

**BBC NEWS****Foreign etiquette guide for firms**

Sarcasm, kissing a client's wife and making small talk are among the ways the British fail in foreign negotiations, an etiquette firm says.

Correct business practice can be a minefield abroad, according to cultural advisor Kwintessential.

It has drawn up a list of the worst offences, from casually handling a business card to speaking too fast.

The company says basic training in cultural differences can create the "optimum conditions for negotiation".

The six most common blunders are:

- Business cards - many countries have strict protocols for presenting and receiving business cards. For example in Hong Kong, the cards must be given and received with both hands, and must be carefully studied and never written upon
- Humour - the sarcasm and self-deprecation common in the British sense of humour can baffle and offend many foreigners - particularly in certain US states where self-deprecation is perceived as an admission of weakness
- Gender differences - the relationship between men and women in some countries is governed by a strict moral code. For example, it would be entirely inappropriate to kiss an Arab client's wife on the cheek, whereas not doing so would be seen as aloof in France
- Presents - in China and Japan, gift-giving must be reciprocated though certain presents are seen as bringing bad luck. In Saudi Arabia, gifts are only given to the most intimate friends and always received with the right hand
- Speaking - talking at 100 miles an hour, with a lack of clarity, and verbosity of words just confuses foreigners
- Small talk - revealing your salary may be frowned upon in the UK but it is a hot topic of conversation in many Asian countries

UK filmmaker Ichikoo produces DVD "icebreakers" for companies to send to foreign clients about their work which are free from these etiquette blunders.

James Vyner, MD of Ichikoo, said: "For too long, British business men and women have deluded themselves into believing that there is something charming or amusing about committing gaffes when in the presence of foreign clients or potential investors.

"It certainly makes for good self-deprecating gags in the bar after work, but these mask the fact that British business is being held back by complacent, out-dated, post-imperial attitudes which simply have no place in the modern international business arena."

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