



Heart

A JOURNEY TOWARD CULTURAL HUMILITY

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What Is Cultural Humility?

Cultural humility is having a humble and respectful attitude toward others, especially those who are different from you. It also means being open to new ideas, perspectives, and other cultures, while still being true to your own. Cultural humility is having the ability to come into new encounters from the perspective of a learner—looking at someone else and asking to learn about their culture without making assumptions.

Additionally, cultural humility is about avoiding stereotypical thinking by making a conscious decision to challenge your own cultural biases and choosing not to believe the stereotypes about others. It's important to remember that each person is unique. The more you educate yourself and learn new things about the people around you, the better you'll communicate.

Cultural humility increases your ability to see different perspectives, understand others' backgrounds, and, ultimately, enable you to work more effectively in diverse settings. Understanding each other can go a long way to create tighter-knit communities.

Why is cultural humility important?

Whether you're in school, at work, or in an organization, the world is a very diverse place. People come from many different parts of the world, they have different belief systems and values, and they have been brought up in ways that may be different from your experiences. These cultural differences make cultural humility an important skill to possess.

Cultural humility is about understanding that you'll never be an expert, guru, or master of another culture that isn't your own. It's realizing that no number of programs, experiences, degrees, or trainings will make you adept about a lived experience that's not your own. The humility portion of cultural humility is your understanding and acceptance of the fact that you have to commit to lifelong learning when it comes to other cultures. The true experts

are the ones who identify with, grow up in, and experience the culture themselves.

What does “humility” have to do with it?

Cultural humility in its authentic form requires us to be critical of ourselves and our behaviors when working or relating with people of another culture. Self-critique and self-reflection create an environment where you can be “checked” or you can “check yourself” for things like bias, ego, superiority, and/or a savior mentality. Remember, we can learn from anyone. Too often, we miss out on richer lives because of the lack of humility in our hearts.

What if you grew up around another culture or have been working alongside others?

Shouldn't that experience count for something? Experience can, at times, be helpful, but it's dangerous when it leads to a place of comfort where we start feeling culturally competent about another person's culture. This false feeling of cultural competence can lead us to believe there's an endpoint to our journey. If we have enough time or experiences with other cultures, then we can think we've learned everything there is to know or we know what needs to be done and how it should be done. This kind of thinking and attitude breeds arrogance and leads to the silencing of individual voices. It also manifests in failing to acknowledge or recognize the true needs of individuals, especially those belonging to a culture that has been marginalized and oppressed.

The worse kind of cultural competence is claiming to be so knowledgeable that we start speaking over others and act as an expert or know-it-all. Unfortunately, this cultural arrogance has permeated schools, organizations, workplaces, and media.

Okay, so culturally humility is really about learning how to listen more effectively. It's no secret that minority communities aren't listened to. The idea of being able to become an expert by studying a particular culture in college or a book is rooted in oppression. People claiming to be experts in a culture that isn't theirs take away power and autonomy from people of color and

other minoritized communities so that they are left voiceless.

This kind of oppressive behavior reinforces power imbalances and continues to keep white dominance in place. Cultural humility seeks to address power imbalances by recognizing the voices that have traditionally been left out. Through cultural humility, marginalized communities are able to reclaim their power and tell their stories unadulterated—absent of the pressures and anxieties of making the majority feel comfortable.

The Cultural Humility Wheel



In the center of the cultural humility wheel is the phrase “others over self”—the catalyst for getting the wheel in motion.

The inner circle starts with your “will” and your desire to learn about others. The second dimension is your capacity to “fill” by gaining new cultural knowledge. The last dimension, “skill” speaks to the application of new cultural understanding in diverse settings to engage others and transform communities.

The outer circle offers five specific steps to the “Will-Fill-Skill” process.

The Center of Humility



At the center of cultural humility is the idea of “OTHERS OVER SELF.” Building a more inclusive place starts with you thinking of others, a little more than you think of yourself. When you take time to put your attention and energies on others, it provides a safe space for them to tell their story.

Stories are powerful and life changing. Many of the stereotypes we have about others are rooted in ignorance. If people focused on others and made time to hear their stories, lives would be changed for the better. One of the best ways to build equity in any relationship is to make time for them. People appreciate being given the opportunity and space to share their stories. Being heard is a privilege and you have the power to give the gift of listening which is at the heart of cultural humility.

- C.S. Lewis -

[illegible]

"A great person is always willing to be little."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson -

*Write down a few examples of when you experienced
cultural humility in action or the lack thereof.*

Be the reason
someone feels
welcomed, seen,
heard, valued,
loved, and
supported.



21 Reflections On Cultural Humility

1. You must be intentional. *Change resulting in equitable outcomes won't happen by accident.*
2. You must *show empathy and cultural sensitivity to underserved communities.*
3. You must be committed to lifelong learning where you *engage in continuous self-reflection and self-critique—this requires humility.*
4. You must be okay with not knowing. *Are you humble enough to admit this?*
5. You must acknowledge the power imbalances that exist in what you do and *look for ways to lessen those power imbalances.*
6. You must look for ways to partner with marginalized communities. *There should be co-learning, co-teaching, and safe spaces to share ideas and stories.*
7. You must avoid assumptions. *Try to consciously slow down so that you aren't quick to judge and assume you know.*
8. You must practice focusing more on others than self. *Remember, it's not always about you!*
9. Cultural humility is BIGGER than the Black and white binary. *Everything and everyone must be examined.*
10. You must make room for other sources of knowledge. *Always remain teachable, understanding that some of the greatest revelations come from the most unlikely places.*

11. Humility is risky. *Stereotyping is safe, but, if you wish to grow, you must be willing to get uncomfortable.*
12. Can you admit when you're wrong or you don't know? *This level of transparency builds trust and helps you win with people.*
13. What is your attitude toward people of color? *How do your family and community talk about people of color?*
14. How are you engaging in this work? *You have a duty to grow and that requires searching for and accessing resources that will enhance your cultural responsiveness.*
15. Do you have the *same patience for communities that aren't your own?*
16. Are you equitable (not equal) in your care for others? *Your help should be specific to those you serve.*
17. How are you building culturally safe and inclusive spaces? *What are you doing to make others feel welcomed and celebrated?*
18. How are you *identifying, believing in, and building on the assets and strengths of communities of color?*
19. Are you aware of your own patterns of unintentional and intentional racism and classism? *Racism in the 21st century is crafty, subtle, and bigger than the interpersonal level.*
20. Are you *examining policies and advocating for the health and safety of marginalized communities?*
21. Everything that is required at the interpersonal level must be required at the institutional level. *Cultural humility has the power to disrupt racist practices.*

Humility is not thinking less of yourself but **thinking of yourself less**. It is a posture of the heart that shows up in how you live, lead, and listen. Humble leaders recognizes the value in others. They inspire, connect, check in and elevate those they touch.

5 STEPS TO START

Leading with Humility

STEP
01

WE LISTEN with our heart

Humble leaders recognize the value in everyone and aren't too big to give their heart and attention to others in order to better understand.



WE ASK questions

Humble leaders don't attempt to know everything. They remove their egos and ask that which is necessary in order to determine what is most important.

STEP
02

STEP
03

WE EMPATHIZE

Humble leaders are emotionally intelligent and self-aware. They exercise self-control and are socially aware. They possess the capacity to feel what others feel and see what others see.



WE keep LEARNING

Humble leaders are lifelong learners. They maintain the posture of a student. They aren't afraid to admit what they don't know but are committed to growth.

STEP
04

STEP
05

WE INFLUENCE

Humble leaders are passionate and relational. They care. Their focus is on adding value to others and their communities with no expectations of reciprocity.



About the Author

Dr. James Knight is an educator, coach/mentor, consultant, author, itinerant speaker/teacher, and equity and inclusion strategist. He resides near Cleveland, Ohio. Much of his work revolves around leading with humility and partnering with other leaders to build dynamic and inclusive communities/spaces where people collaborate, innovate, and engage in fearless dialogue.



As an equity and inclusion strategist, James works with leaders, schools, organizations, and individuals in the corporate, nonprofit, governmental, and academic sector to develop frameworks rooted in humility. The primary goal of this work is to assist others in building safe environments where everyone can thrive and bring their best selves. As an author, James has written three books, including his latest release, *Heart: A Journey Toward Cultural Humility*. This book is a manual and guide for any leader, student, or person looking to develop greater awareness and increase their emotional and cultural intelligence.

As Vice President for Equity and Inclusion at St. Edward High School, James leads the development of vision and strategies that champion the importance of a diverse and inclusive community. Part of his work involves engaging faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni to make the school a culturally safe environment. In his role, James assesses the potential barriers to inclusion and diversity and develops strategies focused on recruiting and retaining a diverse community.

In addition to his work at St. Edward, James has served as a teacher, coach, and pastor. He is the founder and leader of I.D.E.A.S., a coalition of DEI practitioners and directors throughout Ohio.

James has a passion for people and sees himself as a servant-leader. His personal mission is “**education + empowerment = elevation,**” and his number one goal in everything he does is to elevate those he serves through education and inspiration. He holds a Bachelor of the Arts from Oberlin College and a Master’s of Education and Doctorate of Leadership degree from Ashland University. He also holds a Graduate Certificate in Diversity, Social Justice, and Inclusion from the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs.

For more information, resources, or tips on working through the book, visit www.leadwithhumility.org. If you or your team would like to work with James or invite him to speak, please email James@leadwithhumility.org.

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