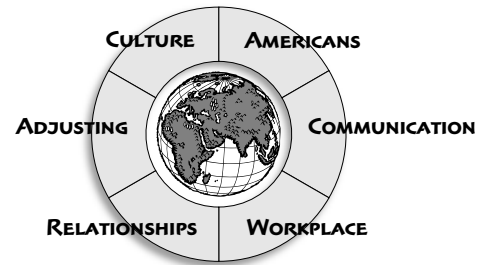


# CHAPTER SIX

## ADJUSTING TO A NEW CULTURE



The focus in this chapter shifts from identifying cultural differences to learning how to live with them. The attention here is on the process people go through in adjusting successfully, both professionally and personally, to a new physical and cultural environment. You will be looking at three different aspects of this process:

- 🌀 the cycle or stages of adjustment
- 🌀 the levels of cultural awareness
- 🌀 changes in attitudes toward cultural difference

In the latter part of the chapter, you will take a closer look at common adjustment problems of PCVs, at strategies for solving them, and how to cope with the stress that goes hand in hand with adjustment.

Adjustment poses a singular dilemma for many PCVs: in changing some of their behaviors to be more culturally sensitive, they turn into a person they no longer like. Is cultural sensitivity, at the expense of self-respect, too dearly won? It's a question many Volunteers struggle with throughout their tour of service and one that is treated in this chapter.



As you read through this material, try to remember that adjustment is not all struggle and no rewards. While it can be a trying experience, it's also challenging and enlightening, the kind of experience you would expect to have by joining the Peace Corps. If you approach the entire cross-cultural experience with your antennae out and plenty of humility, you will certainly be up to the challenge.

*Very well, I'll go. And I shan't be sorry either. I haven't had a decent meal since I came here and I've done a thing I never thought I should have to do in my life: I've drunk my coffee without sugar. And when I've been lucky enough to get a little piece of black bread, I've had to eat it without butter. Mrs. Harrington will never believe me when I tell her what I've gone through.*

**Somerset Maugham**  
**Mrs. Harrington's**  
**Washing**

## 6.1—DEAR FRIENDS

Jan has been asked by Peace Corps to write a letter to people who have received an invitation to join the Peace Corps and serve in Jan's host country. In her letter, Jan has chosen to review her Peace Corps experience by looking back at the various stages she has gone through in adjusting to the country and culture, and reflecting on what it has all meant. Read this letter carefully; later in the chapter you will be asked to refer to it again.

*Dear Friends:*

*1. The Peace Corps has asked me to write to you and tell you all about my country and my experience. I've filled several journals with what I think of this place and what's happened to me here, so you're not going to get very much in a two-page letter.*

*2. As you'll see soon enough, being here is such a rich experience, it's hard to stop talking about it—and harder still to know where to start.*

*3. I guess I could start at the beginning. When we got off the plane in the capital and it was so hot I thought there must be some sort of humidity alert, that everybody except for emergency workers had probably been told to stay indoors until this weather passed. I was wrong, of course; it was actually unseasonably cool that day, as I now realize, but that just shows you how far I've come. I don't even notice the humidity anymore, much less react to it.*

*4. Those were the days, though, when we couldn't get enough of this place. The people were the friendliest people on earth, and nothing we did seemed to faze them. After a while that changed, of course, and it began to dawn on us that one or two things about our culture appeared to be different from theirs, and that probably we shouldn't be quite so sure we weren't fazing the locals, since maybe they didn't "faze" the same way we did! It was all uphill from there.*

*5. Training is a kind of blur now, though I swore at the time that I would never forget anything that happened during those early weeks. I remember it was very intense—everything was intense in*

*(continued)*

those days—and we were so incredibly busy all the time, that we couldn't wait for it to get over. On the other hand, we were scared to death that one day it would be over, and we would have to say goodbye and go out and become Peace Corps Volunteers.

6. But it did end, we did go out, and we did become PCVs—kicking and screaming in my case. I say that because my early days at my site and at my job were not my happiest moments. Even though I knew better, I made all the mistakes I had promised myself I would never make. I won't bore you with details, but suffice it to say that I thought I knew how to do things better than the local people, that if they would just listen, they would see the light and come around.

7. Once I realized I wasn't getting through, that they really did see things differently, I'm sorry to say I got a bit negative. If that's the way they wanted to do things, then to hell with them. This wasn't my finest hour. Somehow I had to climb out of this mood and get back on track. My first attempts were a bit clumsy. I told myself: "Okay, so these people aren't like you. Get over it!"

8. So I went back into the fray—and got bloodied all over again. This was starting to get annoying. I realize now that while I had accepted that the local culture was somewhat different from my own, I still thought that deep down inside we were all alike. While I might have to adjust my style, I didn't need to worry about my basic assumptions and life beliefs.

9. That was the biggest lesson I learned here: that cultural differences are not just on the surface, that people really do see the world in fundamentally different ways.

10. I don't want to say that everything you know about life and people goes out the window when you come here—that wouldn't be true, either—but culture does run deep, and so, therefore, do cultural differences. Anyway, I finally got wisdom, accepted that different people can see the same things very differently, and tried to be more understanding. Now I can laugh at those same behaviors that used to bother me—I've even adopted a few of them myself—and some of the things that bothered me I don't even see anymore.

(continued)

*Remember that just as you  
judge from your cultural  
standpoint, you are being  
judged from theirs.*

*—PCV Fiji*

*11. Well, I didn't expect to get so philosophic about all this, but I guess it's unavoidable whenever you start to look back. And I haven't told you anything about the country yet! I'll have to let others do that. After all, anybody can tell you about the markets and the busses, and the bugs and the food. But true insight—now that's harder to come by!*

*12. I want to say in closing that you'll notice I've addressed this letter to "Dear Friends." We've never met, of course, and probably never will, but I still feel that I know you—not your name or your face or any of the facts of your life—but your heart, or whatever you call that place where your values and your feelings reside. I know this much because I know myself, and I know that you must be something like me or it would never have occurred to you to join the Peace Corps and undertake this adventure.*

*13. We must hope for some of the same things, you and I, perhaps even for the same kind of world, where people understand each other better—where their first impulse upon meeting a stranger is to be curious rather than afraid. When I'm being sentimental (this is such a time, in case you haven't noticed), I like to think I have done my small part in making that happen. I sincerely hope you enjoy doing yours.*

*All the best,  
Jan*



6.2

3. Can you, in retrospect, identify any distinct stages in your adjustment to the new place?



4. Identify two or three specific things you did, consciously or unconsciously, that helped you to adjust in this new place.
5. What lessons from this experience can be useful to you now in the Peace Corps?

## TRANSITION TWO—CHANGING JOBS

1. What worried you the most about the job you were going to take? Did this concern turn out to be valid?
2. How long did it take for you to become comfortable and competent in the new job?
3. Can you, in retrospect, identify any distinct stages in your adjustment to the new job?

6.2

4. Identify two or three specific things you did, consciously or unconsciously, that helped you adjust to your new job?

*Expect to feel embarrassed, foolish, and sometimes inadequate. It's all part of the experience. These trying times are what we eloquently call "adjustment." They're difficult, natural, and useful.*

**—PCV Kenya**

5. What lessons from this experience can be useful to you now in the Peace Corps?



## 6.3—THE CYCLE OF ADJUSTMENT

As Jan's letter to her "friends" indicated, PCVs go through somewhat distinct stages as they adjust to their host country, the host culture, and their job. Together, these comprise the cycle of adjustment, during which PCVs' awareness of and attitudes towards cultural differences change and evolve. While the sequence of stages presented in this exercise seems to be true for most PCVs, no one Volunteer's experience is quite like another's. You may not have all the feelings and reactions described here, but you need to be aware of what *might* happen to you or your PCV friends as you move through your Peace Corps service.

### ***I. INITIAL ENTHUSIASM (THE HONEYMOON)***

- Time frame:** First week or two in host country
- Characteristics:** Exposure to country and culture is limited.  
Excitement and enthusiasm abound.  
Everything is exotic and quaint.  
Attitude toward host country is generally positive.  
Little is expected of you.

### ***II. INITIAL COUNTRY & CULTURE SHOCK***

- Time frame:** First few weeks; first half of training.
- Characteristics:** Wider exposure to country and culture means more realistic and more mixed reactions.  
Enthusiasm is tempered with frustration.  
Feelings of vulnerability and dependence are common.  
Homesickness is frequent.  
Nothing is routine.  
Limited language ability undermines confidence.  
Close bonds are formed with other trainees.



### ***III. INITIAL ADJUSTMENT***

- Time frame:** Second half of training.
- Characteristics:** Routines are reestablished.
- Some aspects of the country & culture are now seen as normal.
- Adjustment to the physical aspects of the host country is better.
- You are somewhat more self-reliant.
- You are more positive about your ability to function in country.
- Adjustment is to the culture of pre-service training as much as it is to host country culture.

### ***IV. FURTHER CULTURE SHOCK\****

- Time period:** First few months after training; settling-in period.
- Characteristics:** You experience post-training withdrawal symptoms.
- You're adjusting to being on your own in country.
- It's your first experience taking care of yourself in country.
- You're having your first encounters with the work-related aspects of culture, with initial surprises and frustrations.
- You miss daily contact with Americans and HCNs who understand you and your version of the local language.
- You're surprised at still having culture shock to go through (you thought you adjusted during pre-service training).

**V. FURTHER ADJUSTMENT\***

- Time period:** Post settling-in.
- Characteristics:** You're getting used to being on your own.  
 You're better able to take care of yourself.  
 You're making friends in the community.  
 You speak the language better.  
 You're more effective at work because you understand the culture better.

In the underlined space that precedes each of the statements below, put the Roman numeral for the stage of adjustment you think the person was in who made the remark.

- I. Honeymoon
- II. Initial Culture Shock
- III. Initial Adjustment
- IV. Further Culture Shock
- V. Further Adjustment

1. \_\_\_\_ I'm sick of these bugs.
2. \_\_\_\_ I thought I knew this stuff!
3. \_\_\_\_ You call that a toilet?
4. \_\_\_\_ I'd give anything for a meal without rice.
5. \_\_\_\_ These people are all so nice.
6. \_\_\_\_ Homesick? For what?
7. \_\_\_\_ I'm getting used to these toilets, believe it or not.
8. \_\_\_\_ I'm looking forward to actually doing my job.
9. \_\_\_\_ This language actually makes sense once in a while.



6.3

—INSIGHT—

Adjusting to a new country and culture happens over time.

10. \_\_\_\_ I don't believe it! They said I shouldn't jog here.
11. \_\_\_\_ Bugs? What bugs?
12. \_\_\_\_ You know, I actually *prefer* Turkish toilets.
13. \_\_\_\_ I'll never learn this language.
14. \_\_\_\_ Are you kidding? I can't eat curry (or beans) without rice.
15. \_\_\_\_ No one said my job would be like *this*!
16. \_\_\_\_ I never thought my problem would be *too much* free time.
17. \_\_\_\_ I actually prefer soccer to jogging; you meet more people.
18. \_\_\_\_ What a great place!

[For suggested answers and commentary, see page 254.]

*\*In the community-based model of pre-service training, there may be fewer differences between stages III, IV and V in the cycle of adjustment.*





## THE UGLIEST MAN

The rocks rattled and clanked as they rolled down the sloped zinc panels, raising a hell-sent cacophony that made my nerves jangle. I ran outside and chased the kids away, [but they returned, chanting] “*Timoteo, Timoteo, el hombre mas feo*” (Tim, Tim, the ugliest man) over and over again.

This unpleasant greeting set the tone for the first few months in my site. I organized soil conservation meetings that no farmers attended. I was heckled by wiry teenagers while giving presentations in my awful Spanish. With the help of school children, I planted a thousand baby trees around the Santa Rosa soccer field, only to find every single one of them uprooted and overturned a few days later. I had constant diarrhea, lost 20 pounds, and even the simplest tasks were a struggle to complete.

I knew my psyche had been scraped truly raw when one afternoon, coming home from a failed attempt to organize a tree nursery in a distant village, I was taunted by kids along the dusty hill path. It was the ever popular *Timoteo* chant that had quickly become my anthem, as far as the children of Santa Rosa were concerned. I saw red; the next thing I knew, I was chasing the little bastards up a hill waving my machete like a maniac, tears streaming down my cheeks and screaming in English: “I am not ugly, you little \_\_\_\_\_s! I am not ugly!”

—PCV Guatemala

*There comes a day when all this suddenly becomes apparent, all at once. Things are no longer picturesque; they are dirty. No longer quaint but furiously frustrating. And you want like crazy to just get out of there, to go home.*

—PCV Peru

## 6.4—SETTLING IN

In many ways, life after pre-service training is very different from what you adjusted to as a Trainee, especially if your training follows the traditional as opposed to the community-based model. To understand what these differences might be, complete this exercise by checking any of the following statements that are *true* of your *pre-service training*.

*The hardest time is at the beginning, when you first move into your village. Being alone, as the only foreigner, takes some adjustment. No matter how much you love it, there are some days when you've just had it.*

—PCV Sri Lanka

1. ☐ There is a large staff of people, as many as one for every three trainees, whose job it is to look after me.
2. ☐ Most of the host country people I deal with have spent a lot of time before with Americans and are used to how they think and act.
3. ☐ The host country people I deal with realize I don't understand very much about their culture and country and are quite forgiving of me.
4. ☐ Most of the host country people I interact with understand my special way of speaking their language and understand me.
5. ☐ Most of the host country people I interact with speak to me in a special version of their language used for people who are not very fluent.
6. ☐ I spend a lot of my day speaking English.
7. ☐ My day is full, well planned, and tightly scheduled.
8. ☐ I have very little free time.
9. ☐ Other people are taking care of me; I am expected to do very little for myself, so I can concentrate on all the things I have to learn as a trainee.
10. ☐ I spend a lot of my time with other Americans.

As these statements are *not* going to be true of your life *after training*, if you checked all or most of them, then consider the following:

1. What are the implications of the fact that the host country people you have been dealing with use a special language with you and understand your special use of their language?
2. What are the implications of the fact that other people have been looking after you—food shopping, cooking, doing your laundry—and you’ve gotten used to being looked after in this way?
3. What are the implications of the fact that you have gotten used to being around HCNs who already understand Americans?
4. What are the implications of the fact that you may have adjusted to the culture of pre-service training and not to the real culture?

—INSIGHT—

You will have to do some adjusting after your training program ends.

## 6.5—THE LITTLE THINGS

*“Not a single day passed without my painfully experiencing some Turk violating the “natural and logical way” of doing things. At first, it was staring, then it was abrupt “no” answers and arrogance from petty officialdom. Later it was blaring horns, and still later, continual interruptions while talking. Each little violation brought irritation, sometimes anger. Rapidly, these irritations built up into an explosiveness that was too easily provoked. This latent tension marred my stay in Turkey.”*

—PCV Turkey

Can you identify with what this PCV describes? Can you imagine it happening to you? Has it already happened to you?

How can you keep these little things from building up as she describes?



## 6.6—THE FOUR LEVELS OF CULTURAL AWARENESS

As you go through the cycle of adjustment, your awareness of the host country culture naturally increases. This awareness tends to progress through a series of levels, which are described below,\* with each level corresponding to a phase or phases in the cycle of adjustment.

### ***I. UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE***

This has also been called the state of blissful ignorance. At this stage, you are unaware of cultural differences. It does not occur to you that you may be making cultural mistakes or that you may be misinterpreting much of the behavior going on around you. You have no reason not to trust your instincts.

### ***II. CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE***

You now realize that differences exist between the way you and the local people behave, though you understand very little about what these differences are, how numerous they might be, or how deep they might go. You know there's a problem here, but you're not sure about the size of it. You're not so sure of your instincts anymore, and you realize that some things you don't understand. You may start to worry about how hard it's going to be to figure these people out.

### ***III. CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE***

You know cultural differences exist, you know what some of these differences are, and you try to adjust your own behavior accordingly. It doesn't come naturally yet—you have to make a conscious effort to behave in culturally appropriate ways—but you are much more aware of how your behavior is coming across to the local people. You are in the process of replacing old instincts with new ones. You know now that you will be able to figure these people out if you can remain objective.

### ***IV. UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE***

You no longer have to think about what you're doing in order to do the right thing. Culturally appropriate behavior is now second nature to you; you can trust your instincts because they have been reconditioned by the new culture. It takes little effort now for you to be culturally sensitive.

*\*This paradigm is based on work by William Howell.*



6.6

—INSIGHT—

My understanding  
of the local culture  
and ability to  
function effectively  
will evolve over  
time.

In the underlined spaces below, write the Roman numeral(s) for the level(s) of cultural awareness you think the person making the observation is in. Some observations may go in more than one stage.

1.           I understand less than I thought I did.
2.           These people really aren't so different.
3.           There is a logic to how these people behave.
4.           Living here is like walking on eggshells.
5.           These people have no trouble understanding me.
6.           It's possible to figure these people out if you work at it.
7.           I wonder what they think of me.
8.           I know what they think of me.
9.           It's nice to be able to relax and be myself.
10.          I'll never figure these people out.
11.          Why did people say this would be so difficult?
12.          There's hope for me here.

[See page 254 for suggested answers.]

## 6.7—ATTITUDES TOWARD CULTURAL DIFFERENCE—FROM ETHNOCENTRISM TO ETHNORELATIVISM

In this activity you look at another aspect of adjustment: attitudes toward cultural difference. As your awareness of culture increases, your attitude toward cultural difference likewise evolves. The model summarized below by Dr. Milton Bennett describes this journey from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism:

### **ETHNOCENTRISM**

#### **STAGE I—DENIAL**

People in this stage don't really believe in cultural differences; they think people who are behaving differently don't know any better. These people tend to impose their own value system on others, knowing that they're "right" and these other people are "confused." They believe the way they behave is natural and normal and the way other people behave, if it's different, is wrong and misguided. These people are not threatened by cultural differences because they simply don't accept them. Generally, people in this stage have had limited contact with people different from themselves and thus have no experiential basis for believing in other cultures.

#### **STAGE II—DEFENSE**

These people have had an indication that their value system may not be absolute—and they're not happy about it. Unlike people in the denial stage, those in the defense stage believe in cultural difference and have accepted the reality of it, but they are deeply threatened by it and believe that other cultures are decidedly inferior. "This may be how things are, but it is not the way things *should* be." They know better than to try to impose their values on others, but they view other cultures negatively and prefer to have little or no contact with those who are different.

#### **STAGE III—MINIMIZATION**

People at this stage are still threatened by difference—that's why they try to minimize it—but they don't think that those who are different are inferior, misguided, or otherwise unfortunate. Rather, they believe that the differences are real but not especially deep or significant, that as different as people are, they are still more similar than dissimilar. We are

different on the surface, but underneath we share many of the same values and beliefs. If people in the denial stage deny difference and people in the defense stage accept but demonize difference, then people in the minimization stage try to trivialize difference.

## **ETHNORELATIVISM**

### ***STAGE IV—ACCEPTANCE***

These people accept differences as being deep and legitimate. They know other people are genuinely different from them and accept the inevitability of other value systems and behavioral norms. They still find some of these behaviors hard to deal with or accept, but they are not threatened by them nor do they judge them as wrong or bad. They do not normally adopt many of these behaviors for themselves nor necessarily adjust their own behaviors to be more culturally sensitive, but they have a more tolerant and sympathetic attitude. They are neutral, not positive, about differences. Difference is a fact of life.

### ***STAGES V & VI—ADAPTATION AND INTEGRATION***

In these stages, behavior as well as attitudes change. These people have gone from being neutral about difference to being positive. They not only accept cultural differences, but are willing and able to adjust their own behavior to conform to different norms. They are able to empathize with people from different cultures. In many ways, they become what is known as bicultural or multicultural, effortlessly adjusting their behavior to suit the culture of the people they're with, "style switching," in other words. They do not give up their own or birth culture's values and beliefs, but they do integrate aspects of other cultures into it. In the integration stage, certain aspects of the other culture or cultures become a part of their identity.



## **PART ONE**

For each of these stages, answer the following questions.

### ***I. DENIAL***

1. Can you think of anyone you know who is in this stage?
2. Have you ever exhibited any of the behaviors associated with this stage? If yes, briefly describe.

### ***II. DEFENSE***

1. Can you think of anyone you know who is in this stage?
2. Have you ever exhibited any of the behaviors associated with this stage? If yes, briefly describe.

### ***III—MINIMIZATION***

1. Can you think of anyone you know who is in this stage?

6.7

*Adaptation comes out of encounters with novelty that may seem chaotic. In trying to adapt, we may need to deviate from cherished values, behaving in ways we have barely glimpsed, seizing on fragmentary clues.*

—**Mary Katherine Bateson**  
***Peripheral Visions***

2. Have you ever exhibited any of the behaviors associated with this stage? If yes, briefly describe.

**IV—ACCEPTANCE**

1. Can you think of anyone you know who is in this stage?
2. Have you ever exhibited any of the behaviors associated with this stage? If yes, briefly describe.

**V & VI—ADAPTATION AND INTEGRATION**

1. Can you think of anyone you know who is in this stage?
2. Have you ever exhibited any of the behaviors associated with this stage? If yes, briefly describe.

- 🌀 In general, what stage do you think you are in now? Why do you think so?

—INSIGHT—

My attitudes toward cultural differences will change over time.

- 🌀 How did you move from the stage or stages you were in before to the stage you are in now?

- 🌀 Consider for a moment two or three PCVs you have met in this country and know fairly well. What stages are they in? Are they all in the same stage? What do you think accounts for any differences?

**PART TWO**

Reread Jan’s “Dear Friends” letter at the beginning of this chapter. At various points in this letter, Jan describes certain behaviors or attitudes that clearly place her in one or the other of all six stages outlined on pages 201 and 202. In the exercise below, you are asked to match each stage with a paragraph from her letter:

- I. Denial** ..... Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_
- II. Defense** ..... Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_
- III. Minimization** ..... Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_
- IV. Acceptance** ..... Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_
- V. & VI. Adaptation & Integration** ..... Paragraph # \_\_\_\_\_

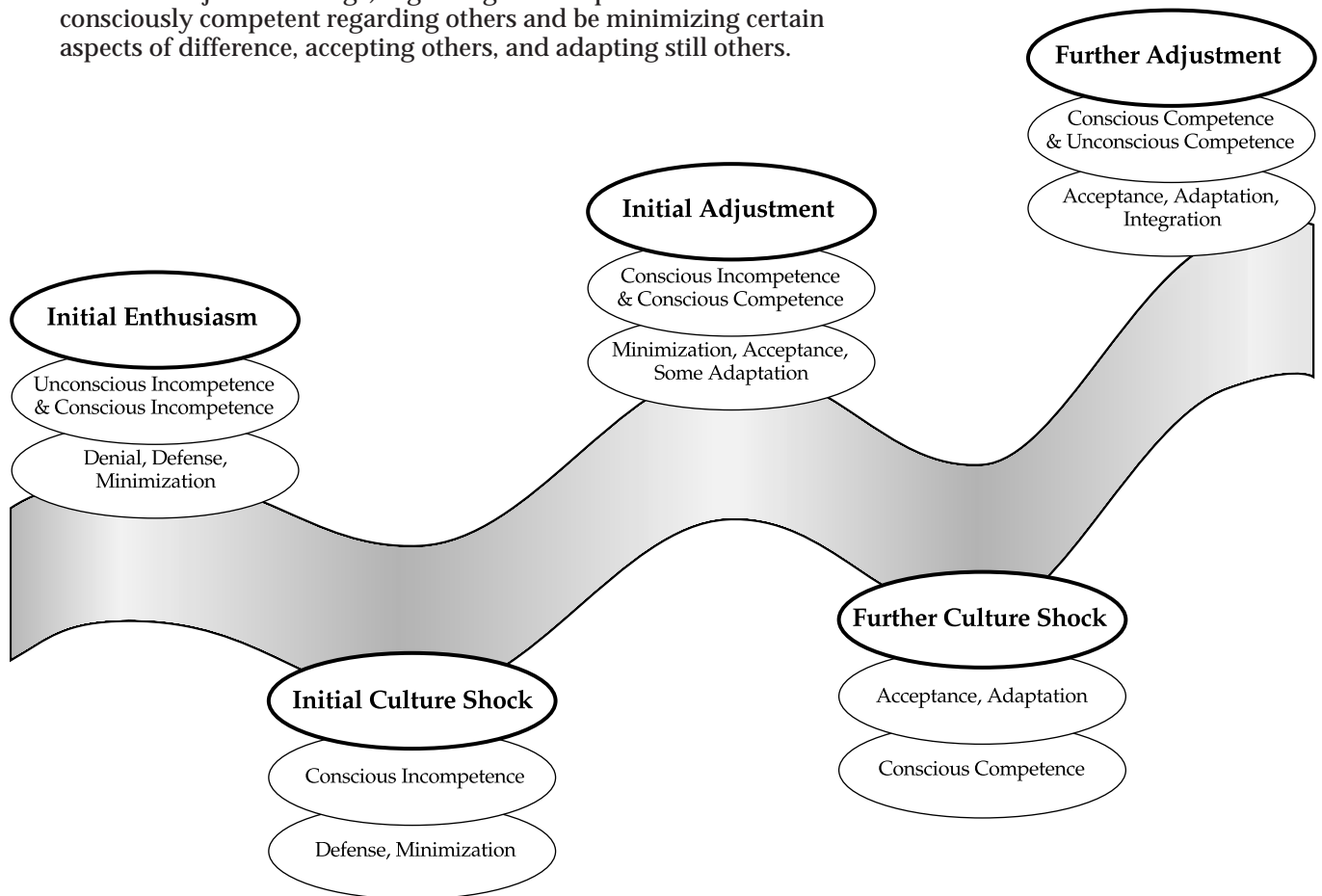
*[Turn to page 256 for suggested answers.]*



## A DIAGRAM OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

All of the previous exercises have been examining one or another of three aspects of cultural adjustment—the adjustment cycle, the levels of cultural awareness, and the attitude toward cultural difference. Although examined separately, they are all features of the same phenomenon. The graphic below shows you how these three models or dimensions of adjustment fit together.

For certain stages of the cycle, more than one level of awareness or attitude toward difference may be listed. For certain aspects of the culture, the PCV or trainee may be at one level, and at another level for other aspects. For example, you might be consciously incompetent (in the initial adjustment stage) regarding some aspects of the culture but consciously competent regarding others and be minimizing certain aspects of difference, accepting others, and adapting still others.



## 6.8—THE TOUGHEST PART

*“I had mistakenly expected the toughest part to be getting used to the physical conditions, but I soon realized the hardest part is the emotional adjustment. Getting used to the slow pace of life, the isolation, and living in a fishbowl—these all take time.”*

—PCV New Guinea

How do you think you will adjust to the slow pace of life?

How will you adjust to living in a fishbowl?

## 6.9—COPING STRATEGIES

Living and working in another country, especially in the beginning, is a series of stressful events, interspersed with occasional periods of calm. For the most part, this stress is the result of the myriad adjustments you have to make, from the trivial to the profound, as you do the following:

- ❧ learn new ways of doing things;
- ❧ learn to do things you've never done before;
- ❧ stop doing things you can no longer do;
- ❧ adjust to an entirely new set of people;
- ❧ learn to live and work in an environment where you speak a foreign language;
- ❧ get used to various new and unusual phenomena;
- ❧ learn to live without all kinds of familiar phenomena.

Everyone has experienced stress before and has developed strategies for coping with it. This exercise is designed to remind you of some of your strategies and to help you think of others you may find useful in your new setting. Under the five categories listed on the next page, write your ideas and suggestions for what you can do to cope with stress.

Notice that “Ways I Can Improve My Language Skills” is listed as its own category. Strictly speaking, improving your language skills is simply one more coping technique that could fall under the category of Things I Can Do On My Own, but it is such an important technique, with so many specific possibilities, that it has been given a place of its own. An example is under each category.



**THINGS I CAN DO WITH OTHER PEOPLE**

*Invite people over*

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**THINGS I CAN DO ON MY OWN**

*Read*

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**THINGS I CAN REMIND MYSELF OF**

*This will pass*

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### ***WAYS I CAN IMPROVE MY LANGUAGE SKILLS***

*Talk to children*

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### ***THINGS I HAVE ALREADY DONE HERE IN-COUNTRY***

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### ***SUGGESTIONS***

Here, for your reference, is a list of coping strategies compiled from suggestions of PCVs from around the world:

#### ***THINGS I CAN DO WITH OTHER PEOPLE***

- Invite people over
- Go and visit someone
- Telephone someone
- Go to a movie, cafe, etc. with someone
- Play a game with someone
- Participate in a team sport
- Volunteer my services to a needy cause

*Stress affects everyone at one point or another and is indeed the biggest health problem. But it's always worth it. The frustrations, disappointments and heartaches are made up for by the fascinations, euphorias, and revelations.*

—PCV Papua New Guinea

### ***THINGS I CAN DO ON MY OWN***

Read	Play cards
Listen to music	Cook a meal
Take a walk	Meditate
Go to a movie	Write in my journal
Go to a restaurant or cafe	Go shopping
Exercise	Listen to the radio
Garden	Take some pictures
Call home	Look at photos
Write letters	Make a tape to send home
Play an instrument	Take a ride
Solve puzzles	Watch birds
Practice a craft	Take a trip
Watch television	Watch people
Study language	Deep breathing

### ***THINGS I CAN REMIND MYSELF OF***

This will pass.  
 It's not the end of the world.  
 I came here to experience a challenge.  
 I've been through worse than this.  
 It's natural to feel down from time to time.  
 No pain; no gain.  
 It's not just me.  
 Things didn't always go well back home either.  
 I have taken on a lot; I should expect to feel overwhelmed from time to time.

### ***WAYS I CAN IMPROVE MY LANGUAGE SKILLS***

Talk to children  
 Talk to older people (who have more time and patience!)  
 Go to a cafe and eavesdrop  
 Listen to the radio or TV  
 Join a club or sports team  
 Participate in some other kind of group activity  
 Study a language textbook  
 Do exercises in a language textbook  
 Listen to language tapes  
 Ask a host country informant to tape record key language phrases that I can practice.

## 6.10—CAN I STILL BE ME?

The Peace Corps experience has a number of built-in dilemmas, but none more significant than the question of how one adjusts to a different culture and still maintains one's own values, identity and self-respect. On occasion, the behavior expected of you by the local culture may conflict with your own personal values and beliefs. Do you adopt the behavior and think less of yourself, or do you resist it and risk being considered insensitive? Fortunately, in many cases, it is not an either/or choice, but when it seems to be, what do you do?

Reading, reflecting and commenting on the incidents below, which could happen in any culture, may help you handle such situations. You also may want to talk with one or two PCVs to find out what they have done in similar circumstances, how they managed to be culturally sensitive *and* true to themselves at the same time.

### **HOLDING BACK?**

You are a female PCV working as an environmental educator in a government ministry. You work under an older host country man who is much less technically competent than you. At staff meetings, you routinely outshine this man, which has begun to cause him acute discomfort. Today he has asked you not to speak at these meetings and especially not to contradict or disagree with him when he speaks, even (and especially) if what he says is incorrect. What should you do?



### **DRAWINGS**

Part of your job as a PCV urban planner is to review and sign off on staff draftsmen's drawings before they are sent on to higher management. Your division has just hired a new draftsman who is incompetent but is a cousin of the head of this division. Tomorrow you will be

reviewing the first of his drawings, and this afternoon your supervisor has called you into her office. She says you can expect these drawings to be of an unacceptable quality but asks you to approve them anyway. She doesn't want any trouble with her boss or to unnecessarily embarrass the young man. How would you respond?

*I have realized that for survival,  
I need to be more assertive, but  
only to a certain point. Some  
things are completely unimportant  
and I can let them go, but I  
have also obtained the courage  
to speak out if I am feeling  
violated or taken advantage of.*

—PCV Guinea-Bissau

### **FRIENDLY ADVICE**

You teach school in a rural part of your country. You eat your meals at a local tea shop run by a low-caste family with whom you have become very friendly. Today the headmaster of your school has approached you and advised you to stop eating at this place. He says it hurts your social standing and indirectly hurts the reputation of his school for you to be seen so often in the company of untouchables. What do you do?



### **GOOD NEWS**

You have been conducting an evaluation of a year-old pilot agricultural extension project. During the course of your study, you have discovered a number of irregularities, including serious misuse of funds, and, in general, have found that the project has been almost a complete failure. In the report you just finished, you have recommended that no further funds be spent. This morning your supervisor has come to you and pointed out that the state senator for this district, who is running for re-election, needs some good news to jump start his campaign. A favorable report on the project would be very useful, not just to the candidate, but to your boss and, ultimately, to the organization you work for. He asks you to rewrite your report. What do you do?

*Since you left, nothing is like  
yesterday. We kept your  
memories in our heart because  
you taught us with love. And  
when you give love, you receive  
the same thing—love.*

### **EXTROVERT**

You are an outgoing, gregarious woman, interested in people and naturally friendly. Today your boss has called you into his office and explained that your friendliness has been remarked upon and is causing misunderstanding in certain quarters. The women who work in the office think you are acting flirtatious, even loose, and the men have begun to question your professionalism. Your boss asks you if you can “tone it down” a bit. You are hurt and surprised; this is just the way you are. What do you say or do?

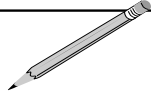
**—Letter from HCN  
to PCV Venezuela**

### **AWAY FROM HOME**

You are a community development worker, helping install an irrigation system in the provincial capital. You, your host country supervisor, and a team of eight technicians have been living here for three weeks in one of the local guesthouses. Away from their families, these men have shown a side of their personality you have not seen before. They start drinking as soon as they get back from the site, about ten miles from town, and at least once a week they visit the town's red light district. They always invite you to these "events," but as you neither drink nor care to visit prostitutes, you have been declining. You can see that your consistent refusals are beginning to create a gulf between you and them. What do you say or do?



## JOURNAL ENTRY 6



What do you think will be especially difficult for you to adjust to in your host country? What has been hardest so far for you to get used to? What are some of the enjoyable aspects of being in your host country that are going to compensate for some of the difficulties? What qualities do you think are important for adjusting to life as a PCV? Do you have these qualities?

