Evaluation Podcast

Hello everyone, my name is Tyler and my pronouns are He/Him/His. I am currently pursuing my master’s degree on Public Administration. This podcast is supposed to talk about different aspects of evaluation, and I am going to speak on cultural competency.

A little background about myself before we begin. I have spent the past several years volunteering and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community. I’ve served on executive boards during my undergraduate career as well as lobbied and volunteer with several LGBTQ+ nonprofits. I find that my experience and passion has helped in creating and evaluation proposal for a currently running transgender leadership program that I am going to help evaluate after my summer class ends; so what if you are a fellow member of the LGBTQ+ community or an ally and want to help study or do research for the community but don’t have the same experience as me. That’s where cultural competence comes in.

What is cultural competency you ask? I think Tori DeAngelis wrote it best when they wrote in an article for the American Psychological Association that cultural competency is the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one’s own. We can break this down to three parts: Understanding, appreciation, and interaction. Let’s talk about them. The first one is understanding. It is hard to evaluate a community when you don’t know the community. This goes for any community not just the LGBTQ+ one. Even if you do not identify with a certain community, you should learn about them. You should study a little bit about their history, whether it is a group of people or a company and you can even consult with someone who may know more than you do. For example, let’s imagen you are hired by a local library to evaluate how effective their display of LGBTQ+ writers was during the month of June. Before you start writing your evaluation questions, it may be important to know why this display was created specifically in June, which by the way, if you didn’t know, June is Pride month in the United States.

Reason number two, cultural competency helps give you an appreciation and another layer of inside towards the people you are evaluating. People have so many facets and identities, all of which intersect. Evaluation means that you are looking to evaluate a certain aspect of people but being aware of the many layers people have can help create a more specific and efficient evaluation processes. Let’s say you are working for the city and are looking to evaluate homelessness rates. What steps could the city take to help the community. The city you are working for has a high LGBTQ+ population and you notice that a large number of those displayed are young adults. Because you knew this about your city, and you did research and consultation from the step previously that we talked about understanding. You will not be surprised to see that in some cases as much as 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+. This is a statistic I found from the chapter projects website. If your findings mirror that percentage, then your final report presentation you could recommend a follow up evaluation to target the needs of high-risk homeless community members such as those that identify as LGBTQ+.

The last reasoning, reason number three is interaction. If you do not have cultural competency and do not learn and respect different communities, some people will be more hesitant to work with you. For example, some people in the LGBTQ+ community are married to someone in the same gender as them. Let’s say you are tasked with interviewing people about their households. If you are interviewing a man, and he says he is married, don’t assume he is married to a woman. I think there are a lot of people who joke about assuming someone’s gender, but in all honesty, members of the LGBTQ+ community will notice when you don’t assume and let them explain for themselves. When you write questions, you could use fewer gender terms like instead of saying “husband” and “wife”, you could instead use the word “spouse”. Another thing you can do is instead of saying “his” or “hers”, you could say something like “theirs”; or instead of “he/she”, you could say “they”. Making small changes to the questions you ask could change the entire tone of the interview.

Now, I don’t assume that everyone will be an expert about every person’s identity when they do an evaluation. The idea of cultural competency is that you understand that everyone is different and that you have an open mind to learn and understand. Anytime you try and learn about someone else is information that will continue to expand your knowledge, that you could take with you to any job field. Even I am still learning about different identities and trying to understand. Once, I worked for a catering company and was serving dinner during Ramadan. At the time, I didn’t know much about it, but my boss did. She not only knew that the event working on fell during Ramadan, but also when certain costumers were able to eat their dinner. She was ready and able to provide take home boxes for people who needed to eat their food after the sun has set. Even though I didn’t know much about Ramadan then, I was able to learn from her example and later, I was able to help provide take home boxes for customers who needed it without them having to explain why. Being able to understand and learn about people’s identities makes you a more valuable employee.

All and all, cultural competency is important in every aspect whether in your professional or personal life. As Tori DeAngelis said, cultural competency is an ability. While it’s not something that necessarily can be learned, it is something that you can realize and work on. Cultural competency involves not only listening and understanding, but also educating. Sometimes you will meet people who want to help teach you and educate about certain religions, ethnic groups, cultures, history, but sometimes it is information you have to find on your own or maybe it is something you will see just living day to day life, but the important part is, once you become aware of something, you should try to do some research to actually understand it. Like in my example, no one told me about Ramadan, but I found out through a life experience and once I finished working that shift, I was able to go home. I was able to research about it, and I was very fortunate to have friends that celebrated Ramadan that would actually be able to ask further questions if there was something I didn’t understand, or if I wanted to know how I can be the most respectful to them and to their culture.

If there is ever something you don’t know, you can Google it, you can read newspapers and magazine articles about it, scholarly journals, articles, databases are out there for all sorts of different identities. Once you are able to understand, appreciate, and interact with different people’s identities and communities, you will make your evaluations that much better because you can be more thorough and more efficient to know exactly what people need how to evaluate them. Anyways, thanks for listening to this podcast. Have a good day.