



## Beware the 4 Cultural Collision Traps that Impact Customers!

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Cultural awareness and skills are keys to effective service when serving customers across language and cultural differences; you will reach higher levels of customer satisfaction if you consider the impact of culture on the interaction. This awareness is the first step to avoiding what I call *cultural collisions*.

Cultural collisions occur when you are unaware of culture's impact on your customer service delivery style and on the customer's service expectations. Many times, unaware of potential pitfalls, you will find that the falling into one of the four cultural collision traps may prevent you from meeting the needs of your increasingly multicultural and multilingual customer base:

- 1. Emotions.** When confronted with requests, expectations or behaviors that seem unfamiliar, you may develop some strong emotional reactions such as anger, fear, frustration or helplessness. You may feel that you are running into a language barrier and that the process of assisting the customer is unusually time consuming. These emotions can trap and limit your effectiveness in empathizing with and understanding the needs of the customer. It is important that we recognize that emotions can be externalized through our tone of voice, our behavior and our words and that they may send an unintended message to the customer.
- 2. Habits.** The usual or typical approach that may work with the majority of customers may not be effective with multicultural and multilingual customers. Rote or mechanical behaviors can be traps because you often are not conscious of the degree to which you are operating on autopilot. Calling customers by their first name or saying "Ma'am" or "Sir" may be automatic for you, but may be discounting to some customers. In other words, what might seem routine or familiar to you as a service provider might be new to your

customer. Keep in mind that customers from other cultures may define “excellent service” differently than you do.

3. **Judgments.** Be careful not to form stereotypes of any group of customers. One sure way to turn customers away is to make quick judgments and provide service based on those judgments. Avoid this trap by being aware of the uniqueness of each customer’s need and treat each customer as an individual.
  
4. **Ethnocentrism.** By definition “ethnocentrism” is the perspective that one’s own race, nation or culture is superior to others. This trap can cause you to believe and behave in ways that indicate that the customer’s needs, wants or expectations should not be taken seriously or that they are wrong and just do not understand how things are done here. To avoid this trap, recognize that other ways of being and doing things is not inherently right or wrong — just different. Avoid judging customers and their requests.

Remember, *cultural collisions* are avoidable. To be successful, learn as much as you can to fill in your knowledge gaps about different cultures and languages. The bottom line is that you understand how culture influences customer service transactions and be ready to detect, understand, interpret and adjust your service delivery to provide all customers high levels of customer satisfaction.

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**About PRISM International, Inc.**

[PRISM International, Inc.](#) is a WBENC certified, full-service provider of innovative, proven consulting services and training programs and products for Leveraging Diversity & Inclusion, Managing Talent, Increasing Global & Cross Cultural Effectiveness and Preventing Harassing & Discriminatory Behaviors

Since 1992, PRISM has assisted over 200 organizations in 23 countries by providing a systemic process and best-in-practices performance solutions focusing on optimizing the opportunities and complexities of the workforce, workplace and marketplace.

PRISM is the parent organization of the [Association of Diversity Councils](#), and the founder of the annual [Diversity Council Conference](#) and the [Diversity Council Honors Award](#).

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