

The power of diversity is that every worldview offers something someone needs. When it comes to turning strategy into tangible projects and programs, I need diverse talents and perspectives on my team. Having both Tyrone's and Susan's widely divergent approaches broadened and deepened our group's reach and impact. And yes, I had them focus on doing things that played to their strengths. The diversity and crosscultural curriculum that so far has been rolled out to more than 15,000 associates and clients worldwide lends itself better to a task orientation. Creating a strategic networking alliance of high-powered corporate, not-for-profit, and government leaders who can have much impact in the global diversity field lends itself better to a relational approach.

As a Diversity and Inclusion "Center of Expertise," we'd better practice what we preach, right? Sure, piece of cake. No hay problema. Hakuna matata. *Right.*

You bet it's not easy. We have to work hard to make this work or our differences could undo us. So we're intentional in talking through the impact of our differences in our interpersonal and working relationships. We have to remind ourselves to assume positive intent on the part of the other, to be self-aware of how our worldview may lead to subjective interpretations, to listen intently to our colleague's side, and finally, to navigate toward resolution. The waters can be rough, but like white-water rafters, we need to expertly navigate the rapids through the myriad rocks and bends.

You bet it pays off. When worked right, it leads to richer relationships that pave the way for more innovative and memorable results.

Leaders Learning Through Relationships

The most transformative experience I've witnessed in developing interpersonal crosscultural competence at work came about through the development of a program by Mary-Frances Winters of the Winters Group and myself. Initially developed for Hewitt leaders, we now offer the program, dubbed Crosscultural Learning Partners, to our clients.

Here's how it works. Twenty-five senior Hewitt leaders were partnered with someone culturally different from themselves for a year. After an initial group kickoff — including a personalized and confidential IDI debrief (explained in book's Appendix A) — they received monthly assignments via email of an article or book chapter to read, or a movie to watch, that touched on a diversity/cross-cultural issue. The senior leaders also received a set of reflection questions that

touched on their individual worldviews — to help process with their partner what they read or watched — along with a set of application questions of how to apply what they learned to Hewitt’s day-to-day realities. They shared each other’s cultural identity stories and points of view in the context of these assignments and were often surprised by unexpected similarities and differences in how they interpreted the very same thing.

At the end of the experience, all participants retook the IDI. As a group, they had all progressed in their crosscultural competence. Their testimonials sounded like this:

A Human Resources leader speaking about the Gen X African-American trainer with whom he was partnered: “Charles [not his real name] helped me see around corners I would not have ever been able to see around. I especially realized this when he took me to the Chicago Theater for an evening debate among Tavis Smiley, host of *Tavis Smiley, Late Night* on PBS TV talk show, Cornel West, author and professor at Princeton University, and Michael Eric Dyson, radio host and University Professor of Sociology at Georgetown University. I must’ve been one of only two or three whites there in an audience of hundreds. I heard a perspective from these three prominent African-American intellectuals in front of a black audience on the current issues of our day that I had felt pretty well versed on, yet that I did not even know existed.”

An African-American Boomer Learning and Development Manager speaking about the white male business executive with whom she was partnered: “Until I had the chance to hear my learning partner’s story, I had never had an in-depth conversation with a white male. I realized that as much as I was providing him with new understandings of the black experience, I had my own deep misconceptions of the white male experience. I was surprised to find out that this well-respected leader had come from a tough family situation, had faced many challenges in his professional life, and even today, did not have it all figured out. I honestly did not know that white males could also struggle in life.”

A white, lesbian Human Resources leader speaking about the overall learning experience: “I will never look at an HR issue the same ever again.” Despite her many years of experience as a highly regarded HR professional known for her effectiveness and wisdom, her experience with her learning partner busted open new ways of looking at familiar dilemmas in addressing breakdowns between associates and their managers. Given her own personal experience as an outsider

Are You Evil, a Moron, or Just Plain Incompetent?

who did not come out to her coworkers until she had been at the company for ten years, her self-perception was that she really had an insider's view of diversity. "In many ways that was true, yet my African-American partner helped me see how I did not know about the black experience intimately and how it shows up in the workplace."

Initially, we worked with U.S.-based groups who were dealing with American diversity and inclusion topics. Since then, we've launched programs partnering Indian and American employees who are working on the same project. Here, in addition to using the IDI to measure the program's impact, we also looked at a handful of the operational metrics that we were already using for measuring the team's efficiency and effectiveness. In comparing the pre- and post-experience results, they were markedly better at the end the program 90 percent of the time.

The Watch Phrase

Constructively calling out differences in relationships is pivotal. Once we can manage these, we can start to be more effective in calling them out among groups and developing savvy strategies around this ability, to which we will turn our attention in Part Three.

Before we do, I realize that some of you may be wondering what happened with our *todo el mundo* party. We ended up having a blast, but it was not without its interpersonal costs. The crosscultural interpersonal lesson? "Don't do that again!" That's not to say one *can't* have a party for 100, just negotiate it up-front. Rather than starting the list at 25 and allowing it to bloat to 100, simply start at 100 or even 200, as we did a few years ago for our daughter's *quinceañera*. Yup, that's big. But this synchronous, externally-controlled, relationship-based, communal guy has found a way to make it possible for my German-American, internally-controlled, sequential, task-oriented wife to go grand. It requires willing, mutual adaptation to work.

The watch phrase for those in crosscultural relationships? Challenge me, yes. Opportunities to grow, yes. Just no surprises, please.

Thank you. ☺

The Inclusion Paradox

SUMMARY POINTS

- Cultural differences and worldviews can derail relationships among coworkers, friends, family, and neighbors.
- Most significant cultural differences exist below the waterline and resist the easy-to-describe differences of language, mannerisms, and other diversity descriptors.
- When encountering an unexplainable behavior that makes you feel the other party is evil, incompetent, or a moron, it's always helpful to assume positive intent.

With that as your starting point, begin to navigate what lies below the waterline between what you believe and what that other person believes.

- Good intentions go a long way, particularly when it comes to the inevitable inadvertent, cultural missteps.
- Across cultures (societies, people, and geography), similar values may be expressed differently and lead to different interpretations.

SHAPING YOUR STRATEGY

- Think about relationships, offices, and locations where you have particular challenges in being able to relate to and understand your coworkers.
- What is it that's below the waterline in terms of how you and members of that group may be interpreting conflict, ability

to seize opportunity, or approach to negotiation?

- What are some steps you can take to navigate the difference?
- Think of a personal relationship and apply the same principle.

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