

# Make an Impression: The Right Business Etiquette for China

By LaVerne E. Brabant

Much of China's business etiquette draws on its basic cultural values, such as respect for age and position, and an orientation toward group goals rather than individualism. At the same time, there is little tolerance for overly emotional or loud behavior, with great value placed on the importance of relationships. With this in mind, here are six tips for being on your best business manners in China.

## 1: Establish Personal Relationships

When you begin to do business with Chinese people, it's important that you talk a little bit about your hobbies, family and yourself before you broach the topic of business. Treat your counterparts in China as your friends. Doing so will help smooth your business relationship.

## 2: Eating and Meeting

Working lunches and dinners are not only common but expected in China. Count on attending banquets arranged by your host. Return the favor if at all possible, either while you are traveling in China or after you return home.

At working meetings, seating will follow strict protocol, so let your host seat you. Start with a few pleasantries before discussing business. During a meal, wait for the host to make the first toast before drinking, then return the toast. It is polite to use both hands when offering or receiving anything, especially a drink.



Are you doing bilingual business?  
A two-sided business card may help.

## 3: Bring Small Gifts

While not absolutely required, small gifts are appreciated—items such as food, pens or items with your corporate logo work well. A book with pictures of your country or region is also a good bet, as are representative objects from the United States. If your Chinese client doesn't open the gift at once, don't assume the present is unappreciated. Chinese often tend not to open gifts in front of others.

## 4: Bring Business Cards

Business cards are absolutely essential for doing business in China. Again, when you receive a name card, do so with both hands. Look at the card for a moment before putting it away in your wallet or purse. To fail to do so is considered disrespectful.

## 5: Learn Some Mandarin

Your Chinese clients will be impressed because they equate learning Chinese with a fondness for China. If you can summon up even a few simple greetings, it will help lay a foundation for a stronger business relationship. Here are a few examples:

**Nin hao** (Nin How) How do you do?

**Wo hen gaoxing ren shi nin (Wa HEN GAOSHING RENshur Nin)** Nice to meet you.

**Xie xie (SHI'EH-shi'eh)** Thank you.

**Qing zuo: (Qing DZO'AH)** Sit down, please.

**Zai jian (Dzy JEE'EN)** Goodbye.

## 6: Keep Things Low Key

Don't be too demonstrative. The hugging or kissing practiced in other cultures may embarrass your Chinese clients. Laughing too loudly is not polite, nor is being too talkative. Expect your host to be more reserved in business than is common in the United States.

And last but not least is the highly sensitive topic of "face." Chinese people are accustomed to burying strong emotions and keeping expressionless faces. "Losing face" means losing business. By comparison, westerners tend to react more emotionally. When you run into problems, whether it's a conflict at a meeting or a taxi splashing you on a city street, don't lose your temper. ■

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