

International Protocol

in Government

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Whether you are a newly elected public official or a veteran of public service, you will probably encounter situations where you must apply rules of international protocol. You may be planning to host international visitors or positioning your organization to conduct business abroad. In either case, you will need to reinforce skills you may already possess and enhance strategies to help your organization compete in the global marketplace.

Presenting an international image and succeeding in the international arena requires that you understand protocol and be very mindful of cultural nuances. Savvy public officials need to learn these protocols while they are still at home and have ample opportunity to correct learned behaviors. Clearly, your behavior at the outset with someone from another country or culture will improve or deteriorate the relationship.

The goal of international protocol is to teach public servants how to enjoy a level of comfort and confidence when hosting international visitors and traveling to another country outside the USA. Mastering all of the techniques of international protocol could take weeks or months. As with most executives, your time is extremely limited.

Here are a few tips to guide you with the basics.

The First Meeting and Business Introductions

Formality is the key when speaking to persons throughout

the globe. Rarely is instant familiarity appreciated and you should refrain from asking "May I call you Fritz?" That is using the person's first name without being invited to do so.

Americans create a sense of extreme discomfort when you immediately begin calling someone by his or her first name or you invite them to call you by your first name.

Honorifics (titles that "confer honor or show respect") should always be used in international business and social settings. If you are serious about enhancing business relationships with international counterparts, think about having cards printed with your name, organization and title in English on one side and in the language of the target country on the other side. Not only is this a gesture of courtesy, but also shows your commitment to doing business. There are also proper techniques for presenting business cards. Practicing these techniques will set you head and shoulders above your colleagues.

When making introductions it is important that you introduce the junior person to the senior person regardless of gender, regardless of one's international origin. When you have forgotten an individual's name, how have you handled this situation? Or if someone mispronounces your name, what do you do? There are several keys to remembering names. Start by listening carefully and deliberately taking time for more than an exchange of names. Use the person's name over and over in conversation. When you can't



remember someone's name, extend your hand, smile and say your name. The other person will then say his or her name.

Nonverbal communications in international protocol say more than you might imagine. Body language includes unconscious bodily movements, facial expressions, gestures, etc. It is essential to note that 55 percent of someone's impression of you is visual, 38 percent is presentation—and words account for only 7 percent of the impact of your message. Without uttering a sound, we communicate by the way we sit and stand, facial expressions, crossed and uncrossed legs, and other gestures. Studies conclude that the higher a person is on the socio-economic scale, the less that person gestures. The vocabulary range is more extensive; therefore, there is less reliance on nonverbal communication.

Additional tips for great introductions:

1. Include the person's position and explain who they are with all introductions.
2. Find out or know who the senior executive is and always show deference to this person in the introduction.
3. Always look at the person as you say his or her name.

4. Men and women should always remember to stand during all introductions—business and social.

What is wrong in this picture? A North American businesswoman cannot remain seated today when others are standing and shaking hands—here or abroad. This is true in dining situations as well.

Eye Contact

Many Americans believe that the eyes are the bearers of the soul. Eyes can project confidence and inspire trust. They also convey messages of love, approval, credibility and interest. However, in some countries, eye contact is strictly forbidden, as it is a direct sign of disrespect to elders and persons of authority. In the USA, direct eye contact should be made 40 to 60 percent of the time if you want to present yourself with confidence and authority. Anything less than this gives the impression that you are shy, shifty, have something to hide, or simply lack confidence and authority. Practicing extreme eye contact can also have negative implications that are probably unintended, but can be damaging nonetheless.

Handshaking

Handshaking, often called the accepted greeting, reveals a tremendous amount about one's inner traits, personality, feelings and motivations. But, most of all, the handshake conveys one's attitude

toward others. How are you judged by your handshake and how might you judge others? Do you use a politically correct handshake or does your handshake exhibit aggressive or condescending traits?

- In Japan, the form of greeting is often a bow and a handshake.
- Shake hands with everyone in a group. It is important not to offend by shaking with some and not others.
- Avoid unpopular handshakes like the dead fish handshake.

Strategic Do's and Don'ts

- Don't cross your legs. In Asian and Northern European countries, this activity suggests premature familiarity or bad breeding. Both feet should be flat on the floor. In most Arab countries, it is offensive to expose the soles of the shoes or feet.
- Avoid excessive use of the hands including gesturing, like fingering an ink pen, jewelry, tie or other personal items.
- Avoid loud speech, directness and abruptness.
- Always accept hospitality when it is offered.
- International gift giving and receiving requires careful study of your guest or target country.
- Refusing the gift may be considered an insult.
- Make sure your gift is MADE in the USA.
- Do homework on gift taboos.