



# Extension Connection

Monthly Highlights – September 2013

- [What is Parenthetical?](#)
- [Cultural Awareness](#)

## What is Parenthetical?

Are you interested in learning more about what makes your tween or teen tick? Would you like the opportunity to interact with other parents who have some of the same challenges and questions as you do? Check out [myparenthetical.com](http://myparenthetical.com), an online site offered by the University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension for parents of children between the ages of 10-16. *Parenthetical* is a combination website, blog and social network. The site provides information and discussion on a range of topics of interest to parents with children in their emerging teen years, as well as opportunities for support from other parents experiencing many of the same needs and issues. Posts include subjects like parent-child conflict, discipline and limit setting, middle school romantic and peer relationships, the challenges of school achievement and much more. *Parenthetical* is available online 24/7 and parents can participate from any web-accessible device. Family Living Educator Shelley Tidemann has been marketing the use of this new approach of providing parent education to busy parents of pre-teens and teenagers in Fond du Lac County. The *Parenthetical* website and opportunities for interaction from the site have been placed on the Fond du Lac County UW-Extension webpage and Fond du Lac County UWEX Facebook page.

## Cultural Awareness

In July, Diana Hammer Tscheschlok attended the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, OR, with two other colleagues from UW-Extension. Her session on *Foundations of Intercultural Communication* gave her these ideas for incorporating awareness of culture into the workplace and other group work settings. Here are some highlights.

- **Culture** was used broadly in this session to describe many aspects of a person beyond the obvious physical differences we have. Culture includes communication styles, educational background, work experiences, personality, values, religion, family status, etc. The better we know the people around us, the better we are able to understand how all of these dimensions come together in the individual to influence their thinking and behavior. We also listen more to people we know in the workplace. The more people we get to know, the more input we will have into our decisions.
- We can help others understand our intentions when we **describe the purpose of our actions ahead of time**. For example, “In this job evaluation, I want to give you tools to become a more effective employee.” Taking this step first may avoid unnecessary consternation on the part of the other person and you when the person doesn’t respond the way you expect.
- **We can’t stop our reactions, but we can delay them**. Everyone makes judgments about other people and events within milliseconds of seeing a stimulus. This is how our brain works. If we practice becoming more

aware of our reactions, we can examine them internally before acting on them. “Is what I’m hearing and seeing really the case?”

- **Assume positive intent of the other person.** Sometimes we feel offended by something another person does, so slowing down our reaction can help avoid making the situation worse. Find out what they meant to achieve by the behavior you saw. Explain what that meant to you when you saw it. Don’t jump to a negative interpretation without getting more facts.
- We all tend to prefer people who are like us, and this evidences itself in promotions, in team assignments, in who we socialize with at work. This often leads to teams which are heavily dominated by a few skill sets and perspectives, and lacking in others. Leaders can ask, “**What difference does the difference make?**” What are we missing out on in our current team structure? What skills and perspectives would improve the outcome of our task?
- **Increasing diversity and inclusive practices is not comfortable.** There will usually be a period of extra stress and “dis-ease” as individuals adjust to each other and new ways of working. Ultimately, this leads to a stronger team and a stronger work culture. Leaders can prepare groups for this by teaching techniques like these.

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