

## Cultural Awareness Bridge Building

Three roles you play contribute to your ability to act as a bridge builder.

- **Role 1: Being a guest in the culture.** Think of being a guest in someone's home. How would you behave, react, interact, etc.? Or conversely, what expectations would you have of a guest in your home? What might irritate or please you?
- **Role 2: Being a student of the culture.** Think of yourself as a person who is there to study and learn. How does a student in school earn an A? What behaviors contribute to their success?
- **Role 3: Being a servant within the culture.** Think of being a person who serves everyone he or she encounters in the country. How does a servant approach those whom he or she serves? How does a servant handle differences in others?

### Bridge Building Involves the Following Applications:

- **Acceptance:** Accept the fact that you will not completely understand the people in just seven days.
- **Awareness:** Be aware that at times you may feel your prejudices. You may become frustrated with the way things are or the way people behave. Do not deny the feelings, own them. Being aware will help you grow in understanding the differences.
- **Listen:** Listen more than you talk. You are there to learn, not instruct. The right to instruct is earned by demonstrating respect.
- **Give:** Give of yourself. Take the initiative to reach out!
- **Enjoy:** Enjoy the people, their culture and language. If you do not take yourself too seriously, you can have more fun. Help create an environment where the Jamaicans can enjoy you and your culture just as you aim to enjoy theirs.

**Paul tells us in Romans 10:12, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."** This is certainly easier said than done but, as Christians, this is what we're called to do.

Americans don't always have the best reputation abroad. From "Getting It Right: Serving for Long-term Impact", a training manual from World Hope International (WHI), these are the behaviors and attitudes that might inhibit your ministry:

1. "Americans often expect to accomplish more in the local environment than is reasonable;
2. Americans are sometimes insensitive to local customs and cultural norms;
3. Americans tend to resist working through normal administrative channels;
4. Americans often take credit for joint efforts;
5. Americans often think they have all the right answers; and
6. Americans' style of interacting and behaving is often seen by those in other cultures as aggressive, loud, rude, wasteful, disrespectful, materialistic, and impatient."

Regarding flexibility, the WHI manual continues:

"Americans can be bothered while in another culture by language barriers, lack of mobility, indirectness, formality, rank, protocol, slow pace of life, lack of conveniences, unfamiliar foods, alien social customs, and frequent and/or unexpected changes in schedules. One other common frustration for many Americans is the emphasis of their hosts on building relationships over accomplishing a task. Reminding yourself over and over of your reasons for going – and of the preeminence of *relationship* in all that you do – may help you to remain flexible and open to the ways of your host culture.

"An openness of heart will take you well beyond mere flexibility. The orientation most helpful in the overseas adjustment process includes the following winning qualities:

- \* Open-mindedness
- \* Empathy
- \* Flexibility
- \* Adaptability
- \* Sense of humor
- \* Warmth
- \* Ability to listen and learn
- \* Low priority on goal/task accomplishment  
(but high priority on relationships)
- \* Humble acknowledgement that you may fail"

## Will They Like Me After I've Gone?

Although this question in and of itself is not our goal for ministry, "the Getting It Right: Serving for Long-term Impact" training manual has this to say:

"How much impact can one person make in another culture if that visit leaves a bad taste in the people's mouths? Here are 11 tips:

1. **Don't promise or even suggest.** When volunteers brainstorm and think out loud about what could be done, it sounds an awful lot like promises to the people they are serving, which can lead to crushing disappointments.
2. **Be flexible.** Plans will change. Your attitude on change to plans is what will be remembered.
3. **Giving is not always the best thing to do.** Well intentioned gifts of goods or services do not always send the message the giver wanted to convey. Be very careful about giving, and ask someone with more experience about the appropriateness and constructiveness of your gifts.
4. **Sacrifice the little things.** Be willing to forgo little comforts, rights, or conveniences for the sake of relationships. Don't take out your hand sanitizer as your host is trying to offer you hospitality!
5. **Shrink your personal space.** We in the US tend to get uncomfortable when people move a little too close. But many people do not have the same sensitive personal space meter as Americans. Open up your idea of personal space, so that your body language does not tell people their presence is unwanted.
6. **Value – don't just serve - those you meet.** It is easy to become so caught up in the tasks you are doing that you forget that it's all really about the people. Ask yourself often whether you are putting raw service ahead of relationship – and change course if necessary.
7. **Experience the suffering.** If the bus breaks down, walk (without complaints) in the sweltering heat to reach the project site. Accept suffering and inconvenience as a natural extension of your participation in your hosts' lives.
8. **Eat the food – yes, eat the food!** People in your host country do not understand the American preoccupation with food likes and dislikes. When you deny their food, you are denying their hospitality and generosity.
9. **Listen – and learn from – the nationals.** They have much to teach you. The people you are serving are leaders in their communities with much to teach you.
10. **Embrace the culture.** Don't just tolerate the customs, manners, and values that are different from your own. Celebrate the differences, and embrace the beauty of the foreign culture.
11. **Your way is never the right way – even if it *is* the best way.** It's not about being right. It about being humble and not insisting on your own way."