

Jeff Johnson: You can learn to cope with culture shock

August 15, 2014

It was the end of my sophomore year in high school, and I had completed English grammar and rhetoric. (That's what they called it in the 1970s.) I signed up for my first English elective—science fiction.

I soon would be reading Bradbury, Wells, Asimov, Clarke and Verne. The one that caught me “off guard” was Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*. It was in that book, at the age of 16, I first encountered the phrase “culture shock” to describe the effect rapidly advancing technology was having on civilization.

✘ Jeff Johnson I vaguely remember what Toffler described wasn't so much a shock to my “culture” (my perception) as it was gadgetry that worked to change the face and pace of society. I was not so much “shocked” by technological advances as intrigued by them. Is there anything quite so enchanting as playing Pong for the first time?

I also liked *Star Trek* then. Not because of episodes laced with culturally challenging values. But they played with elaborate technological toys that were the stuff of my dreams.

Adapting to new technology and gadgets certainly is challenging but not impossible. It's only when we begin to experience other cultures arriving in our community—bringing with them their moral codes, basic values and guiding principles—that we finally begin to feel the tremors of a serious “culture shock.” Our communities are more culturally and ethnically diverse than ever before. Grasping the complexity and speed of cultural change is almost impossible. Help! I need the extra-strength pain reliever!

[Patty Lane](#) is our Texas Baptist director of intercultural ministry. [Mark Heavener](#) is our intercultural ministry strategist. This Texas Baptist ministry has shown me how to develop my relational skills that build intercultural friendships. They also provide practical resources to help navigate multicultural environments with sensitivity and savvy.

✘ In fact, in her book *A Beginner's Guide to Crossing Cultures*, Patty explains frequently misunderstood aspects of culture, debunks stereotypes and suggests ways to resolve cross-cultural conflicts. Above all, I have found that both Patty and Mark demonstrate God's heart for building bridges across cultures and show how we can reach out to people of every nation, culture and ethnicity.

Texas is in rapid multicultural transition. This can be a real culture shock—events still too far outside the realm of my cultural psyche that often send tremors through my soul. For sure, each of us has his or her own threshold of “shock-ability.”

Some changes roll right off my back. Other changes annoy me. Funny, my associate pastor recently claimed some folks are not going to like the Resurrection, because they are going to be changed “in the twinkling of an eye.” They will have something to say to God about changing things too quickly. All kidding aside, some changes disturb us down to the depths of our souls.

But wait. Before you decide to be buried with a bottle of extra-strength pain reliever by your side to help you cope, contact our [Texas Baptist intercultural team](#).

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