



Vol.6 Larry E. Smith Self-Leadership Consultant

To Deal with Difference and Establish Trust

Pioneers of Education
for Intercultural Understanding

Hawaii is a multi-ethnic/multi-cultural society and its major institution of international education is the East-West Center (EWC). The Intercultural Communication Institution (ICI) affiliated with Kanda University of International Studies, and the Center have had exchange activities. In 1998, Dr. Teruyuki Kume, deputy director of ICI, stayed at the Center for research work and Dr. Everett Keinjans, first president of the Center, had a workshop at the ICI Summer Seminar. This is an interview with Larry E. Smith who worked at the East-West Center for about 30 years and was responsible for both education and training there. He now applies his knowledge to leadership development at his own consultancy.

The East-West Center was established in 1960 with the stated objective of promoting relations for better understanding among the people of Asia, the Pacific and the United States through cooperative study, training, and research. In 1970 I was hired to go to the Center to examine the role of English in Asia and the Pacific. I suggested that we include the United States as well because I thought it was important for Americans who are interested in English language education to understand the role of English in the Asia-Pacific region.



At the East-West Center, I worked with scholars from many different countries. I soon realized that although they spoke English fluently, they did not use it in the same way as Americans. Their conventions of communication; for example the way they made suggestions, or refusals, or compliments, were very different from the way Americans did.

I could understand the scholars and they could understand me even though our pronunciations were different. They had been trained to understand American English and they spoke clearly and carefully so that I could understand them. The problem was that they couldn't understand each other. This was a surprise to me until I realized that they had received no training to interact with people from other countries whose mother tongue was not English. Initially, the Japanese couldn't understand the Filipinos and the Filipinos couldn't understand the Indians, and the Indians couldn't understand the Singaporeans. After a few weeks together we grew accustomed to one another's speech pattern and understanding was easier.

Our goal was for the Japanese to be able to speak in English to all others and explain a Japanese perspective on any issue we might be discussing. That was also true for our Thai scholars and for each member of every other national group. It became clear that the participants knew more about the United States and American issues and ways of thinking than they did about each other's country. Unfortunately, the Americans didn't know much about anybody except themselves. The advantage was that each of them was curious and interested in learning about each culture represented. Soon we came to know more about each other's backgrounds and had a solid foundation for building strong relationships.(1/6)



My interest has been in the recognition of multi-varieties of English.

Early in my work at the East-West Center, I realized that a lot of work needs to be done concerning intercultural communication. I worked on this from the view point of English and my first book about this topic was English for Cross-Cultural Communication, published in 1981. Since that time my interest has been in the use of English as an international language (EIL) and the recognition of multiple varieties of English or "world Englishes."

With Professor Braj B. Kachru, we co-founded the professional journal "World Englishes-Journal of English as an International and Intranational Language" in 1985. The journal is concerned with all varieties of English, not just mother-tongue varieties like American, British, Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand but also Indian, Singaporean, Japanese and Chinese.

We should be conscious of one important thing when we attempt intercultural communication in English with people who have different cultural backgrounds. If we are going to be involved in intercultural communication with Japanese, we should know the way Japanese use English to communicate. If Japanese are going to be communicating with Germans in English, they need to know something about the way those Germans use English. We recognize that there are multiple varieties of English in the world. In fact the differences of communicating in English are so great, it is best to talk about "Englishes" in the plural.

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There are people today promoting what is called "Global English" or "Globish" but I don't believe there is such a variety of English. There are others who promote "Lingua Franca English" or "International English" but I don't believe there is such a variety. Certainly I know that English is the most common lingua franca in the world and the most frequently used language for international communication so I can discuss English as a lingua franca but I don't accept any particular variety of English as THE lingua franca for world communication.

It is possible to develop such a variety but it would be similar to BASIC (British, American, Scientific, International, Commercial) English which was created in the 1940s. It would be a created (artificial) variety of the language. I am not interested in an artificial language. I am interested that human beings use real languages in real situations and those are the interactions I want to study. Today they use multiple varieties of English or Englishes.(2/6)

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You should not have made a slash mark across my paper without making an apology.

Working at the East-West Center with people who came from different cultures helped me to clearly see that fluency in English does not guarantee successful communication.

Let me provide an example.

There was a Japanese colleague who wrote a report and requested that I review it and make suggestions for improvement. I read it and said, "It's too long. There is no need for the lengthy introduction so let's cross out this part." As I said that, I used my pen to cross out the section I was referring to.

I handed the report back to him and he took it. I noticed that he looked a little startled but I thought maybe he had developed a headache. He said nothing.

Much, much (days) later, he said, "I have been angry with you. You should never have made the diagonal mark across my work. You should have said "You can delete this part." You could have pointed to it, but you should not have made a slash mark across my paper without making an apology. I understand that you meant well and I am no longer angry with you about it but I wanted you to know what happened to upset me."



As he explained the situation, I understood it easily. It made perfect sense but I would never have understood his being angry without that explanation. So this is the kind of thing that happened to me at East-West Center. When I began I just had no idea there was so much more to effective communication than fluency in English.(3/6)

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The important thing is to realize the difference and establish trust.

Working at the East-West Center was a giant experiment in intercultural communication on a day to day basis.

When I began I thought with English fluency and good will I could handle anything which might occur. I was shocked when people would say to me, "Oh that is not the correct thing to do or say in this situation with these people." Obviously, it wasn't from their point of view and I was doing something wrong.

When I asked why not and stated that what I had done/said was what I had been taught was polite and appropriate for the situation. They would then explain that it was not appropriate in their culture.

I quickly learned that there are major differences in what is appropriate across cultures when speaking in English and that the important thing is to realize the difference and establish trust so that people feel free to explain those differences to one another. There will always be misunderstandings. We want to learn ways to recognize them and develop systems of repair, based on mutual respect and trust.



A common misunderstanding is that cross-cultural discourse is only among people from different nations. But it happens between doctors and patients even of the same nationality. Doctors and patients have different cultures. If a patient does not trust the doctor, then that patient will tell the doctor very little and may not give the doctor enough information about his/her symptoms for the doctor to prescribe the best medicine. As long as doctor and patient are Japanese, it's easier. But if the doctor is Japanese and the patient is Filipino, it becomes very complicated. The difficulty will be double, or triple because of the differences of cultures. It is the same with managers versus leaders. Actually it is true even in the same organization with different departments and divisions; such as human resource divisions versus division of finance. These are examples of differences of cultures.

And it is very important to agree on the objective when we work with people who have different cultures. In my work at East-West Center, I had many staff members of different cultures. The mission of the Center was very important for me and all of us. When we agreed about that objective, we can work effectively with almost with anybody. If they are Hindu, or Jew, or Christian, or Buddhist, even though that is important, it is not the most important element in our work together. We can be different, and still successfully work together toward the objective.(4/6)



**Leadership is more than the ability to lead.
It is a dynamic process of influence.**

At the East-West Center, I got to work with a lot of leaders from all over the Asia/Pacific region. I realized that leaders act differently in terms of how they encourage their followers, how they motivate them or correct a behavior without being hurtful. It caused me to want to become more knowledgeable about how people lead.

When people choose to lead, what causes others to choose to follow? Is it necessary to be a good follower in order to become a good leader? Do men lead the same as women? Does national culture make a difference? Are managers and leaders the same or different? Is it necessary to be a good person with a pleasant personality in order to be an effective leader? What role does personality play in leadership? These questions caused me to want to be more knowledgeable about how different people lead.

In 1999 I left the East-West Center to begin my own leadership consultancy with an emphasis on Self-Leadership, believing if one can lead one's self effectively, one is more likely to lead others successfully.

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I believe there are four components of leadership: 1. Leader; 2. Follower; 3. Situation; and 4. Goal. I define a leader as someone with followers. Leadership is more than a position and more than the capacity or ability to lead. It is a dynamic process of influence involving a leader with followers in a particular situation toward an established goal. The situation usually determines the goal. The situation and goal should determine the leader and the followers.

Leaders and followers can be trained to be more effective in their roles. There are five basic questions to keep in mind: 1. Who am I? 2. Where am I? 3. Why am I here? 4. Where do I want to go? and 5. What time is it? Self-identity is crucial. Self is more than the individual and includes relationships as well as memberships in work groups and teams. Perhaps the most important ability in self-leadership is based on contextual intelligence.(5/6)



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We will all gain when we increase our understanding of intercultural communication.

I think students who are interested in studying intercultural communication are on the right track. This is more important now than ever before.

No matter what the future and no matter what the occupation we must be aware of the many cultures in our own nation as well as the many different cultures in the world for it will be necessary to interact with people different from ourselves.

We must be prepared to communicate with those who are radically different from us if we are to cope successfully with global warming, nuclear proliferation or the many other issues of importance before us. I believe we should not be afraid to interact with people who are different from us, just because they are different.

I congratulate students who are studying intercultural communication and I am grateful to them because what they learn and share with the rest of us will help us all. And I wish them the best. I am looking forward to them writing articles about new insights they gain. I know I will learn from them too.(6/6)



Larry E. Smith

Born in 1941. After graduating from Arkansas State University in 1962, he joined the U. S. Peace Corps and served as an English teacher in Thailand from 1963-1967. He received an M.A. in sociolinguistics from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in 1969. In 1970 he was invited to join the East-West Center as a researcher in cross-cultural communication. He was a pioneer in the field of English as an International Language (EIL) and world Englishes. He left the Center in 1999 while he was Dean and Director of the Program on Education and Training to begin his own consultancy in Self-Leadership, called Christopher, Smith & Associates, LLC (www.csaworks.com). His most recent book concerning world Englishes, co-authored with Yamuna Kachru, is *Cultures, Contexts, and World Englishes* (2008) which was translated into Japanese by Keio University Press in 2013. His most recent leadership text is an e-book titled *SelfLEADERSHIP: Direction from Within* (2014).