

SOCIALIZING : speed-reading exercise, useful vocabulary, culture

Cracking cross-cultural etiquette

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It may be konnichiwa in Japan, Guten Tag in Germany and Merhaba in Turkey -- saying hello is easy -- but understanding cultural nuances for international business is far more challenging.

Many people are familiar with business in the West, where there is little time for establishing relationships and **getting straight down to business** is not considered rude.

But in other parts of the world, achieving mutual success with an **overseas partner** involves a lot more than a few quick meetings and a signature on the **dotted line**.

"You could say that business is business in the West, and business is personal everywhere else," Neil Payne of Kwintessential, a culture specialist firm, told CNN.

"In other parts of the world being **mindful** of other cultures can **give you the upper hand** and help you **clinch that deal**."

For instance the consensual nature of Japanese society means that decision-making in a meeting can involve many members of a negotiating team.

"It is important to build a relationship not only with the director or the manager or the head of the team but all those involved," explains Payne.

One way of recognizing how the hierarchy works in a Tokyo boardroom is that the head of the team may normally sit in the middle of the table, **furthest away** from the door.

Payne suggests greeting the most senior person first -- due to a respect for hierarchy -- then **greeting** the rest of the team in descending order, in terms of **rank**.

In North Asia, handing out **business cards** with both hands in a respectful manner will also be noticed. For many in the West they are just bits of card, **handed over** as an **after-thought**, whereas in Asia they are **tokens** of value and esteem.

Speaking clearly and slowly, avoiding jargon and writing everything down can also help out in a meeting.

One common trait in Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Asian and South American cultures is that many executives like to do business with people they know, trust and feel comfortable with.

"It is important to understand what these people may like, so if they are into sport it may be worth going to a match or having a round of golf," says Payne.

"It is more about putting yourself in a context where both **parties** can be relaxed and both parties can get to know each other as people -- not just as business people."

It is best to remember that business will only continue once this relationship has been established. "(Many executives) will not enter into a relationship because they will not feel comfortable conducting business with someone that they do not feel 100 percent comfortable with," explains Payne.

A few words in the language of the country you are visiting as a sign of respect is always appreciated. And before you travel, contact your embassy to request briefing on **business etiquette** and cultural background.

"If you are going to give one specific **pointer** to everyone, which is applicable across the world, that would be -- always maintain a sense of professionalism," says Payne.

http://articles.cnn.com/2004-10-15/travel/bt.culture.etiquette_1_business-people-upper-hand-etiquette?_s=PM:TRAVEL