

## Course Material No.2

# About Korea: Business Etiquette

**Course 2: About Korea – Business Etiquette** aims to equip Central American companies and agencies with essential knowledge of Korean business etiquette, which is crucial for establishing successful partnerships and conducting business in Korea.

By the end of the course, learners will be able to:

- Apply appropriate greetings and communication styles in business interactions;
- Navigate meetings, dining, and social settings with confidence; and
- Adhere general etiquette expected in the Korean business environment.

## Greetings

- ❖ **Bowing** is the traditional form of greeting in Korea, typically followed by a handshake.
  - In most situations, a slight bow is sufficient, particularly when greeting or acknowledging senior staff.
  - A deeper bow is used to convey greater respect or formality.
  - Make sure to give a verbal greeting such as hello or nice to meet you.
- ❖ **For handshakes**, it should be initiated by the person of higher status, while the reverse is in effect for the bow.
  - When shaking hands, it is polite to support the right forearm with your left hand.
- ❖ **Business cards** are often exchanged at the start of the first encounter.
  - Present your card with both hands with a slight bow and a short introduction of affiliated company with your name.
  - After having exchanged cards, take a moment to carefully look at the card, as this demonstrates your respect for the other person and their position.
  - Make sure to include your full title on your business cards, as Korean's look at this as a clue on how to address you.

## Examples of Handshaking and Presenting Business Card



# Business Meetings

## ▶▶ Before the Meeting

- ❖ Punctuality for the meeting is very important in Korean business culture. Arriving on time or even prior to meetings show respect for others and are seen as a sign of reliability.
- ❖ Professional attire is generally conservative and formal, as appearance is considered a reflection of respect for the business relationship.
  - Men typically wear dark-colored suits with ties, while women opt for suits or dresses that are modest in style and color. Neutral colors like black, gray, or navy are preferred.

### Examples of formal attire in Korea



- ❖ Respect for hierarchy and seniority is a fundamental aspect of workplace conduct in Korea, and this is reflected in seating arrangements.
  - The most senior individual is typically assigned the most prestigious seat, often at the head of the table or farthest from the entrance.
  - It's customary for the senior person to take their seat first, with others following in hierarchical order.

## ▶▶ During the Meeting

- ❖ Communication in Korea tends to be indirect, emphasizing harmony and the avoidance of confrontation. It is essential to read between the lines, as direct refusals or negative responses are often avoided.
- ❖ Decision-making often occurs as a collaborative process; however, the opinion of the most senior individual, who typically leads the discussion, tends to carry the most weight.
  - Younger employees or those in lower positions are expected to defer to senior colleagues, waiting for them to speak first.

## ▶▶ After the Meeting

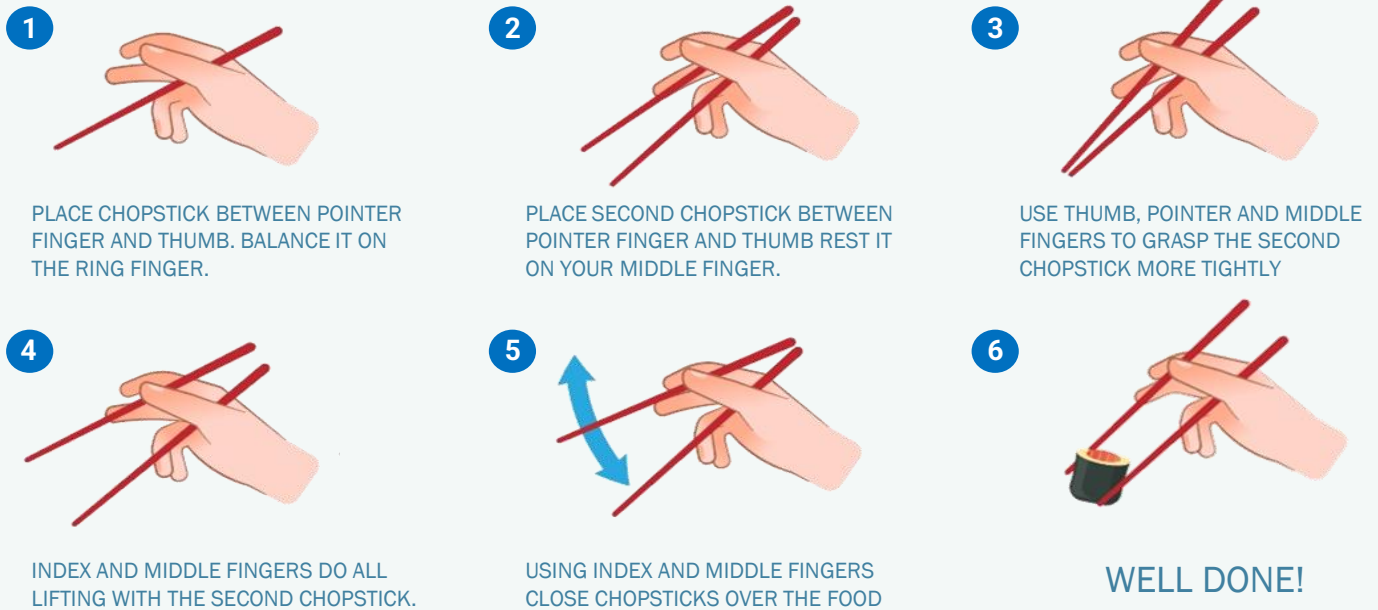
- ❖ Expressing gratitude for the opportunity to meet is important; this can be done by offering a formal bow and handshake.
- ❖ Additionally, gift-giving after meeting is a common practice for expressing gratitude, symbolizing respect and appreciation.
- ❖ When leaving the meeting room, follow the lead of the most senior person, exiting in reverse order of hierarchy.
- ❖ It's customary to send a formal thank you email or letter shortly after the meeting, expressing appreciation and reiterating key points or action items discussed.

## Business Meals

Meals hold significant importance in Korean business culture and are often used to foster relationships. Business lunches or dinners are commonly proposed after meetings as a way to strengthen connections. The following tips are useful to keep in mind during Korean business meals:

- ❖ It is customary to wait for the most senior person to begin eating, as this is a sign of respect.
- ❖ Proper use of chopsticks and spoons is expected. Avoid sticking chopsticks upright into a bowl of rice, as this resembles funeral rites. Refrain from pointing or waving chopsticks, as it can be considered impolite.

### How to hold your chopsticks



\* Source : Freepik

- ❖ Sharing food is common in Korean meals, with side dishes typically placed in the center of the table. It is polite to take small portions onto your plate rather than eating directly from the shared dishes.
- ❖ Drinking is an integral part of Korean business culture, often involving traditional beverage, Soju.
  - Pour drinks for others rather than for yourself, and when pouring or receiving, hold the bottle or a glass with both hands as a sign of respect.
  - Toasting is common practice, with the phrase “Geonbae” meaning “Cheers” in Korean.
  - When drinking in the presence of senior colleagues, it is customary to turn your head slightly away while taking a sip, as a gesture of deference.

### Examples of Drinking etiquette in Korea



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