

## Title:

Minding Your Global Manners

## Word Count:

1024

## Summary:

Guidelines to help you find your way through the maze of international etiquette rules that apply whether you work on-line or in an office.

## Keywords:

global manners,etiquette,rules,international,business,behavior

## Article Body:

To say that today's business environment is becoming increasingly more global is to state the obvious. Meetings, phone calls and conferences are held all over the world and attendees can come from any point on the globe. On any given business day you can find yourself dealing face-to-face, over the phone, by e-mail and, on rare occasions, by postal letter with people whose customs and cultures differ your own. You may never have to leave home to interact on an international level.

While the old adage "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" still holds true, business clients and colleagues who are visiting this country should be treated with sensitivity and with an awareness of their unique culture. Not to do your homework and put your best international foot forward can cost you relationships and future business. One small misstep such as using first names inappropriately, not observing the rules of timing or sending the wrong color flower in the welcome bouquet can be costly.

There is no one set of rules that applies to all international visitors so do the research for each country that your clients represent. That may sound like a daunting task, but taken in small steps, it is manageable and the rewards are worth the effort. Keeping in mind that there are as many ways to do business as there are countries to do business with, here are a few tips for minding your global P's and Q's.

**Building relationships:** Few other people are as eager to get down to business as we Americans. So take time to get to know your international clients and build rapport before you rush to the bottom line. Business relationships are built on trust that is developed over time, especially with people from Asia and

Latin America.

**Dressing conservatively:** Americans like to dress for fashion and comfort, but people from other parts of the world are generally more conservative. Your choice of business attire is a signal of your respect for the other person or organization. Leave your trendy clothes in the closet on the days that you meet with your foreign guests.

**Observe the hierarchy:** It is not always a simple matter to know who is the highest-ranking member when you are dealing with a group. To avoid embarrassment, err on the side of age and masculine gender, only if you are unable to discover the protocol with research. If you are interacting with the Japanese, it is important to understand that they make decisions by consensus, starting with the younger members of the group. By contrast, Latin people have a clear hierarchy that defers to age.

**Understanding the handshake:** With a few exceptions, business people around the world use the handshake for meeting and greeting. However, the American style handshake with a firm grip, two quick pumps, eye contact and a smile is not universal. Variations in handshakes are based on cultural differences, not on personality or values. The Japanese give a light handshake. Germans offer a firm shake with one pump, and the French grip is light with a quick pump. Middle Eastern people will continue shaking your hand throughout the greeting. Don't be surprised if you are occasionally met with a kiss, a hug, or a bow somewhere along the way.

**Using titles and correct forms of address:** We are very informal in the United States and are quick to call people by their first name. Approach first names with caution when dealing with people from other cultures. Use titles and last names until you have been invited to use the person's first name. In some cases, this may never occur. Use of first names is reserved for family and close friends in some cultures.

**Titles are given more significance around the world than in the United States and are another important aspect of addressing business people.** Earned academic degrees are acknowledged. For example, a German engineer is addressed as "Herr Ingenieur" and a professor as "Herr Professor". Listen carefully when you are introduced to someone and pay attention to business cards when you receive them.

**Exchanging business cards:** The key to giving out business cards in any culture is to show respect for the other person. Present your card so that the other person does not have to turn it over to read your information. Use both hands to present your card to visitors from Japan, China, Singapore, or Hong Kong. When

you receive someone else's business card, always look at it and acknowledge it. When you put it away, place it carefully in your card case or with your business documents. Sticking it haphazardly in your pocket is demeaning to the giver. In most cases, wait until you have been introduced to give someone your card.

Valuing time. Not everyone in the world is as time conscious as Americans. Don't take it personally if someone from a more relaxed culture keeps you waiting or spends more of that commodity than you normally would in meetings or over meals. Stick to the rules of punctuality, but be understanding when your contact from another country seems unconcerned.

Honoring space issues: Americans have a particular value for their own physical space and are uncomfortable when other people get in their realm. If the international visitor seems to want to be close, accept it. Backing away can send the wrong message. So can touching. You shouldn't risk violating someone else's space by touching them in any way other than with a handshake.

Whether the world comes to you or you go out to it, the greatest compliment you can pay your international clients is to learn about their country and their customs. Understand differences in behavior and honor them with your actions. Don't take offense when visitors behave according to their norms. People from other cultures will appreciate your efforts to accommodate them and you will find yourself building your international clientele.

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