



So What?



Rebecca has a part-time job filing papers for the billing department at the local hospital. Her manager has just introduced her to her new co-worker, Bonnie.

Bonnie looks old enough to be Rebecca's grandmother. Rebecca groans. Why couldn't the hospital have hired someone younger? She won't have anything in common with Bonnie, and she'll probably have to constantly show her how things are done.

A week later, Rebecca has to go to work on her first real day. She is nervous. Work is always a challenge for her. Bonnie is always helpful and is always willing to share her stories. She has a fast learner who needs a little help to get going on the job.

We are constantly surrounded by people who are different from us in a variety of ways. Imagine how boring the world would be if everyone were the same. Rebecca has just learned a lesson in valuing diversity—recognizing that differences can be positive. Read on to learn how you can value diversity and become a culturally sensitive co-worker, classmate, and friend.

Objectives:

-  Describe diversity and cultural sensitivity.
-  Exhibit cultural sensitivity.



Diversity: Know It

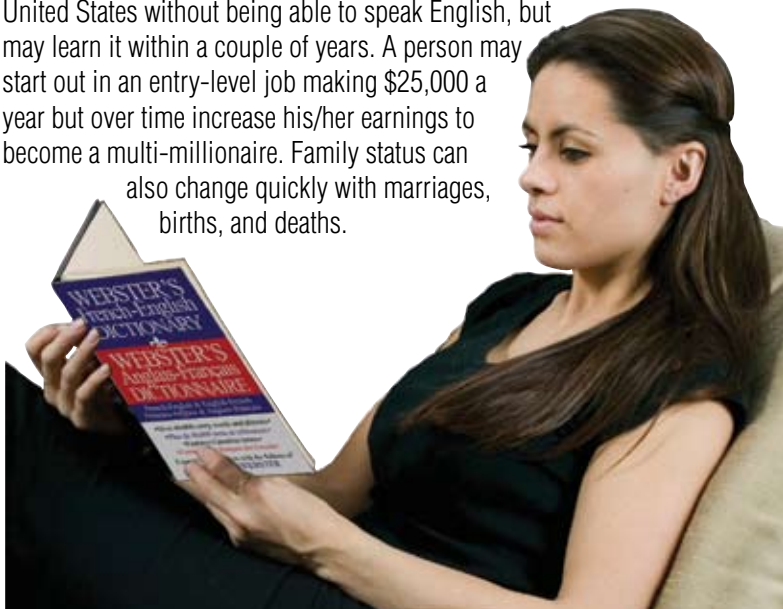
What is diversity?

All the ways in which people differ is known as **diversity**. Look at the person sitting next to you. Can you list at least five ways in which you are different from that person? Probably! And, most likely, you are different from that person in some ways you never even thought about.



There are two dimensions of diversity. The **primary dimensions** are those inborn differences that cannot be changed and affect a person's entire life. They include such characteristics as age, gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, physical traits, and abilities (both mental and physical). People cannot change their dates of birth, or how tall they are, or where they were born.

Secondary dimensions of diversity are those characteristics that may change at various points throughout one's lifetime. They include differences in language, religion, income, geographic location, family status, work experience, communication style, and education level. A person may come to the United States without being able to speak English, but may learn it within a couple of years. A person may start out in an entry-level job making \$25,000 a year but over time increase his/her earnings to become a multi-millionaire. Family status can also change quickly with marriages, births, and deaths.





Details, details

So, you know what it means to value diversity and to exhibit cultural sensitivity, but what are some specific situations in which you might need to do so? Consider the following cultural issues that commonly arise:

- *Language barriers.* This problem is obvious. It's difficult, if not impossible, to communicate with someone when you don't speak the same language. Being culturally sensitive will not solve this problem; however, it's important to at least make an effort to acknowledge the person. Nonverbal communication, such as a handshake or a smile, can go a long way. You can also learn the person's name and how to properly pronounce it.

köszönöm תודה! *děkuji*
mahalo 감사합니다 *gracias*
thank you
merci 谢谢 *danke* شكرا
 Ευχαριστώ どうもありがとう

- *Nonverbal communication.* Not surprisingly, communication causes the greatest number of cultural sensitivity issues. Look at the following examples:
 - In the United States, businesspeople would never bow to each other before a meeting. But in Japan, this is customary and a sign of respect.



- You may think nothing of walking down the street with your hands in your pockets, but in Turkey, this would be considered a rude gesture.
- In Western culture, sitting with your legs crossed is a normal activity. But in certain countries, such as Ghana, this would be quite offensive.

- Laughing and joking with friends at a restaurant is no big deal to you, but Europeans may perceive you as being too loud and aggressive.

Nonverbal communication also includes tone of voice, touch, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture, symbols, and even dress and appearance. Of course, one cannot memorize every culture's verbal and nonverbal "do's" and "don'ts." But, if you are traveling to another country or preparing to greet guests from a different culture, it's a wise idea to get some information and avoid potential conflicts.

- *The value placed on individualism.* Western culture places a high value on **individualism**. People are expected to "find their own way" and to work hard and receive credit for their achievements. Other cultures are geared more toward **collectivism**, or group accomplishments. If you are working in a group with someone from a collectivist culture, and you take too much individual credit, that person may be offended.

The Gray Zone



Many companies and organizations have policies in place regarding diversity. Of course, discrimination on the job is illegal. But organizations take it a step further. Some organizations that discriminate against people don't. What does a policy promote diversity, by making race an issue, does the policy become inadvertently racist as some people claim it does?

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