



Diversity Gazette

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Understanding

by Frank Alford & Yadira Conyers

In this installment of the *Diversity Gazette*, we will discuss ways to better understand others. Understanding requires mental effort. We have to think when we interact with others. Here are a few points to consider.

We can start with a very old but profound piece of advice: "everyone must be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). In the October edition of the *Diversity Gazette*, Alecia discussed the importance of listening. Let's expand on that: listen *with empathy*. To understand others, you first have to hear what they are saying. It can be difficult to listen with empathy to people who have ideas and opinions different from your own, but it's easier to understand someone if you are slow to speak, listening respectfully and patiently even if you do not like what you hear. Someone may say something that touches a nerve. Do not let it upset you. Be slow to anger, and reserve judgment as much as possible. One saying that is often repeated on this topic is, "Our days are happier when we give people a piece of our heart rather than a piece of our mind."

Najma Khorrami at Huffpost.com puts it another way: "Try to listen to understand, rather than listening to reply." You may sincerely want to help someone who is speaking to you, but if you focus solely on a solution or a good response, you may miss the whole point of the conversation. It is unrealistic to think you can solve serious problems in just a few minutes of a discussion. Instead of trying to be a problem solver or quick responder, Khorrami says, try to be a "vessel of comfort." In many cases, people may just want someone to listen and understand their situation rather than resolve it.

Finally, it's easier to understand others if you understand yourself. What are your opinions, your beliefs, your assumptions, your biases, and your feelings on certain matters? Why do you feel the way you do? If you do not have a good understanding of yourself, it will be harder to understand others, especially if their journeys through life are significantly different from your own. People have different upbringings. They have different attitudes and experience life differently.

People from different places in the same country or even the same state can have vastly different life experiences. These help shape their opinions and, to some extent, their expectations for life. We should not disregard another person's view just because it is out of line with what we believe.

Resources

Chernyak, Paul. "How to Understand People." Wikihow.
<https://www.wikihow.com/Understand-People>.

Khorrami, Najma. "5 Tips to Be More Understanding." *Huffpost*, July 16, 2017.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/5-tips-to-be-more-understanding_b_5977940e4b0c6616f7ce57e.

Picture source:

<https://www.stateofdigital.com/understanding-audience-doesnt-mean-exactly-say/>

Ames, Daniel, Lily Benjamin Maissen, and Joel Brockner. "The Role of Listening in Interpersonal Influence," *Journal of Research in Personality* 46, no. 3 (2012): 345-49.