



# South Korea

Tips for ***business*** success in a High – Context culture



# Introductions and Body Language in Business Settings

- Be aware that personal relationships generally take precedence over business. The first meeting should be solely for the purpose of getting to know your counterpart and establishing rapport.
  - Expect tea to be served at the beginning of the meeting, and make a point of accepting this offering of hospitality. Keep a formal demeanor as long as your counterpart does.
- Tone down hand motions and facial expressions when talking or laughing because being too animated or demonstrative is frowned upon. Keep your voice tone moderate since they generally speak in a soft voice.
- Third party introductions are usually preferred, so wait to be introduced to another at gatherings and parties. Complimenting an elder's good health is always appreciated.
- South Korean men greet each other with a slight bow, and sometimes an accompanying handshake, while maintaining eye contact. Respect may be added by supporting your right forearm with your left hand during the handshake.
  - The junior person will initiate the greetings and be the first to bow. The senior person will be the first to offer his hand. A gentle handshake or nod of the head may also be sufficient in business...so follow their lead.
- While this is slowly changing, women in the South Korean business culture often don't shake hands. Western men should not try to shake hands with a Korean woman; Western women will usually need to initiate a handshake with Korean men.
- South Koreans may ask personal questions regarding your age, salary, education, religion, and family life because they think that they can establish rapport by finding common denominators. These questions may also be asked to determine your status—which means everything in South Korean business culture.

# Business Card Etiquette

- Since you will be judged according to your status, your title should be emphasized on your business card. This gives the recipient an idea of your job responsibility and assists him or her in determining the amount of decision-making authority you have.
- In this culture, it is considered important to keep business cards in immaculate condition. Investing in a business card case will allow your cards to stay well preserved. Writing on a business card is perceived as a sign of disrespect.

Also accepting a business card and then immediately stuffing it into your back pocket will be perceived as disrespectful.



# 5 Key Conversation Topics or Gesture Tips

- Eye contact is very important to indicate your sincerity and attentiveness to the speaker
- Talk about South Korea's economic success and international accomplishments
- Compliment and ask questions about South Korea's cultural heritage, landmarks, art, and customs
- South Koreans are avid sports enthusiasts — especially when it comes to the Olympics!
- Discuss your personal hobbies – they love kites and kite flying!





# 5 Taboo Conversation Topics or Gestures

- ❑ Don't discuss South Korean or North Korean politics, Socialism, Communism, and the Korean War
- ❑ Blowing your nose in public is considered vulgar. If heavily spiced food makes your nose run, get up and move away from the table before blowing your nose.
- ❑ Beckoning a person by moving a single finger toward you is considered very rude. Beckon someone by extending your arm palm down and moving your fingers up and down.
- ❑ Cover your mouth when yawning or using a toothpick.
- ❑ Feet are perceived as dirty and should not touch other people or objects. Men should take care that the soles of their shoes are pointing down. Women are permitted to cross their legs as long as the sole of the shoes don't point at anyone.





# Appreciative Gestures

Modesty is very important in South Korea. When you are paid a compliment during a conversation, respond by saying that you are not worthy of such praise. It's best not to acknowledge a compliment by saying "thank you" or to affirm it. However, this should not stop you from complimenting another person, since compliments are still very much appreciated.

South Koreans have an intense pride in their country and a rich sense of its history. Consequently, it is important that you make every effort not to confuse the history and culture with other Asian countries, especially Japan. It's also best not to bring gifts from Japan or talk about your contacts or travels there.

Gift-giving is often practiced in a business setting. Good gifts for a first trip include office items with your company logo or something that is commemorative of your home region. Your gift should be of good quality but modestly priced. Use both of your hands when giving or receiving a gift. Gifts are not opened in the presence of the giver.

# Giftgiving

- Receive with both hands
- Never open a present in front of the person



Sharp objects



Four of anything



Shoes



Handkerchiefs



Umbrellas



Clocks



Pears



Cut flowers



Black or white objects



Mirrors



# Social welfare > individual Gibun concept

- Keep neutral atmosphere
- Avoid bluntness, Criticism of any kind should be done in private to avoid “loss of face”.
- Be respectful
- Be polite





# FAMILY

The Family is the most important part of Korean Life



# The Value And Meaning Of The Korean Family





# Family Values

- ❑ Strong family values
- ❑ Children and parents
- ❑ The Children are expected to provide for their parents once they have grown up
- ❑ The Eldest son will live with his parents even after marriage
- ❑ In Korea a family is seen as one person



# Family Structure



- The father is the leader of the family
- The Eldest son is next in the hierarchy
- The mother is in charge of the family finances and domestic sphere
- The rest of the children must respond to every duty they are given, in the order of Father, Son and Mother





# Communication tips

- Respect the hierarchy
- Keep in mind that all their decisions are based on their family rather than their selves
- Do not portray any signs of disrespect towards your family
- Any flirtatious communications can be highly offensive due to arranged marriages