International Etiquette – France
Getting hot under the collar

(TIME) -- In France, be prepared for a passionate business encounter.

When organizing a business trip to France, it is important to plan your business wardrobe carefully -- the French are very fashion-conscious and take great care with their appearance.

Being well dressed will create a positive first impression with your counterparts.

Courtesy and formality play a significant role in defining the structure of working relationships. French business culture is intensely hierarchical - always observe business titles and use the more formal "vous", rather than the familiar "tu", unless invited to do so.

Although likely to speak English, your French associates will appreciate an effort to conduct meetings in French - this might also help you gain an advantage over English-speaking competitors.

Generally, negotiations are direct and to the point. Difficult, probing questions are to be expected so ensure your proposal is carefully thought out and don't be unnerved by criticism or by confrontation.

The French enjoy heated debate and you will earn the respect of your counterparts by articulating your point of view clearly and intelligently. Remember to maintain your composure at all times and mask any signs of frustration.

The French consider it vulgar to mention money at the start of a meeting so leave this until negotiations are nearing an end.

The highest-ranking individual will make the final decision and bring the session to a close. Even though lower-ranking intermediaries may not hold any decision-making power, do not neglect them; effective communication with all levels of an organization is the key to business success in France. Informal business lunches are a popular way of building good working relationships, though business may not necessarily be discussed.

The French are passionate about good food and wine -- sharing a few glasses of wine (customary at most meals) with business associates is the best way to cement personal relationships.