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Guest speaker addresses multi-cultural communication

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by Cartha Neher - Staff Writer

Phillip E Walker, national multi-cultural lecturer, spoke last Thursday about cultural sensitivity. Walker emphasized that a well-rounded education must include multi-cultural communication. "If you're going to get a true education, this is a subject area that must be dealt with," he said.

Walker proposed the question of why we should be culturally sensitive. He noted that a typical answer is that it's the humane thing to do. But, he says, that's not enough to motivate us to action. The things that will propel us to become culturally sensitive are the economy and trying to survive in the job market and because "you get what you give." He clarified this adage by relating the potential of cultural diversity as a valuable American resource.

We all deal with people of different races, cultures and philosophies. In order to communicate effectively we must, according to Walker, learn to see all the world's activities as culture and realize that everyone's culture is as important as our own.

Walker presented six techniques to use to become sensitive. The first of which is admitting our racism, because "you can't solve a problem that's not identified." He pointed out that you can't grow up in America and not be racist.

Next, he suggested walking a mile in the other person's shoes. "Ask yourself, how you would feel in the same situation," he said. Then he recommended learning how to recognize and diffuse communication blocks, which he identified as certain offensive phrases. When a communication block is thrown out, the offended person will either freeze or cease communication until the blocks are diffused.

Then we should "stand up and be counted." He stressed that one should not be afraid to point out insensitive statements and slurs to others who use them.

Finally, strive for sensitivity not understanding, because only through direct experience can we truly understand. But we can always be sensitive, according to Walker.

He indicated that one can never fully understand another person. To drive his point across he used the humorous analogy of not being able to understand PMS. "I can never understand PMS, but I can be sensitive to it," he said.

In his conclusion, Walker urged those in attendance not to be frustrated by low turn out, but to remember that multicultural sensitive to others is a slow process.

Walker has recently been appointed to the National Advisory Committee for the Association of American Cultures Leadership 2000 Project.

He is also a multicultural advisor to the Western Alliance for Arts Administrators plus has acted in movies, including "Peggy Sue Got Married," and "Howard the Duck."

www.MulticulturalWorkshop.com

African American Drama Company

Thirty East Julian Suite #218, San Jose, CA 95112-4076

☎ (415) 378-0064 cell

✉ DRAMART@comcast.net

