MAINSTREAM MULTICULTURAL SOLUTIONS

Cultures develop individuals along one path, but leave undeveloped or under-developed other individual paths. If a goal beyond becoming an effective manager, strategist, marketer and communicator, is also to achieve greater maturity as an individual, then the development of multicultural flexibility also becomes a tool to access into new and different parts of one's self.

To the extent that we can develop and integrate these differences into ourselves, we are better able to deal effectively with different kinds of people in different kinds of situations.

12 Gilligan, p.42

APPLYING MULTICULTURAL FLEXIBILITY TO SITUATIONS AT WORK: A PROTOCOL

This protocol is based upon the therapeutic premise that feelings of themselves are not right or wrong –they either exist or they don't exist -- and that no one really causes how you or another person feels.

One of the steps that we suggest when confronted with interpersonal conflict is to translate frustration into curiosity. This step has two parts. The first is to try to figure out what is going on for the other person that makes them behave the way they do. The second is to try to figure out for yourself what is going on that makes the other person's behavior problematic for you. The next step, which builds upon step one, is to own the problem that you're having with someone else's behavior as your problem. This entails not making the other person (or their behavior) the problem. Step three is to work toward an outcome with respect to what is culturally or individually at stake for both parties and then choose the best way to get there. The following is a training example of this process in action.

In one training session a CWM put on his "pet peeve" list that African Americans are "cliquish." The pattern of behavior that he was referring to was black men hanging out among themselves at the

drinking fountain outside his office. I asked him what about their behavior was problematic to him. Since he could not answer off-hand –people generally can readily tell you what bothers them but have to dig deeper to figure out why-- I proposed the following: "Do you think they are talking about you?" He said "No!" I then asked him, "Is their behavior problematic because you see them as having a group and you don't." He thought a bit and then said, "Yes!" I then asked him to consider how he might use that information. I offered the following hypothetical: "If you take the assimilationist approach then you would push for the African American men to start to become a "collection of individuals" (like CWM). I then asked, "Would that solve your problem." I then said, "What you have just identified about yourself is a wish for a group experience like the one you perceive African Americans having. You have shown a hunger for community—something that your own culture, perhaps, does not give you enough of. A more effective solution for your problem may be then, that, you, and perhaps other CWM, too, need to work toward satisfying a wish for a greater 'member of group' social experience."[13]

Once the CWM was able to identify the issue underlying his view of African American group behavior --his hunger for community-- he was able to come up with a more personally satisfying strategy for dealing with the situation. One result was that the African American group behavior that he had an earlier problem with went away. In turn, the African American men who worked for the CWM were also able to congregate among themselves more freely –the negative vibes emanating from his office went away—as a result of his new understanding of what their behavior meant.

13 Philip Slater, 1976. The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point, pp.8ff.