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This training course is self-paced, consisting of six modules that provides an understanding of the concept of culture and helpful tips on how to acclimate more effectively in your new environment. An evaluation questionnaire will be provided to you to be completed at the end of the course. A Certificate of Participation is available at the end of the course.

This course was designed for everyone migrating or visiting the United States. The target population includes expatriates, refugees, faith-based workers on mission trips to the United States, healthcare professionals, and International students.

Benefits of Training course

There is a dire need to prepare individuals who have recently relocated to the United States and from other parts of the world on how to adjust to life in their new environment culturally. In my discussion with fellow immigrants like me, I have observed that many of us, both young and old alike from different regions of the world, have faced similar challenges adjusting to the culture of a land unfamiliar to us, especially in the workplaces and schools. For the worker, there is a potential communication breakdown between them and their colleagues, as well as the individuals they serve. For the student, communicating with their fellow students and instructors as well as other school staff could prove incredibly frustrating. To this end, LWCS offers Cultural Adjustment training to mostly individuals from English speaking countries. However, the information in this course can be translated into any language. Through the information provided, this training would help ease the individuals gradually into their new communities and enable them to become effective communicators where they work, go to school, shop, and visit.

Course Introduction: Adjusting to Life in the United States

When an individual relocates to a new community or culture, it is completely understandable to experience complicated feelings like emotional responses such as anxiety, fear, frustration, excitement, nervousness. These emotions can all happen simultaneously or at different stages of the move.

Finding yourself in a new environment away from friends, family, and the familiarity of home can be overwhelming and, if not handled appropriately, can result in a negative

outcome. And so, if you find yourself feeling confused or frustrated as you make the transition to adjust to life in the United States, remember that you are not alone. In this training course, we will provide information and strategies to enable you to cope with living in a new country.

Module 1: Defining Culture & Cultural Acclimatization

What is Cultural Acclimatization?

Cultural Acclimatization, also known as Cultural Adjustment, refers to the process and time it takes a person to assimilate into a new culture. It is not always a smooth transition. One minute you are driving down the road and paying attention to road signs, and the next time you find yourself driving, you are in a foreign land, trying to learn new road signs, rules and regulations of the road, and a new way of doing things. Living in an unfamiliar society takes time and effort. It can be quite challenging and even more frustrating when there is a significant difference from your own culture.

Defining Culture

The term “culture” means different things to different people. It depends on whom you talk to. Wikipedia defines culture as an umbrella term that encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, and habits of the individuals in these groups. In simple terms, culture is the way of life of a group of people within a specified area. It is not innate; it is learned. Culture is merely a socially connected group of people with shared values within a social group or society and it embodies all aspects of living.

The Elements of Culture

There are five essential elements of culture: symbols, language, values, beliefs, and norms.

Symbols

In most societies, a person's manner of dressing is a symbol of their social status or

class. In terms of religion, the cross represents the Christian faith, and the Jewish culture has the cultural symbol of the Star of David. In Hawaiian culture, the performance of a Hula is a symbol of their heritage. The Hula is performed through a song and dance. The Bald Eagle, which symbolizes freedom, strength, and power, is a symbol of America. In ancient Egypt, cats were viewed as semi-divine, and harming a cat was considered treason, making them powerful symbols. The kola nut, whose tree is regarded by some Nigerian tribes to be the first tree on earth, symbolizes solemnity, reverence, communion, hospitality, and tradition in many African cultures.

Language

It will be challenging to understand a person's language without connecting with their culture. Language and culture are interwoven in the sense that the culture of a society forms language. Language is an expression of communication; it expresses cultural values and beliefs, allowing us to express our thoughts and feelings. Language is more than spoken words; it also includes dialects and accents. Now regarding dialects and accents, dialects refer to a variety of communication with various pronunciations, grammar, and vocabulary from other variations of the same language. When you talk about accents, we are referring to a certain way a group of people speaks; for example, within the same United States, different regions speak differently; Southerners may drawl, which means speaking slowly with vowels greatly prolonged and those in the Northeast speak faster than their Southern neighbors.

It is interesting to see around the world how language varies from culture to culture and even fascinating when within that same country, as mentioned in the case of the United States, people speak differently.

Values

Values are a culture's standard for moral behavior, i.e., discerning what is reasonable and acceptable in society. For example, values determine acceptable behavior when it comes to the justice system, ethics, proper sexual behavior, and attitude towards certain areas such as music and art. When people go against the societal values of a group, there are consequences. In most cultures, if a person robs another, most likely, the individual will be arrested and taken to jail. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, customs differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. In some cultures, men and women cannot sit together in public places such as a place of worship, but, in other cultures, it is typical behavior. In some cultures, for example, in the United States, individuals maintain eye contact with

someone to whom they are speaking and expect the same from others. In other cultures, like in most Asian countries, such behavior is considered intrusive or overly aggressive, and avoiding eye contact while speaking is regarded as more respectful.

Beliefs

In any culture, the belief system is an incredibly significant part of society. Depending on the culture, there can exist multiple religions such as Christianity, Islam, idol worshipping, and new age beliefs. These beliefs typically meet the spiritual needs and want of a group of people. In the Christian faith, for example, the man expresses his belief in Jesus Christ through his prayers, reading and studying the Bible. In Sociology, beliefs are said to be the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values.

Norms

Norms are also referred to as the customs or traditions of a society. The social norms of a society help society define their beliefs about right and wrong and create social pressure to obey those beliefs. Norms define how to behave by what society defines as good, right, and essential, and most community members adhere to them. Standards or norms exist in the form of rules and guidelines that specify how individuals are to behave in a society.

Norms hold a person within the boundary of society and its culture. It gives us restrictions concerning what to do and what not to do. It molds our behavior and provides us knowledge and understanding on what is wrong and right. Norms are often divided into:

Formal norms and Informal norms

Formal norms are laws, rules, and guidelines of society. These are usually specific and clearly stated for everyone to comprehend and adhere to.

Informal norms have to do with casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to. People learn Informal norms through social interaction, being taught directly, and by observation. For example, when you were younger, you were probably taught how to eat and behave when out in public or in front of guests, i.e., how to hold

your cutlery set and act at the dinner table.

Below are social norms that are widely observed within a particular society or culture. They are categorized into folkways and mores.

a. Folkways. Folkways are the simple customary ways of the people. It is the regular and routine activities of people within a culture. Folkways are recognized or accepted forms of behavior. These are the behavior pattern which a person generally uses in his daily life. For example, please and thank you which we usually teach our children.

b. Mores. Mores is a Latin word and the plural of mos, which means customs or beliefs by a group customary expectation. It is the “must” behavior of a person. Mores refers to “what ought to be and what ought not to be.” Mores are fundamental norms but are informed like folkways. Punishment may be both formal and informal for the violation of mores. Examples: The use of illegal drugs is illegal.

Module 2: Coping With Culture Shock and Emotions

Have you ever moved to another part of the country or across the globe for work, school, or visited somewhere you have never been before? If your answer is yes, then you may have experienced some level of anxiety, disorientation, and uncertainty because you have now gone from familiar territory to unfamiliar territory.

What is Culture Shock?

Meriam Webster dictionary defines Culture Shock as a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation.

Culture shock is elicited by a sudden, drastic change in the environment. It is the feeling of uncertainty, confusion, or anxiety that people experience when visiting, doing business in, or living in a society that is different from their own. Culture shock happens to most people, but its more prevalent in refugees, international students, and immigrants.

Common symptoms of culture shock include:

- Feelings of frustration, loneliness confusion, irritability, insecurity, and helplessness

- Unstable temperament and hostility
- Paranoia
- Criticism of local people, culture, and customs
- Oversensitivity and overreaction to minor difficulties
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Loss of sense of humor
- Homesickness

The Stages of Culture Shock

We are going to look at the five phases/stages of culture shock that individual experience.

1. Honeymoon Stage (Initial Euphoria)

This stage typically extends from arrival through the first couple of months within the new country. It is described as being filled with excitement and curiosity. When an individual first arrives in a new place, everything seems strange, exciting but, at the same time, intimidating. In order to adjust, some people take language classes; There was this friend of mine who did not speak a word of English when he first arrived in the US. He was French speaking from one of the francophone countries, but then he was encouraged to take English as a second language, and 30+ years later, he speaks better English than an English or American man. My culture shock came when I left Nigeria, the country I was raised in until the age of 18. A couple of months after arriving in the US, I enrolled in a community college and observed that out of over twenty-something people in the class, I was the only black person. It fast became my new normal several classes later, even when I transferred to a four-year college. It was quite uncomfortable; I was eager to make friends of the same color and, most notably, those who shared similar experiences, but at the same time, I knew that I needed to get accustomed to a society where people of color were the minority. And sadly, in a melting pot like America, racism and prejudice are still very rampant.

Things you never paid attention to or were aware of before in your home country will now stare you in the face daily as you meet and mingle with people. In these situations, you will have to find your way of adjusting and do your best not to let the ignorance and prejudices of others affect you personally and deter you from

achieving your goals. Everyone acclimates differently, and that is something the individual will need to understand. An individual's experiences will most likely be different from that of someone else he or she meets even though there might be a few things that they might have in common.

2. Distress Stage (Irritation and Frustration)

This stage might be the most challenging stage of culture shock and probably familiar to anyone who has lived abroad or travels frequently. It usually occurs about after 3-4 months of residing in your new society and culture. The euphoria will wear away quickly. You will become frustrated and irritated at basic things being so different from what you are used to. Like me, you will probably get lost a few times. There are many things and behaviors that you will not be able to understand. This phase is the time you will get homesick and long to go back home. Anxiety and depression may set in, and this is very normal. But it's important to understand that this is still the teething period. This phase will surely pass.

3. Adjustment Stage (Gradual Understanding)

During the adjustment stage, a person will find themselves gradually settling into their new community. The anxiety and frustration lessen as the person gets familiar with the culture of the land. Things that used to be unfamiliar and confusing will begin to take shape. At this stage, the person now takes time to study the people, their way of life, and other things that are important to them. Also, moving around becomes more manageable once there is a set routine, new friends, and familiarity with neighborhood and workplace or school have been established.

4. Acceptance (Adaptation) Stage

In the acceptance or adaptation stage, an individual is now feeling a sense of belonging. One is now feeling confident and getting well-adjusted to the new environment. One sees oneself being able to give directions, has obtained your driver's license, and now driving around like a pro. The language barrier is no longer a problem; one has mastered the "American" English and doing well within your place of work or school. Of course, there are still moments when you long for home and your mom's home-cooked meals, but you are now able to handle

the feelings better. Also, there is now a healthy balance between living in your new community and being able to maintain your cultural identity.

The Acceptance stage doesn't mean that you have become an expert at understanding your new home, but what it does is provide you with more awareness and appreciation of your new culture as you continue to strive to adjust to it.

5. Re-Entry Shock Stage

Coping with culture shock overseas will have provided you the tools for dealing with the challenges of readjustment into your homeland. As a result, your re-entry culture shock will be shorter-lived than your initial adjustment overseas.

For many, coming to the United States did not translate to becoming permanent residents or US citizens. Groups like the International students who were part of an exchange program, expatriates who came to the US on a 1-2-year assignment or individuals planning to work for a few years and return home to help their countries fall into this category. So, what happens to these individuals is that upon returning to their home countries, they can anticipate experiencing an initial stage of euphoria. It is also highly possible that the city or town they left behind is no longer the same; it has moved on just like you did. The feelings the individual experienced during the crisis phases will parallel those encountered while in the United States. Emotional responses like frustration, irritability, and loneliness will most likely occur, but just remember that you went through the same thing before, and you were able to overcome it.

It is also important to acknowledge that you will miss the home, lifestyle, friends, colleagues you have left behind, but the beauty of this experience is that you have now made some long-lasting significant relationships and memories in the United States. Even if one never returns, it has made him or her a more knowledgeable and appreciative individual.

Module 3: Strategies For Coping With Culture Shock

Now that you know what culture shock is all about, how does one now adjust to one's

new culture and environment in a healthy manner? One thing I want you to know is that experiencing culture shock is temporary; of course, it takes some time to adjust to something new. And so, it is natural to experience emotions like anxiety, depression, frustration. However, if you feel like it is taking you unusually long to adjust, or you find yourself experiencing an extreme level of anxiety, fear or depression even after talking with family, friends or your spiritual advisor (e.g., a pastor, Imam, then seeking professional help might be the best option.

Let us look at some tips to help you cope with culture shock.

1. First of all, you must understand that it is natural to experience emotional responses to adjusting to a new culture and society.
2. Have a positive attitude – Do not be judgmental; learn to appreciate and respect your new host country's culture. Do not give room for stereotypes.
3. Stay connected to your family and friends back home. Digital technology has made it easier to communicate with loved ones. Thanks to WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram.
4. Avoid making comparisons between your home country and your new community. Continuously doing this will prevent you from settling down quicker.
5. Get Active – Find a new hobby or something that you are passionate about and do it. Join a gym/fitness center, if you are a person of faith, find a local church, synagogue, mosque to attend.
6. Share – Sharing your own culture with your new friends, neighbors, coworkers, is a great way to cope with culture shock. It is exciting to share your culture with others.
7. Be mindful of the feelings of people you meet to prevent offensive behavior, such as cutting in line and interrupting a conversation without previous warning.
8. Travel – Make it a habit of visiting places, research popular tourist attractions around the country, or within your state. Take a trip via bus, rental car, go with a friend and enjoy the beauty of your adopted or host country
9. Practice good self-care – eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep. It is especially important to do this.
10. Be intentional about making friends from different ethnic groups and within your own group. (For example, you can make friends through social groups like church, your local gym, school).

11. Find out where your local grocery store that sells your home foods and drinks are located. For example, when my family and I relocate to a new city in the US or country as a result of my husband's job with the U.S. government, the two primary things I seek out are 1) place of worship 2). The African food market, or any store that sells food items and other things like hair products, clothing etc. Find these places is a significant relief and an anxiety reducer for many people.

When you eventually locate your ideal faith-based group and food market, it is there that you will be able to get connected to other necessities like barber's shop, beauty salon, ethnic restaurants that will help you adjust more quickly to your new culture.

Module 4: Ethnocentrism

What is Ethnocentrism?

It is the belief that one's way of life or culture is superior to others. Ethnocentrism is a judgmental approach, a preconceived notion that one is preferred over another and must be avoided at all costs.

It is easy to come to another culture or society and assume that one's culture is somehow better than another, and this can happen both ways. The international student, expatriate, and refugee may feel like this, especially in the honeymoon phase. The same thing goes for your host country; the people can feel the same about their culture when compared to yours in a discussion.

Ethnocentrism is problematic for many reasons; it prevents people from respecting and appreciating each other, and it gives the assumption that just because something is familiar and comfortable, it is better. It is crucial to maintain a non-judgmental attitude and be willing and ready to embrace other cultures while also not losing your cultural identity.

Module 5: Understanding U.S. Culture & Customs

Understanding the culture and customs of the United States will help effectively immerse you into their culture. America is a "melting pot" and known to be the most culturally diverse place on the planet. The American culture has been influenced by the cultures of Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Italian Americans, Africans, and Asians. The different cultures have contributed their own distinct "flavors" to American society.

Here are a few standard practices and traditions The different cultures have contributed their own distinct "flavors" to American culture. Here are some things to know about the rules and customs of the United States.

Here are some standard practices and traditions

Holidays

There are officially ten public holidays on the American calendar where the Federal Government is closed for business:

New Year's Day (January 1)

Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday. (Third Monday in January)

President's Day (Third Monday in February)

Memorial Day (Last Monday in May)

Independence Day (July 4) – Includes fireworks, baseball, concerts, and barbecue.

Labor Day (First Monday in September)

Columbus Day (Second Monday in October)

Veterans Day (November 11) – Honoring the military veterans who fought for our freedom.

Thanksgiving Day (Fourth Thursday in November) – Family and friends typically gather on this day. It is the beginning of the holiday season.

Christmas Day (December 25)

In addition to Christmas, faith-based and culturally based holidays such as Easter, Ramadan, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Passover are celebrated as well around the United States

Greetings

Most American greetings are "Informal" often describes social and even professional life. First names are commonly used. However, initial introductions, and informal or business situations, it is better to address someone as Dr., Mr., Mrs., or Ms., then by the first name if invited to do so. Students in the U.S. generally use first names with peers and last names with professors. "Hello" and "How are you?" are standard greetings. "How are you?" is more a social convention than a genuine desire to hear about another person's well-being. In addition to a verbal "Hello" or "Nice to meet you," a handshake is a standard form of greeting for both men and women.

Time

Despite an emphasis on informality, punctuality is appreciated and highly emphasized in most situations, especially in the workplace. Meetings, social functions, classes, and other organized activities start within minutes of the established time.

Too Many Hours Worked

The United States is probably the only country in the world where its employees work excessively. A typical employee works between 40 and 65 hours a week. It can be one full-time job (e.g., nursing, hospitality, retail) or a combination of two to three jobs and take fewer vacations. In some situations, you will find some retirees coming out of retirement to work again for either financial reasons or out of boredom. Presently, there is no federal law requiring American workers to take paid sick days, and the United States is one of the few industrialized nations with no legally mandated annual leave.

Sports

Americans love sports. Their most loved games include baseball, football, basketball, and hockey. They are the four biggest sports by the audience in the U.S., with other

activities like soccer, car racing, tennis, and golf each have a large and dedicated fanbase. The American national anthem is sung or played before most sporting events, and the tradition also includes Americans will stand, remove their hats, and face the flag for the duration of the song.

Social Etiquette

It is vital to develop an understanding of the social etiquette of society. Standards of politeness and common courtesy typically vary widely across cultures. This includes knowledge about how to greet different people, rules associated with giving and accepting gifts, table manners and eating customs, body language and gestures, attitudes toward sacred spaces, and more. In the U.S., people maintain considerable space between themselves and others. If a person backs away during a friendly conversation, the person is likely trying to reestablish a comfortable personal distance. People in the U.S. are concerned with personal cleanliness. Attention to personal hygiene is vital for business and social success in the United States.

Maternity Leave

The United States is the only country in the world that does not make paid maternity leave mandatory for new mothers. The only thing allowed for eligible employees is up to 12 weeks of unpaid FMLA (Family & Medical Leave Act) a year. The employee must have worked at least 1,250 hours during 12 months before starting the FMLA leave.

Tipping

Although tipping is voluntary in the United States, it is customary in many circumstances for service at almost every eat-in restaurant.

Tips are usually 15%-20% on the pre-tax amount. When you think about the waiters and waitresses who work for tips or on minimum wage, it encourages you to give, mostly if the service was excellent.

Module 6: Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

(a more comprehensive training on this module will be provided for healthcare workers and those in the human services field)

What does it mean to be Culturally Sensitive?

Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better, or worse, right, or wrong. The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) describes cultural sensitivity this way: "Cultural sensitivity is broadly recognized as the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that enable people to work well with, respond effectively to, and be supportive of people in cross-cultural settings. Cultural sensitivity is not solely the acceptance of cultural differences, but rather a transformational process that allows individuals to acknowledge interdependence and align with a group other than their own."

Why is Cultural Sensitivity Important?

Cultural sensitivity is crucial because it allows one to function in other cultures effectively. It will enable one to respect and value different cultures, which can help reduce cultural barriers between professionals and their patients, employees, employers, teachers, and students. Cultural sensitivity is also important because it provides a protective (safe) and nurturing groundwork that people, especially youths (high school, college students), can draw upon in times of worry and anxiety.

What is The Difference Cultural Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity?

Cultural awareness" is the subsequent stage of understanding other culture groups, being open to the idea of changing cultural attitudes. "Cultural sensitivity" is recognizing that differences exist between cultures, but not assigning values to the differences (bigger or worse, right, or wrong).

Tips on How to Be Culturally Sensitive and Aware.

Here are a few helpful ways to practice cultural sensitivity in your community, workplace, schools, and everywhere you go.

- Excellent communication skills – You might not understand their language. However, you can always make use of a translator that several businesses and schools in the U.S. have or look for an individual who speaks the language and ensures that you clarify what is being said to you and vice versa to avoid miscommunication.

- Practice good manners - I always tell my children, no matter where you are, always make sure please and thank you are in your vocabulary. These two words are also an essential part of the business conversation in the United States.
- Be interested in learning the language of your coworkers, classmates, and even customers. Observe, listen, and make an effort.
- Be respectful and mindful of the culture of your work environment. Pay attention and ask questions for clarification when needed.
- Faith and Religious Beliefs – plays a significant role in cultural sensitivity. You might not understand their belief system, but as a professional there to serve your clients or patients, you must acknowledge and respect it.
- Acknowledge that one's skin color does not define their culture. According to Dr. Steven Moffic of Current Psychiatry, culture goes beyond the color of one's skin. He states that even though darker-skinned persons are universally identified as "black" or African American, but there are darker-skinned persons in other ethnicities such as Hispanic, Asian, Jamaican.

To help your clients and patients effectively, one must be respectful and understanding. They will be more likely to trust you and respond positively when you show them some level of respect. Take the time to understand your client's or patient's personal cultural beliefs by asking thoughtful, respectful questions. Also, when speaking to your patients or their family members, use appropriate titles instead of first names, and pronounce their names correctly.

Summary:

When you go about your daily life, operate with the consciousness that cultural differences between yourself and the people you encounter exist, and be appreciative of the differences. I hope that this training has provided you with some basic information on how to effectively acclimate or adjust to life in the United States. Whether you have been here for a couple of days or a couple of months, this course is a valuable resource to guide you into settling down with ease, ultimately making a life for yourself in your host country and new environment.

*****End of Training*****

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