

## CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH PEOPLE FROM



# JAPAN



### Greetings



The Japanese are very aware of Western habits, and will often greet you with a handshake. Their handshakes will often be weak; this gives no indication of their assertiveness of character. The bow is their traditional greeting. If someone bows to greet you, observe carefully. Bow to the same depth as you have been bowed to. As you bow, lower your eyes. Keep your palms flat against your thighs. Use last names plus *san*, meaning Mr. or Ms. Do not suggest that the Japanese call you by your first name. Business cards are extremely important for establishing credentials.

### Conversation



Do not be offended by the many personal questions traditional Japanese may ask. Expect to be asked about your job, your title, your responsibilities, etc. A Japanese response "I'll consider it" may actually mean "no." "Yes" may mean that the person understood what you said, not that he or she agrees. Negatively phrased questions will get a "yes" if the Japanese speaker agrees. Incorporate the words "I'm sorry" into your vocabulary. However, don't be ingratiating out of fear of offending; just be polite.

### Gestures



In Japan even the smallest gesture carries great meaning. Therefore, avoid expansive arm and hand movements, unusual facial expressions, or dramatic gestures of any kind. The American "O.K." sign (thumb and forefinger curled in an "O") means "money" to the Japanese. Pointing is considered impolite. Instead, wave your hand, palm up, toward the object being indicated. Beckoning "come here" is done with the palm down. Moving the open hand, with the palm facing left, in a fanning motion in front of the face indicates a negative response. Sniffing, snorting, and spitting in public are acceptable, but nose blowing is not. To get through a crowd, the Japanese may push others. There is also a gesture meaning "excuse me," which involves repeating a bow and a karate chop in the air. The Japanese do not approve of male-female touching in public. Direct eye contact is not the norm. Keep a smile, even when you are upset. Laughter can mean embarrassment, confusion, or shock, rather than mirth.

### Business Attire



Men should wear conservative suits, and never appear casual. Slip-on shoes are best, as you will remove them frequently. Women should dress conservatively, keeping jewelry, perfume, and makeup to a minimum. Pants are not appropriate. High heels are to be avoided if you risk towering over your Japanese counterparts. If you wear a kimono, wrap it left over right! Only corpses wear them wrapped right over left.

### Hierarchy/Family



Age is revered. There is a great deal of competitiveness among equals. Ethnocentrism is very strong. Male dominance is strong in all public situations. Sex roles in society are clearly differentiated, but Western-style equality is strong in younger generations.

### Manners



Be punctual at all times. Because age equals rank, show the greatest respect to the oldest members of the Japanese group. Don't make accusations or refuse anything directly; be indirect. Also, don't ask questions that the other person may be unable to answer. When you are taken out, your host will treat. Allow your host to order for you. Be enthusiastic while eating and show great thanks afterwards. When entering a Japanese home, take off your shoes at the door. You will wear one pair of slippers from the door to the living room, where you will remove them. You will put them on again to make your way to the bathroom, where you will exchange them for "toilet slippers." Don't forget to change back again. Never point your chopsticks at another person. When you are not using them, you should line them up on the chopstick rest. Gifts are given at mid-year (July 15) and year-end (Jan. 1) and often at first business meetings.

### Cognitive Styles



The Japanese have very high anxiety about life because of the need to save face. There are constant pressures to conform. A very strong work ethic and strong group relationships give structure and stability to life. Emotional restraints are developed in childhood, and all behaviors are situation-bound. Decisions are made within the group with little or no personal recognition. Outsiders must be accepted into the group before they can participate in decision-making.

### Currency



The unit of currency is the Yen.

### Ethnic Make-Up



Over 99% of the population consists of native-born Japanese.

**\*Fun Fact:** the Japanese have a tradition of eating Kentucky Fried Chicken on Christmas – some Japanese came to associate the white-bearded Colonel Sanders with Santa Claus.

### Language



The official language is Japanese.

### Religion



The Shinto religion is unique to Japan; the institution of the emperor is supported by Shintoism. However, the Japanese are very tolerant of religious differences, and may even practice Buddhism and Shinto concurrently. There is no official religion.