

Conducting Business in China

Greetings and Introductions

- The Chinese usually do not like to do business with strangers, and will make frequent use of go-betweens. Whenever possible, try to use established relationships, or an intermediary known by both sides, to make the first contact
- Chinese prefer to be formally introduced to someone new. This applies to both Chinese and foreigners.
- The Chinese may seem unfriendly when being introduced. They are taught not to show excessive emotion.
- Always stand up when being introduced and remain standing throughout the introductions.
- When being introduced to Chinese, the accepted form of greeting is the handshake, even among Chinese. Chinese may also nod or slightly bow (Unlike the Japanese, the Chinese bow from the shoulders rather than the waist). One would then present a business card.

Business Card Etiquette

- Use both hands when presenting business cards and be sure the writing faces the person to whom you are presenting your card. Cards should also be received with both hands. Do not immediately put the card in a pocket or bag-this is considered rude.
- Follow with the standard "I am pleased to meet you, or "ni hao" in Chinese.
- When seated, place cards on the table. This shows respect and is also an excellent way to remember names.
- Business cards should be printed in English on one side and Chinese on the other.
- Be sure to use simplified Chinese characters for China, not the classical characters used in Hong Kong and Taiwan. If traveling to China and Taiwan or Hong Kong, it is a good idea to put the different cards in separate boxes to avoid mix-ups.
- Remember that China is the People's Republic of China and Taiwan is the Republic of China. When in Mainland China, refer to Taiwan as the "Province of Taiwan". It is best to avoid discussing the Taiwan situation.

Personal Questions & Compliments

- Do not be surprised when asked personal questions regarding age, marital status, children, family, income, job, etc. This is done to seek common ground.
- On the other hand, the Chinese will be uncomfortable with American familiarity, particularly early in a relationship. The arm around the shoulder or pat on the back with "just call me Bob" approach should be avoided.

Social distance, Touching & Gestures

- Every culture defines proper distance. Westerners, particularly Americans, find that the Chinese comfort zone regarding distance is a bit too close for their comfort.
- Instinctively Westerners may back up when others invade their space. Do not be surprised to find that the Chinese will simply step closer.

- The Chinese do not like to be touched, particularly by strangers. Do not hug, back slap or put an arm around someone's shoulder.
- Do not be offended if you are pushed and shoved in a line. The Chinese do not practice the art of lining up and courtesy to strangers in public places is not required. Hong Kong is one exception.
- People of the same sex may walk hand-in-hand as a gesture of friendship in China.
- Western gestures that are taboo in China include:
 - Pointing the index finger--use the open hand instead.
 - Using the index finger to call someone--use the hand with fingers motioning downward as in waving.
 - Finger snapping
 - Showing the soles of shoes.
 - Whistling is considered rude.
- Chinese customs that are annoying to Westerners:
 - Belching or spitting on the street
 - Lack of consideration when smoking and failure to ask permission to smoke
 - Slurping food
 - Talking while eating.

It is often said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. Taking time to learn something about Chinese culture and customs can only pay dividends

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Mark Hehl's career spans over 30 years and includes leadership roles in international operations, technology transfer, quality, reliability, cost reduction, supply chain improvement, ISO 9001 implementation and lead time reduction in many industries in North America, Europe, Asia and Latin America. As a past executive for the Timex Corporation, Mark implemented Six Sigma at major suppliers in China and at other worldwide corporate facilities. In recognition of his contributions, these Chinese suppliers honored him with the award of the Chinese name 何文楷 "Ho Man Kai", which is Cantonese for "good and knowledgeable.

Mark was a Delegate and featured presenter at the II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE CALIDAD (Second International Quality Congress) in Quito, Ecuador and at the Third China-American Quality Symposium held in Shanghai, China. He has also authored over 15 technical papers on various Business Process Improvement & International Business Development subjects and is writing a book titled Improving Your Operations in Emerging Countries.

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