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Leadership Cultural Competence PAS 409

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Personal Leadership Journal Entry 2

As a first generation American, the differences between my culture and the cultures around me are very clear. My family ties originate from a small country called Belize. In this journal entry, I will describe my culture through the lens of people, food, space, time, and language, as I provide clear examples of how they differ from the culture around me.

People

Belizeans are very proud people, and our pride is generally displayed through our actions, reactions and behavior. Respect is extremely important in my culture, and it is especially important when interacting with others. Much like most Hispanic and Latino cultures, the display of respect translates to positive communication and an even more positive message. However, the lack of respect translates to negative communication and overall message. Also, it is our culture to communicate candidly. While candid speech can in some cases appear aggressive to Americans, we believe that candid speech sends a message of honesty, fearlessness, and the absence of intimidation.

In addition to the cultural communication differences, the roles of males and females are clear and distinctly different. For example, men are expected to bear the financial responsibility of the home, whereas, women are expected to take care of the husband, children and the home, even if they are employed outside of the home. Also, females are expected to know how to cook, in

order to be considered a “suitable wife.” While some males are taught to cook and clean, it is the cultural expectation that the woman is ultimately responsible for this task in the home, along with the health and well-being of the family. Finally, males are generally favored above females, especially in the eyes of the mother. Based on this, one might believe that males are regarded as the leader or patriarch of the family; however, in the Belizean culture, it is very much the woman who is the driving force, or matriarch of the family – more specifically, the abuela. Even though the woman is often the backbone of the family, it is customary for the father or eldest male to be presented to society as the jefe del campamento!

Food

Our staple foods consist of red beans, black beans, rice and plantains. We also enjoy tamales, penedes, and escabeche. While many of the surrounding countries are greatly influenced by the Spanish cultures, since Belize was colonized by the British, the times and types of meals served are strongly influenced by the British as well. Unlike in the United States where Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner are the three meals served, in Belize breakfast, dinner and tea are served daily. In Belize, dinner can be eaten as early as 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., and tea is served at six o'clock p.m. Tea is usually enjoyed with bread, cheese, and crackers or cookies, often referred to as “biscuits.” Food is extremely important in our culture, and unlike many cultures, we only dine with those who we like. This is extremely important because food is an extension of who we are and to extend a place at our table to a friend, is like extending a place in our family to those who are invited to dine with our family. It is extremely important to know that to refuse a meal being offered by a Belizean family is a grave insult, and it may result in your never being offered or invited again!

Time

In most cases, Belizeans are very punctual people, who hold timeliness in high regard. While this can be a good thing, it can also lead to impatience with others who hold time in less regard. In my observations of American behaviors, I have noticed that most Americans do not have a problem with spending time with those whom that do not particularly care for. This is not the case with most Belizeans. In the Belizean culture, time is generally granted to those who we like or respect. However, it is in our culture to either avoid spending any unnecessary time with individuals that we dislike, or to ignore their very presence all together!

Space

Globally, Americans are known for their need for, and love of space! Many know and understand what is referred to as the invisible space or bubble. In several cultures, especially those of third world countries, such space just simply does not exist. While in my culture, space is equally important in some instances, there are times when space is simply not an issue. For example, it is not unusual for people to touch when walking down a crowded street. Also, it is not uncommon for women to joyfully dance together, at times closely, and not be labeled or viewed strangely. Finally, it is common for men, especially fathers to hug and kiss their teenage sons in public as they greet or prepare to depart.

Language

Most of the surrounding countries speak Spanish; however, due to the British influence, the official languages of Belize are Creole and English. Creole is a broken form of English and is generally spelled as phonetically as it sounds. Culturally, our method of communication is

straight forward and as mentioned earlier -candid. In fact, it is culturally acceptable to call things as we see it, and because of this, we are often perceived as being abrupt, aggressive and even assertive at times. Culturally, we tend to all speak at the same time, which is unlike what is practiced by Americans, who tend to find it rude if someone neglects to listen and speak once it is their turn. Regarding the youth, there is never an acceptable time for a younger person to express themselves in a disrespectful manner towards an older person. Most importantly, children are expected to remain completely quiet while witnessing a conversation between their elders.

Culture is the DNA of all individuals. Our cultural backgrounds influence and in some cases drive us to behave in ways that we have been programmed to behave all of our lives.