



Dancing between Cultures: Culturally Intelligent Coaching for Missions and Ministry
Tina Stoltzfus Horst ©2017

Skills of the Culturally Intelligent Christian Coach: Intentionality

Romans 12:2, *The Message*: Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.

Cory, an American coach who intentionally integrated Russian values when he spoke Russian and stuck to his own American values when he was speaking English, made a conscious and deliberate choice to adopt Russian values, Russian phrases, and Russian ways of doing things when he was speaking Russian. He had to commit to this plan ahead of time, and when he began implementing this decision, it was a conscious choice each time.¹

Wolfgang Jani, a Swiss coach based in Hungary and working internationally, writes,

My own mental preparation before a cross-cultural coaching session is key. For instance, I may need to raise my awareness about this particular client and their cultural values. When we come to making a commitment, I need to listen even more carefully. This client may want to be able to do a particular action step, but can't due to their group constraints. I may not know until our next session whether this was the case, based on whether they follow through or not. If they were unable to do their action steps, I can go back and think about what a different approach to finding action steps would be that they will be able to follow through on. I need to review what happened after the session and change *my* approach and questions when the client outlines their action steps at the end of the session and have the client build in involvement from his group.²

Planning, awareness, and reflection are all important components of the element of Cultural Intelligence called Strategy CQ. We'll explore strategies demonstrating these components, essential for success cross-culturally, as they occur before, during and after the coaching session.

¹ Dr. Cory Lemke, Personal Communication, Permission granted on July 3, 2015.

² Wolfgang, Personal Communication, Permission granted on July 5, 2015.

The advantage for us as coaches is that we already incorporate some of these components in our practices. Most coaches build in time between sessions for preparation beforehand and reflection afterwards. If you are already in the habit of doing one or both of these, you have a head start on the cross-cultural planning process.

It's important to note that Crisis and Non-Crisis Coaches will approach this skill differently. Those who are Non-Crisis value or who favor spontaneity and feel constrained by a routine due to personality factors may favor reflection immediately afterward. Crisis value coaches will likely want to incorporate some element of pre-planning. Either approach is valid. Note in the last example that Wolfgang deploys both pre-session preparation and post-session review. Some combination of approaches will produce the best fruit.

To help you begin thinking about how to incorporate intentionality, here are some ideas that encompass a variety approaches at three points: before, during and after the session:

Pre-Planning Before the Session:

First, prepare yourself to coach a particular client by calling to mind their value orientations. You could copy and paste the client's value continuums at the top of the page on which you will be taking notes. Alternatively, you might keep the value continuums clipped into the client's paper file. Highlight the continuums where you have the most cultural distance with your client. Practice greeting skills before the session to put yourself into the rhythm and cadence of the client's language.

Prayer is also vital. Before the session, pray for your client or for each person on the team you are coaching. Picture each in your mind as you pray, thinking about who they are and what their values are. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you sensitivity to the client's cultural values as you coach.

To remind yourself of your client's unique milieu, slip a photo of your client's home into their file/your note template or picture their setting in your mind. Introduce something to your environment that helps you recall the client's culture. For instance, I clean off my often-messy desk before I coach my German and Swiss clients, even when we coach over the phone.

Lastly, review any notes relating to culture dynamics that you made after the previous session.

During the Session:

Likewise during the coaching appointment itself, you may want to introduce something to your environment that will be a potent cue to help you recall the client's culture. For instance, I often drink chai while coaching Indian leaders. You could turn the heat up or down to remind you of the client's home climate. Or if you are doing distance coaching, put on music from your client's culture. Or like Cory, use the client's language.

When something does not seem to be connecting with the client during the session, or if you feel a strong response within yourself, stop yourself briefly. Ask yourself if this is connected to cultural distance or cultural values. How could you think differently or do something differently? If during the session you encounter a cultural difference you are not sure you understand, follow your curiosity and ask the client some open questions. If they are from an indirect culture, ask what someone in their culture might want from their coach. Use third person.

As you coach, if the strategies and approaches you have identified ahead of time for this client, based on their cultural values, are not working, re-adjust. Do some real-time adaptation based on what is happening in the moment.

Post-session Review:

When you have finished the session, take a few minutes to reflect on what worked well and what didn't. Ask yourself if any of these things relate to culture or CQ. If something related to culture did not work well, what could you do differently next time?

Make a note to do something that the client wants more of that you do not do naturally. For instance, I coach one very direct American who thrives on confrontation to the point that it is sometimes uncomfortable for me. I have a note in his file that says: "He wants me to BE DIRECT!"

Review your session notes for that client from several weeks back. Given enough distance, sometimes culture issues pop out you may not noticed before. I've found this extremely

instructive. Finish your review by taking time to pray for the next session you'll have with this client.

The skill of intentionality utilizes pre-planning and reflection before, during, and after the session to increase your coaching performance and effectiveness. This procedure is highly personal to the individual coach. Some coaches use a combination of all three approaches. Most will tend towards a stronger emphasis on one of the three. I tend to favor reflection afterwards. But whether you prefer pre-planning or post-session review or both, I recommend strongly that you include some "during the session" techniques. In the Take a Minute section below, you'll be asked to develop a procedure for intentionality that works for you.

Take a Minute

Practice Intentionality and Planning:

→ **Strengths:** *What comes most naturally to you: pre-planning or reflection? Being intentional before, during, or after the session? Choose at least three things from the lists above that reflect your style and are most appealing to you. Some you may already be doing.*

→ **Weaknesses:** *Where do you most need growth in this area? Choose one or two items from the lists above that may not come naturally to you, but that you know will help you become more intentional. Make an action step to try this item(s) in the next month. After trying this several times, evaluate whether it will work for you long-term or if you need to try something else.*