Cross-cultural communication

Tips for communicating with people from other cultures

Our multicultural city
Our city is home to a diverse range of cultures with just over a quarter (27.9%) of our residents born overseas and half of our residents having at least one parent born overseas.

Our cultural diversity is of great value to our city and everyone has the right to express their own culture and beliefs.

Over 50,000 residents speak a language other than English in their home, with the most common being: Japanese, Mandarin, Korean, Cantonese and Italian.

Our city is a popular international holiday destination with 811,000 international visitors between September 2012 and September 2013. We also have a high volume of international students.

For more statistics visit our community profile at profile.id.com.au/gold-coast

Avoid cultural misunderstanding
Cultural differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings in the community or the workplace. Misunderstandings can occur around the simplest things, such as:

- food
- language
- greetings
- gestures
- facial expressions
- eye contact
- touching
- pointing
- self-expression
- privacy
- male and female roles
- punctuality
- religion
Communication tips
It is important to recognise difficulties that people may have when understanding you and your message. When communicating with anyone, regardless of their cultural background, remember to be clear and concise. Other useful tips include:
• speak slowly
• use short, simple sentences
• paraphrase
• avoid slang, jargon, jokes, irony or sarcasm
• demonstrate when giving explanations
• give instructions in the order they are to be carried out
• avoid double negatives
• show understanding and patience
• avoid raising your voice
• ask open questions so the person can relay the message back to you. This allows you to hear whether they have understood your message correctly.

Language can be influenced by culture
Words and body language can mean different things in different cultures. When interacting with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, consider how your words and actions can be interpreted. Areas in which cultural differences are highlighted include:
• patterns of conversation
  – taking turns to speak, silence, how much and what we say, attentiveness and listening
• functions
  – apologising, inviting, complimenting, requesting
• expressiveness
  – facial expressions, gestures and body language
• personal space
  – how far or close we stand or sit when talking to others.

Cultural differences
Cultural differences in the workplace can include:
• perception of authority
• understanding of teamwork
• understanding the importance of time
• attitude to rules
• discussion or meeting styles
• expectations about employee rights, wages, awards and entitlements
• workplace health and safety requirements
• conflicts of interest.

Translating and interpreting
The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) is an initiative of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, which can connect you to an interpreter if you are from a non-English speaking background, or if you need to assist someone from a non-English speaking background.

TIS National is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free for non-English speaking Australian citizens and permanent residents when contacting the City of Gold Coast with enquiries relating to rates, garbage collection, community support, planning and building permits only.

To contact TIS National please telephone 13 14 50 and ask for an interpreter in the language you need.

For more information
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