

## Tips for working cross-culturally

### No best way

We acknowledge that there is no 'right' or 'best' way to travel through this terrain, and suggest some possible routes as a guide. No matter which route is taken, there are potential traps for unwary travellers. We also acknowledge that working through this site is only one possible way to travel. As much can be learned from reflection on experience of working appropriately and effectively across cultures as by studying what others have done.

### Some suggestions:

- Be tolerant: your way of doing things is not necessarily the best
- Be patient: it takes time to get used to strange ways and customs
- Be understanding: try to put yourself in the other person's place and imagine how s/he feels
- Be fair: would you do the same thing to your own people?
- Be prepared to learn from others: they can teach you a lot
- Make the first friendly gesture: other people may be just as shy as you are
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(From Understanding Pakehas p 21-22, Polynesian Advisory Committee of the Vocational Training Council, 1985).

If you're not sure how to proceed in a particular context, try to identify someone of the same age and gender as yourself and model what you do on what they are doing. There is a whole subject relating to 'cross-cultural communication' which emphasises that almost all aspects of communication vary by culture (a smile may be universal?); so try to be aware of body language and gestures as well as spoken language. If you are trying to communicate with people when you don't have much spoken language in common, try to:

- use basic, common terms or if you must use slang, idioms, jargon or specialised terms, explain what they mean.
- if the other person doesn't understand you, try to express yourself using different words. There is no point in raising your voice, which an amazing number of people tend to do.
- speak more slowly and enunciate more clearly than you usually might.