Hello!​

Welcome to lesson 4 of the course Diplomatic English. In this lesson we will focus on typical mistakes collected from business meetings.

Let’s begin with mistake number one, which is **NO small talk.**

Imagine you’re in a conference call with several co-workers. You’re waiting for a meeting to start. Does the silence feel comfortable? Probably not. There is a very simple solution to awkward silence – small talk. The power of small talk should not be underestimated – it helps to break the ice, create a better atmosphere and make us appear more personable. Here are a few examples of questions you can ask to make small talk:

How are you today?/ How have you been?

How has your week been so far?

How was your weekend?

Any plans for the weekend?

What’s the weather like in your location?

 The safest and most common topics seem to be **general update, weekend** and **the weather.**

Another mistake relating to small talk is **No smooth transition from small talk to business talk.**

Very often we move straight to discussing business. Meanwhile, there are a few useful expressions which can take us smoothly from small talk to business talk, for example

*Right, we’ve got a lot to get through, so let’s get down to business, shall we?*

*Well, it’s been great to chat, but perhaps we should get started, if you don’t mind.*

*Okay, we don’t have a lot of time, so I guess it’s time to begin, don’t you think?*

 As you might have noticed, all these expressions follow a simple formula.

First, we **SIGNAL the end** of small talk and explain why we need to get down to business,

Right, we’ve got a lot to get through, so

Well, it’s been great to chat, but

Okay, we don’t have a lot of time, so

then we **SUGGEST** moving on,

let’s get down to business,

perhaps we should get started,

I guess it’s time to begin

and finally we **SOFTEN** the suggestion with

shall we?

if you don’t mind.

don’t you think?

With this repertoire of expressions, you will be able to take the meeting to the business level and avoid awkwardness.

Let’s now look at another common mistake. We have noticed that sometimes interruptions can appear rude, so, we are going to focus on how to interrupt politely.

Here is an example of a typical and incorrect interruption **Listen to me, please.** Obviously,it’s too direct and impolite.

A diplomatic alternative could be for instance, **May I interrupt for a moment?,** or **Could I just come in here?** Or **Sorry to interrupt, but…**

As you can see, modal verbs ‘MAY’ and ‘COULD’ as well as the word ‘sorry’ come in handy here. We have covered these in lesson 1 on diplomatic tools. Using these phrases will make the interruption more smooth.

The next mistake is about blaming the other party. We sometimes witness it during meetings with the customer.

In order to avoid responsibility we tend to place the blame somewhere else. For example, **YOU didn’t give us...  or  YOU should understand….** These statements are too direct. A more diplomatic and strategically wise action would be to avoid finger-pointing and say,

**Sorry, it seems we didn’t receive…,** and for the second example **Perhaps, I wasn't very clear’)**

Switching attention from YOU to I or WE helps us to remove the blaming tone of the message.

Let’s move on and analyze another typical mistake, which is inappropriate response to criticism.

 At times you hear the following feedback **This is not what we expected,** or **This is below our expectations.** And a frequent reaction is,

**We did what you asked us to do.**

However, this response is not appropriate because it doesn’t encourage cooperation. Instead, we should ask for specific examples

**Could you give us a few examples of what doesn’t meet your expectations?**

This way we not only remain diplomatic, but we also open a dialogue based on customer expectations.

The last mistake we will look at addresses the problem of asking accusatory questions.

Let’s first look at two examples of accusatory questions to illustrate what we mean **Can you answer, please?** and **WHY aren’t you doing this?**

Both these questions are inappropriate because they suggest that you think someone has done something bad. We need to soften them and reduce the attack impact.

A more polite alternative to the first question would be to simply ask about an opinion, for example **What do you think?** or**: What’s your take on this?**

As for the second question, we could ask a more specific and constructive question, such as **What stops us from this?** or **What are the obstacles/blockers?** This way we avoid adding unnecessary pressure and can form a more cooperative relationship.

I hope you’ve found this information useful. Please go to the practice section and complete a few exercises on Typical Mistakes.

 Good luck with your studies