

COUPS AND FAUX PAS

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Purpose:

To open an intercultural training program and begin a discussion of how cultural differences affect us in work or daily life.

Target Audience:

This activity is for groups starting to learn about working or doing business across cultures. It requires some experience abroad or experience interacting with people of other cultures. Group members should not be afraid to share personal experiences. Coups and Faux Pas can be used even if most of the people in the group already know each other or are an intact work group. This exercise can be done in one large group, or in smaller groups.

Time:

5 minutes to set up and introduce yourself, 2 minutes per person, and a few minutes to debrief. Materials include handout, “66 Ways We Differ,” for each participant.

Procedure:

Tell the participants that you are all going to introduce yourselves to one another in a special way by sharing:

- A cultural *faux pas* – a mistake made abroad or in interacting with people from another culture, or
- A cultural *coup* – something that turned out well when you respected another’s cultural values.

Scanning the handout, “66 Ways We Differ,” might help them think of an experience. You can demonstrate what you mean by introducing yourself with BOTH a *coup* and *faux pas*.

Debrief:

Transition into the next part of the program by telling the group that when it comes to culture, often “We don’t know what we don’t know,” and that we frequently learn by mistakes. Tie this into the theme of the presentation or course: “It is the purpose of the course to learn how to avoid making tragic mistakes when dealing with people different from ourselves, and to learn how to turn our mistakes into successes.”

[Handout 1 – page 1]

Instructions to Trainer: Edit or change this list to make it fit your group or the topics you are interested in exploring during the rest of the program.

66 Ways We Differ

1. How we define “proper” behavior
2. How and when we greet each other
3. What’s considered common courtesy
4. What’s polite or impolite
5. How closely we stand to each other
6. The holidays we celebrate and how we celebrate them
7. How we show respect and disrespect
8. How and when we use money, credit, and bartering
9. The range in which we negotiate
10. What is modest or risqué
11. What is embarrassing or shameful
12. What makes us feel good, and what depresses us
13. What makes us proud, and what shames us
14. What, when, and how we eat and drink
15. What we wear, and when and where we wear it
16. How we see and behave toward sickness and health
17. How and when we seek and use health services
18. What we find funny or sad
19. How and when we use means of transportation
20. What we buy and sell, and when, how, and with whom we do it
21. When, where, and how we sit and stand
22. If, how, and when we touch each other
23. What we believe
24. What we value
25. What makes “common sense”
26. What are worthwhile goals in life
27. What is beautiful or ugly
28. The nature of God and other religious beliefs
29. What we believe we need and don’t need
30. Whether privacy is desirable or undesirable
31. Who makes what decisions, and in what circumstances
32. Whether a person is in control of his or her own life, or whether fate determines it

33. What should be communicated directly, and what indirectly
34. What or who is clean or dirty
35. What language, dialect, and tone of voice we use
36. To whom we speak and to whom we do not speak
37. The role of the individual
38. The roles of men and women, and how each should behave
39. The roles of parents and children, and how each should behave
40. The importance of harmony in a group
41. The importance of competition between individuals
42. Social class
43. Educational levels
44. Hierarchy in business relationships
45. How time is understood and used
46. Whether schedules are important or unimportant
47. The importance of tradition and rituals
48. How often we smile, whom we smile at, and what it means when we smile
49. How strangers interact
50. How we interact with a person in authority
51. How we interact with a person serving us (e.g., in a restaurant)
52. Relationships and obligations between friends
53. Relationships and obligations toward extended family members and relatives
54. Facial expressions and other nonverbal behavior and gestures, and when they are used
55. Crowd or audience behaviors
56. The importance of preparing for the future
57. How we see old age and how we value elders
58. Whether conversation should be formal or informal
59. What should be said; what should be left unsaid
60. Whether, when, how, and with whom we make "small talk"
61. How we perceive what is friendly or unfriendly
62. How open or guarded we are with information
63. What behavior is ethical and what behavior is not ethical
64. How, whom, and how much we entertain
65. How or whether we take turns, stand in line, etc.
66. How often we change jobs or "move house," and where and why

And, there are many, many other ways in which we differ!

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