

International HR Best Practices

Tip of the Month

DECEMBER 08

A monthly best practices alert for multinationals confronting the challenges of the global workplace

This Month's Challenge

When doing business abroad, not knowing the local customs can lead to serious embarrassment.

Best Practice Tip of the Month

A little preparation can prevent a lot of trouble. Get to know the local customs before embarking for an international business meeting.

Law & the Workplace™

When stepping into a foreign country, be sure to start on the right foot.

Doing business globally requires more than compliance with legal mandates. Knowledge of local customs is also critical, especially when making a first impression.

As 2008 draws to a close (none too soon), and we all look forward to greeting the New Year, we offer some tips on how to say hello in countries around the world.

With best wishes from the International Labor Group.

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
EUROPE						
UK	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting.	Generally no kissing or hugging.	Customs similar to U.S.	Avoid excessive hand gestures and displays of emotion.	Direct eye contact is common and acceptable, but don't be too intense.	Pants actually means underwear , not trousers .
France	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting and farewell. However, handshakes are not as firm as in the U.S. or Germany.	In social settings, friends do <i>les bises</i> (touching cheeks and air-kissing).	Cards should be printed in English on one side and French on the other. Business cards received should be treated with respect.	The U.S. sign for ok means zero in France.	Direct eye contact is common and acceptable, and sometimes intense.	Always apologize if you do not speak French or if you need to conduct business in another language that you are more comfortable with. Avoid being overly loud. Interrupting is common and considered part of the art of argument/discussion.

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
Germany	A firm handshake with direct eye contact is the most appropriate greeting and farewell.	Generally no kissing or hugging.	Customs similar to U.S.	Avoid excessive hand gestures and displays of emotion.	Direct eye contact is common and acceptable.	Address people by their title and always as Herr so-and-so, unless otherwise requested. Be punctual.
Italy	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting, and may include grasping the arm with the other hand.	Close women friends may touch cheeks and air-kiss. Close male friends may embrace and slap each other on the back.	Business cards are only exchanged in the business setting. Many Italians have a less formal card to exchange in social settings.	Expect a lot of talking with one's hands.	Direct eye contact is common and acceptable.	Flowers must be given in even numbers. Business matters are generally not discussed in social settings. It is common for people to talk over each other.
Netherlands	A warm and hearty handshake is the most appropriate greeting for both men and women.	Generally, the Dutch are formal and reserved in public.	Customs similar to U.S.	Avoid excessive hand gestures and displays of emotion.	Direct eye contact is common and acceptable.	Despite being basically reserved, the Dutch have a manner of speaking that may startle you by its directness.
Spain	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting.	Men who are close friends may shake hands and hug each other; women who are friends may hug and air-kiss on both cheeks.	Cards should be printed in English on one side and Spanish on the other.	The U.S. sign for ok is a rude sign in Spain.	Direct eye contact is common and expected.	Dining is usually associated with establishing business relationships in Spain, so be prepared for your business associate(s) to join you at any or all of your daily meals.
Russia	A firm, handshake while maintaining direct eye contact is the most appropriate greeting.	Close friends and family may hug and kiss.	Cards should be printed in English on one side and Russian on the other.	People tend to stand close to the other person when talking. The U.S. sign for ok is a rude sign in Russia.	Direct eye contact is common and acceptable.	In formal situations, people use all three names, whilst friends and close acquaintances may refer to each other by their first name and patronymic; for example, Ivan Ivanovich.

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
MIDDLE EAST/ NORTH AFRICA						
Israel	In a business context with foreigners, a handshake is the most appropriate greeting.	Generally no kissing or hugging.	Customs similar to U.S.	Always use the right hand. The thumbs up gesture is offensive throughout the Arab world.	Direct eye contact is common and expected.	Spatial relationships are much closer during conversation.
Saudi Arabia	In a business context with foreigners, a handshake is the most appropriate greeting; however, it may feel a bit more like a hand-hold. Women should follow their host's lead. Also, wait for the host's lead when greeting women.	Many Saudi men accompany their greetings with an embrace and cheek kissing. However, visitors who are not established close friends should not make physical contact except to shake hands.	Cards should have English on one side and Arabic on the other. Always receive cards with the right hand.	Always use the right hand. The thumbs up gesture is offensive throughout the Arab world.	Direct eye contact is common and expected.	Spatial relationships among males are much closer during conversation. If a Saudi man is accompanied by a veiled woman, he will probably not introduce her. It is important not to rush the negotiation process. Generally, no may be signalled by a sharp tilt backward of the head, and yes with a couple of sharp tilts forward. A yes might mean maybe.

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
Egypt	<p>In a business context with foreigners, a handshake is the most appropriate greeting; however, it may feel a bit more like a hand-hold.</p> <p>Women should follow their host's lead.</p> <p>Also, wait for the host's lead when greeting women.</p>	<p>Men in Egypt tend to be more touch-oriented, thus a handshake may be accompanied by a gentle touching of the elbow with the other hand.</p>	<p>Cards should have English on one side and Arabic on the other.</p> <p>Always receive cards with the right hand and make a point of studying it before putting it away.</p>	<p>Always use the right hand.</p> <p>The thumbs up gesture is offensive throughout the Arab world.</p>	<p>Direct eye contact between men is common, and sometimes even intense.</p> <p>It is considered a sign of honesty and sincerity.</p>	<p>Spatial relationships among males are much closer.</p> <p>Egyptians will tend to stand close and if you move away, this may be seen as a sign of aloofness.</p> <p>On the other hand, men and women stand farther apart than in the United States and Europe.</p> <p>Yes may mean possibly.</p>
Algeria	<p>A handshake is the most appropriate greeting.</p> <p>However, a person may continue to hold the hand during the ensuing small talk.</p> <p>Women should follow their host's lead.</p> <p>Also, wait for the host's lead when greeting women.</p>	<p>Algerians may give each other a kiss on the cheek but only for friends and family.</p>	<p>Always give or receive business cards with the right hand.</p> <p>It is a good idea to have them translated into Arabic or French.</p>	<p>Always use the right hand.</p> <p>The thumbs up gesture is offensive throughout the Arab world.</p>	<p>Direct eye contact between men is common; however prolonged, direct eye contact is not acceptable between men and women.</p>	<p>Spatial relationships among males will be much closer and a person may even hold another's arm while conversing.</p> <p>Gifts, such as pastries, fruits, and flowers, are common to cement relationships, but they are generally not opened in front of the giver.</p> <p>Saying no directly is usually avoided.</p>

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
ASIA						
China	<p>A handshake is now customary, but a nod of the head or a slight bow is sufficient.</p> <p>Neither should include too much direct eye contact.</p>	Definitely No.	<p>Cards should be printed in English on one side and Chinese on the other.</p> <p>Present card with both hands and accept it using both hands to show respect.</p>	<p>Public displays of affection are not common.</p> <p>Personal space is smaller.</p> <p>Pointing should be done with an open hand.</p> <p>Beckoning should be done with the open palm facing downward with the fingers moving back and forth in a curling motion.</p>	Prolonged direct eye contact is considered impolite and even intimidating.	<p>Actually saying no is generally avoided, instead it is often communicated by tipping the head backward and audibly sucking air in through the teeth.</p> <p>Silence during conversation is customary and acceptable.</p>
Japan	<p>Bowing is traditional, but a handshake with a light grip accompanied by a slight bow is a good show of respect for traditional custom.</p> <p>Avoid too much direct eye contact.</p> <p>The person of lower rank bows first; a formal bow is 30 degrees, an informal bow is 15 degrees.</p>	Definitely No.	<p>Cards should be printed in English on one side and Japanese on the other.</p> <p>Present card with both hands and accept it using both hands to show respect.</p>	<p>Standing with your hands in your pockets may be considered rude.</p> <p>Overly demonstrative behavior should be avoided.</p> <p>Pointing should be done with an open hand.</p> <p>Beckoning should be done with the open palm facing downward with the fingers moving back and forth in a curling motion.</p>	Prolonged direct eye contact is considered impolite and even intimidating.	<p>Actually saying no is generally avoided, instead it is often communicated by tipping the head backward and audibly sucking air in through the teeth.</p> <p>Silence during conversation is customary and acceptable.</p>
Korea	<p>Bowing is traditional, but a handshake with a light grip accompanied by a slight bow is a good show of respect for traditional customs.</p> <p>Women usually do not shake hands, especially with men, but usually just nod slightly.</p> <p>The senior person offers to shake hands first, but the junior person bows first.</p>	Definitely No.	<p>Cards should be traded respectfully.</p> <p>Keeping it on the table in front of one is a sign of respect.</p>	<p>Pointing should be done with an open hand.</p> <p>Beckoning should be done with the open palm facing downward with the fingers moving back and forth in a curling motion.</p>	Prolonged direct eye contact is considered impolite and even intimidating.	<p>Actually saying no is generally avoided.</p> <p>Try to phrase questions to avoid the necessity of the other party having to say no.</p> <p>Silence during conversation is customary and acceptable.</p>

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
Taiwan	The handshake has become the customary form of greeting, but without too much direct eye contact.	Definitely No.	Cards should be traded respectfully, keeping it on the table in front of one is a sign of respect, but do not scrutinize it in the presence of the other person.	Avoid loud boisterous behavior. Pointing should be done with an open hand. Beckoning should be done with the open palm facing downward with the fingers moving back and forth in a curling motion.	Prolonged direct eye contact is considered impolite and even intimidating.	Great respect should be shown to the elderly. The gesture to indicate no is to lift the hand to face level, palm facing outward, and moving it back and forth like a windshield wiper, sometimes with a smile.
India	The handshake has become the customary form of greeting in westernized urban settings, but there are also the customary forms of greeting among Hindi, Muslims, and Sikhs. When shaking hands with a woman, wait for her initiative. If she does not offer her hand, use the traditional greeting, which is used between Indians: hold the palms of both hands together under the chin, smile, bow slightly and say Namaste.	No, especially between a man and a woman. Indian culture is fairly conservative about physical contact.	Business cards only in English are fine and are normally handed out at the beginning of the meeting, taken with the right hand, and put respectfully in the pocket. However, be sure that there are enough for everyone present.	Standing with your hands on your hips is considered an aggressive posture.	Prolonged direct eye contact is considered impolite and even intimidating.	Dress conservatively, avoid too much leather if the hosts are Hindu. Accept the offered tea/coffee as a show of politeness and good will. A direct no is considered harsh, evasive refusals are more common. I'll try is an acceptable substitute for no .
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting.	Close male friends will shake hands and/or embrace each other. Close female friends will kiss each other.	Cards should be in English on one side and Spanish on the other. No formal ritual.	People converse with each other at a much closer distance and may maintain physical contact while conversing.	Maintaining eye contact is important.	Be prepared for business to take longer and to engage in small talk. Dress conservatively.

Country	Handshake	Hugs and Kisses	Business Cards	Gestures/ Physical Space	Eye Contact	Other
Brazil	A handsake is the most appropriate greeting.	Generally no kissing and hugging, but touching of shoulders, backs, and elbows is fairly common.	Cards should be in English on one side and Portuguese on the other. No formal ritual.	People converse with each other at a much closer distance and may maintain physical contact while conversing. The ok sign is considered vulgar.	Maintaining eye contact is important.	Business usually begins with small talk first. Dress conservatively.
Costa Rica	A handsake is the most appropriate greeting.	Generally no kissing and hugging.	Cards should be in English on one side and Spanish on the other. No formal ritual.	People converse with each other at a much closer distance.	Maintaining eye contact is important.	Be fairly punctual for meetings. Dress conservatively.
Chile	A handsake is the most appropriate greeting.	Abrazos (embrace) is common between good male friends, while female friends hug and kiss each other on both cheeks.	Cards should be in English on one side and Spanish on the other. No formal ritual.	People converse with each other at a much closer distance and may maintain physical contact while conversing.	Maintaining eye contact shows interest and sincerity.	Dress conservatively.
Venezuela	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting.	<i>Abrazos</i> (embrace) is common between good male friends, and women friends may give each other a kiss on the cheek. However, touching of arms and shoulders while conversing is common.	Cards should be in English on one side and Spanish on the other. No formal ritual.	People converse with each other at a much closer distance and may maintain physical contact while conversing.	Maintaining eye contact is important.	Be punctual. Small talk is limited. Dress conservatively.
Mexico	A handshake is the most appropriate greeting; however, wait for the woman to offer her hand first.	<i>Abrazos</i> (embrace) is common between good male friends, and women friends may give each other a kiss on the cheek.	Cards should be in English on one side and Spanish on the other. No formal ritual.	People converse with each other at a much closer distance and may maintain physical contact while conversing.	<i>Not</i> making eye contact may be a sign of respect.	Avoid saying no directly. We will see is an acceptable substitute for no . Dress conservatively.

International Labor and Employment Law Practice Group

Proskauer Rose LLP's International Labor and Employment Law Practice Group counsels companies doing business globally in connection with the employment issues they face in their workplaces around the world.

For more information about this practice, [click here](#) or contact:

Bettina B. Plevan
212.969.3065 – bplevan@proskauer.com

Aaron J. Schindel
212.969.3090 – aschindel@proskauer.com

Howard Z. Robbins
212.969.3912 – hrobbins@proskauer.com

Yasmine Tarasewicz
33.1.53.05.60.18 – ytarasewicz@proskauer.com

Anthony J. Oncidi
310.284.5690 – aoncidi@proskauer.com

Jeremy M. Mittman
310.284.5634 – jmittman@proskauer.com

Allan H. Weitzman
561.995.4760 – aweitzman@proskauer.com

This publication is a service to our clients and friends. It is designed only to give general information on the developments actually covered. It is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of recent developments in the law, treat exhaustively the subjects covered, provide legal advice, or render a legal opinion.

BOCA RATON | BOSTON | CHICAGO | HONG KONG | LONDON | LOS ANGELES | NEWARK | NEW ORLEANS | NEW YORK | PARIS | SÃO PAULO | WASHINGTON, D.C.

www.proskauer.com

© 2008 PROSKAUER ROSE LLP. All Rights Reserved. Attorney Advertising.