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Suggestions for Using “Decreasing Ethnocentrism”

Objectives:

- See cultural norms in a less ethnocentric, more neutral light
- Increase understanding about different norms

Intended Audience:

- Individuals seeking increased cultural sensitivity
- Managers frustrated with behaviors arising from different cultural norms
- Employees frustrated with behaviors of co-workers or clients/customers that arise from different cultural norms
- Trainees in diversity seminars

Materials:

- Copies of the worksheet *Decreasing Ethnocentrism*

Processing the Activity:

- Individually or in groups, participants list the advantages of both mainstream U.S. American and other cultures' norms.
- Lead a discussion of reactions, surprises, and insights gained.
- As a personal application, ask individuals to identify a particular norm they find difficult. They then follow the same process, listing advantages and disadvantages of that norm.

Questions for Discussion:

- Which norms were hard to find either advantages or disadvantages for?
- Which norms do you feel strongest about?
- What surprises did you have? What insights?
- How can this help you in dealing with differences on the job?

Caveats, Considerations, and Variations:

- Individuals may want to get into discussions about the rightness and/or wrongness of particular norms. Avoid polarization by reminding them that while they may have preferences, all cultural norms have a purpose and cut two ways, and that working with others who have different norms is made much easier when we approach them without the judgments that their ways are wrong or inferior.
- As a variation, groups may make their own lists of favorite American norms and irritating foreign norms.