

WORKING TOGETHER

**How to Become More Effective in
A Multicultural Organization**

Dr. George Simons



Working Successfully with People Different from You

WORKING TOGETHER

HOW TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN
A MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATION

George F. Simons

A FIFTY-MINUTE[™] SERIES BOOK



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George F. Simons

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

WORKING TOGETHER can be used in several different ways, including:

- **Self Study.** This book is designed so that you can use it on your own. It will involve you actively as an individual learner from beginning to end. The basic concepts are highlighted by examples and exercises so that you will retain them and be able to apply them appropriately.
- **Group Learning.** You can learn more by doing the exercises in this book with a partner or a group of people. It will be especially helpful if your partner or members of your group come from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Training.** Add the capabilities and leadership of a skilled trainer and this book enables you to explore the person-to-person and intergroup issues provided by cultural differences within a work team or organization. As a self-study workbook it can also be used to train those in remote locations who cannot attend home office training sessions.
- **Education.** On the high school, college or university level, the book will supplement classroom work in the social sciences by enabling students to investigate their attitudes about cultural diversity and then develop useful interpersonal skills.

There are several other possibilities. One thing for sure, even after it has been read, this book will be looked at—and thought about—again and again.

PREFACE

Working with people who look, believe, or act differently from you, may be difficult or uncomfortable. You don't know what to say, or what to expect, or simply find yourself inhibited, self-conscious, or even fearful when those from other cultures are around you.

Certain people may not react when you speak to them, or perform in the way you expect. What moves you doesn't seem to motivate them in the same way.

Maybe you sincerely believe that you do your best to treat everyone equally and fairly, but others inform you that you are insensitive, unfair, or prejudiced. Perhaps some have even accused you of discriminating against them.

It might be that you are an "outsider" in someone else's culture. You may be angry or frustrated about not being taken seriously or not being able to "read between the lines" to find out what you need to know to do your job well.

Perhaps you see the rich variety of people in your city and in your workplace and are saddened by the misunderstandings that keep your city, your country or your business from being what it could be. Imagine what these people, with all their experiences, skills, and ways of looking at things, could create if they were allowed to reach their potential!

This book provides you with an opportunity to do something about understanding other cultures. The future will bring more diversity, not less. Public and private leaders all over the world face the challenge of uniting different individuals and groups to reach common goals. The best leaders learn to draw unique contributions from each group. The future of your world depends on it.

You can become a leader, whether you are a manager in a multinational corporation, a government employee, or simply work or live side-by-side with another human being different from yourself.

WORKING TOGETHER will help you to understand and respect people of other cultures and be understood and respected by them. Its three main sections will show you how to interact with different kinds of people. Follow each step and you will learn to:

- 1) **Manage your mind**—master how you think about yourself and others,
- 2) **Manage your words**—learn to speak and listen to people with different backgrounds, and,
- 3) **Manage your unspoken language**—know how to pay attention to the non-verbal language of “where, when and how” you do things.

So, pick up your pencil—this is both a “read” and a “do” book—turn the page, and let’s get started!



George F. Simons,
Principal
George Simons International

WHAT DO I WANT FROM THIS BOOK?

If you know what you're looking for, you're much more likely to find it. Below is a list of goals which this book could help you achieve. Check those that are important for you. Then you will be able to focus on specific goals as you read this book and have a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when you have finished reading this book.

I HOPE TO:

- ☐ Work efficiently with people of other backgrounds.
- ☐ Avoid offending those different from me.
- ☐ Feel more secure around people whose values, opinions and priorities are different from mine.
- ☐ Learn to appreciate, understand and gain cooperation from those who talk and act differently.
- ☐ Build an organization that encourages the full potential from the different groups within it.
- ☐ Learn to influence those who are in the dominant culture to treat others fairly.
- ☐ Combat prejudice and injustice in whatever form it takes.
- ☐ Know how to put my values about cultural diversity into practice.
- ☐ Be more comfortable traveling to other cultures.

ADD YOUR OWN:

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



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SECTION ONE

MANAGE YOUR MIND

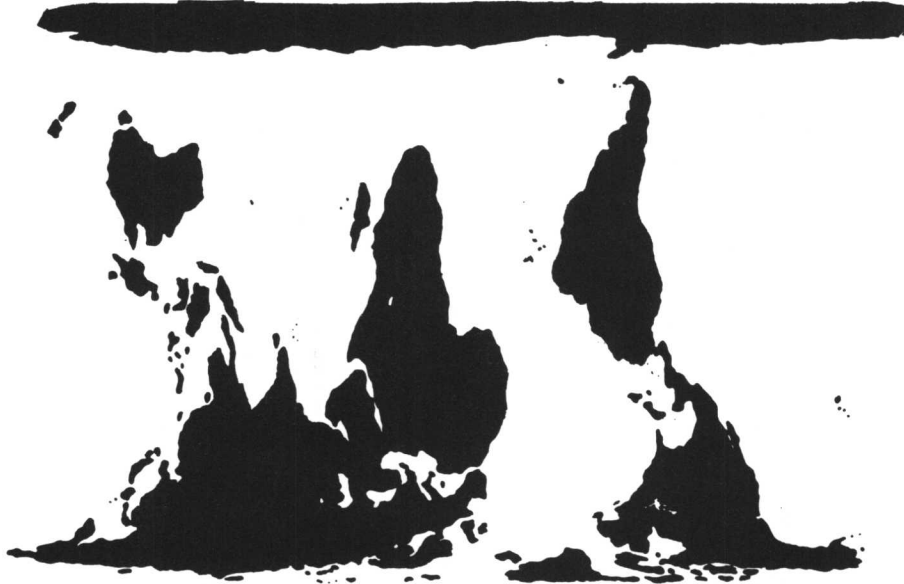
Managing how you think about yourself and others who are different from you requires a fresh way of looking at things. This section will help you step outside of yourself and your normal way of thinking.

Section One will:

- Ask you to take a look at how culture makes you different from others.
- Teach you how your mind automatically judges others and what you need to do to keep prejudice from hurting you and them.
- Encourage you to explore situations in which your discomfort with others may make it difficult to deal with them.
- Teach you how to manage your feelings of fear and suspicion in order to work together effectively.

WHICH SIDE IS UP?

Below is a map of the world. Although it is turned "upside down," it shows accurately the *true size* of the world's continents and nations in relation to one another. This map, called the Peters Projection,* gives us a more honest picture of the world than older versions. Can you pinpoint on this map, where you, your parents, and your ancestors came from? What about where the "roots" of some of your neighbors and co-workers are from?



Does this new image of the world change how you see the importance of certain continents and countries? How does it feel to look at the world from a different point of view? Where does that put you? What thoughts come to mind?

It occurs to me that: _____

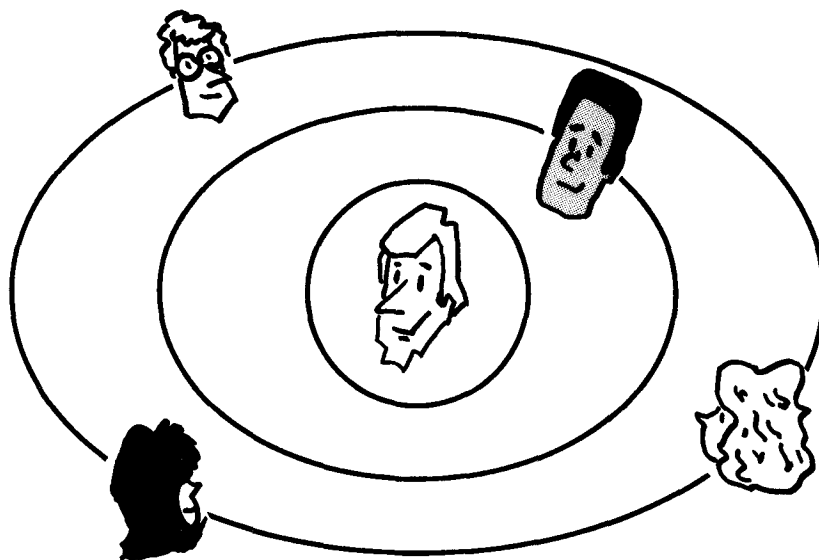
WHICH SIDE IS UP? THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO LOOK AT IT!

*For more information on the Peter's Projection, see page 76.

WHO'S IN THE CENTER OF OUR UNIVERSE?

Three hundred years ago people were debating whether the earth or the sun was the center of the universe. Although scientists eventually proved that the earth revolved around the sun, many people still did not accept it. Even today, for most of us, the sun still “rises” in the east and “sets” in the west. We naturally tend to put ourselves in the middle of the universe.

Each of us also looks out from the center of a personal and cultural universe. From this *egocentric* or *ethnocentric* point of view, we (and the group we belong to), are in the middle. Other people and events revolve around us. It's easy for us to assume that the way we see things is the *real* way things are for everybody, or the *real* way things *should* be.



The truth is that people have many personal and cultural points of view. Even within your own culture, you are the only person with exactly your outlook! The world is *polycentric*—that is, there are as many midpoints as there are people to look out from them.

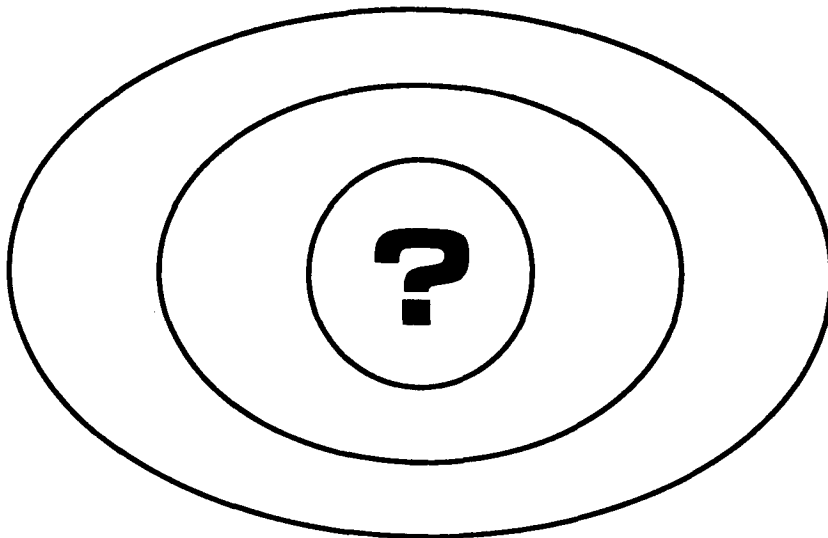
It is easy to say, “walk a mile in someone else’s shoes,” but it is not easy to do. You can observe, study, talk, listen, imagine, and empathize with others but *your* eyes, ears, mind and personal experiences still interpret what you take in. The next page will illustrate this point.

AN EXERCISE IN PERSPECTIVE

Think of some people whose differences are hard for you to accept or understand. Pick one of those people and think for a moment about the things that make that person different. Think especially about things that irritate you. Then shift your point of view. Imagine that you could be in this person's body and mind. You now have his or her eyes, mind, and feelings. You now see your true self from the "center" of another's universe. What would irritate you about you if you were that person? Jot down three things that you think another person would find hard to understand or accept about you:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Good try! You won't know how accurate you were however, unless you were able to ask the person that you had in mind. However, you did something just as important. You stepped out of the center of your universe into someone else's, and opened your mind to the possibility of seeing things from another point of view. If you practice this at least once with each new person you meet tomorrow, you will be on your way to understanding diversity.



WHO'S IN THE CENTER? IT DEPENDS ON WHO'S LOOKING!

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE DIFFERENT?

Following are two factors:

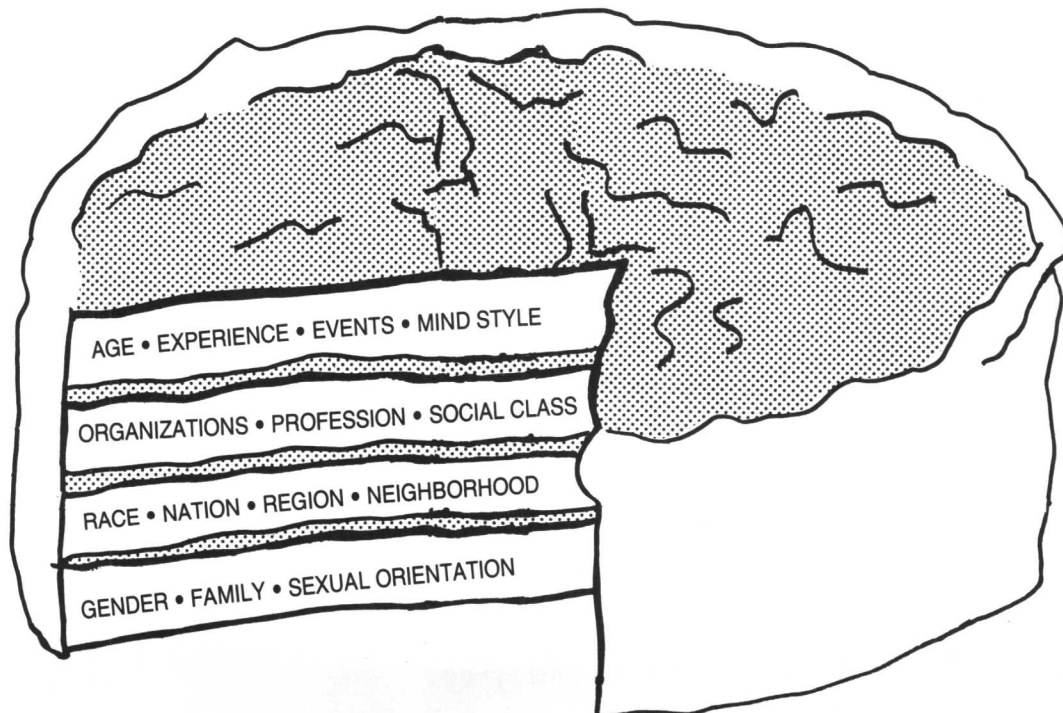
1. BIOLOGY

No two people (excluding identical twins) have the same genes. We look different and have different kinds of bodies to work with. Biology determines our sex and the color of our skin, hair, and eyes. Sometimes it limits us physically as, for example, when a person is born without sight, or is disfigured, or without the use of a limb.

Most biological differences don't mean much in themselves. It's what people make of them that really counts. This means we need to pay more attention to the second factor, culture.

2. CULTURE

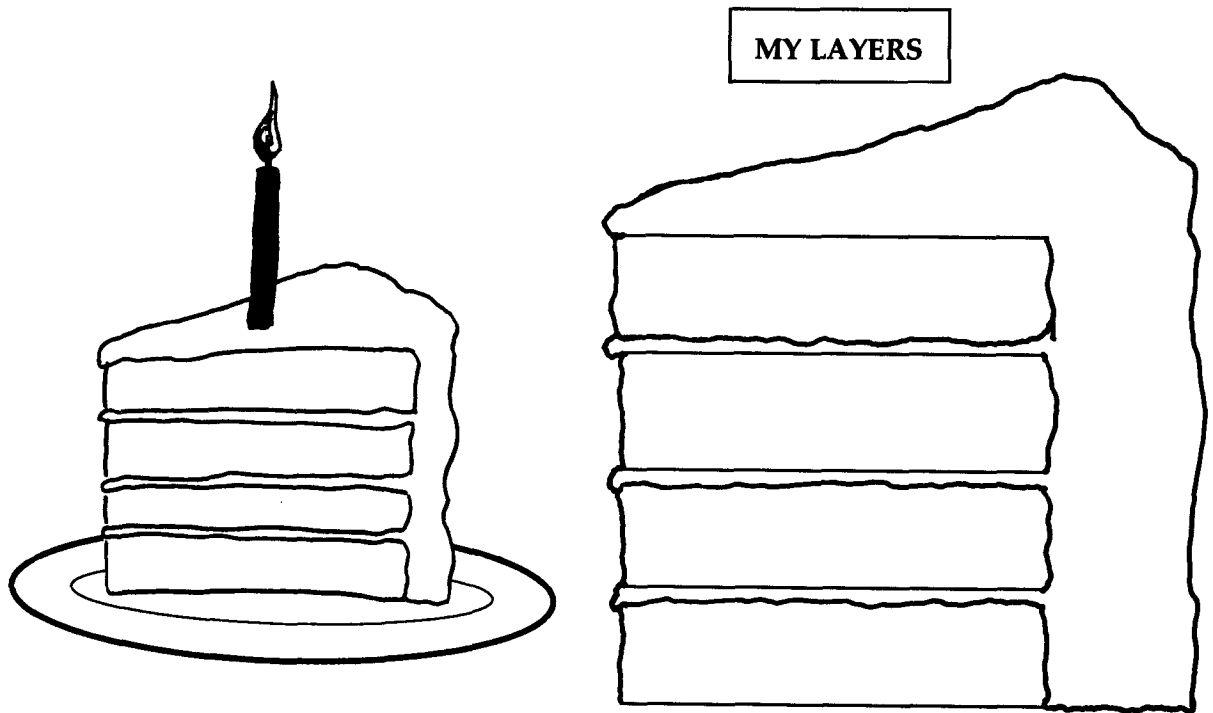
Culture is how we are raised to view and practice life. It is the inevitable result of rubbing elbows with one segment of the human race. It shows up in how we make, do and celebrate things. You can see it in how we talk to ourselves about "us" and "them." It tells us who "we" are and gives us attitudes about "them," the people who are different from us. It tells us what should be important as well as how to act in various situations.



ONE CULTURE OR MANY?

A few people belong to only one or two cultures. Most of us are like a slice of layer cake. We have several cultural layers. Each teaches us something about how to interpret everyday events and how to behave. Our "layers" make us like other people in some ways and different from them in others.

Imagine you are a slice of cake. Using the picture below, write on each layer some of the things which make you culturally different from other people at work or in your neighborhood. Start with the basics, like gender, race, where you or your ancestors came from, religion, etc. Look at the cake on the previous page if you need help thinking of things.



WHEN IT COMES TO PEOPLE, *DIFFERENT IS NORMAL*

A normal human being is a person with a variety of biological and cultural distinctions as well as an individual personal history that sets her or him apart from every other person. Each of us is a unique recipe.

The candle on the drawing of the cake should remind us that each of us has some light to bring to the world. Every person has something to contribute.

HOW AM I DIFFERENT?

Usually we think of other people as different from us when we in turn are also different from them. Below are some of the most common ways we differ from others. Each is followed by an unfinished phrase which calls attention to these differences.

Read each description and finish the phrase. Don't dwell on a right answer, just read the phrase and write the first response that comes to mind. The voice you hear is your honest cultural upbringing speaking, even though you may have second thoughts about what it says.

GENDER

Because we are born male or female the world treats us differently. The culture we are raised in teaches us how to be feminine or masculine.

A real man is: _____

A real woman is: _____

FAMILY

The family group, makes its own rhythms, customs, and rituals.

At our house our customs are: _____

In my family our rituals include: _____

AGE

The generation we grow up in experiences the world in its own unique way.

In my generation, we: _____

HOW AM I DIFFERENT? (Continued)

RACE

How people view the characteristics which result from a common genetic bond.

My race is _____ and has the following characteristics: _____

NATION AND ETHNICITY

How we talk about ourselves as citizens of a certain country or as a people with a broad common heritage of culture, belief, and language.

My nationality is _____ and we believe: _____

GEOGRAPHY, REGION

Distinctions we make about ourselves and others on the basis of where they live or where they come from.

Where I come from people are: _____

ORGANIZATION

What we adopt as a result of working together in a specific group or company, our organizational or "corporate culture."

My organization is unique because: _____

BELIEF

How we see ourselves and others because of our religion or philosophy of life. We fall into groups defined by faith or personal conviction about who we are and why we are in this world.

Deep in my heart I believe: _____

Before you continue, read back through what you have written and jot in the margin one benefit you have received by being part of the cultural group to which you belong.

WHAT WE MAKE OF DIFFERENCES

Cultural differences become important because we make them so. People pay more attention to certain differences than others. Following are differences that were not in the exercise on pages 7 and 8. In your opinion, how do people in your community or workplace tend to see these differences? Rate each category below as:

1 = little or no importance; 2 = somewhat important; or 3 = very important

RATING

3

Occupation

How we view ourselves as a result of the kind of work we do. (Engineer, Tradesperson, Machinist, Retailer, Artist, Marketer, Supervisor.)

2

Sexual Preference

Unconscious or conscious choices we make about whom we desire for sexual partners or the choice not to have sexual partners. (Gays, Lesbians, Heterosexuals, Bi-Sexuals, Celibates.)

1

Social class

How others see us and how we see ourselves according to factors such as birth, income, education, lifestyle. (Rich, Poor, Middle Class, High-School or University-Educated, etc.)

2

Physiology and Physical Limitations

How body size and shape, structural or functional differences, or limits to physical or mental abilities affect our self-perception and others' perception of us. (Tall, Short, Heavy, Thin, Disfigured, Deaf, Paraplegic, etc.)

With these distinctions fresh in your mind, next time you read a newspaper or listen to a news broadcast, notice how many of the stories involve cultural background, (either directly or just below the surface). See if you also notice, how, when reading or listening, you tend to judge others because of their race, gender, social class, occupation, nationality, physical make-up, sexual preference, age, philosophy or where they live.