Texas is the third most populous state in the U.S., with well over 20 million people. The state’s population has increased dramatically over the past two decades and the Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer predict continued growth.

Texas is also one of the most diverse states in the country, with all ethnicities represented. Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group statewide. In the near future, it is predicted that Texas will not have a majority ethnicity. This diversity means that Texans have many different cultures, values and norms. As leaders, we must evaluate our communities and determine effective ways to communicate with all the people who live here.

What does this mean? It means that we must look at ourselves and see how well we communicate with others. To do this, we must first understand other cultures and how to communicate most effectively with all types of people.

*Culture* can best be described as a way of life, or as a group of people who share beliefs, values and norms. Culture is an integrated and dynamic system that shapes a person from birth.

Hall (1976) categorizes cultures as high- or low-context cultures. High-context cultures have strong interpersonal bonds and extensive networks among members of the group. Low-context cultures compartmentalize their personal relationships and prefer lots of background information. Here are the cultures in each category, as Hall classifies them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Japanese</td>
<td>• German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chinese</td>
<td>• Scandinavian</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Korean</td>
<td>• American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• African American</td>
<td>• English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to think about types of nonverbal communication common within cultures. People can draw many conclusions about others based on nonverbal communication clues. Nonverbal clues are found in someone’s facial expressions, their touching of others, their hand movements, and how much space they give others when talking to them.

- **Face** – The face is the primary transmitter of emotional cues (happy, sad, frustrated).
- **Hand** – Hand movement is a primary means of showing intensity.
- **Touch** – Touch includes hugging, kissing, shaking hands and clasping shoulders.
• **Space** - Space is commonly misunderstood in cross-cultural communication. People from high-context cultures prefer to be close when speaking to one another. People from low-context cultures prefer to maintain some distance when speaking to one another.

Samover and Porter (1995) suggest these pointers for leaders who deal with people from cultures unlike their own.

• Know yourself and your own cultural makeup.
• Consider the physical and human settings.
• Seek to understand diverse message systems.
• Develop and display empathy.
• Encourage and provide feedback.
• Develop communication flexibility.
• Avoid stereotyping and prejudice.
• Be aware of consequences.
• Seek commonalities.
• Recognize the validity of differences.
• Communicate respect.
• Be nonjudgmental.
• Tolerate ambiguity.
• Be aware of individual differences.

Leadership is so much more than just knowing your personal style, managing people, and motivating people to reach an intended goal. Leadership is about challenging people to get the most out of them. Your success is based on your ability to communicate, and communication involves so much more than words. It includes how you approach people, how you dress, how you listen, and how you react to others.

Remember, you are always being evaluated as a leader. Make sure you are displaying appropriate communication tactics.

**References**


