International Etiquette – Japan

Team players wanted

(TIME) -- Only team players will succeed in Japan's group-oriented culture. The country has a very formal, hierarchical culture.

When addressing a Japanese associate, use their surname or job title followed by 'san'. If speaking to a much more senior colleague, use Mr or Ms with their surname.

Never use first names unless invited to do so. The Japanese will traditionally greet each other with a bow, though western counterparts are more likely to be greeted with a simple nod followed by a light handshake.

If someone does bow to you, respond by bowing to the same level, with eyes lowered.

The key to establishing credentials, business cards should be written in both English and Japanese. Present your card with both hands with the Japanese side facing up.

Similarly, receive a card with both hands and take a few moments to read it. A first meeting tends to be very formal.

Be careful not to display negative emotions or be too abrupt, which might cause loss of face. Be especially deferential to older associates, who will usually be the most senior in rank.

In Japanese business culture, the group identity always prevails and all decisions are made within the group. Do not single anyone out, either for praise or criticism.

Expect every aspect of your proposal to be reviewed in minute detail -- the Japanese will gather as much information as possible to avoid potential problems later on.

Once outside the structured office environment, the Japanese are much more informal.

Business entertaining might take place at a golf course, karaoke bar or a private room at a restaurant. If uncertain of the intricate dining etiquette, simply follow the lead of your counterparts and remain humble, polite and modest.