Navigating Cultural Differences We Never Knew We Had

Presented for

UUA General Assembly 2013

Session # 2032

Margaret E Anderson

Good afternoon.

My name is Margaret Anderson, and I train people to get what they need from one another, in ways that build bridges, rather than burning them. I go into organizations and present training programs in consensus building and complementary communication skills. I'm the author of *Bridges to Consensus—in Congregations* and a member of the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship.

Today's topic is "Navigating Cultural Differences We Never Knew We Had." But what do cultural differences have to do with building consensus, or with covenant and commitment, the themes of this conference? For the answer, let's look at some things our covenants have in common.

Most of our covenants reflect principles of love and a quest for truth, along with promises to walk the talk through service. In order to create and implement specific plans for service, we have to build consensus. But when we start to do that, well-meaning people differ about what love or truth looks like. Disagreements about the specifics discourage people, who then lose enthusiasm, or even bail out of the project, no matter how committed they thought they were and said they were.

Cultural differences can look like differences in principle because those cultural differences can cause two people to interpret the same words or actions in two very different ways.

The good news is that recognizing these interpretations for what they are can support consensus building and commitment by enabling us to listen and

communicate in ways that bridge the differences. The even better news is that this stuff is fun to learn. When I train a group in a full-blown consensus building system, the cultural and temperamental diversity sessions are often their favorites.

Here's an example of what can happen. Suppose a congregation made a covenant after Justice GA 2012 to lobby their state government for better living conditions for detained immigrants. They set up a team to do this. They choose a leader, Carlos, whose family legally immigrated to the U.S. when he was 15 years old. He and his parents worked hard to get him a higher education.

However, Carlos's English is still imperfect. For example, he pronounces the English word "indigent" as "in-DEE-jent," and other similar things. Now, Carlos has landed an opportunity to meet with the governor. Some of the troublesome words are likely to come up in the interview. Everyone thinks the governor *shouldn't* judge Carlos by a few mispronounced words. However, one team member, Ethan, realizes that things like pronunciation *do* affect people's opinions of one another, often subconsciously.

So Ethan thinks their lobbying efforts are more likely to succeed if Carlos improves his pronunciation. He believes that the most loving approach, for Carlos as well as the immigrants they want to help, is to correct him. This will help the governor open her mind to Carlos's message.

Another team member, Abby, thinks correcting Carlos is unkind. She feels that asking him to Americanize himself denigrates his Hispanic background. Heck, even the governor occasionally mispronounces something. Correcting a few silly little mistakes isn't worth losing Carlos's enthusiasm for the team.

Both Ethan and Abby are trying their best to practice the Golden Rule, to treat Carlos as they'd like to be treated if they were in his shoes. Ethan would want to know if his pronunciation kept the governor from respecting the speaker, and thus, hearing the message. He'd view the correction as supportive.

Abby feels that, if her pronunciation were corrected, yes, she'd learn to say "indigent," but she'd never feel quite the same toward the person who corrected her. She might lose some of her enthusiasm for the project.

The Golden Rule is no panacea because not everyone wants to be treated the same way in a given situation. But we don't always realize this. In a worst-case scenario, one team member might even begin to use their covenant as a weapon, accusing another of violating the covenant.

Ethan finds it impossible to imagine how Carlos, or any other “reasonable” person, wouldn’t’ want support in getting his message across. If he tells Abby he plans to correct Carlos, and she tries to talk him out of it, he accuses her of lacking commitment to their covenant because she’s willing to sacrifice the team’s goals to spare one person’s feelings.

And for her part, Abby accuses Ethan of violating their basic principle of love by buying into the same anti-Hispanic prejudice they’re trying to overcome.

Either or both of them could even become so disillusioned that they resign from the team.

The reasons different people want to be treated differently in a given situation include temperament, unique packages of life experience, and cultural factors. By “cultural,” I don't just mean nationality. In fact, intra-national cultural factors, like gender, region and generation, often cause the biggest problems.

If we know somebody grew up in a different country, we tend to cut her a little slack and not judge her badly if she speaks or behaves in a way that we consider impolite. We rarely cut that same slack to those of our own nationality. If, instead of Carlos, the team leader is Charlie, a 5th generation American, Abby might not be as reluctant to correct him if he says “in-DYE-jent" instead of “indigent.”

So let's say the team leader is Charlie, he does say "in-DYE-jent," and everyone thinks it would be better if he said “indigent.” What does the Golden Rule tell them about the most loving way to proceed with Charlie?

1. One team member, **Bill** would look for an opportunity to say “indigent” in front of Charlie & hope he gets the message.
2. **Darlene** would take Charlie aside and gently correct him in private.
3. Our friend **Ethan** finds a private talk more embarrassing, like you’re making too big a deal out of it; next time Charlie says, “in-DYE-gent,” in

a meeting, Ethan will just say, “Hey, Charlie, that’s “indigent.”

4. **Abby**, as we know, would do nothing.

How many of you, if you were Charlie, would prefer Bill’s approach, just say “indigent” in front of you and hope you get the message?

How many of you, in Charlie’s shoes, prefer Darlene’s plan, take you aside and gently correct you in private?

How many like Ethan’s way, “Hey, Charlie, that’s ‘indigent”?

And which of you prefer Abby’s do-nothing approach?

Look how we in this room differ about how we’d like to be treated in Charlie’s shoes. With our hearts in the right place, we’d treat him like we’d prefer, and most of us would not sync up with his cultural preference.

When it comes to consensus building and complementary communication skills, telling isn’t training. You wouldn’t try to learn to drive without practicing in the car, and you’d start in an empty parking lot, not on the freeway. So in learning consensus building, I pair people off to practice on safe hypothetical problems before they try to deal with a difficult person they have to work with. We have neither the time nor the set up for hands-on training like that here today.

Of all the pieces in my curricula, intra-national culture is one that lends itself better to a presentation format, as opposed to a skills training format, so I’m going to give you a little taste of that piece.

It’ll help if I first orient you by explaining where this cultural diversity piece fits into a comprehensive consensus building system. There’s a brief thumbnail system outline at the top of page 1 of your handout. It’s a 5-part system:

I. **Skills for uncovering** the underlying **interests** that drive people’s positions. When we address the real interests, instead of taking positions and reacting to positions, everyone usually comes out better. I’ve developed a practice I call “The Three Magic Questions” for uncovering those interests.

II. **Walk-away Alternatives** for deciding when to keep talking and when to give it up and walk away

III. **Creating the content for an agreement**; that piece includes:

   A. Skills for developing creative win-win solutions

   B. How to compromise reasonably, *if* compromise becomes necessary

IV. **Communication skills** actually comprise almost half the content. They include:

   A. General communication skills you can use with just about anyone

   B. Communication Diversity. Under that, I cover

      1. Temperament
      2. Culture (in red because it's today's topic)
      3. Learning style
      4. Conflict style

V. **Closure**

In teaching Cultural Communication Diversity, I include what I call a "You Can't Lose Quiz." You can't lose because there are no wrong answers. But you can be sure that there will be different answers.

Now you all get to try a sampling of this quiz. The answer sheet is on the bottom of p. 1 of your handout.

I'll go through this at a fairly rapid pace because we don't want you over thinking it; we want your instinctive reactions.

1. You're working with a fellow volunteer in the church office. Which is the most polite, or least offensive, thing to say to her? *[Note: the question is not which is the most correct use of the English language, nor which is the most polite you could possibly say; just which of these choices is more polite.]*

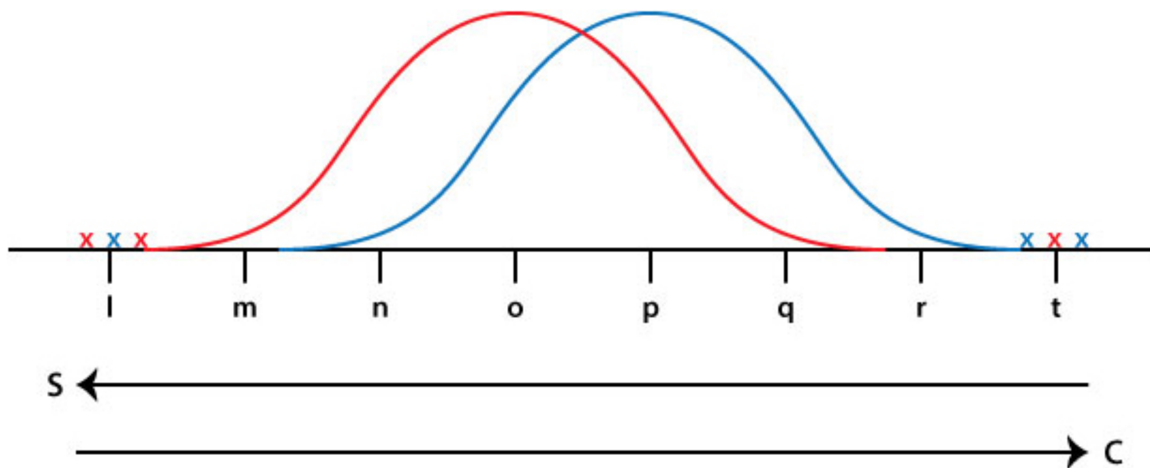
   a. Would you change the printer cartridge?

   b. Could you change the printer cartridge?

2. Jane and Ken have an argument. Later, Jane says, “I’m sorry about what happened yesterday.” Ken replies, “Apology accepted.” Would Jane feel:
    a. Relieved
    b. Offended
    c. Angry
3. George & Ellen are preparing to do a two-part project. Ellen wants to do Part 1. George says, “You do Part 2; I’ll do Part 1. ”Ellen replies:
    a. “Hey, you’re not my boss.”
    b. “No, I want to do Part 1.”
    c. “I’d sort of like to do Part 1.”
4. You sit down to a meal with your friend Roger. The butter dish is closer to you. Roger says, “Will you have some butter?” You:
    a. Say, “Yes, thank you,” and take some butter.
    b. Say, “No, thank you,” and continue eating.
    c. Pass the butter to Roger, saying, “Please help yourself.”

Before we go over your answers, here’s a paradigm that explains why those answers will differ among you. Everyone has two opposing needs in relation to other people. We all want some measure of **status**—to be independent and autonomous, distinct from others, and to compare favorably with others. The desire for status manifests itself in hierarchical relationships and competitive interactions. Hierarchical relationships and competitive interactions.

Everyone also has a need for **connection** with other people—to feel that they’re similar to others and fit in with a group. The desire for connection manifests itself in egalitarian relationships and collaborative or cooperative interactions. Egalitarian relationships and collaborative interactions.



We all want some status and some connection with others, but these two needs are at odds with each other. That's why people get nervous before marriage. In order to gain that higher level of connection, they have to give up some autonomy and status.

People differ in how much of each they want. I've shown this on p. 2 of your handout with two scales running in opposite directions. They're inversely proportional. S, for status, increases from right to left. C, for connection, increases from left to right.

So if Pat feels comfortable at point n, and Midori feels comfortable at point p, Pat feels a greater need for status, and Midori wants more connection. But they both include status and connection in their relationships with others.

People also differ in how they satisfy the two needs. Let's say Pat represents an American organization and is negotiating with Midori, who represents a Japanese organization.

When things begin to look interesting to Midori, she brings a colleague into the room, and they continue negotiating with Pat together. When they get a really good deal on the table, before agreeing to it, they bring in a third colleague and decide together. No one of them wants to unilaterally make a decision that will affect the whole company. That's one of the ways Japanese manifest their needs for connection.

Pat, on the other hand, tries to handle the matter on his own. He doesn't want to have to "phone home" for advice or approval. That's one of his ways of

expressing his need for status.

But put Pat and Midori at an evening reception. If Pat sees Midori with several of her Japanese colleagues and approaches them, it would be a great faux pas if Midori does not introduce her colleagues in the order of their rank in the company. That's one of their ways of honoring status.

Reverse the situation. Midori approaches Pat and a number of his American colleagues. They would think nothing of Pat introducing them in whatever order they happen to be standing around. That's an egalitarian behavior that satisfies their need for connection.

Many factors influence these priorities. So if I want to show two groups of people who differ by one factor, I don't show them as two points, but rather as two overlapping bell curves. Let's say the red curve represents Americans, and the blue curve represents Japanese. In general, Americans are relatively status oriented compared to Japanese.

But an American whose gender, region and temperament also make him favor status might fall at point m on the far left of the red curve, while an American whose gender, region and temperament make her favor connection falls at point q, where she overlaps with a fair number of Japanese. Most Americans fall in between where the red curve is tallest and overlaps with fewer Japanese.

These curves are conceptual, not mathematically precise. I don't know how tall or wide they are or how much they overlap. All those things vary depending on which groups the curves represent. But I know they're always overlapping bells. Plus, there are extreme individuals from both groups who are off the curves, as indicated by the red and blue Xs at the far ends.

The red and blue could represent Americans and Japanese, or Californians and New Yorkers, or men and women. Although today's program focuses on culture, biological factors also influence our priorities. Gender is a combination of culture and biology, and temperament is another biological factor that influences these preferences.

Now let's apply this paradigm to our covenanted housing condition team.

- We can envision Abby, who would say nothing to Charlie, at about point r.
- Bill would wait for an opportunity to say "indigent" in front of Charlie. He might land at point q.
- Darlene would take Charlie aside and say, "I thought you might like to know that, around here, "We say 'indigent' not 'in-DYE-gent' and the governor would understand better if we say it that way." Darlene's at point p.
- Ethan, at point o, would wait for Charlie to say "in-DYE-gent" and tell him, "Hey, Charlie, that's 'indigent.'"
- There's another team member we haven't met yet, Fred. Like other people who sit anywhere from about point p on over to the left, he doesn't like others controlling him, showing him up, or winning over him. But Fred is so hierarchical, somewhere between points m and n, that he likes to control others. He likes to make interactions competitive, and he wants to win.
    - Like Darlene, Fred might take Charlie aside, but he'd say, "Charlie, your English just isn't on the level we need in order to get enough respect for our message. You need to let me take that meeting with the governor.
    - And if Fred's all the way over at point m, he might make that same statement in front of the whole team.

Who thinks Fred broke the Golden Rule?

Maybe he did, but here's another thought: Let's say you put Fred in Charlie's shoes. If Fred is *that* hierarchical, direct and blunt, and someone tries a more subtle approach, like Bill's, Darlene's or Ethan's way, Fred might not get the message. It's possible that the only way he'd understand that his pronunciation is unacceptable is for someone to be as blunt with him as he would be with Charlie.

So, even though most of us, myself included, think Fred is way too hierarchical, even he might be treating Charlie as he would want to be treated if he were in Charlie's shoes.

So against this double scale paradigm, let's look at our quiz.

1. You're working with a fellow volunteer in the church office. Which is the most polite, i.e. least offensive, thing to say to her: Who chose
   a. Would you change the printer cartridge?
   b. Could you change the printer cartridge?

   "Could" can seem to imply doubts about whether the person is capable of changing a cartridge, which a more status oriented person might find insulting. So they'd choose a. "Would"

   "Would" can seem like ordering someone to do something, which a more egalitarian, or connection oriented, person might find offensive as between equal coworkers. So they'd choose b. "Could."
2. Jane and Ken have an argument. Later, Jane says, "I'm sorry about what happened yesterday. Ken replies, "Apology accepted." Who thought Jane would feel:
   a. Relieved
   b. Offended
   c. Angry

   A person with a status-oriented view of apologies, like Ken's view at point n on the graph, generally tries to avoid lower status positions, such as accepting blame by apologizing. But he may deliberately take a lower status position in order to get something he wants from the other person. For example. he would apologize if he wanted forgiveness. So that's what he offers Jane by "accepting" her apology. If Jane feels likewise, she'd feel relieved, answer a.

   But if Jane takes a more egalitarian view of apologies, when a person assumes a lower status position, by saying the words "I'm sorry," the polite thing is to pull her back up to your level by saying something like

"I'm sorry too" or "That's OK." It's a ritual for reducing hierarchy and re-establishing parity.

But Jane doesn't know it's a ritual. To her it just feels like the right thing to do. So Jane feels safe saying "I'm sorry," not to accept total blame, but to indicate that she wants to clear the air. She relies on the other person to pull her back up.

When Ken fails to complete the ritual, leaving her in a lower status, Jane feels like she offered the olive branch, and he took it and whacked her over the head with it. She'd be offended, answer b., or even angry, answer c.

Conversely, if Ken had said, "I'm sorry," in order to accept blame and get forgiveness, and Jane replied, "That's OK," he may assume whatever he did yesterday really was OK with her, and do it some more, when all Jane meant was, "Let's put it behind us and move on."

Another factor in Ken's take on this is that people sometimes don't hear qualifying language. When Jane said, "I'm sorry *about what happened*," words that qualify the amount of blame she accepts, the only words that registered with him were, "I'm sorry."

3. George & Ellen are preparing to do a two-part project. Ellen wants to do Part 1.George says, "You do Part 2; I'll do Part 1." Who thought Ellen replied:
   a. "Hey, you're not my boss."
   b. "No, I want to do Part 1."
   c. "I'd sort of like to do Part 1."

George, somewhere between points n and o, is used to a hierarchical system where people express preferences in directive, or imperative, language. He assumes that, if Ellen doesn't want to do Part 2, she'll say so in similarly competitive terms—answer b. "No, I want to do Part I."

But if Ellen is used to a more egalitarian system, between points p and q, it's inappropriate and impolite to order a peer to do something. She

might feel his impoliteness justifies her replying in an impolite manner—answer a. "Hey, you're not my boss."

Or she might reply in accord with her own ritual, qualifying her preference with "sort of" so as not to seem selfish, even though she actually has a strong preference for Part I—answer c. "I'd sort of like to do Part I."

4. You sit down to a meal with your friend Roger. The butter dish is closer to you. Roger says, "Will you have some butter?" How many of you would:
   a. Say, "Yes, thank you," and take some butter.
   b. Say, "No, thank you," and continue eating.
   c. Pass the butter to Roger, saying, "Please help yourself."

   Roger's take on this matter is so extremely non-hierarchical, at point r, that he feels impolite directly asking for the butter, putting himself before you. So he indirectly indicates that he wants butter by inviting you to have some.

   That's fine if you know the same ritual, but if you don't, Roger's going to be waiting for that butter a long time.

Our sample quiz questions and our example with the immigrant housing team represent only a very few of many, many examples of culturally driven differences in interpretations of the same words. These cause hurt feelings, irritation, reduced enthusiasm, and even failure of team efforts. But we can learn things that help us bridge these differences.

Many people learn through examples. You can read more examples in my own book, *Bridges to Consensus*, and you can read even more than that in the various works of Dr. Debra Tannen, especially *That's Not What I Meant*.

But, the fact remains that we can't learn all possible cultural differences in interpretation.

Fortunately, there are skills within our consensus building system that can help us deal with differences, even though we may not fully understand the bases for peoples' unexpected behavior.

If you were on Charlie’s team, and concerned about his pronunciation, you might try one of my favorite general communication skills, the open question. That means a question that can't be answered yes or no.

There are many different uses of open questions that we don’t have time for today. In this case, you can use it to learn about the interests that are driving Charlie. So this also ties in with Part I of the consensus building system. What does he really want to get out of his meeting with the governor?

You might ask him, “How do we want to come across to the governor? How do we want her to see us?”

Charlie might reply, “I want her to know that we’re smart people, we've done our homework, we know what we’re talking about, and she should take us seriously.”

In that case, he might accept, or even welcome, a discussion of pronunciation.

In that discussion, you can use other consensus building skills, such as what I call the Silver Rule of Consensus. That rule is, “Avoid making other people wrong.” Phrase things in a way that minimizes the implication that Charlie is wrong.

You could say, “A lot of people around here pronounce some things differently than we do. If the governor's like most people, she'll think we're smarter, and take us more seriously, if we say things her way."

You’ll feel tempted, then, to launch into the correct pronunciation. But it's less wrong making to pause and give Charlie a chance to ask, “What do you mean?”

Whether he asks you that or not, you can then say, “For example, the governor would say ' indigent,' rather than 'in-DYE-gent."

Now, you notice Charlie's reaction. If he seems to appreciate your advice, you might then go on to discuss other mispronounced words. On the other hand, if he seems offended, let him know you’re concerned that you might have offended him, and would like to know what you can do to make things better.

Another possibility is that, when you ask Charlie what impression he wants

to make on the governor, he says, “I want her to know I'm not some pie-in-the-sky elitist. I'm down to earth, and I understand what these immigrants are up against living in tents in three-digit heat.”

In this case, it's possible that Charlie will be offended if you correct his pronunciation. But at least you've made your decision more clear-cut. So now you look at *your* ultimate driving interests? Is it more important to you to make the best possible impression on the governor, or on the other hand, to prioritize Charlie's goodwill?

If you decide that making the best impression on the governor justifies rocking Charlie's boat, you still go about it in accord with the Silver Rule, minimizing wrong making.

You could ask Charlie another open question, "Why do you think the governor will be most receptive if she sees us as down to earth?”

Let's say Charlie replies, “The governor seems pretty down to earth herself, almost anti-intellectual.”

You pause and think, then follow-up, “So if the governor says 'to-MAY-to,' she’d be put off if you said 'to-MAH-to,' right?”

Charlie nods.

Then you can say, “There's a word I've heard pronounced different ways that could come up in your conversation. I've heard 'indigent,' and I've heard 'in-DYE-gent.' How about we do a little poking around and try to find out how the governor pronounces that word?”

Those are just a couple of examples of what might happen if you begin by asking Charlie an open question calculated to determine what he really wants to accomplish with the governor.

In the situation I just described with Charlie, you planned ahead, thinking of open questions and ways to reduce wrong making. But what about those times when someone has already offended you? Or maybe you say something you think is innocuous, but the other person seems offended?

When something like that happens, people often feel an instinctive urge to

say something immediately. But it's better to push the pause button. Give those emotions a chance to settle down and your rational mind time to kick in.

Consider the fact that these feelings are often reciprocal. If you find Roger's extreme indirectness about passing the butter aggravating and nonsensical, then, hard though it may be for you to imagine, Roger probably finds a direct request for the butter jarring, or even aggressive.

If Ellen finds George's imperative manner of expressing his preference to do Part I of the project arrogant and bossy, George finds her statement that, “I'd sort of like to do Part I," when she *very much* wants to do Part I, puzzling, and possibly even dishonest.

You may wonder why Roger can't *just* ask for what he wants.

Roger wonders why you can't *just* be more polite.

Ellen wonders why George can't just express a preference as a preference, rather than a command.

And George wonders why Ellen can't just say how much she wants to do Part I.

The word “just” doesn't belong in any of those sentences. It would be equally hard for Roger to directly ask for the butter as it would be for you to devise a way to get the butter without asking for it. It's equally hard for Ellen to adopt George's imperative manner as it is for George to say “sort of” when he actually feels that he'd like very much to do Part I.

I've mentioned my Silver Rule of Consensus: Avoid or minimize wrong making. The reason for this rule is that the human brain is hardwired to resist when someone makes us wrong, as by finding fault with us or contradicting our strongly held beliefs or opinions.

Resistance to being wrong evolved as a survival skill. In prehistoric times, if one member of a hunting group got the signals wrong, he or one of his fellow hunters could be maimed or killed. If a member of the tribe got the social rules wrong, she could be ostracized, and wouldn’t survive on her own.

People resist being made wrong in three predictable ways. Even little children instinctively do this.

The first way we resist is by **denial**. You tell the child to do her homework, but you hear the TV blaring from her room. You knock on the door. “Susie, I told you to do your homework.”

“I am doing it.” That’s denial.

The second form of resistance is **rationalization**. *Knock knock.* “Susie, I told you to do your homework, and I can hear you watching TV.”

“But, Mom, I’m watching PBS. It’s educational.” Rationalization.

The third form of resistance is **projection**. *Knock knock.* “Susie, you aren’t doing your homework.”

“Well, I was doing it till a few minutes ago, but my brother’s been out riding his bike ever since we got home from school.”

In projection, Susie relieves the discomfort of being wrong by making someone else, her brother, even more wrong than she is. So she feels right by comparison. But as adults, the person we project onto is usually the person who made us wrong. We make them even more wrong. Then they escalate, and the whole thing spirals out of control.

Suppose a friend of a decorator finds out that a client paid the decorator cash for a consultation, and he didn't report it on his income tax. The friend accuses the decorator of cheating.

He might say, “$120? That’s not cheating. [Denial] Besides, I’m sure that, if I went through all my back tax returns, I could find at least $120 in deductions I failed to count. [Rationalization] Anyway, last week, you absent-mindedly walked out of that café without paying, and you never went back and settled up; I think it’s better to cheat Uncle Sam than to cheat a little Mom and Pop café [Projection].

So if Roger feels it's impolite to directly ask for the butter, and he forces himself to do so anyway, he's making himself wrong by his own standards of good manners. That feeling’s very uncomfortable and hard to cope with.

If you consider Roger's level of indirectness manipulative or sneaky, and you try to imitate that, you're making yourself wrong by your own standards. The same thing goes for all the other people in our quiz.

When we realize the mutual difficulty of changing what we consider to be

proper behavior, we can develop more compassion for the one who offends us, or on the other hand, takes offense in a situation where we wouldn't. We can start cutting people of our own nationality a little more slack, like we might do for a foreigner. Their behavior might still offend us, but we can consider the possibility that they didn't intend any offense.

So you've had an unfortunate experience with someone you'll be dealing with in the future—a fellow member of a team, committee, board, choir. How do you proceed? It rarely works for one person to make all the adjustments to the other's norms. This happened back in the 70s and 80s when women began to enter male-dominated professions in significant numbers. Women were told things like, in order to appear confident and sure of yourself, you have to "just" learn how to brag and boast and put yourself forward, never qualify your statements, don't explain your reasons for things, don't tip your head to the side, and on and on. In other words, you have to behave just like the average American male, who lives right in the center of that red bell curve.

The only women who could get comfortable in their own skin when they did this were women who lived on the far left-hand end of the blue curve, or even outside that blue curve, in other words, exceptionally competitive and hierarchical women. And then, of course, they were criticized as being bitchy, unfeminine, pushy, uppity. More typical women either burnt out or washed out. Consequently, the business world has been slow to reap the benefits of the cultural diversity that would've been introduced had women who live in the tall middle of the blue curve been accepted as they were.

So let's say Ellen and George discuss how they can avoid another miscommunication about preferences in the future. George could agree that, if he has a preference, he'll express it as a preference, "I'd like to do Part I," rather than stating what he *will* do and *telling* Ellen what she will do. Ellen, likewise, agrees that if she has a clear preference, she, too, will say "I'd like to do Part I," without adding "sort of." Smaller adjustments on both parts are more feasible and prevent either of them from making themselves drastically wrong by their own ingrained standards.

We can't predict all the culturally driven differences in standards of politeness that we might encounter, but we can learn from our experiences. We can plan other ways to express ourselves, ways that get our point across and still feel comfortable by our own standards, when dealing with that same person in the future. And if you both serve on a covenanted group, that's a "when," not an "if."

Suppose you ask your co-volunteer "Could you change the printer cartridge?" And he replies sarcastically, "Oh, no. I'm way too stupid to change a cartridge."

So you push the pause button, and when your rational mind is back at the helm, you tell him, "I didn't mean to offend you. How would you like me to ask you if I want a favor?"

It's important to note that asking that question doesn't mean you're agreeing to do whatever he suggests. At this point, you're only gathering information to guide you in forming a plan that feels comfortable to you as well as to him.

Say, he replies, "I would have said, ' *Would* you change the printer cartridge?'" But that feels wrong by your standards. It feels too bossy.

Once again, go back to what you're really trying to accomplish, your interest. You want to know if he'll change the cartridge. There are an infinite number of ways to ask that. For example, you could plan for the next time you're working with him to use the format, "Would you mind… [fill in the blank]…?" "Would you mind taking the mail with you when you leave?" This gets your real point across without either suggesting that he's incapable of taking the mail, or on the other hand, appearing to order him to do so.

After her misunderstanding with Ken, Jane might reflect on what she really meant to convey when she said, "I'm sorry about what happened yesterday." What was her interest in speaking to him? For the future, she can plan to get a similar point across to Ken, without using the word "sorry" by saying, "Would you like to talk about what happened yesterday? See if we can clear the air?"

I hope you've enjoyed this tiny sampling of cultural diversity and consensus building skills. There's much more in my book, *Bridges to Consensus*. You can read more about the book and about me on page 3 of your handout. I also have a blog incorporated in my website.

This book can take you a long way. But, if you want to become truly proficient in these skills, so you can call them up in challenging, stressful situations, you have to practice in easy situations, like a new driver practicing in an empty parking lot. Practice in dealing with human differences is especially important because so many of the things that work best are counterintuitive. Not even a presentation like this one, informative as it may be, is my idea of true skills training.

In true hands-on training, you practice actually building consensus with a partner in safe hypothetical situations, and you get the opportunity to debrief, get feedback, and ask me questions immediately afterward, while everything's still fresh in your mind. You also learn from hearing the other trainees' experiences.

Our faith is close to my heart. I've done work for some UU and Unity groups and individual leaders, and I'd so love to share more. I know this training will help you all, because practicing this system has made such a sea change in my own life. And I hear similar stories from my clients and my students from Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing Studies.

My curricula are flexible, so I pick and choose skill sets and practice situations for each client group, based on their interests.

I'd be honored if you consider these programs for leadership training.

They also make very nice retreats for UUMA, LREDA and UUMN or any other group.

Sometimes, they can even be structured as fundraisers.

I'd love to work with the seminaries on courses for students as well as continuing education courses.

And you can use the skills you learn, not just at church, but anywhere thinking people think differently from one another. So you get a lot of mileage out of a training course.

I also do consulting work, and I coach individuals one-on-one.

You can read a bit about the services I offer on page 4 of your handout, and more on my website.

I'll be signing books in the UUA Bookstore booth beginning at 3:30 today.

Thank you all so very much for attendance, your attention and your participation.

And now I'd like to take some questions.