**Exercise:** **Direct and Indirect Communication**

The exercise below helps you define the differences between high and low communication and direct and indirect communication. In the underlined space before each of the numbered statements, write “I” if you think it applies to a culture in which communication is indirect/high context, or “D” if communication is direct/low context.

**Characteristics & Behaviors**

1. \_\_\_\_ Communication is like that between twins.

2. \_\_\_\_ People are reluctant to say no.

3. \_\_\_\_ You have to read between the lines.

4. \_\_\_\_ Use of intermediaries or third parties is frequent.

5. \_\_\_\_ Use of understatement is frequent.

6. \_\_\_\_ It’s best to tell it like it is.

7. \_\_\_\_ It’s okay to disagree with your boss at a meeting.

8. \_\_\_\_ “Yes” means yes.

9. \_\_\_\_ “Yes” means I hear you.

10. \_\_\_\_ Communication is like that between two casual acquaintances.

11. \_\_\_\_ It’s not necessary to read between the lines.

12. \_\_\_\_ People engage in small talk and catching up before getting down to business.

13. \_\_\_\_ Business first, then small talk.

14. \_\_\_\_ Lukewarm tea means all is not well.

15. \_\_\_\_ Lukewarm tea means the tea got cold.

16. \_\_\_\_ People need to be brought up to date at a meeting.

17. \_\_\_\_ People are already up to date.

18. \_\_\_\_ The rank/status of the messenger is as important as the message.

19. \_\_\_\_ The message is what counts, not who the messenger is.

20. \_\_\_\_ People tell you what they think you want to hear.

*(Answers in Answer Key Section)*

From “Culture Matters” *The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook*. Washington D.C: US Government Printing Office. 1997

**Exercise:** **Practicing Indirectness**

The next two exercises give you a chance to practice the skill of indirect communication. In this first activity, you are presented with a series of seven direct statements. Try to rephrase them to make them more indirect, writing your suggestions in the blank space below each one. While these statements could be appropriate in some situations, the setting here is a meeting, in which allowing people to save face is important. Suggested rephrasing of the first statement is offered as an example.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DIRECT** | **INDIRECT** |
| **1.** I don’t think that’s such a good idea. | *Do you think that’s a good idea?*  *Are there any other ideas?*  *I like most parts of that idea.* |
| **2.** That’s not the point. |  |
| **3.** I think we should.... |  |
| **4.** What do you think, Mr. Cato?  *(Calling on people sometimes embarrasses them. How can you find out what Mr. Cato thinks without directly asking him?)* |  |
| **5.** Those figures are not accurate. |  |
| **6.** You’re doing that wrong. |  |
| **7.** I don’t agree. |  |

*(Answers in Answer Key Section)*

From “Culture Matters” *The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook*. Washington D.C: US Government Printing Office. 1997

**Exercise: Decoding Indirectness**

This exercise is the opposite of the one you just completed. In this activity, you are presented with a series of indirect statements and asked to decode them—to explain in direct language what the speaker probably means. Looking at the first statement, “That is a very interesting viewpoint,” remember that the person may mean exactly that, but *sometimes* it’s an indirect way of saying “I disagree with you.” In communicating across cultures, you need to *at least entertain the possibility* that the speaker may mean something other than what he or she has said. The first statement has been rephrased for you.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **INDIRECT** | **DIRECT** |
| **1.** That is a very interesting viewpoint. | *I don’t agree.*  *We need to talk more about this.*  *You’re wrong.* |
| **2.** This proposal deserves further consideration. |  |
| **3.** I know very little about this, but.... |  |
| **4.** We understand your proposal very well. |  |
| **5.** We will try our best. |  |
| **6.** I heard another story about that project. |  |
| **7.** Can we move on to the next topic? |  |

*(Answers in Answer Key Section)*

From “Culture Matters” *The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook*. Washington D.C: US Government Printing Office. 1997

**Decoding Conversations**

You are invited to sit in on a consultation meeting between a Caltrans employee and a tribal representative concerning a project. The two speakers are involved in the discussion as you enter, so you are not sure whom the two people work for, their identities, or their roles in the consultation. One person is standing in the center of the room, while the other is sitting at a table.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Standing Speaker: | “I understand that, but …” |
| Sitting Speaker: | “Don’t you see that’s not an issue? We’ve talked about this before.” |
| Standing Speaker: | “Yes, I see.” |
| Sitting Speaker: | “I’m glad we’ve gotten that taken care of. There’s not anything else, is there?” |
| Standing Speaker: | “Well… no, I guess not.” |
| Sitting Speaker: | “Good. I’ve got work to do. I’ll talk to you later.” |

Based on the conversation and the materials presented in this class, which do you think would be the best answer to the following four questions.

Which of the following statements best describes the styles of communication in the conversation?

a. Standing Speaker uses Direct communication while Sitting Speaker uses Indirect.

b. Standing Speaker uses Indirect communication while Sitting Speaker uses Direct.

c. Both Standing and Sitting Speakers use Direct communication style.

d. Both Standing and Sitting Speakers use Indirect communication style.

Based on your reading and understanding of the communication styles presented in the Participant’s Workbook and the in-class discussion, which of the following statements best describes the situation?

a. The Standing Speaker was in control of the situation.

b. The Sitting Speaker was in control of the situation.

c. The Standing Speaker believed his issue had been taken care of.

d. The Sitting Speaker was open to the viewpoint of the other individual.

Which of the following statements would best fit within the communication style of the Sitting Speaker?

a. “Yes” means “I agree.”

b. “Yes” means “I understand.”

c. “Yes” means “I hear you.”

d. “Yes” means “I’m waiting to hear more.”

When the Sitting Speaker says: “I’ve got work to do”, it means:

a. “I wish I could talk some more but …”

b. “I’m swamped and need to get to my other work …”

c. “You may leave …”

d. “Our conversation had nothing to do with anything of interest to me …”