

Security Briefs 22 – Strategic Intercultural Relations Part 4

We are continuing our conversation about Strategic Intercultural Relations or S. I. R. Last episode we saw that legitimacy is the foundation upon which respect can be established. Awareness is the link between legitimacy and respect.

In the past several episodes we saw how important how you are perceived by others is. To create a positive impression of those around you, we need to understand the cultural nuances of people in our context. This is called “awareness”.

Self-Awareness

The first part of awareness is self-awareness. We generally have very positive views of ourselves. But especially in cross-cultural settings, it’s likely that some locals may see you as an agent of trouble just because you are different.

It is the same in every culture – including our own. We function in close-knit groups where familiarity meant safety. Outsiders or those who behaved differently could be threats and could potentially disrupt the prevailing social order.

Imagine that a new family moves into a close-knit neighborhood, but their different language, customs, and food make longtime residents uneasy. Whispers spread—*Are they trustworthy? Do they even want to fit in?* People keep their distance.

When you hear that story, you probably put yourself in the place of the people in the neighborhood. But when we move overseas, *we are the new neighbors* in the story. This “in-group vs. out-group” still influences modern attitudes, often unconsciously.

Good self-awareness goes beyond trying to understand how others may see you. Instead, you should be aware of how your behavior confirms or contradicts the views people have of you.

You should be aware of how you can speak or act in culturally respectful ways. Good self-awareness is the foundation for good cross-cultural communication and developing a good reputation.

Cultural Awareness

The next part of awareness is closely linked. It is cultural awareness which is learning language and basic cultural norms. The truth is that language and culture cannot be separated. This is why the Growing Participant Approach to language learning, or GPA for short, refers not to language, but to langua-culture.

You can live for years in a setting and even speak a language fluently. But to be truly incarnational, we must gain a deep understanding of the cultural environment through cultural awareness.

We should, for instance, know what it means to be honorable or dishonorable in a culture. We should learn what they fear, love, and hate and why. What are their common hopes and aspirations. As we learn these things, we get a greater understanding of cultural awareness.

Now you know.

Next episode we will continue to talk about awareness as we explore more about Situational Awareness in our discussion about Strategic Intercultural Relations. Well see you then.