

Why the Skill of Talking with Others about Our Differences Matters

- Significant differences in experience, especially culture and gender, create systematic, predictable complications for communications. It's no one's fault; it just is.
- Currently, many people find such differences an uncomfortable topic, especially with people different from themselves. We talk about other people among our own group but rarely to those *other* people.
- Our work life is becoming more and more complicated.
- Our work teams are coming from more and more diverse backgrounds.
- Rumors, stereotypes and other indirect sources of information are not accurate guides for understanding our differences.

Golden Rules for Communication About Differences

- Ask – don't tell.
- You are talking to a person, not a profile.
- You, an outsider, are asking to hear an insider's perspective. Therefore, it may be difficult to understand what you hear. It may also be difficult for the person to trust you enough to tell you. Many of us feel uncomfortable or downright disloyal, talking to outsiders about what goes on inside our group.
- If you receive the information, treat it with respect. Telling anyone who is not a member of a group about the inner workings of one's own group requires trust and courage. Never misuse the information a person has shared with you to create a stereotype that may harm another member of that group.
- Always check the information again. Don't assume that one person's information is infallible. When you are in a position to use the information that has been shared with you, return to rule #1: ***Ask, don't tell.***