

## **Do's and don'ts of multicultural communication**

One of the most frequently asked questions during diversity training programs is: "Whenever I interact with a person from a different culture, I'm afraid I'll say something offensive. How can I keep this from happening?" Here are seven do's and seven don'ts to greatly minimize the possibility of offending:

### **The don'ts**

1. Don't talk to people in a patronizing fashion (*Example: Don't "talk down" to people*).
2. Don't make assumptions about people, particularly those who are culturally different from you (*Example: Don't assume certain people have certain values or like to do certain things*).
3. Don't assume a culturally different person is an "expert" about his or her cultural group. (*Example: Don't ask someone, "What do your people think about this?"*).
4. Don't assume a culturally different person is representative of all the members of his or her cultural group (*Example: Because one member does something does not mean all members think or act like that*).
5. Don't engage in behaviors that single out a culturally different person especially if that person is in the minority at your workplace (*Example: Asking a person to serve on a committee primarily because of his or her race or gender*).
6. Don't ask inappropriate questions or engage in inappropriate behaviors, especially of a personal nature (*Example: Don't ask if you can touch someone's hair; don't ask about a person's grooming habits*).
7. Don't try to speak or act like a culturally different person if it is not YOU (*Example: Don't pretend you like certain foods or music if you really do not, just to build a relationship*).

### **The do's**

1. Do talk to others as equals (*Example: Treat people respectfully, even if they are lower on the organizational chart*).
2. Do recognize that cultural differences exist but confirm these differences before you act on them (*Example: Get to know a person rather than act on your assumptions*).
3. Do stick to the business at hand until you have established an effective relationship (*Example: Avoid a great deal of personal conversation until you get to know someone*).
4. Do treat every person you come into contact with as an individual (*Example: Avoid stereotyping based on group membership*).
5. Do seek to find common ground between yourself and others, particularly those who are culturally different (*Example: Keep in mind that you will often have much in common with a culturally different person*).
6. Do consider the feelings, thoughts and experiences of others, particularly those who are culturally different (*Example: Listen and care about what others are saying; avoid using demeaning words*).
7. Do be YOURSELF at all times (*Example: Just relax and be yourself, don't try to be what you think others want you to be*).