

How I Perceive Others who are Different from Me

To build relationships with different people, you go through a development process. It starts with understanding yourself and moving on to understanding others. No step in the process can be skipped. The steps are straightforward:

1. Identify your “personal” diversity. Understand how it affects your communication and interaction with others.
2. Identify how you perceive others. Understand why this is so.
3. Determine which “personal” diversity factors and perceptions of others hinder or help your relationships.
4. Learn to understand others.
5. Identify actions you can take to improve your ability to perceive others correctly.
6. Implement the changes.

The second step of this process – identifying how you perceive others – is a difficult one for most people. It requires you to be truthful about your feelings and actions. Most of us are not comfortable sharing this type of information with other people, so here are some questions you can ask of yourself. They will help you uncover your perceptions.

- Who do you consider to be different from yourself?
- What do you think about them? How do you behave towards them?
- What stereotypes, biases and attitudes do you have of them, whether positive or negative? (Consider biases, etc., as they apply to racial/ethnic groups, job title/roles, gender.)
- How did you come by these attitudes or stereotypes (e.g.: through experience with people in those groups; from what others have said).
- What impact do these attitudes, biases, and stereotypes have on your interaction and relationship with others?
- What can you do to change both your attitude and behavior?