This list of "Tips for Working Effectively with Intercultural Groups" was generated in April and May 2000 by the members of the on-line intercultural resource-sharing group, "Intercultural Insights", which is sponsored by Nipporica. Click here to visit the group's website. It was part of a contest to celebrate Insights' first anniversary. Many thanks to Thiagi and Raja, who coordinated the contest for us. A link to the group's page is at the bottom of this list, as is a link to instructions for running your own email contest.

The winners of the contest, those that made it to the Hall of Fame, were: 1. Michele Ehlers (180 points), 2. John Bauer (150 points), 3. Dianne Hofner Saphiere (100 points), and 4. (tie) BK (80 points), Peggy Pusch (80 points).

The top-winning entries from the five-week contest (according to an independent panel of experienced interculturalists) were:

1. MINDFULNESS: Be mindful of your own reactions to what is occurring in the interaction and how it is based in your own culture. Use your physical reactions as a point of information...something is going on, why am I responding in this manner? Be mindful of other's behavior, attending to the interactions that are occurring, your contributions to them, and how they can be enabled. (MDP)

2. COMFORT WITH SILENCE: Do not feel obliged to fill the silence. Relax into it, observe, and allow a quiet space to occur. (MDP)

3. ENCOURAGE DIVERGENCE. Be sure to let a group diverge -- explore and understand one another's differing opinions thoroughly -- before attempting to bring the group to agreement and a common understanding. (DHS)

4. AVOID DEBATES. Discourage group members from "persuading" or "debating" -- this is far too personal and stifling for many people. One technique for members who value debate is to have them take the position opposite their personal beliefs. (DHS)
5. OBSERVATION. Before you enter actively into the new group yourself, observe, observe, observe. Is there a leader? Who talks? How do they all seem to interact with each other? etc. (You can develop an entire checklist.) (PMc)

6. TELL STORIES. Across all cultures, I have found short, relevant, personal stories and illustrations are an effective way of reinforcing a theory and bringing a concept to life. Encourage others to do likewise, within reason. (JS)

7. KNOW THYSELF - In order to understand differences and be sensitive to other people's thoughts and feelings, we must be aware of our own thoughts, feelings, and biases. It is far easier to understand each other as individuals if we understand ourselves first. (LS)

8. NORMALIZE DIVERSITY. As the group leader or facilitator, pick a topic outside of the training discussion to which you know there will be diversity, like what types of food would make a perfect desert, and have each person share their views, and other views that they are aware of. Use this as an example to confirm that diversity is interesting, appreciated and respected. Encourage participants to share cultural views during any part of the training where there may be a cultural difference that other might benefit to know about. (JdP)

9. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT VALUES ARE A SYSTEM FOR DECISION-MAKING. It is impossible to compare cultures by saying this culture values "this" while another culture values "that." Humans and the societies we live in are much more complex than such simple comparisons allow. If we want to understand why a person behaves the way she/he does, we need to understand the context in which a decision was made, and thus, the context in which the person prioritized her/his value system and which one came out on top. For example, it is often said that U.S. Americans value time, while others value relationships. But, when I, as a U.S. American, walk across town on my way to a meeting, whether or not I stop to visit with a person I know depends on several factors - sometimes my emphasis of timeliness will rise to the top (I am on the leader of the meeting, it's a job interview, etc.), whereas other times my emphasis on relationships will rise to the top (depending on the person's status, family relationship, etc.). (BK)

10. ESTIMATE YOUR TIMELINE, THEN DOUBLE IT. (IF YOU ARE WORKING FROM DIFFERENT LOCATIONS, THEN DOUBLE IT AGAIN.) Working across language and culture barriers takes extra time and energy. Plan for it, and you will avoid the added stress of falling behind schedule. (ME)

---------- That's the top ten! Here's the complete list, in the order in which they were received:

1. EXTRAPOLATE. Don't take Thiagi's SIIC workshop until you are an experienced trainer. Try various methods to get him to respond after the workshop....(telephone voice mail seems to be ineffective.) Then take his workshop again another summer, and tease the Old Fox until he does respond...(KW)

2. MINDFULNESS: Be mindful of your own reactions to what is occurring in the interaction and how it is based in your own culture. Use your physical reactions as a point of information...something is going on, why am I responding in this manner? Be mindful of other's behavior, attending to the interactions that are occurring, your contributions to them, and how they can be enabled. (MDP)

3. TOLERANCE FOR AMBIGUITY: The ability to be in a situation that is unclear and not become overly anxious but to patiently determine what is appropriate as that becomes apparent. Stay calm and be patient. Low Tolerance: people seek information to support their own beliefs. High Tolerance:
people seek "objective" information from others to gain an understanding of the situation and to accurately predict the behavior of others. (MDP)

4. COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY. Being able to create new categories; we need to make more rather than fewer categories to avoid the tendency to stuff new information into old, pre-set categories. (MDP)

5. BEING OPEN TO NEW INFORMATION. Being aware of more than one perspective; becoming aware of how we interpret messages and situations differently than others. (MDP)

6. CROSS-CULTURAL EMPATHY: Being able to participate in another person's experience in your imagination; thinking it intellectually and feeling it emotionally. Not a matter of walking in another's shoes, actually, but of seeing and feeling the situation from their perspective. (MDP)

7. COMFORT WITH SILENCE: Do not feel obliged to fill the silence. Relax into it, observe, and allow a quiet space to occur. (MDP)

8. SAME DIFFERENCE. Often when you are trying to point out the difference and commonalities that exist in groups and individuals, it is often best to use an activity that illustrate the point. One activity that works well is to ask the group to draw something, such as a man sitting on a bench being approach by a young women holding a box in her hand. Give the group a set time. Then ask the group to silently walk around and observe other people's work. Ask them to notice what attracts them about the person's drawing. Then debrief, pointing out the different interpretation of the same vision. It's a simple and effective technique and can be used with many age group. have the group (VS)

9. GETTING PERSONAL. Strike up a conversation of a personal nature, starting with something about yourself, but open ended that allows for input. Good subjects are family, vacations, or continued learning. While listening to the conversation and participating, learn from how the participants answer what some of their priorities are in life. You will also learn which individuals seem genuinely interested in the differences (or similarities) exhibited by the different cultures. Use this learning experience as a guideline for future interactions. (GW)

10. YOUR MENTOR. Ask each person in the group to talk about a mentor in their life. If they do not have a mentor, then they can choose someone that has had a profound effect on their life such as a teacher, family member, minister, etc.. This level of sharing and learning brings some commonality to the group and helps them work well together. (GW)

11. PEER LEARNING. Seek out information from your new peers. Discussion groups such as Dianne's and the many books and varied literature on the subject of working effectively with intercultural groups are a wealth of information. (GW)

12. FACILITATION. Stimulate reflection in the group (if possible in the beginning of the team process) on the deciding upon using a group facilitator. A temporarily "neutral" person having the authority to guide through the process seems to be widely acceptable for most cultures. By randomizing the role among the team members acceptance of this function and balanced power distribution can be achieved.

Follow three steps:

a) Check out first, if all group members consider a facilitating person be of help to structure the group process (if there is reflection it won’t work or the group will fall apart)

b) Help the group to vote for one member who gets the "authority" to do the facilitating in the sense of
watching the time, decision making, balancing of commitment, etc.

c) Ensure that the role of a group facilitator randomizes, so that several members have the opportunity to stimulate the group process in "their way" but for a limited (!) period.

We observed several teams and found out that even if the use and acceptance of "third-person mediation" is cross culturally different, this was experienced as helpful by all. (MO)

13. READ THIS BOOK: Fons Trompenaars: Riding the Waves of Culture. Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1993. It is great book about how we manage time, feelings, relationships, etc. according to different cultures. (PC)

14. NATIONAL CULTURE IS IMPORTANT BUT ... there are usually many cultures at play within intercultural groups, particularly organizational and individual culture. (JS)

15. SPEND TIME TO CREATE COMFORT AND SAFETY. Anxiety levels can be high for a variety of reasons and all participants need to be eased into the process gently and carefully (JS)

16. GET AND GIVE FEEDBACK REGULARLY. Don't wait until the end of any intervention to get and give feedback. Do interim evaluations at the end of each day and report back the feedback to the group at the start of each subsequent day. (JS)

17. LEARN A GAME. Whenever I meet someone from another culture, I ask her about the favorite indoor game played by members of that culture. I ask her to teach me the game and make several stupid mistakes (without trying to) in the learning process. Then I play the game with her. This strategy for establishing instant rapport has worked for me with members of any culture, any gender, and any age. As a bonus, I know several games from many different cultures and one of these days, I'll write a book. (ST)

18. READ ALL ABOUT IT. Reading novels and short stories written by members of a cultural group is a great way to learn about the values, beliefs, and world views of that culture. I learn more about a culture by reading murder mysteries written by members of the host culture than by reading anthropology texts. As an additional source, read fiction about a culture written by members of another culture. For example, E.M. Forster and Ruth Prawer Jhabwala have interesting takes on the Indian culture. (ST)

19. STIR! Too often people try to be politically correct and say popular things instead of true feelings. WHEN THERE IS FACILITATION AVAILABLE: Provoke members by probing with obvious errors or stereotypes like: "The only people left in Africa are those who were unfit to be slaves". This helps to "heat" people up sufficiently to be honest. Take notes and address issues in debriefing. (Do not attempt in facilitator is not competent) (DS)

20. PLAY SPOT THE DIFFERENCE. Show a picture and ask for any possible interpretations. Often highlights cultural bias or content e.g.: child standing in front of father may indicate disrespect to one who prefers a more subordinate stature, while another culture may see just a friendly relationship. (DS)

21. SYNONYMS? MAYBE NOT! USE PICTURES. Guard against misunderstandings. Second language users may not have the same meaning for certain phrases. E.g.: a man asking a woman at a shop if she has milk, may indicate a purchase inquiry to some, but may mean "Are you lactating?" to another. Use pictures or other visual stimuli to enforce true meaning. (DS)
22. LAY GROUND RULES. Start off with common understandings and goals. Let rules come from group, but ensure that expectation are clear. eg: punctuality is not equally important in all cultures. If you should have any strong measures in this regard, make sure they are clear. (DS)

23. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE. Ensure that the opportunity is there even for quiet people to speak out if they feel "violated". This can for instance be an unanimous suggestion box. Often "attacks" are unintentional or even out of ignorance. Lay it on the line, correct it and avoid pitfall in future. (DS)

24. ENCOURAGE DIVERGENCE. Be sure to let a group diverge -- explore and understand one another's differing opinions thoroughly -- before attempting to bring the group to agreement and a common understanding. (DHS)

25. LISTEN BETWEEN THE LINES. Encourage group members to "listen" to words as well as body language and the context of the communication. (DHS)

26. AVOID DEBATES. Discourage group members from "persuading" or "debating" -- this is far too personal and stifling for many people. One technique for members who value debate is to have them take the position opposite their personal beliefs. (DHS)

27. OBSERVATION. Before you enter actively into the new group yourself, observe, observe, observe. Is there a leader? Who talks? How do they all seem to interact with each other? etc. (You can develop an entire checklist.) (PMc)

28. BOOKS TO LIVE BY. Studying, living, and being familiar with the various books of the Teachings of Don Juan by Carlos Cassenda has helped me tremendously in intercultural situations. This is because of the spiritual/circular nature of his wisdom enables me to integrate them into many other ways of thinking. (PP)

29. ASSUME EXPERIENCE. Start with people's strengths including their experiences and competencies. Everyone has some cross-cultural experience and skill areas. Draw these out and build on them. Then assist in expanding their understanding of cultural differences and in developing additional skills. (BP)

30. ATTITUDE. Participate in intercultural groups with an attitude of "I want to learn" rather than "my opinion is the right opinion". (RCSjr)

31. GETTING STARTED. Set group guidelines to start off. Brainstorming suggestions of how to work together as a group and making the group agreed suggestions into a code of conduct, intercultural groups can work effectively within parameters established by them. (RM-J)

32. GOAL CLARIFICATION. Establish common understanding of the tasks. By exploring individuals' assumptions and/or understanding of the set goals, an intercultural group can draw a "new" common understanding of that is expected of the participants while collaborating in a mutual task. The resulted common understanding should reflect the different and complementary views of the diverse participants. (RM-J)

33. DON'T PUBLISH A PHOTO OF YOURSELF. Racial and facial features can bring out innate prejudices in others. Let your print explain what and who your are. (JB)

34. AVOID USING IDIOMS. Idioms are forms of expression understood usually by only native speakers of a language. In English, for example, avoid expression like, "I've got to get out of Dodge,"
or "I've got to bite the bullet." (JB)

35. ASK CULTURAL QUESTIONS. Most people enjoy talking about themselves and their culture when asked. This helps develop comfort, warmth, and trust in a relationship. (JB)

36. AVOID USING THE FIRST PERSON. In a multicultural setting, you must go beyond yourself into the world of others. A good way to do this is to avoid conversations that begin with "I." (JB)

37. PLAY THE "TOP FIVE" TRAVEL CARD. Ask each person in your multi-national group to list the top five "must see" vacation spots in their country. It gives everyone a sense of pride in their country and provides a great source of tourist information. (JB)

38. DON'T CONFUSE ME. Whenever I am in a committee meeting, I feel like that all I need is one more sixer to reach my century. Unfortunately, however, I end up lbw by a slow bowler delivering a googly with an off break. ... Totally confused? This is how I feel when my US colleagues use sports metaphors and believe that it's a slam dunk! (ST)

39. DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE DONE TO YOU. Be aware and sensitive of other people's feeling, reactions, etc. You will unwittingly pick up on cultural nuances and others may learn similar characteristics about you. (DSM)

40. A THIN LINE. Understand characteristics of people from different cultures, but try to avoid stereotype. (YM)

41. COMMUNICATION. Make extra effort to encourage communication, because misunderstandings and conflicts may occur more easily among intercultural groups. (YM)

42. PLAY A GAME. Play the email game "Depolarizer" to promote multiple perspectives among intercultural group members. (YM)

50. RESPECT TIME ZONES. If your participants have to travel over time zones, allow for jet lag as well as culture shock. Begin your sessions gently to ease the experience. Likewise, adjust your schedule earlier or later to accommodate their most alert time of day. (PM)

43. REACH OUT - SLOWLY. Don't be refrained from approaching people from intercultural groups by the concern that you might do or say something deemed as insulting or wrong in other cultures. Let them know your concern frankly, and approach them gradually. People will understand even if you say something wrong. (YM)

44. SAME DIFFERENCE. Keep in mind that people from different cultures are different, but on the other hand, they are all human beings. Cross-cultural similarities exist in many respects. (YM)

45. TALK MORE. Much of what we say assumes shared information and values. If this assumption is faulty, communication can break down and difficulties will begin. Be more explicit in your communication and assume as little as possible. (ME)

46. FORGET "COMMON SENSE." "Common sense" is not universal. It is based on shared learnings, values, and experience, which are often not directly remembered. What is felt to be "common sense" to someone with one cultural background may be "utter nonsense" to someone from another, with the same level of validity for their environment. (ME)

47. PLAN CAREFULLY. THEN BE READY FOR NOTHING TO GO ACCORDING TO PLAN.
Planning will help you consider many possible occurrences. Opening yourself to the possibility of scenarios beyond your plans will further expand your acceptance of numerous possibilities. The more possibilities you have considered, the greater your ability to deal effectively with the many new experiences you will encounter in a multicultural environment. (ME)

48. DON'T GET ANGRY - ASK QUESTIONS. Recognize that unexpected behaviors and strong emotional reactions are often signs of language and cultural barriers. Put aside your own emotional reactions to unexpected behaviors, and avoid making assumptions about the motives behind those behaviors. Ask questions instead, and you may be surprised at what you will learn. (ME)

49. RESPECT TIME ZONES. If your participants have to travel over time zones, allow for jet lag as well as culture shock. Begin your sessions gently to ease the experience. Likewise, adjust your schedule earlier or later to accommodate their most alert time of day. (PM)

50. USE THEATRE! Create, borrow or re-live role-play scenes with your participants to create controlled experiences of another culture. This can be done with props, clothing, temperature, food, music, language, poetry, play, respect and humor, to share experiences with low risk. Two exemplar/mentors are Peter Brook, the playwright, and Colin Turnbull, anthropologist/professor at George Washington University, who authored a manuscript on Cross Cultural experience. (PM)

51. TRAIN WITH PASSION. If you are not passionate about what you do, why should anyone else be? Let people see and feel how much you care about this topic (JS)

52. TELL STORIES. Across all cultures, I have found short, relevant, personal stories and illustrations are an effective way of reinforcing a theory and bringing a concept to life. Encourage others to do likewise, within reason. (JS)

53. SHIFT STYLES. Working across cultures is like learning to write with your other hand. You are not losing the ability to write with your normal hand, just learning another skill. You are now becoming ambidextrous and able to adapt to any situation. (JS)

54. HUMOR, NOT JOKES. Light, self-deprecating humor can be a great way to reinforce points but do not slip into jokes, jargon or slang. (JS)

55. LEARNINGS FROM ELDERS. A great way to get people to understand how values are passed down is to ask them to think of something they learned from their elders (family, teachers, mentors, priests etc.) For example, one of my all-time favorites is: Some days you're a dog; some days you're a hydrant! (JS)

56. SELF-REFLECTION. Always allow time during or at the end of each day for people to reflect on the day's learnings by journaling alone or responding to a few pre-set questions in a listening dyad. (JS)

57. LOW-TECH AND PROUD OF IT. In these Powerpoint days, concise and pithy handouts and colorful flipcharts are still the most effective ways of helping all participants -- whether native speakers or not -- learn, understand and, most importantly, retain more than the 10% they usually remember. (JS)

58. ENCOURAGE AND STRUCTURE DIRECT DIALOGUE between the parties involved, especially if the topic is heated, and then trust the process. Some of my biggest successes in high-conflict situations have come after I thought all was lost: parties screamed at each other or said the unthinkable. But the process prevented abuse and balanced power dynamics, and the results were remarkable. (DHS)
59. GO FOR THE "HEAT": In a high-conflict situation, after some skill practice I like to structure a solution-creating process on the "hottest" topic for the group. If the group can be led through a process where they really hear one another's concerns and objectives in a deep way, and do not trap themselves in a digital "yes or no" choice of next steps, they can usually create a solution that maximizes outcome. And, once the group has had success on their most difficult issue, they feel empowered and emboldened to keep practicing their new skills and solution-finding processes. (DHS)

60. REAL TASKS. Facilitate processes with intercultural groups in which they are working on their actual group tasks, using the skills and processes you may want to teach, rather than having them "practice" on artificially created tasks. (DHS)

61. HAVE FUN. Help the group members to enjoy themselves and have some fun. Even the most serious task can be conducted in an enjoyable manner, and many cultures value the interpersonal connections that are obtained through good, strong, shared belly laughs. (DHS)

62. RITUALS. Help the group to create their own shared rituals; rituals that bridge the cultures of the members and focus them on their joint vision. Ritual is an incredibly powerful tool for strengthening interpersonal bonds and group identity and reflecting on history and what the group has learned. (DHS)

63. EQUAL AIR TIME. When you facilitate groups, be sure that group members from minority groups are given enough air time and that their contributions are not discounted or disregarded by other group members. (AT-B)

64. REMEMBER HISTORY. When facilitating an ice-breaker, classroom exercise, or constructing an e-learning exercise, or whenever giving real world examples, metaphors, etc. in any type of learning program, remember that the historical perspectives of people from different cultures can be very different. Thus, for most cultures to relate or to participate in a learning program where monocultural examples and perspectives are used to augment the learning, participants who are not part of the monoculture will feel alienated, and perhaps, disenfranchised. Here's an example of what I am describing: To start a meeting, a group facilitator asks participants to tell something unique about their ancestral backgrounds. Most of the participants have an Anglo-Saxon ethnic background, some far-eastern, some Hispanic, and there are only a few from African backgrounds. Many participants described how their family histories went back into the 19th and 18th centuries, etc., except the African-American participants. They went back only to their grandparents, or in one case, great-grandparents, to describe something that they felt was pertinent. I could tell from the body language and tone of voice, especially facial expressions, that they were very uncomfortable in participating in this type of exercise. But I also feel that they are used to this stuff happening to them from time to time. In summary, all trainers, facilitators, and instructional designers should think about how the contents of a learning program could be perceived by a multicultural audience. This will help create successful experiences for everybody. (RT)

65. DISPLAY WITH TASTE. Ensure that the environment of an instructor-led classroom displays photographs, drawings, patterns, slogans, etc. that do not offend any participant from any of the cultures represented in any learning experiences that are conducted in the room. (RT)

66. KNOW THYSELF - In order to understand differences and be sensitive to other people's thoughts and feelings, we must be aware of our own thoughts, feelings, and biases. It is far easier to understand each other as individuals if we understand ourselves first. (LS)

67. BE CLEAR ABOUT EXPECTATIONS - Make a list of what group members expect from the
training and how they expect conflict or differences to be handled. (LS)

68. NORMALIZE DIVERSITY. As the group leader or facilitator, pick a topic outside of the training discussion to which you know there will be diversity, like what types of food would make a perfect desert, and have each person share their views, and other views that they are aware of. Use this as an example to confirm that diversity is interesting, appreciated and respected. Encourage participants to share cultural views during any part of the training where there may be a cultural difference that other might benefit to know about. (JdP)

69. GIVE EACH PARTICIPANT A LEGITIMIZED VOICE Use the example above or something like it to make each participant feel appreciated and legitimized as an equally valued participant of the training group and that their voice is as valued at maybe another voice of a 'large' culture. (JdP)

70. DON'T ASSUME CAUSE/EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS: Every opinion, strategy, solution and behavior that you observe on the part of another person may not be the result of their national culture. Ask the individual to explain the basis of their ideas, before you assume that they are always inspired by culture. (LD)

71. ASK “WHY?” When confronted with offensive or incomprehensible behavior, ask yourself how is that behavior valued positively by the other individual/group. This will help you to understand the positive context from which the behavior arises. (JK)

72. SPACE TRAVEL. Realize that you are entering another planet where the rules are different and your rules may lead to social death. (JK)

73. SUSPEND JUDGEMENT. Realize that the offending or incomprehensible behavior is quite normal and acceptable from the other individual's viewpoint. It's your job to figure out why and how which requires you to suspend your values configuration momentarily. (JK)

74. ASK. Ask when you don't understand. (JK)

75. OBSERVE. Watch and listen how others do it. Then try to follow their model as best you can. (JK)

76. SELECT WITH CARE: Not everyone is comfortable working in multi-cultural groups. Therefore, some selection is necessary in identifying the participants in such groups. (DPD)

77. DON'T INSIST ON SPEAKING: Not all cultures are equally verbal. People from some cultures are not comfortable speaking in groups. Therefore insisting on speaking can dampen their participatory spirit. (DPD)

78. CHOOSE RITUALS WITH CARE: Rituals like self-introduction, mixing males and females, etc., may not be acceptable to all cultures. Therefore, identify some alternative rituals and get these approved by the group beforehand. (DPD)

79. TOLERATE DIVERSITY: There is no common set of values shared by all cultures. Values like timeliness, truthfulness, etc., although sometimes assumed to be universal, are in fact not (yet) so. Therefore don't assume anything. If necessary, specify some ground rules in the beginning. (DPD)

80. OPTIMUM STRUCTURE: Some facilitators follow the strategy of 'soft-structuring', i.e., introducing the minimum required structure in the workshop and allowing the interactions to evolve. This will not work if a large percentage of participants expect a greater degree of structuring and a
greater degree of authority from the facilitator. Therefore, keep some alternative designs ready. Don't assume that less structure is always good. (DPD)

81. NONVERBAL BEHAVIORS. The diversity of meaning of nonverbal communication is endless. When communicating cross-culturally the meaning of the nonverbal signals can be perceived incorrectly by the receiver. Or, the meaning may not even be received at all. Communication at this level can be intentional or unintentional and may cause misunderstandings in multicultural groups. Remember: Don't take nonverbals at face value! A shaking head, closed eyes, or a tap on the forearm can all mean different things to different people. So my tip is to keep an open mind when interpreting nonverbal cues from a person who is culturally different. (CS)

82. START A CHESS GAME. Chess is the one intercultural board game that many people know. Set up a board by your computer and arrange to play a couple moves per week. A good diversion from the stress of the screen. (JB)

83. LEARN GREETINGS. It is never bad form to learn simple greetings in another tongue, and to use them when emailing. It shows an interest in other people and shows your willingness to accept differences in others. For example, What is the American "Hi!" in Russian? (JB)

84. BE COMPLIMENTARY. Since you can't use a smile, nod, or a pat on the back while doing business online, be outwardly complimentary when it is deserved. Don't hesitate to say, "Good point." or "I like your idea." (JB)

85. KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR. There is a tendency to be a little stuffy, or stiff, in the world of words, since they can be chosen carefully before being sent. So remember that words and situations can be a source of fun and help bring down barriers. The best person to laugh at is yourself. (JB)

86. DON'T DISCUSS RELIGION AND POLITICS. Religion is a private matter that almost no one is comfortable sharing with others. Politics involves voicing opinions, and opinions lead to disagreements and defensive postures. (JB)

87. PEOPLE ARE INDIVIDUALS. Although knowledge about cultural tendencies is very helpful when working across cultures, people are individuals and follow cultural tendencies to differing degrees. Learn about the individuals you are working with, and let that knowledge supercede your knowledge about cultural norms. (ME)

88. FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS. Keep discussions centered around understanding and accommodating each person's needs and values. Avoid discussions about the "correctness" or "validity" of those values. Instead, search for solutions that respect everyone's position. (ME)

89. COMMUNICATE IN MULTIPLE MODES. Convey important messages in as many ways as possible. Say it in person, leave a voice message, write it down, add illustrations, etc. (ME)

90. CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING. Minimize miscommunications by having the listener retell the speaker what they heard. Clarify the message until the speaker accepts the retelling of the listener. (ME)

91. SIMPLE TRANSLATION ISN'T ENOUGH. Crossing language and culture barriers can be very tricky. Direct translation of existing material from one language to another often results in unexpected and unintended results. Get guidance from cultural experts about the appropriate approach, method, and tone for communication directed at a different cultural audience. (ME)
92. When traveling with a group of not so sensitive Americans I saw them go up to merchants and ask in a most demanding voice, "Do you speak English?" Imagine if a Frenchman came up to you in the US and asked in a very demanding voice, "Do you speak French?" If you answer no, then you know that you have lost face in the eyes of the person asking. If you answer yes, but are irritated at the assumption that you should be able to speak French in the U.S., then you feel like you have violated your own values if you don't point out the implication of the question. I have found that if I say in English or in French, "I am sorry but I don't speak French (or German, or Danish). Do you speak English?" The response is universally positive, even in Paris. When you apologize for not speaking their language it makes it clear that the onus is on you not on them. When an insensitive person (intentionally or unintentionally) asks directly if the person speaks English, it often creates a defensive reaction because the question implies that they should be able to speak English. However, when you say, "I'm sorry I don't speak French" before asking if they speak English, it puts the responsibility where it belongs-on you. It also shows that you respect their language. I have used this many times around the world and the response has been universally positive. (GS)

93. TAKE THE LEAD - First and foremost, it is important to check your cultural baggage at the door. If this is not possible, at least be somewhat introspective throughout and remember that you are part of the environment and situation as well. Others in the group will be feeling uncomfortable and look to you for leadership (by example). (GW)

94. PASS THE CONCH - An abstract reference to Lord of The Flies--hand out a gavel, or similar device to give a person the 'uninterrupted' floor. Each person than in turn leads a discussion on the topic of their choice (interesting to observe the choices) and feels un-threatened so long as the conch is respected. Facilitator must be sure to firmly introduce the concept and be prepared to enforce. Also during debriefing (either as a group or alone) watch for changes in personality as the 'power' that comes with the floor changes the personality of the people leading the discussion. (GW)

95. RORSCHACH TEST - Not sure on the spelling, but I think you will all know what I mean. Use ink blots, or other abstract images (my personal choice would be clouds), and ask each person what they see. This exercise can be useful when trying to help members find similarities or to explain the basis for differences. (GW)

96. WICKI STIX - This is a children's toy (very cheap). Multi-colored wax coated string that is bendable, not breakable. Comes in sets of 8. Each participant can be asked to make something in particular of anything of their choosing. Then, they can either introduce their creation to the group or have the group guess what they made. (GW)

97. DISCUSS THE FUTURE. "Where do you see yourself in three years?" is a good lead in. People generally enjoy discussing their future plans, since what they are doing at the present is really predicated on their future. (JB)

98. AVOID MAKING PROMISES. In a world of uncertainties, promises are often hard to keep and end in disappointments and hurt feelings. A particularly bad promise is to say, "Next time I'm in Moscow I'll look you up." (JB)

99. SHARE NEWS EVENTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. If you are an avid Internet surfer, turn to news from the home countries of your intercultural friends and help keep them, and yourself, informed. (JB)

100. DISCUSS UPDATES IN TECHNOLOGY. There is often new technology going on in some
countries that isn't available in others. Or ask someone about the functions of their handhelds and if they think it is a good investment. (JB)

101. BE HONEST, BUT BE POLITE. If you make a mistake, or commit a cultural faux pas, a simple, quick apology is good form. On other occasions, it's not okay to say to say you hate the sushi that your new Japanese friend has prepared for you even though you wish you were eating grilled catfish. (JB)

102. LISTEN TO LEARN--Listening to people from cultures different than your own is not an act of kindness. Cultures different from one's own can offer different and better ways of reaching common goals. Don't just listen to other viewpoints out of benevolence. Listen to learn. (LS)

103. DON'T SHOUT. Speak slow with simple words but not in a loud voice. They are not deaf. (NK-R)

104. WHY? When you get angry, stop there. And ask yourself "why"? There must be a misunderstandings, wrong choice of words, and other meanings. (NK-R)

105. MULTI-CULTURAL PICTONATRY. Break participants into groups and play a variation of pictionary. Use emotions, expressions or events rather than the usual places and things. Encourage dialogue and exploration during debriefing. (GW)

106. ENVIRONMENT IS EVERYTHING. Be sensitive to surroundings and unofficial hierarchy. Arrange chairs, tables, etc... to prevent any one person or persons from being in a 'power' position. Use various techniques at different times, such as a giant circle, sitting on the floor, standing...? A level playing field gives people a real sense of comfort. (GW)

107. LET EVERYONE KNOW THE RULES. We take a lot of things for granted. Don't be shy about telling a diverse group where the bathroom is, that they are free to get up as needed, when and where they can smoke, where a telephone is located, cell phone etiquette, eating and drinking policies. Ask yourself, "Have I ever been embarrassed, because no one told me something?" (GW)

108. SILENCE IS GOLDEN. Dramatic and not-so-dramatic pauses are often needed in order to allow participants to digest what has taken place, and to allow for dialogue and feedback. (GW)

109. SLOW DOWN. If the pace gets to fast, take control and ponder for a while. If you are not comfortable with that, take a 60 second stretch break, or brief meditation session. (GW)

110. SHOW THAT YOU'RE VULNERABLE. Even though you are a newcomer to training in this area, you will be perceived by the participants as a seasoned veteran. You can make your life easier, and set them at ease by demonstrating your vulnerability. You can share a story reflecting on a cultural mishap or an embarrassment you suffered or show them something that you, as an individual, representative of your culture, finds uncomfortable. As an alternative, you can share with them a stereotype or misperception you had felt, until you learned otherwise. (GW)

111. USE THIS MAGIC WORD. When conflict arises in a cross-cultural setting try to use what I call the TABAR approach to get some perspective on the situation before responding. TABAR means to Take A Breath And Reflect on what happened and why it happened. It is important to do this before reacting -- especially if your values are involved. If the problem is a cross-cultural issue, it usually means that the other person is either oblivious to it or that his or her values are also involved. Stop, take a breath and reflect before reacting and escalating the situation. (DR)

112. UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS. When running a country-specific training, it is important to keep
reminding participants that generalizations are guideline, but that individuals are unique. (DR)

113. MIRROR. When working across cultures, the technique of subtly mirroring the other's body language generates a sense of rapport in the other person. But perhaps more importantly, it will also help you to gauge your behavior. For example, you will more naturally convey the level of formality or informality your counterpart is comfortable with at that time. If you mirror speech pacing (including silences), it will help you to avoid speaking faster than the other party can understand you or monopolizing the conversation. (DR)

114. GIVE RESPECT. In working with people anywhere, probably the most important aspect of your behavior is conveying respect. If it is apparent that you have, and are trying to show, respect for the other person, then generally faux pas are of little consequence. However, if it appears that you lack respect, then small infractions can be seen as major slights. (DR)

115. CULTURAL INTEGRITY. If you understand a behavior to be a cultural custom, you must also realize that, whether or not you like that behavior, it has cultural integrity. (DR)

116. LISTEN TO RHYTHM. It's easy to overlook that non-native speakers of a language use a different rhythm and pattern for speaking. I don't just mean speaking a 2nd language slower or faster. I mean a different length to one's pauses within and between sentences and a different beat to the exchange between speakers. To help minimize interrupting others who are speaking "your" language, listen to the speakers using their native language to gain a better understanding of what their preferred speech patterns are. (BK)

117. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EARLY. If personality and/or cultural characteristics lead to some people desiring more time to process a question before responding, one tip for interviewing candidates for positions is to distribute questions ahead of the interview. A way to easily implement this is to have candidates arrive 15 minutes before the interview begins and pick-up the questions. You don't necessarily have to distribute all interview questions ahead of time; you could save a few to solicit spontaneous reactions, if that is required/desired for the position. (BK)

118. ASK DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS. The Describe, Interpret, Evaluate process (written about by Jon Wendt and Stella Ting-Toomey, among others) is an excellent tool for double or triple checking one's reactions to a cross-cultural experience. In preparing sojourners for cross-cultural experiences, we have heavily emphasized the skill of describing what one has experienced (participants are prompted to come up with a "pure" description until other participants agree it is a description). The emphasis on description is helpful in that it is much better to ask "what might it mean if someone stands and touches me on the shoulder?" because it is much less apt to get a defensive response than "why are the people so aggressive in this culture?" (BK)

119. STORY OF YOUR NAME. As an icebreaker for newly formed group-or even as an activity with a group that feels they know each other well, encourage members to share the story of his/her name. This is a great way to learn about personal, family, and cultural history. I have seen it also be a great way for Euro-Americans to realize the importance of trying to pronounce a non-U.S. Americans name correctly - because of the cultural and family importance of the person's name. I first saw this idea listed as an activity on a handout by Juan Moreno of The Diversity Institute, University of Minnesota. (BK)

120. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT VALUES ARE A SYSTEM FOR DECISION-MAKING. It is impossible to compare cultures by saying this culture values "this" while another culture values "that."
Humans and the societies we live in are much more complex than such simple comparisons allow. If we want to understand why a person behaves the way she/he does, we need to understand the context in which a decision was made, and thus, the context in which the person prioritized her/his value system and which one came out on top. For example, it is often said that U.S. Americans value time, while others value relationships. But, when I, as a U.S. American, walk across town on my way to a meeting, whether or not I stop to visit with a person I know depends on several factors - sometimes my emphasis of timeliness will rise to the top (I am on the leader of the meeting, it's a job interview, etc.), whereas other times my emphasis on relationships will rise to the top (depending on the person's status, family relationship; etc.). (BK)

121. BE PATIENT, WITH YOURSELF AND WITH OTHERS. Working across cultures provides many *opportunities* to make mistakes, be unintentionally offensive, and react in surprising and inappropriate ways. Be patient with yourself, and with others, and move past these occurrences as quickly as possible. (ME)

122. UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CULTURE BARRIERS AND CULTURE SHOCK. A culture barrier is external, and is encountered when two or more people experience a difference of values, assumptions, or expectations of appropriate behaviors. Culture shock is internal, and is a reaction to unfamiliar stimuli. Culture shock can be triggered by the experience of hitting a culture barrier, however culture shock is a personal experience, whereas a culture barrier is a shared experience. (ME)

123. LEARN TO SPEAK INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH. If you are working across a language barrier, and you cannot speak the other language, at least learn to modify your speech for easier comprehension. Choose simple words rather than complex ones. Use short sentences. Speak slowly. Speak clearly, pronouncing each sound distinctly, especially the sounds at the ends of words. Avoid *filling* with unnecessary chatter -- rather leave silent time for processing. Avoid idioms and slang. (ME)

124. ESTIMATE YOUR TIMELINE, THEN DOUBLE IT. (IF YOU ARE WORKING FROM DIFFERENT LOCATIONS, THEN DOUBLE IT AGAIN.) Working across language and culture barriers takes extra time and energy. Plan for it, and you will avoid the added stress of falling behind schedule. (ME)

125. CHOOSE YOUR HUMOR CAREFULLY. Humor does not always translate well across language and culture barriers. Check carefully that your humor is understood as intended, and be ready to explain and apologize if needed! (ME)

126. DE-STRESS. Exercise, meditate, sing, dance, whatever you do to relieve stress. Do it regularly, and do it often. (ME)

127. WHAT'S IN A NAME. Since I come from a different culture and have a hard name, I abbreviate it and let people mispronounce it any way they want to. However, I have notice that when some people spend time and effort and gently insist I teach them how to say and spell my name, I feel important and happy. While it may be a bad idea to generalize from my vanity, I always make it a rule to apply this let's-focus-on-your-name strategy with people who have unusual names. (Warning: This approach may backfire with Tom Jones.) (ABC)

128. VERB PLUS PREPOSITION. As a second-language speaker of English, I am particularly confused by verb + preposition phrases such as “turn on”, “turn out”, “turnover”, “turn down”, “turn
up”, and “turn off”. The non-native speaker's initial tendency is to translate each word, combine the meanings, and then try to make sense. Please avoid this confusion by using straight verbs as “motivate”, “result”, “reject”, “appear”, and “ignore”. (DEF)

129. WRITTEN WORDS. Most professionals from non-English speaking cultures probably have a wider reading vocabulary than listening vocabulary. Make use of this phenomenon by supporting your oral presentations with handouts and text slides. (GHI)

Please connect me to Intercultural Insights, a discussion and resource-sharing group on intercultural business, consulting and training topics!

Connect me to Thiagi's website so I can get instructions on how to run my own e-mail game of this type.

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