

BUSINESS TRAVEL

U P D A T E

Curbing Corporate Faux Pas

Etiquette Expert Helps Agents, Managers Say and Do the Right Things

BY LAURA DEL ROSSO

SAN FRANCISCO—A travel agent was on her way to a lunch to meet with the president of a small, local company that is a potential corporate account.

She had researched the company's travel management needs and put together what she believes was a surefire sales presentation that showcases the agency's services and that would give her the edge over the competing agency.

But she was not anticipating that the impression she made at the meeting would cost her the account.

She didn't know that the Belgian-born company owner came from a more formal culture and did not appreciate being called "Pierre" upon their first introduction.

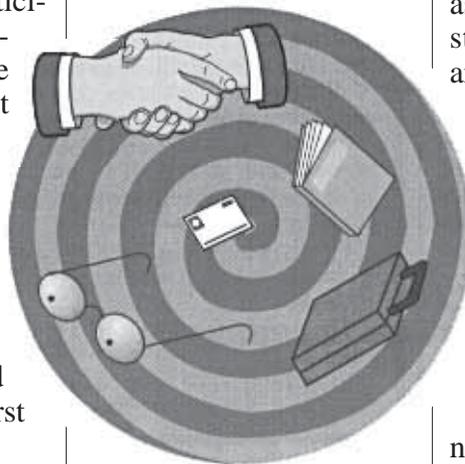
When she extended her hand to shake his, her hand was clammy. She also gave him a weak handshake, so that he was only able to grasp her fingertips.

When the company

president presented his business card, she shuffled through her cluttered purse and absentmindedly produced hers, handing it over as if she were dealing a card from a deck.

Another company executive arrived to join them for lunch. She remained seated during the introduction as he stood before her to shake her hand, which was still clammy.

While



shaking his hand, she continued a conversation with the company owner and failed to make eye contact with the colleague.

Even though the trav-

el agent's proposal was attractive to the company, she did not get the account.

Why?

It was simply a question of poor etiquette.

Syndi Seid, who is the founder of San Francisco-based Advanced Etiquette, told the Bay Area Business Travel Association that when a business deal falls apart for no apparent reason, it could often be because of something as simple as a clammy handshake or as complex as misunderstanding the nuances of another culture.

"Today, people do business with those they know, like and trust, and who display impeccable manners," said Seid, who conducts seminars on proper business and social etiquette.

"In fact, refined manners are the most cost-effective way of doing business and sustaining positive public relations."

Seid said that the workplace is becoming more social, and companies increasingly are expecting their employees and

executives to manage both business and social situations gracefully.

In international settings, it becomes even more critical because of cultural differences.

"There have been studies that show that 80% of international businesses have failed because they did not understand the local culture," Seid said.

For example, in the above situation, the travel agent did not understand that Americans tend to be the most casual when it comes to addressing strangers by their first names.

In most other cultures, "Mr." or "Ms." is used until the person asks that his or her first name be used.

With handshakes, firmness and eye contact are the keys, she said.

A proper handshake is "web-to-web" so that the hands are clasped closely and comfortably, but while it should be firm, it must not be a painful "bone crusher."

On the other hand, a handshake that forces the receiver to squeeze only

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the fingertips of the other may be perceived as a sign of weakness.

And the "condolence" shake, in which the free hand covers the handshake, is inappropriate in social situations.

Save that handshake for funerals and weddings, she said.

Don't forget to maintain eye contact during the handshake — it instills a feeling of trust and confidence in a business setting.

For clammy hands, Seid has a solution: antiperspirant which is as effective on the palm of the hand as it is under the arm.

The exchange of business cards can be a tricky matter.

In Japanese culture, cards are considered an extension of a person and are kept clean and neat and in a separate carrying case.

Cards should be presented formally with both hands, and the card should be facing the receiver so that he or she can read it.

When receiving someone's card, Seid suggested taking a few seconds to read it and saying the name aloud in order to associate the name with the face.

She also said that business cards should be kept in an attractive carrying case of their own.

Men should not keep them in a wallet because the Japanese, for example, would find it offensive "to be handed something that you've been sitting on all day."

Also, in Japan, do not offer your business card to someone of a much higher rank.

If you need his address or the spelling of his name, telephone the company and ask for it, or send the person a note telling him you enjoyed meeting him and enclose your card. The person may respond with his own card.

When doing business in a foreign country, have your business cards translated.

It may be best to have them translated in the U.S. because translators overseas may not know

whoever reaches the door first should open it.

In business settings, women should stand for introductions just as men do.

"If you meet someone in your office, always stand and come around



Syndi Seid

the desk. Don't shake someone's hand from

Do research to determine appropriate gifts for the country you are visiting; the safest are chocolates or a picture book.

how best to translate complicated American business titles.

Women's advancement in the business world has caused some confusion and rethinking of etiquette, Seid said.

Women should not hesitate to open doors for men; the new rule, according to Seid, is that

abrupt, direct, loud or boisterous, as these are major faux pas particularly outside the U.S.

- Do not be afraid of silence. Use it as a way to keep yourself centered and to regroup your thoughts. In most parts of the world, silence is a sign of strength.

- Do not be overly friendly; otherwise you will seem pushy or insincere.

- Acknowledge everyone present with a handshake, and repeat the process when the meeting is over.

- Do not compare American ways to those of the country you are visiting, and do not act like everything in the U.S. is bigger and better.

- Do not criticize your competition; what you do not say can make a powerful statement about your personal dignity.

- Do research to determine appropriate gifts for the country you are visiting. Seid said that the safest gifts are fine chocolates or a handsome picture book of the giver's city or country.

For more information, contact Advanced Etiquette at (415) 346-3665.