**CORE TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

**1. Be aware of your own biases** so they don’t unconsciously control your behaviors. Research indicates that merely being reminded that we have biases will allow decisions to be made in a more bias-free manner.

**2. Practice flexibility**. The more choice you have in the different ways you can communicate, the more effective you will be in a cross-cultural context. Consider three important aspects of communication competence:

• Understand your own preferences in style and process.

• Allow others to communicate in a range of ways—without negative evaluation.

• Use a wide range of styles and processes depending on context.

**3. Slow down your response and check your assumptions**. Many organizations operate at a very fast pace—and, in fact, reward quick responses. When this is added to a conscious or unconscious assumption that we are more like others than unlike them, it can lead to a quick response based on assumptions. When this quick reaction is based on an inaccurate assumption, it reduces cross-cultural effectiveness. Asking ourselves

“what assumptions am I making?” and “how do I know my assumption is accurate?” allows us the opportunity to be more effective.

**4. Assume positive intentions**. When people say or do things that have a negative impact on us, we may assume they meant to do so. It is our experience, however, that most people mean well most of the time—negative impact on others is frequently the result of assuming that we are “all alike” and do things with good intentions that are simply misunderstood. Assuming that someone else has positive intentions will allow us to begin a conversation both to discover their intent and to share the impact of their behavior on us. If their intention was positive, they will be more likely to behave in ways that we appreciate based on the feedback we have given them. This fits with another technique, which is to:

**5. Share the impact of other’s behaviors on you**—and ask them to do the same.

**6. State your intent**. Negative communication impacts often occur because the sender of a message assumes that the receiver of the message will understand their positive intent. When communicating across cultural differences, however, this is not a safe assumption. Telling someone your intention helps avoid this misunderstanding.

**7. Listen with TING**—listen openly and empathically (using your head, your heart, your gut feeling, etc). This is key to effective communication—and especially cross-cultural communication.

**8. Use the process of Describe, Interpret, Evaluate (D.I.E.)** when someone else’s behaviors are confusing to you—or you don’t like them. This is a great technique for better cross-cultural communication. (cf job aid D.I.E. technique)

**9. Ask of someone else’s behavior,** “Is a difference that makes a difference?” This is an advanced technique, made possible only when someone is able to set aside their own behavioral preferences and consider how another behavior might work. If someone else’s behavior does not negatively affect (a) cost; (b) people or productivity; (c) safety; or (d) legality, then it is not generally a difference that makes a difference, and allowing someone to use behaviors that are most culturally comfortable for them will increase their feelings of being respected.

**10. Define the basics of business**. In international business contexts terms such as: ‘success’, ‘doneness’, ‘meetings’, ‘punctuality’, etc. may mean different things to different people. Spend time early in your communication defining what these mean to you and others. Invest in building a shared vocabulary.

**11. Provide information via multiple channels**. Follow phone calls with emails that summarize what’s been said. When possible, provide presentations, agendas, etc. in advance so those working in their non-native language can get familiar with materials.