

LESSON NUMBER 5

TASK: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

CONDITION: In a small group discussion environment.

STANDARD: All participants will be able to describe leadership issues related to cultural diversity.

TIME OF INSTRUCTION: 1 Hour

1. *Diversity is defined as the condition of being different.* In other words, it means dissimilarity and variance between things. The differences could be in size, weight, age, texture, and so on.

Discussion Question: What are some of the major concerns or problems a leader might face in a culturally diverse organization?

2. English is the sole operational language used by the Army, communication problems, however, can still exist. Here are some of the reasons:

a. *Communication style.* Even when the same language is used, people interpret information differently. Therefore, the message sent is not always the message received. Differences in communication styles can make the sender of the message appear to be pushy, rude, aggressive, passive, etc. Factors involved in this are volume and rapidity of speech, tone of voice, and emphasis on key words.

Discussion Question: Have you ever experienced this?

b. *Nonverbal Communication.* Nonverbal communication is the sum total of our body's communication. It is how our body communicates or sends a message. Nonverbal communication has different meanings for different people or groups. Studies show that 50 percent of a message's impact comes from body movements or nonverbal communication. For example, crossing your arms may indicate defiance. Putting your hand on your chin may show thought. Leaders need to understand the importance of checking nonverbals when communicating. This might give them a clearer picture of how the soldier is reacting to the discussion.

Discussion Question: What types of body language do you see in this group right now?

c. *Trust.* Trust plays an important role in intercultural, interracial, and inter-gender communication. A lack of trust can result not only in miscommunications, but even in no communication-taking place.

Discussion Question: Have you ever experienced this?

d. Accents. Some people react negatively to accents. They may even be rude when someone does not speak "proper" English. People have accents either because of ethnicity or region of country from which they come or because English is their second language. Some people consider them to be less intelligent, less competent, and even less trustworthy. Leaders need to judge if accent interferes with the ability to communicate or perform. If accents do not interfere, then our focus needs to be on listening to what is being said, not on how it is said.

Discussion Question: Are you bothered by accents?

e. Regional Jargon. People make judgments about others based on the kinds of expressions they use because of the region of country from which they come. These speakers are sometimes thought to be uneducated, or less intelligent than soldiers who do not use regional jargon. Leaders need to understand that certain terms are unique to individuals from certain regions and do not indicate their level of intelligence.

Discussion Question: Are you bothered by regional jargon? Why?

f. Stereotypes. A stereotype is a standardized mental picture that one person or group of people holds in common about another person or group of people. Stereotyping is very common. Many people do it to justify their conduct in relation to the group they have stereotyped. Stereotypes can either be positive or negative, for example, "Asians are intelligent" or "Hispanics are emotional." Positive stereotyping can be just as dangerous for a leader to use as negative stereotyping.

Discussion Question: Do you see stereotyping as a problem in the unit?

g. Lack of Common Experiences. The fact that people have different experiences accounts for many of the problems that occur when they try to interact cross-culturally or across genders. Cultural, racial, and gender differences affect our experiences. Our experiences directly relate to our ability to communicate. For example, if you are from a broken family, the word "family" might have a different meaning or emotional charge for you than for someone from a different family situation, or home of orphan.

Discussion Question: What are the key experiences that shape soldiers?

h. Responses to Physical Differences. Emotional responses to physical differences may hinder effective communications between or among groups. Beliefs about superiority or inferiority associated with physical differences interfere with the communication process. They may be related to racism or sexism, but in the Army, where outward appearance and bearing are so important, physical differences may also affect communications in such areas as weight, grooming, or posture.

Discussion Question: What physical characteristics bother you the worst when you see them in another soldier?

i. Values and Beliefs. Values are beliefs, which regulate how we should or should not behave. Our values often reflect a larger, social value system. How we interact with others is quite often based on our value systems and beliefs. When people hold different values or have different beliefs, communication may be very difficult. For example, some people value extended families and have close kinship ties. A leader who does not have the same values on extended family members might not be willing to grant leave to a soldier wanting to attend a great-uncle's funeral. This can have a negative impact on the relationship between the soldier requesting the leave and the commander, or may create anger among other similar soldiers in the organization who hear the story.

Discussion Questions: What are your top three values? What do you think the Army's values are? What do you think our Commander's (or 1SG's or CSM's) values are?