

Back to Back/Speaking without Seeing

Purpose:

This can be done as an icebreaker to help participants get to know each other, and can help introduce the topic of nonverbal communication and communication styles.

Description:

Stand back to back with a person standing next to you with whom you are not acquainted (if you know the person next to you, choose another partner).

Take turns briefly introducing yourself and telling your partner a little about yourself.

Discussion questions:

How did you feel?

How easy or difficult was it to introduce yourself?

How easy or difficult was it to get to know your partner?

Were there any differences in the way you or your partner introduced yourselves, compared to the way you would normally do so?

How did your turn taking work?

Did you use any strategies to improve your communication?

Debriefing:

According to communication research, nonverbal communication conveys more than 90% of the message when people are communicating. Standing back to back interferes with or changes much of the information conveyed - particularly the nonverbal cues that someone would normally receive - thus making communication more challenging. Variations in nonverbal communication are common when communicating interculturally, and it is often necessary for people to make adjustments and develop strategies to communicate more effectively.

Source: Alice Wu, for Toolbox for the Intercultural Future, NAFSA 2008 National Conference, Washington, DC, Wednesday, May 28, 2008, 8 - 9:15 am