

The Founder and Director of the Etiquette and Leadership Institute, on how CPAs can enhance their overall presence when meeting diverse people



...refine business etiquette

Many of my adult clients avoid introducing themselves to new people because they feel awkward. They are nervous and they are at a loss for words. They don't know what to do with their hands. Some people are the opposite – they overcompensate by raising their voices to feign confidence or even inadvertently ask intrusive questions and make inappropriate comments.

If you met someone who behaved like this, would you want to do business with them? Chances are that you will think, no.

Every CPA or corporate employee should know how to properly introduce himself or herself to a new client, colleague, or supplier. It helps you project an image of being savvy, respectful, competent, and credible. Being polished helps you work effectively with co-workers, influence prospects, and strengthen client relationships.

This year, enhance your executive presence by following these simple business etiquette tips.

Seven steps for introducing yourself

The guidelines below are globally accepted norms but have distinct national variations. Take the time to learn these differences because Hong Kong's business community is wonderfully diverse, with people coming from all over the world.

Stand – When being introduced to someone, stand up to show respect. If you are physically unable to stand up, simply say, “Pardon me for not standing.”

Good posture – Foster a commanding presence by standing erect and your eyes leveled. Keep your arms

and hands relaxed at your sides.

Eye contact – In Hong Kong, steady eye contact during a conversation is acceptable.

Smile – Chinese business greetings generally do not include much smiling. However, consider smiling slightly to show friendliness.

Handshake – I suggest that people develop a firm handshake (not too hard, not too soft). In Hong Kong, be prepared to receive handshakes that are firm, soft, or even non-existent (from germaphobes)!

“Hello, my name is [first name] [last name]” – When meeting new acquaintances use more formal language, such as saying “hello” instead of “hi.” Introduce yourself with your full name.

Clear voice – Speak audibly so the other person can hear your name and remember it easily.

“Common sense is not so common” – Voltaire

A business executive once told me that she thought these steps were “very basic” and asked when she could learn advanced material. My response: knowing and doing are not the same thing.

For example, compare a five-year-old child and the world-famous Lang Lang playing the basic C major scale on the piano. They may play the exact same notes with the same fingering but Lang Lang would undoubtedly do so with vastly superior artistry and control of volume, speed, fluidity and tone.

The same comparison can be made between someone who knows business etiquette and goes through the motions, and a master of etiquette who navigates even the most sensitive social interactions with ease and grace.

Elevate yourself to a higher level

Where the etiquette of self-introductions is concerned, you will know you are operating at a high level when you:

- Always feel relaxed and confident
- Mindfully use calm, composed body language
- Introduce yourself without accidentally interrupting the other person
- Effortlessly recall the other person's name
- Know what to do in tricky situations (e.g. when the other person doesn't introduce themselves, is inaudible, has a difficult name, an unusual handshake, a missing or disabled right hand, etc.)
- Can quickly start a conversation and find common ground for further discussion and relationship building

Master the essentials until your self-introduction is flawless and personalized, and you can improvise like a seasoned jazz musician when something unexpected occurs. These are the hallmarks of a senior business executive.

Values and principles matter

Rather than worrying about memorizing countless rules or robotically reciting your self-introduction, focus on understanding why etiquette exists in the first place. It facilitates smooth, effective relationships. As etiquette expert Emily Post wrote, “Good manners reflect something from inside – an innate sense of consideration for others and respect for self.” When you believe and act on this principle, your business acquaintances will remember and appreciate you for your professionalism and polish.