



Become a Cultural Translator

Did you know that 11 percent of Americans claim a primary language other than English and that the Asian, African and Hispanic populations in the United States combined spend almost \$600 billion annually on goods and services? These demographic figures indicate that many of the customers you serve have diverse backgrounds and cultural influences that shape their expectations of you and the way you deal with them.

Therefore, in order to effectively serve all your customers, you need to become a *cultural translator* to interpret customers' needs and expectations and to tailor your service efforts to ensure their satisfaction. By definition, "culture" is a total way of life for a group of people that is transmitted from generation to generation. By understanding different cultures - including your own - you can become a more effective service provider by being aware of what customers value and expect from you, and by bridging the gap between the differences in expectations of the service encounter.

Serving an increasingly diverse multicultural and multilingual customer base in ways that are respectful and meaningful is key to survival and success. In order to be an effective cultural translator, you must first understand that customers' needs and expectations may vary across cultures.

As you become aware of customers' cultural influences (as well as your own) and how they shape expectations, you can begin to "translate" during the service encounter by tailoring your efforts to every customer to ensure their satisfaction. One way to do this is to use the *Service Response Cycle*. With each customer encounter, you should use the cycle by:

1. Assessing what your goals are for the service encounter and what you think the customer's goals are as well.
2. Identifying the possibilities of how to provide the best service.
3. Adapting your style to meet the customer's expectations.

4. Reflecting on the outcome and try to determine whether or not the customer was satisfied with the service or solutions you provided.
5. Reinforcing change.

Applying these steps of the *Service Response Cycle* will help you in your efforts to become a cultural translator. As you become skilled in interpreting customers' expectations through proper training and experience, you will be able to:

- Recognize and work to remove barriers that limit your ability to adapt to diverse customers
- Adapt to the needs of diverse customers
- Know common communication mistakes made by foreign speakers
- Respond with culturally-appropriate etiquette and courtesies
- Recognize when a customer does not understand the conversation.
- Adapt speaking and listening style and pace
- Anticipate and recognize differing customer needs and expectations
- Empathize with customers' frustrations in a culturally appropriate manner
- Identify additional resources for assisting customers

In all your encounters with customers, begin to use a few of the strategies. You will not only be more sensitive to each customer's unique preferences, but you will enhance the service you provide by anticipating and responding to customers' needs in a way that is meaningful to them.

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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