

CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH PEOPLE FROM



SOUTH KOREA



Greetings



Korean men greet each other with a slight bow and sometimes an accompanying handshake while maintaining eye contact. Indicate added respect by supporting your right forearm with your left hand during the handshake. The junior person will initiate the greeting and be the first to bow. The senior person will be the first to offer his hand. Women rarely shake hands. Western men should not try to shake hands with a Korean woman; Western women will have to initiate a handshake with Korean men.

A Korean has a family name, a generational name, and also a given name (in that order). Address people by their title alone or by both their title and their family name.

Conversation



Good topics of conversation include the Korean cultural heritage (which is extensive), kites, sports (especially the Olympics), and the health of the other's family (although family inquiries on topics other than health are considered an intrusion). Topics to avoid are local politics, socialism, Communism, Japan, and your host's wife. Do not be surprised if you are asked personal questions, such as how much you paid for something or your salary. These questions are not considered in bad taste in Korea and often reflect an attempt to determine your rank or status.

Gestures



Do not put your arm around another person's shoulders. People of the same sex will often hold hands. Physical contact is inappropriate with older people, with people of the opposite sex, or with people who are not good friends or family. Feet are considered dirty and should not touch other people or objects. Men should keep their feet flat on the floor during formal situations. At other times men should take care that the soles of their shoes are pointing down. Women are permitted to cross their legs. Get someone's attention by extending your arm, palm down and moving your fingers up and down. Beckoning a person by moving a single finger toward you is very rude.

Business Attire



Men should wear a conservative suit and tie and a white shirt; women should wear a conservative skirt and blouse or dress. Avoid tight skirts, since many people sit on the floor in homes and restaurants. Dress modestly for informal times. Revealing clothing for women will be a mark of poor character. Avoid the colors yellow (associated with illness) and pink.

Hierarchy/Family



Rank and age are very important in all interactions. While all actions of the individual reflect upon the family, filial piety is of utmost importance. A Korean man has a higher social status than a Korean woman. It is still rare to have women participate in business in Korea.

Manners



Be punctual to meetings. Bow at the beginning and end of a meeting. Avoid being loud and boisterous around Koreans. Treat the elderly with respect. Acknowledge them first in a group, and do not smoke or wear sunglasses when they are near. If you meet in a doorway, allow the older person to pass through first. Modesty is very important. Protecting "face" – the dignity of another person – is a very important and delicate matter. Do not sign a contract or write a person's name in red ink. This indicates that the person is deceased. Remove your shoes when entering a Korean home, restaurant, or temple building. Leave them with the toes pointing away from the building. When sitting on the floor for a meal, men should cross their legs while sitting on the cushion. Women (and men) may sit with their legs to the side, but never straightened out under the table.

Cognitive Styles



The basis for a successful business relationship in Korea is a respectful rapport between individuals. Personal relationships take precedence over business. Businesses are basically conservative and have a strong work ethic. Harmony and structure are emphasized over innovation and experimentation. In business, the emphasis is on entry-level skills and team play. Respect and deference are directed from the younger to the older, and authority and responsibility from the older to the younger. There are clearly differentiated sex roles in society. Men still dominate in public situations. Korean businessmen are tough negotiators so firmness, consistency and persistence may be needed.

Currency



Korea's currency unit is the Won.

Ethnic Make-Up



99.9% Korean with a very small Chinese minority..

Language



The official language is Korean. English is widely taught in schools.

Religion



Dominant religions include Confucianism, Christianity (28% of the population), Buddhism, Shamanism (spirit worship), and Chondokyo (religion of the heavenly way).