

## **Non-Verbal Communication**

### **Silence.**

You may view silence as awkward, however, other cultures are quite comfortable with periods of silence.

### **Distance.**

The most comfortable physical distance between you and another person varies from culture to culture. The typical person from the U.S. generally prefers to be about an arm's length distance away from another person. Hispanics usually prefer closer proximity than most people from the U.S. Allow the other person to establish the proper distance for the interaction.

### **Eye Contact.**

The amount of eye contact that is comfortable varies with each culture. Many people from the United States are brought up to look people straight in the eye. However, some cultures have been taught not to make eye contact. Staring is considered impolite in some groups. However, if you avoid eye contact, or break eye contact too frequently it may be misinterpreted by the participant as disinterest. Sitting next to someone, rather than directly across from them, will reduce eye contact.

### **Facial Expression.**

Expression of emotion between people of different cultures varies from very expressive, as it is with some Hispanics, to total non-expressiveness, as it is with some Asians. Many people from the United States have a tendency to regard people who are more expressive as immature and those with less expression as unfeeling.

### **Body Language.**

The position, gestures, and motion of the body can be interpreted differently depending on the culture. The use of hands is a common vehicle for nonverbal expression. A firm handshake may be a positive gesture of goodwill in the Anglo-American culture, but some other cultures prefer only a light touch. Many cultures use handshakes more frequently than do most people in the United States, some even as a greeting between husband and wife. Standing with hands on hips may imply anger to some participants. Pointing or beckoning with a finger may appear disrespectful to some cultures. Conservative use of body language is wise when you are uncertain as to what is appropriate within a cultural group. Observing actions and interactions may give you direction. Being open with participants and asking general questions about body language can also help.

## **Verbal Communication**

How you speak is as important as what you say in cross-cultural interactions. Often we mistakenly assume that a louder voice is clearer and therefore more easily understood. However, some cultures may be offended by being spoken to in a loud voice and instead prefer a softer tone that connotes respect. To minimize verbal miscommunications, avoid

slang and technical jargon. Also, learn to explain complex procedures and conditions as simply as possible using pictures or other visual aids. This is especially important when the primary language is not English.

**Formality.**

Anglo-Americans tend to be informal in their verbal communication, but some other cultures prefer to keep a relationship more formal. Many other cultures may view being addressed by their first name as too familiar and may infer disrespect. Asking how someone prefers to be addressed is the easiest solution, or assume formality when in doubt.