



CELEBRATING  
DIFFERENCES™

M A U R I T I U S™



FranklinCovey™

*Our ability to reach unity in  
diversity will be the beauty  
and test of our civilization.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

**SAMPLE**

## **Suggested Uses for Celebrating Differences: Mauritius**

The *Mauritius* videotape and this Discussion Leader's Guide are designed for the following applications:

### ***Optimizing Teams***

The essence of synergy is valuing differences. This means that people respect differences and view them as opportunities for learning. Other people's opinions, viewpoints, perspectives, talents, and gifts are valuable when seeking solutions. These differences enable people to discover and produce things together that they are much less likely to discover and produce individually.

*Mauritius* illustrates how an island nation with a highly diverse population values differences as strengths. The Discussion Leader's Guide provides application exercises and discussions that facilitate the application of the lessons taught by *Mauritius* to the challenges faced by teams and organizations.

### ***Leadership and Management Development***

How do I as a leader view differences, disagreements, dissent, and controversy? The answer to this question will have a significant effect on my overall effectiveness. *Mauritius* provides a role model for this vital leadership competency.



### ***Total Quality Management***

The power of total quality programs is subject to the limitations of the competence and character of the individuals who create and implement them. Total organizational quality can occur only when the unique strengths, gifts, talents, and opinions of each individual are brought to bear in the quest to create total quality. A first-hand example of this character and competence is evidenced on the island of Mauritius.

### ***Interpersonal Skills Training***

Our basic beliefs and assumptions underlie and affect our ability to acquire more effective interpersonal skills. *Mauritius* enables groups and individuals to examine these beliefs in a nonthreatening way.

### ***Problem-Solving Skills***

Synergistic problem solving is vital to the long-term success of any team or organization. *Mauritius* provides a mind-set for approaching problems in a less confrontational and more cooperative way.

**Imagine a small East African country...**



- that is among the most densely populated nations of the world and in the 1960s was forecast to have a population far beyond the rate of sustainability;
- that is a volcanic island with an area of 720 square miles—one-tenth the size of New Jersey or Wales;
- that only recently attained its independence;
- where there are no mineral resources, where the people cannot produce enough food to feed themselves, where in 1965 it was said that “no other country in the world is so dependent on the export of a single product” (sugar was 99 percent of all exports), and where the nearest major market is 6,000 miles away;
- where the population consists of 750,000 Indians; 300,000 Creoles; 30,000 Chinese; and 20,000 Caucasians, and where English is the official language, but where French, Creole, Patois, Bhojpuri, Urdu, Telegu, Tamil, and Chinese are also commonly spoken;
- where Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and several minor religions are all actively practiced by their followers;
- where in 1965 tension between the Hindus and the Creoles was so high that a state of emergency lasted for three months, and where only six weeks before attaining its independence, British troops were flown in from Malaysia to quell rioting.



Considering events in the world today, what would you expect this country to be like now? Would it be safe? Would you see frequent outbreaks of ethnic violence? What about poverty and malnutrition? Would you want to live in this country?

This tiny nation is Mauritius. An isolated island east of South Africa, it is anything but what one would expect given the conditions of just a few years ago. Consider the following:

- The absolute poverty and starvation common to many Third-World countries does not exist.
- There is a 98-percent literacy rate.

- It is the only one of 39 sub-Saharan countries with more than 90 percent of its children completing five years of school.
- The police do not carry guns.
- Workers are imported to fill a labor shortfall.
- It is one of the few functioning democracies in Africa.
- Muslims celebrate Divali, a Hindu holiday; Hindus celebrate Id al-Fitr, a Muslim holiday; and everybody celebrates Christmas—the people live together in peace.

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As Mauritians describe their society, such words as rainbow, garden, and bouquet of flowers are frequently used to describe the island's synergistic diversity. One tells of an influential statement made by Monsignor Bargeau, a cardinal on the island: "He says that we should consider each group, racial or cultural, as a fruit: an apple, a pear, a mango. And we want to make Mauritius not a marmalade, where we mix up everything and grind everything, and we have one marmalade with one (I don't know what) taste. But we would like to have a fruit salad, where in a fruit salad each one retains its individual flavor and taste."

### *It's not "I" or "me." It's "us."*

Perhaps the isolation of the island has helped to cultivate cooperation. In Mauritius, people cannot simply walk away from their problems—they have to work them out. In such a close society, "You can't afford to be naughty," as one put it. The fragility of the economy also plays a role. The Mauritians realize that everyone must cooperate to make it work. A statement by educator Horace Mann captures the attitude of those who are not able to exercise



**Q: What skills get people promoted?**

**A: Not counting sucking up? The best way to success is to look, act, and dress like the person promoting you. I don't see that changing anytime soon.**

**From an interview with Scott Adams, creator of the comic strip "Dilbert," reported in the August 8, 1995, Wall Street Journal.**

the discipline of Mauritians: "In vain do they talk of happiness who never subdued an impulse in obedience to a principle. He who never sacrificed a present to a future good or a personal to a general one can speak of happiness only as the blind speak of color."

One Mauritian said, "Every community had its share in building up this country. Every community must also take a share out of what is being done in this country now. . . . A team of persons, a family, a nation, cannot live in a better world if they cannot live together. I think the Mauritian people understand that."

Mauritius is not a utopia and faces serious challenges to its way of life in the years ahead. As an export-dependent country, the island's economy, people, and culture could be drastically altered by a small decision by a large market. Some concerned observers note that the material fruits of Mauritian success will corrode the base upon which its prosperity has been built. The problem is especially visible among the youth, who have inherited the prosperity without the hard work and effort that made it possible.

#### ***Transforming challenges into opportunities***

Stresses upon family life are being felt as never before. One Mauritian noted, "Proper socialization [of children] is not taking place, and the fast food culture is rapidly spreading. Culturally, children are finding their own distinctive values. People are losing their Mauritian identity and replacing it with a quest for material gratification."

The answer to these and other challenges lies within the Mauritians themselves. If the Mauritians are to expand or even maintain the quality of life they have created, they need to follow the principles upon which it is based. If any recent society has demonstrated the power of working together to overcome tremendous challenges, it has been Mauritius.



Positive synergy is one plus one equals three or more. The fruits of synergy include improved products, services, and relationships—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Positive synergy results in creative cooperation that produces outcomes no one could have ever achieved alone.

***Creating complementary teams instead of clones***

Compromise is one plus one equals one and a half—it consists of both giving and taking. The communication isn't defensive or protective, angry or manipulative; it is honest, genuine, and respectful, but it isn't creative or synergistic.

Negative synergy is one plus one equals one-half. Negative synergy occurs in many organizations in which people struggle to deal with differences while still maintaining positive, productive relationships. Often the negative dynamics in their relationships kill creative potential. They wonder how to change those relationships to achieve more creative, innovative thinking and positive results.

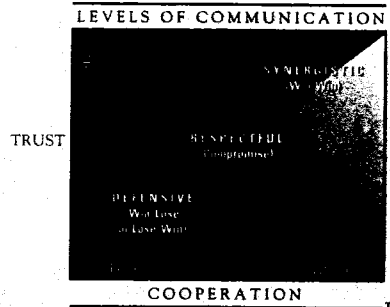
The natural tendency in entrepreneuring is to clone people instead of to create complementary teams. Cloning produces negative energy because it inhibits the full expression of a person's talents and gifts. On the other hand, building a complementary team—which has one goal but many different roles, perceptions, methods, and approaches—enables the full expression of talents and releases positive energy. The key is to stop cloning others and to start valuing differences.

***What you want to hear vs. what you need to know***

Why is the tendency to clone others so prevalent and so strong? Because cloning gives leaders a false sense of security. When people think like you, act like you, speak like you, refer to you, quote you, dress like you, and groom like you, you feel you're being validated as a leader. You feel that you have value because other people value being like you. But they're telling you what you want to hear, not what you need to know. You may achieve artificial harmony, conformity, or uniformity, but you won't achieve real creativity, synergy, unity, and security.



This diagram illustrates how closely trust is related to different levels of communication.



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The lowest level of communication that results from low-trust situations is characterized by defensiveness, protectiveness, and often legalistic language, which covers all of the bases by identifying qualifiers and escape clauses in the event things go sour. Such communication is win-lose or lose-lose. It isn't effective, and it creates further reasons to defend and protect.

The middle level of communication is characterized by respect. This is the level where fairly mature people interact. They have respect for each other, but they want to avoid the possibility of confrontation, so they communicate politely but not empathically. They might understand each other intellectually, but they don't look deeply at the perspectives and assumptions underlying their own positions, which inhibits their ability to be open to new possibilities. Creativity suffers as a result.

#### *The infinite value of valuing differences*

The synergy that results from high trust produces solutions that are better than any originally proposed. In addition, each party genuinely enjoys the creative process.

There are some circumstances in which synergy may not be achievable. Even in these circumstances, a sincere effort will usually result in a more effective compromise.

Economic necessity is teaching many organizations to be champions of diversity and to value differences. These principles are vital to bottom-line performance in the global marketplace. Senior executives are realizing that nothing kills success more quickly than being incapacitated by limited data and narrow thinking. They see that sameness is not oneness, uniformity is not unity. The new ideal is the complementary team in which unity is achieved by people who have different talents—a team that has one vision and purpose but is comprised of people with many different roles, perceptions, capacities, and duties.

When spider webs  
unite, they can tie  
up a lion.

*Ethiopian Proverb*

Unless organizations have a transcendent purpose and a shared value system, differences become negative and counterproductive—not positive and synergistic—simply because there isn't unity on fundamental issues. If there is unity on this level, people can tolerate differences in other areas and begin to create positive synergy.

If we accept this principle, why don't we practice it more often? The primary reason we often fail to achieve synergy in our projects and relationships is that our personal security is threatened by differences. Our security is fragile if it is based on the need to be right.

***Don't take it personally.***

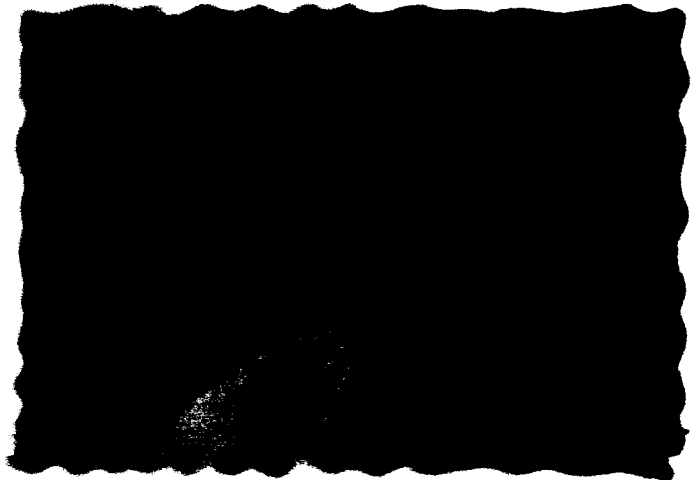
At the root of the ability to fully value and celebrate differences in others is having your own personal security tied to a shared vision, a common purpose, and integrity based on correct principles. If your security is based on these things, you can improvise, adapt, change, and easily admit if you are wrong because you're not taking the situation personally. You can then be positive and supportive.

Every leader and entrepreneur needs to have an inspiring vision and transcendent purpose. Instead of being dependent on his or her own perceptions or methods, he or she must value differences as people meet to discuss more effective ways of doing things.

***We can't afford not to have differences.***

Strength truly does lie in differences. These aren't just words, they are moral imperatives for those who really want to solve problems in entirely new ways. Go for synergy. The moment someone disagrees with you, say: "Good. You see it differently."

When we achieve a transcendent purpose, a common vision, and a shared mission in our relationships, differences will become strengths. Without them, we'll be limited by incomplete data and partial perspectives.



- Synergy means the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- The essence of synergy is to value differences when solving problems—to respect differences, build on strengths, and compensate for weaknesses.
- Recognize that other people's opinions, viewpoints, and perspectives are helpful when seeking solutions.
- Valuing differences lets people discover things together that they are much less likely to discover individually.
- All parties gain more insight, enthusiasm, knowledge, and growth by working together.
- When we synergize, we look at a problem, understand needs, and work to create synergy to meet those needs.
- Because people are limited to their personal knowledge and experiences, they need other people's perspectives to expand their understanding and gain a more balanced, objective view.

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## I. Preparation

- Provide paper and pencils for note-taking.
- Check to see that the VCR and television or monitor are working properly.
- Make sound and color adjustments, if needed, before starting the session.
- Ensure that all participants can clearly see the television or monitor.
- Dim the lights when playing the video.
- Minimize distractions in the room.
- Ask viewers to remain seated throughout the video presentation (leaving the room or moving about detracts from the video's effect).

## II. Introduce the video

We will now watch a two-part video that takes place in a remote corner of the world where differences between people are many and varied. Dr. Stephen R. Covey, a noted authority on leadership, will introduce the video by asking you to imagine a small country, which actually exists, with some of the following characteristics.

### Display overhead transparency

I would like you to imagine a country...

- that is among the most densely populated nations of the world and in the 1960s was forecast to have a population far beyond the rate of sustainability;
- that only recently attained its independence;
- where the people cannot produce enough food to feed themselves;
- where in 1965 it was said that "no other country in the world is so dependent on the export of a single product" (sugar was 99 percent of all exports);
- where the nearest major market is 6,000 miles away;
- where the population consists of 750,000 Indians; 300,000 Creoles; 30,000 Chinese; and 20,000 Caucasians;
- where Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and several minor religions are all actively practiced by their followers.

### III. Show the video (26 minutes)

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### IV. Discuss and apply lessons from the video

Immediately following the video, distribute participant workbooks and ask participants to individually reflect upon and write their responses to the question on page 4. Instruct them not to speak to each other during this period.

#### Individual Application Exercise (Participant Workbook, page 4)

- *What impresses you about the Mauritian people?*

Ask participants to share their responses with the class.

#### Group Discussion Questions (Participant Workbook, page 5)

Ask participants to divide into groups of three or four to discuss the following questions. Ask each group to select a spokesperson to report the group's responses to the class following their discussions.

1. *What enables the citizens of Mauritius to value differences?*
2. *List the differences that exist among the members of your small group. List more than gender and ethnic differences.*
3. *Comment on the value of these differences. Why are they important? What benefits do they create?*
4. *How can your work group or organization apply the lessons learned from Mauritius to increase your effectiveness?*
5. *What would you have to do within your organization to more fully value differences?*

After these discussions, reconvene the class and invite the spokesperson from each group to share his or her group's observations with the class. Ask spokespersons to avoid repeating what has already been reported.

## Individual Application Exercise (Participant Workbook, page 6)

Ask participants to write their responses to the following questions:

1. *When someone disagrees with you, how do you tend to respond?*
2. *What could you do to improve your ability to value differences?*

### **Consider:**

- *How well do you listen to truly understand the other person's point of view?*
- *How and to what extent are you influenced by the other person's:*

*—race?*

*—gender?*

*—religion?*

*—organizational position?*

*—socioeconomic status?*

- *What other characteristics of people or situations influence your effectiveness in valuing differences?*
3. *What are some of your strengths in valuing differences?*
  4. *What insights did you gain from the Mauritius video that could enable you to practice synergy with those who are different from you?*



Invite participants to share their insights from the Individual Application Exercise with the class.

Conclude by sharing an example of how valuing differences has had a positive effect within your own professional or personal life, and encourage participants to make a sincere effort to think and act more synergistically.

### ***Summarizing Statements***

The following statements relating to valuing differences may be useful in summarizing and concluding this session:

- You don't have to take insults personally. You can sidestep negative energy; you can look for the good in others and utilize that good to improve your point of view and enlarge your perspective.
- You can exercise the courage to be open—to express your ideas, feelings, and experiences—in a way that will encourage other people to also be open.
- You can value the differences in other people. When someone disagrees with you, you can say: "Good. You see it differently." You don't have to agree with them; you can simply affirm them. And you can seek to understand.
- When you see only two alternatives—yours and the "wrong" one—you can look for a synergistic Third Alternative." There's almost always a Third Alternative, and if you adopt a win-win frame of mind and really seek to understand, you usually can find a solution that will be better for everyone concerned.