CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUES IN THE WORKPLACE

List of strategies for effective communication with student assistants

Culturally-sensitive strategies:

- Be mindful of cultural differences for the following concepts:
  - Time (being late)
  - Hierarchy of authority (employer/employee relationship) i.e. “power distance”
  - Space (physical distance between 2 speakers)
  - Face saving
- Be aware of different communication styles: in general, people from collectivistic cultures tend to use indirect speech to explain or to request something
  - When s/he says “yes”, consider if this is his/her real response
  - When you detect indirect styles of communication, use a direct style to double-check
- Watch for non-verbal behavior i.e. body language:
  - Eye contact (it may be considered rude to look you in the eye especially when student assistants are from a culture that respects authority)
  - Nodding to indicate a positive response but it may not actually mean yes

General strategies:

- Clarify expectations on the first day of hiring e.g. issues of time, work ethics, etc.
- These should be addressed at least once a month (student assistants may forget!)
- For every task that you assign, make sure s/he understands each task clearly
- Ask him/her to repeat to you what s/he has to do
- Write down step-by-step instructions
- Encourage questions from student assistants
- Re-phrase the question that s/he asks you (i.e. do not make assumptions)
- Always treat student assistants with respect

Ltt04/2011