

# Multicultural Awareness: Implications for Reality Therapy and Choice Theory

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**ABSTRACT:** A presentation of the importance of self-awareness, knowledge, and experience in achieving multicultural awareness and adapting personal beliefs and behaviors in the application of CT/RT. Prepared by 11 signatories from 10 countries.

At the first Certification Week held in Japan in 1990, Ms. Yoko Nasada made a presentation on how she trains new waitresses in manners for serving tea in restaurants. She teaches them to do this with typical Japanese politeness, using extremely kind and polite words with each customer such as, "I am so very glad to be of service to you. Could I present you with some of our tea for your enjoyment?" She described how the tea is served and presented to the customer, emphasizing that the customer's needs must be attended to; that of respect and power. In fact, the customer often expresses an apology to the waitress in order to receive such courtesy.

This anecdote serves to point up the importance of courtesy in the Japanese culture as well as the indirect manner of communication. To the unaware Western ear, this example of human interaction might seem to indicate an excess in polite expression. As one American tourist observed, "They seem to overdo it!" Yet for the member of this "different" culture such expressions are based on norms that have existed for thousands of years and which help to insure an orderly society.

The very fact that a candidate for certification in Reality Therapy would choose this topic indicates a significant cultural difference and ethnic value. In many years of conducting groups and monitoring the certification process, I (Wubbolding) have not heard a presentation that is close to such a topic. While volumes have been written about the importance of the tea ceremony to the Japanese, this story serves to illustrate customs that are everyday occurrences and of crucial importance to the conduct of business in Japan. More importantly, the story illustrates the subtlety of cultural differences and how easy it is to miss the messages sent by someone from a different culture.

## ELUSIVENESS OF CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Consider the following intercultural event. It illustrates what happens when well meaning but unaware individuals interface with another culture. Storti (1991) describes the example of a western family that was invited to a Moroccan family's home. "We might consider as well the apocryphal story of the American

couple invited to a Moroccan family's home for dinner. Having pressed their host to fix a time, they arrive half an hour late and are shown into the guest room. After a decent interval, they ask after the host's wife, who has yet to appear, and are told that she's busy in the kitchen. At one point their host's little son wanders in, and the couple remark on his good looks. Just before the meal is served, the guests ask to be shown to the toilet so they may wash their hands. The main course is served in and eaten from a large, common platter, and the couple choose morsels of food from wherever they can reach, trying to keep up polite conversation throughout the meal. Soon after the tea and cookies, they take their leave."

By western standards the visiting family acted quite appropriately. They wanted to be prompt: not too early and not too late. They showed an interest in the man's family asking about his wife and complimenting his children. They wanted to freshen up before handling food and asked where to do this. They tried to be sociable during the meal and took food just as is done in polite western society. They were as courteous as they could be - according to western standards. Did they do anything wrong? Storti states that according to the Moroccan culture they did nearly everything wrong. He states: "1) They confused the host by asking him to fix the hour, for in the Moslem world an invitation to a meal is really an invitation to come and spend time with your friends, during the course of which time, God willing, a meal may very well appear. To ask what time you should come is tantamount to asking your host how long he wants you around and implies, as well, that you are more interested in the meal than in his company. 2) One should be careful about asking after a Moslem man's wife; she frequently does not eat with foreign guests, even if female spouses are present, nor would she necessarily even be introduced. In any case, she belongs in the kitchen guaranteeing the meal is as good as she can produce, thereby showing respect for her guests and bringing honor on her and her husband's house. 3) Nor should one praise the intelligence or good looks of small children, for this will alert evil spirits to the presence of a prized object in the home, and they may come and cause harm. 4) It was not appropriate to ask to be shown the toilet either, a decorative basin

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would have been offered for the washing of hands (and the nicer it is the more honor it conveys upon the family. 5) Nor should one talk during the meal; it interferes with the enjoyment of the food to have to keep up a conversation and may even be interpreted as a slight against the cooking. 6) And one should only take food from the part of the platter directly in front, not from anywhere within reach. Not only is it rude to reach, but doing so deprives the host of one of his chief duties and pleasures: finding the best pieces of chicken or lamb and ostentatiously placing them before the guest."

The purpose of the above examples is not to imply that the teacher, counselor, therapist or trainer in Reality Therapy can be competent in all "other" cultures. Not many such persons are invited to Moroccan homes and only a few attend Japanese tea ceremonies. The aim of such examples is to demonstrate the principle that in order to work cross culturally, it is necessary to know more than the basics of western education, western therapy, or western training methods.

1. How does Ms. Yoko Nasada train her waitresses for serving tea in restaurants?
2. What needs are being attended to?
3. What does the customer do in return?
4. How do many Westerners view this interaction?
5. Such expressions of courtesy are based on what?
6. "Doing everything Wrong" - A Western Family Eating at a Moroccan Family Dinner.

Event:	Cultural Norm:
Asking for a fixed time	Western view:
	Moroccan view:

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Remarking on son's good looks	Western view:
	Moroccan view:
Asking to be shown to the toilette to wash hands	Western view:
	Moroccan view:
Choosing morsels of food from the platter from wherever they can reach	Western view:
	Moroccan view:
Keeping up polite conversation during the meal	Western view:
	Moroccan view:
Leave after eating tea and cookies	Western view:
	Moroccan view:

