

## P R E F A C E

**T**HE ONLY THING I REMEMBER ABOUT the first dorm meeting of the first day of college was Lionel.

I was sitting across the room from a dark, unsmiling, big, black man. I came from an all-white, small town. I began to think I should meet Lionel—we were dorm mates, both freshmen, both new. Why not introduce myself?

But I was trembling. I was scared. With so little previous interaction with black people, all I had to go on were all the stereotypes and news reports. He was threatening to me, without doing or saying a thing.

Eventually I crossed the room. Eventually we were roommates and I the best man at his wedding. But that hesitation, and the internal energy I expended, is duplicated countless times every day across the United States and the world.

In over 20 years of consulting, I have seen that hesitation cost companies business, as culturally diverse customers decide not to approach. I have seen it bottle up employees who fear telling their bosses and organizations how their difference from the organization's majority groups influences their progress and productivity.

And this example is just about race. Consider all the different people you deal with in your business or

agency, hospital or school—whatever your workplace. They may differ by age, language they speak, religion, sexual orientation, education, social class, nationality, and many other ways.

Do you honestly think you know what makes them all tick?

Do people representing all those differences knock on your door to buy your product, seek your mentoring, or help you accomplish your organization's goals?

Or are they waiting for you to “cross the room”?

The evidence in this book suggests that many leaders and organizations are clueless to culture's impact. That impact includes lost customers and profits, customers spreading bad news about your company, key talent going elsewhere, and employees having no clue how to handle multicultural situations. What don't we know—and how much can *knowing* pay off? See for yourself in the first part on “Faces of Cultural Cluelessness.”

Are you clueless? The answer to that question, in a global world, could bring you new customers, solve your need for scarce talent, and resolve community and school conflicts. With a few Clues, that is.