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Society for Intercultural Education  
Training and Research

## LESSONS FROM AN UNPLANNED LIFE AS AN INTERCULTURALIST

13 Feb 2021 8:16 PM | [Rob Pusch](#) (Administrator)



by Neal Goodman Ph.D.

*Dr. Neal Goodman, CEO of Florida-based [Global Dynamics Inc.](#), is an internationally recognized authority on Cross-Cultural Competence, Global Mindset, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. A leader in DEI since 1963, his wealth of experience makes for a great reason to publish his lifelong journey as an interculturalist. Organizations and publications from around the globe seek his advice on creating globally inclusive organizations. He received SIETAR's 1995 Outstanding Senior Interculturalist Lifetime Achievement Award and serves as*

*Professor Emeritus at Saint Peter's University. He is most proud of his two daughters and grandchildren and still publishes articles, among them [Best Practices in Unconscious Bias Training](#).*

I have spent most of my life teaching, training, and facilitating in front of thousands of groups, but you may be surprised to learn that my voyage has been completely unplanned. For those of you beginning your journey, you may discern some tips or danger zones you may want to avoid from the story below. For those of you in the midst of your careers, or who are veterans of our field, you may find this an opportunity for stop and reflect on where you are and why you are committed to learning.

There has been one constant in this unplanned life and that is that I have learned the most from people who are not like me. That learning comes as a direct result of my curiosity about others. During the mid-60's, my mother wanted me to build up my resume for college so she recommended that I apply for a youth leadership retreat. Unknown to her, this was a Civil Rights camp and the experience was life-changing. I knew I wanted to do something to end bigotry and injustice. I delivered my first workshop on Racism and Prejudice while not yet a Junior in high school. My peers at the retreat represented every race, religion, gender, and ethnicity (which was how we thought of diversity at the time). I learned much from the other participants as I listened to their stories of prejudice and discrimination.

In my Junior year, I was put into an English class with the most feared teacher in the school. She measured competence by one's handwriting and mine is still the worst I have seen. We could have not been more different, but when she found out about my activities in the Civil Rights movement, she would tell me to skip the books she was assigning to the class and gave me several novels by James Baldwin (always handed to me after class in a plain manila envelope). And so even while still in high school, I led numerous youth meetings where we discussed how to eliminate bias in our lives, schools, and communities.

At the retreat, I also met two Jesuits who were part of a panel on religious diversity. They taught at a Jesuit College in my hometown and asked me if I would consider attending a Catholic college to help the Catholic students learn about Judaism. Little did they (or I) know that I was about to become a devout agnostic, but I did decide to attend the Jesuit Saint Peter's College. As part of a minority group, I quickly learned much more about Catholicism than I helped Catholic students learn about Judaism.

The Jesuits were inspiring and ironically coaxed me into spending my Junior year at Hebrew University of Jerusalem- which is not a Jesuit college. This was the summer of 1967 and a month before my arrival, a major war was fought between Israel and its neighbors. I was leaving the urban unrest (protests and riots) of New Jersey for the war zone of Jerusalem. As it turned out, my closest friend in Israel was a Baptist from Minnesota, who had been in his last year in the Naval Academy when he saw a vision of Christ on the beach in Jacksonville, FL, and decided that he had to leave the Navy and become a Baptist Minister. We could not have been more different- a tall deeply religious Minnesotan who knew that the Vietnam war was justified, me a city kid from New Jersey who was non-religious and was involved in many anti-war protests – yet we learned the most from each other. During this year, I also spent considerable time with communists on a kibbutz, Palestinian Arabs, and students from Africa who were studying at the school.

Coming home from an international experience can be very daunting. I could not relate to my fellow NJ students and I was looking for something international and I found myself working for the US Mission to the United Nations. Again, here is a working class, college student learning from two U.S. Senators who were at the Mission during my stay. We could not have been any different but their sage advice to avoid a political career shaped my career goals.

I learned from my experiences that I could not solve the race issue in the United States, could not bring an end to conflict in the Middle East, and could not bring world peace to humanity. So what does an idealist do for a career? I became a College Professor. Ironically again, I was offered a position at Saint Peter's College barely one year after graduating. At the time, it was a temporary position but ended up lasting for 35 years.

During much of my career, I suffered from “Imposter Syndrome”. Even though I had a doctoral degree from NYU and was publishing articles, I expected someone to come out and expose me: a working-class kid from Jersey City with little to offer. What I lacked in confidence, I made up for in certainty about my love for learning and helping people reach their full potential.

As a faculty member, I would have my students read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Almost 50 years later, I would be facilitating Unconscious Bias programs at Dow Jones. At Saint Peter's College, I created an International Student Exchange Program that allowed our students to study abroad, and it brought international students to our campus. I also began to facilitate seminars on Internationalizing the Curriculum at many colleges and professional meetings. Fortunately, this led me to meet Rick Detweiler and Nan Sussman who both encouraged me to consider applying for a sabbatical at the East-West Center, a think tank in Hawaii. At the SIETAR International Summer Institute in Washington, I met with the top scholar at the Center and he told me that the Center was not interested in those who were “teachers” only researchers. Later at the Institute, I publically challenged his research and rather than disagree with me, he approached me later to invite me to spend a year at the Center. Hawaii's multiculturalism was a perfect fit for my curiosity. At the Center, I was on a team that focused on how to teach others about our respective cultures. I was the only American on a team of people from 12 diverse cultures from Asia. I worked with luminaries such as Richard Brislin, Dan Landis, Paul Peterson, and others. Again, I was learning from others who were very different from me.

My background in Social Psychology and my interactions with others led me to recognize that there are multiple perceptions of the same reality. To be successful, I needed to learn how to see the same situation from multiple perspectives simultaneously. I came back from the Center re-energized and created an Intercultural Studies program at St. Peter's, which led me to reach out to faculty from other disciplines. The program was multidisciplinary and my courses were co-sponsored by the Sociology and Business departments- something akin to blue states working with red states. Crossing over to learn about others is critical to me and to those in my programs.

When I returned from the Center, I found little academic interest in the field of intercultural relations or diversity from academic disciplines. Through a mutual acquaintance I was invited to attend a small meeting of corporate heads of learning and development. My perceptions of corporations were radically altered as a result of this meeting. Once again, meeting others with an open mind led to learning. The goal of these learning leaders was to create more successful international assignments for expatriates. I understood that their corporations' self-interest was at the center of their goals, but this provided me with the opportunity for me to

implicitly promote the agenda of mutual respect and understanding to a much wider audience. I knew that I needed to facilitate their ability to build bridges of understanding to be successful in the increasingly culturally diverse and geographically dispersed workplace and marketplace.

Join us next month for part two of Neal's journey: founding Global Dynamics and developing state-of-the-art consultancy and training services.

## **PART 2. LESSONS FROM AN UNPLANNED LIFE AS AN INTERCULTURALIST: CREATING GLOBAL DYNAMICS...**

15 Mar 2021 3:24 PM | [Rob Pusch](#) (Administrator)

by Neal Goodman, Ph.D.

In 1983, upon my return from the East West Center, I began to participate in meetings with corporate representative and consultants about Global Leadership Development. I soon realized that the ideas I was sharing with the group were being appropriated by the consultants, repackaged and sold to the corporations. This convinced me that there may be an opportunity to promote intercultural understanding as a consultant to the corporate world. My wife, who was an International Student Advisor at the University of Hawaii, while I was at the East West Center, was going to return to counseling once we got back to NJ. Together we decided to create a consulting company. I came up with the modest name Global Dynamics Inc. We gave this endeavor 1.5 years to succeed or we were going to close up and my wife was going back to Counseling. During this time, I resumed my position as a Professor of Sociology and Intercultural Studies and started a minor in Intercultural Relations.



I stayed active in SIETAR and joined ATD and SHRM to learn more about corporate training. We had given ourselves until the end of December 1984 to make a profit at GDI or close the business. It was November 1984, and we had no clients, despite trying to make a go of it. I was concerned since the adviser from the Small Business Retired Executive Corp. reviewed our proposed consultancy and declared it “dead on arrival”. He warned me that no company would pay for cultural training. It was clear that in 1984 no organization was interested in learning how to work with China, Russia, Brazil, Japan or any other country. If things did not work out, all we lost was some time and the cost of a computer- we were one of the first small companies with a PC in 1984.

At the end of November 1984, just one month before closing down GDI, I gave a presentation to the NJ chapter of ASTD and realized that this was my last attempt at starting a business. The first week of December, I received a call from someone at AT&T who was at my presentation and wanted to know if I was interested in reviewing an early version of their cross-cultural program and with recommendations for creating a new program. I agreed immediately and we went to work 16 hours a day on the proposal. We cancelled our winter vacation to work on the proposal. I handed in my proposed new course in January, and AT&T liked it and offered to pay me 1/3 of my faculty salary for it. There was only one problem, AT&T wanted to buy my program and have someone else teach it. As far as I was concerned, it was the training that would be the most fun, result in the biggest financial reward, and I wanted to retain ownership of my intellectual property. I offered to deliver one workshop at no cost to see if AT&T would consider me as an

instructor and I would retain the rights to the materials, and they would have unlimited use of the materials.

On the day of my first (and possibly last) day of training, AT&T invited several senior executives plus the Head of the AT&T School of Business to evaluate the course and my instruction style. At the end of the day, the Head of the AT&T School of Business reported that they unanimously liked the material. They would allow me to retain ownership of the materials and they would let me teach some of the offerings while other offerings would be taught by someone related to a senior AT&T Executive. Over time, I learned the AT&T preferred style of instruction and I became the sole facilitator and would offer a 2-day program every week all over the country while still committed to my Professorship at St. Peters. I would teach on Monday, go right to Newark Airport and fly where they needed me to train on Tuesday and Wednesday, and return home to teach at the college again on Thursday. We would assemble the manuals at home and carry them on to the plane. There was no TSA.

I was very fortunate that the College administration allowed me to have a 2-day teaching schedule until 2004 when I retired. The administration recognized the value of having one of their professors teaching at AT&T and my ability to bring real-world cases into my classes. For those of you familiar with Barnaga, I was proud to use St. Peter's College playing cards all over the country and eventually the world.

In 1985, AT&T was the most valuable company in the United States, and it had the prestige of owning Bell Labs, the top technology lab in the world. AT&T could not operate outside the United States since it had a U.S. monopoly. That changed just before I started training. We eventually trained close to 100,000 AT&T employees.

The prestige of AT&T greatly benefited Global Dynamics. Suddenly other organizations would reach out to us for Cross Cultural Training as globalization was taking hold. A good example of this was a call I received on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving from a California start-up called Sun Microsystems. They wanted GDI to deliver cross-cultural sales skills in scores of locations around the globe. They asked me to come meet with them in Silicon Valley and I told them that due to my teaching schedule, I would not be available until Dec. 17. They said this was way too late and suggested that I fly out that Friday night and meet with them on Saturday morning and fly back east on Saturday afternoon. They would arrange all the travel for me and asked me how much I would charge them to make a sales call. They had no qualms about meeting my request. When I arrived at the San Francisco airport, I was picked up, taken to a hotel and picked up the next morning. I was dressed in my best NJ business suit and tie, which I would wear at AT&T and J&J. Those picking me up at the hotel, were stunned by my attire, they were wearing shorts, t-shirts and sandals. They asked me to lose the tie and jacket before I entered the Sun campus. I met with 6 Sun representatives for 2 hours over bagels and coffee. I left Sun with one of the biggest contracts we had ever received. When I asked the person who invited me, who referred GDI to them, he said he really did not know but he was told to call me.

**Sun Microsystems as a GDI example of how we operated.** Sun wanted GDI to teach a 6-hour seminar in multiple locations in Asia, Europe, Latin America and the US. To do this, I solicited the help of several trainers I met over the years. One was a former executive at J&J who had hired me a few years earlier. He was a former Peace Corp member who served in Brazil and later worked for J&J in Brazil and all of Latin America. One was a Harvard grad in Asian studies, who IBM hired to open their first office in Japan and then China, that I met at a meeting where I

was the speaker, and he came over to introduce himself. For Europe, I brought on an expert in European cultures, technology and trade shows who I also met through a conference. I had several other trainers to cover the US.

One thing I need to mention is that GDI has always been a Global Virtual organization. We always operated out of a home-office, with a staff of 2-3, and in one year we delivered 376 days of training with a staff of 2, including me. We have been blessed with an exceptional VP for programs. We never had a business plan, never took a business course and never had a business development person. Our clients were and are our sales force.

There was no secret sauce - hard work, persistence, good fortune, an emphasis on relationships and trust over all else, a philosophy to listen carefully before preparing a proposal and a keen eye for opportunities kept us going. A good example of this was in the late 80's while I was delivering a program with my European expert on Working With the Dutch for AT&T. Being a naturally inquisitive sociologist, I asked the person requesting the program, why this was so urgent. He told me that AT&T just bought a division of Philips (a Dutch company) and Philips wanted to tell AT&T how to run the huge exhibit they would share at World Telecom in Geneva. This is the "super bowl" of trade shows. Working together with my European expert, I proposed a "scientific" objective analysis of the exhibit in comparison to their competitors at the show. We would evaluate, the sales skills and biases of their salesforce by sending around secret shoppers who varied by skin tone, languages spoken, nationality, age and gender. We also evaluated the exhibits, theater productions, giveaways and private client events. This landed me two rows behind Kofi Anan, the Secretary General of the UN, at a global fundraising concert starring Sting and scores more.

The plan for our Trades Show Analysis was simple. I and my team would go to Geneva, we would get special passes that allowed us unlimited access to the floor, and we would start our analysis from 8 a.m.-10 p.m. each day. When visiting an exhibit, I would very openly be writing things down on my clipboard. I anticipated that I would be noticed by the staff and be asked what I was doing at their exhibit. I told them that one of their competitors was having us evaluate their exhibit and four others for a comprehensive comparative report on best practices in trades show exhibits. I would then be taken to the exhibit manager who almost always asked if they could retain us, on the spot, to analyze their exhibit in comparison to 4-8 of their competitors. By the late 90's we had 41 of the leading telecom companies as clients. In fact, NEC, by following some of our recommendations from a prior report, moved up from 6th place to 2nd and wanted to fly me to Japan to present them with a plaque honoring their 2nd place accomplishment.

**It takes a team.** I have been blessed by getting to know some of the smartest people in the world through SIETAR. As the treasurer of SIETAR International, I went to every SIETAR International Conference. GDI success would not have happened without the many exceptional people I met through SIETAR and other professional organizations. For example, when I needed a Middle East specialist, George Renwick introduced me to his friend Jean AbiNader, who quickly became my friend as well. Not only did he do many programs on the Middle East with me, but he also worked with me on creating a customized (International) Negotiations Course for Chrysler. Within a year, we were delivering many of these programs at Chrysler when Daimler acquired Chrysler and said that they wanted to replace GDI's Negotiations program with the highly respected Harvard Negotiations Program. The people at Chrysler asked the Daimler people to just sit in on one of our programs, which was customized based on days of interviews

with Chrysler leaders and actual Chrysler negotiation cases. Not only did Daimler keep us at Chrysler, they started to bring us to Europe to deliver our program for Daimler.

Over the years I have worked closely with over 250 fellow interculturalists. I learned so much from them about their respective countries and perspectives. Knowing these people has enriched my life immeasurably. Many of these people have become very close friends for 30+ years. You know who you are. Due to their commitment to excellence and their willingness to be extra generous with sharing their knowledge, GDI grew organically.

**Here are just a few highlights from the past 36 years:**

The National Basketball Association (NBA) wanted to go global, they had no international players. They knew their merchandise was selling off the shelves in Asia but had no idea why. We designed a Global Mindset program for David Stern, the NBA Commissioner, and his senior team. The program was well-received and the rest is NBA history. I still cherish the silver Tiffany NBA pen David Stern gave me. Every time I watch an NBA game, I look for the international players and smile knowing that I may have played a very small part in the globalization of sports.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) honored GDI by being designated as their preferred vendor for cultural competency training in healthcare for all of its members. The AHA gave us prominent exposure at their conferences and asked me to write several articles for their publications. I showed my appreciation by offering to co-author an article in Diversity Executive Magazine with the President of the AHA Diversity Institute in Diversity, about our collaboration in promoting Cultural Diversity Competence in hospitals.

Samsung would regularly fly me and an associate to Korea to provide cultural training for their non-Korean executives. They did not think the Koreans needed it. I realized just how important the HQ is in the global success of organizations. I also learned a great deal about Korea and a deep appreciation of Korean culture that I would never have known without these opportunities.

During the financial crisis in 2008, banks were closing offices and Citi Bank asked us to create a 6-part webinar series on Managing a Virtual and Global Workforce that their trainers could teach. Over 60,000 of their employees attended one of these webinars. This led to a new specialization in leading and working virtually which we have been delivering since then.

I had 200 Bayer German executives hug each other in order to create oxytocin in the room. They hugged, laughed and applauded. The newly affiliated airlines of Air France, KLM, Delta and Air Italia asked GDI to conduct teambuilding for their entire sales group, providing many intercultural insights.

J&J, BMS, AT&T, Novartis, BD and others had GDI regularly deliver programs in their corporate universities and several of them required Working Globally and Working with Japanese for those supporting Japan and Working with American Partners for those working with the US. I was particularly anxious about our first offering of Working with The Japanese for AT&T since the company was losing a lot of money in Japan and invited the President of their Japanese organization to fly back to the US to attend. At the end of the 2-day program, a senior executive asked the president of the Japan unit, if the program would have helped them. I will

never forget how I felt when he announced that “AT&T would have saved over 40 million dollars if they had taken the course earlier”.

My relationship with my clients is also very personal. We discuss our concerns, our children, our visions and our dreams. One client who we started working for at J&J, later invited us to work for her at Allied Signal, Novartis, Merck, BMS, Hilton Hotels and others. Between each of her executive assignments, I played an informal role as her career coach. I have co-presented and co-authored articles with my clients. I also have great respect for our competitors who are also good friends, and we learn a great deal from each other.

I have been doing anti-bias training since 1963 and still see this as a critical need. We are doing DEI training for some of the largest companies around the globe. GDI also moderates the Global Diversity Group on LinkedIn. I am particularly proud that we are delivering Unconscious Bias training in China, Japan, Malaysia, France, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Canada and the US.

In summary in 36 years, GDI provided Cross-cultural training for scores of industries including; High Tech, Pharmaceuticals, Airlines, Oil and Gas, Hospitals, Universities, Chemicals, Insurance, Manufacturing, Banking, Software, Hardware, Telecoms, Professional Sports, Hospitality, Professional Associations, Public Schools, Civil Rights Organizations, Municipalities, Federal Government Agencies, The National Academy of Science, Investment Groups, Agriculture, Retail Operations, Food and Beverage, Auction Houses, and many more. We have clients that are headquartered on four continents. How did 2-3 people with no business experience do this? I have no idea- it just happened, in large part due to our loyal Associates many of whom are SIETAR members. Many are friends I made while serving on the Executive Board of SIETAR International who are now like sisters and brothers. My wife Varda and I worked together for 36 years and going. We raised two daughters who we required to study overseas. They are now successful professionals and mothers of two each. Both daughters grew up attending scores of SIETAR retreats and conferences and listening to endless cross-cultural stories. I have travelled all over the globe and made friends and memories to last a lifetime. I have many stories to tell and look forward to writing them down. I look forward to creating a Master Mind Group, Podcasting and training a new generation of interculturalists and DEI specialists.

My journey continues... I hope my story will inspire some of you to stay dedicated to your life's mission, you never know when the phone is going to ring.