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## ***CULTURAL SENSITIVITY URGED***

by James S. Tyree - Albany Democrat-Herald

Developing cultural sensitivity helps not only individuals, but also the Nation, a lecturer said Friday at Linn-Benton Community College.

Phillip Walker, an actor and a lecturer on cultural affairs, said cultural unity is necessary for American to survive.

"This is the greatest importance of multi-cultural sensitivity," Walker said. "Look at the Soviet Union. This time last year that society existed. It was a divided society, this Soviet Union. Now, it doesn't exist."

"Our country is primed to be divided because we already are," Walker said. "We're all in our own groups, in our own little boxes. All we need is someone with charisma to come along and drive that wedge [between us]. In a way, I like the [former] Soviet Union because I no longer have to prove it [my point]."

At the individual level, Walker said, being sensitive about the other sex and of people with other ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds is the "humane, just and right thing to do," but added there are other benefits.

Cultural sensitivity can help those in the job market, especially in the Southwest and the Southeast, where the Nation is growing fastest economically.

"But this will even help in Oregon," Walker said. "Why? Because everybody is different, and you'll need to get along with them."

Walker said cultural sensitivity should apply to people different in sex, economic status, physical and mental capabilities, sexual preference, [etc.] but spoke mainly about cultural sensitivity to race.

"The English culture - - you know those people off the Mayflower - - is taught as the primary culture and everything else is ethnic," he said. "The truth of the matter is, we're all ethnic, English people too"

Walker spoke on a six-part method of increasing one's sensitivity to other cultures. The first, he said, is realizing everyone raised in America is a racist.

"There's nothing wrong with being a racist," Walker said. "I don't beat myself across the head about it, because it's ingrained in my culture. The question is deciding what to do about it from this moment forward."

Walker said admitting racism, no matter how small it may be within an individual, is necessary before improving relations with others.

"When was the last time you fixed something you didn't know was broken?" Walker asked. "If I don't know I'm a racist, I can't work on it."

Walker's next step was "walk a mile in his shoes." Before saying or doing something, imagine how it would feel with the situation reversed.

Walker also said to watch for communication blocks, caused by phrases with demeaning overtones. "[For example] the phrase 'you people' denotes someone looking down upon you," Walker said. "Or how about a woman at work talking with her supervisor, and they're going on and he says, 'Well honey.' In her mind, all conversation stops because she's dwelling on that remark."

Walker said there are two ways to tell whether someone has stumbled across a block - - the offended person freezes with a blank stare, and/or the person becomes suddenly quiet.

Walker said appreciation and empathy for others is the goal. Trying to understand people from other backgrounds will lead only to frustration.

"The only way to understand being a woman in America is by being a woman in America," he said. "And there's no way you would know how it is growing up as a Black boy on the South Side of Chicago like I did."

One must trust that people with different experiences know what they're talking about and accept it."

Walker also urged people to let their voices be known when they are in the minority and to react to racism or sexism even when they are among the majority.

Walker tours with his one-man Black history play, Can I Speak For You Brother? and has acted in several movies. He has lectured on cultural sensitivity at more than 500 colleges during 15 years.

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