



## THE POLISHED PROFESSIONAL

*“Good manners are like a road map for society”*

By Josephine O'Donoghue

H.Mackay

From the new kid on the block to the experienced businessman, you might be hard-pushed to find a truly polished professional these days. There was once a time when eating with knife and fork, officially exchanging business cards or making formal introductions in a proper hierarchical order were second nature; but in an increasingly informal business environment, how can companies be sure that their employees won't let them down with bad manners?

An issue that has perhaps escaped the top priorities of some bosses recently, the business etiquette of staff can make or break a deal, influence business relationships and determine the outcome of company proposals. First impressions are long-lasting and inappropriate conduct, whether intentional or not, may encourage loyal clients to seek services elsewhere. Would you trust a member of staff to lead a major sales pitch or crisis meeting if they had been unable to handle themselves at a cocktail party or company function? It's time to get back to basics.

Always be sure to introduce persons of lesser authority to persons of greater authority; ensure

the right hand is always free for a handshake, undertaking the greeting with confidence and avoiding the limp handshake at all times; when excusing yourself, never presume to offer an explanation - a simple "excuse me" will suffice; and whilst you must always carry business cards, do not fling them out like flyers in a shopping mall.

**“In Japan, the business card enjoys a high status and should be received with profuse thanks, held with two hands and kept carefully in a business card wallet.”**

Acting in accordance with protocol and polite etiquette is a trait that will distinguish the best professionals in a sea of similar characters, functions and boardrooms; investing in manners, one of the essential business assets, ensures you

outclass competitors and regain an edge within your field. “The Polished Professional” course run by Minding Manners covers everything from a handshake to after-dinner cocktails, and can be applied to a variety of situations and locations. Founded by etiquette guru Tamiko Zabli, the school offers business etiquette training to corporate groups and individuals, and promises to turn out the most accomplished professional businessmen and women. For those at the top of their game, this is serious stuff.

Moving outside the immediate circle of UK business relations, international etiquette, diplomacy and awareness is key to large-scale business success. The extremely personal and polychronic structure of the Eastern business world differs greatly from our hierarchical and linear patterned monochronic business environment. For example, in Asia and the Middle East, there is far greater emphasis and interest in people than in numbers; thus business meetings may often overlap with personal life, involving relaxed occasions such as meeting the family, playing sport with colleagues or giving ornate gifts. In these situations, it is a good idea to bring gifts for family members; direct questions to the senior members of the group (age determines a hierarchy in the East); and in order to maintain credibility in such groups, keep dramatic gestures to a minimum during conversation (often contradicting Western advice on giving speeches).

Cultural awareness is vital. The standard handshake you offer in the Middle East may well develop into an embrace or a kiss on each cheek, so be sure not to leap backwards with surprise, as it is likely to cause offence. In Japan, the business card enjoys a high status and should be received with profuse thanks, held with two hands and kept carefully in a business card wallet. If a proposal goes well in China and you receive applause, good manners dictate that you applaud back. It is very important to try to follow local custom where possible (indeed, HSBC have benefitted from an entire advertising campaign on local custom and multicultural etiquette), as this will act as a sign of respect and unity, and make business transactions as smooth as they would be at home. ■

The Polished Professional course is priced at £285  
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