

Business Communication –The Right Touch in Business

By Lynda Goldman

Communication is essential to business, and touching is part of the way people connect. But when and where do you touch in business communication?

Researchers studied people in cafés around the world to see how often they touched. What they noticed is remarkable: London 0; Florida 2, Paris, 110; and Puerto Rico, 180 times. Clearly, the amount of touching people do is different around the world!

How much should you touch in business communication? Here are some guidelines as to when to touch, and when to keep hands off in business. Use these ideas to add the right touch to your business communications.

- Some countries are considered low-touch. These include the US, Canada, Britain, the Netherlands and some other northern countries. This means you are unlikely to be touched in a business situation, and any kind of touching will cause discomfort.
- Countries such as Mexico, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and other Mediterranean countries are classified as high-touch. You are more likely to get a friendly hug or pat on the back from people from these countries.
- In low-touch countries, the handshake is the only accepted form of touching in business. It's the only time you are expected or allowed to make physical contact.
- Handshakes can vary greatly. In North America, a good handshake is firm, with two-three pumps. Someone with a weak handshake is considered to be insecure or lacking in confidence, and leave a negative impression. In other countries, a softer handshake may be the norm.
- In many cultures, people kiss socially and in business settings. For example, in English Canada people shake hands, but in French Canada, it is not uncommon to kiss a business contact on the cheek. Kissing on one cheek, two cheeks, or even three times varies according to culture and location.
- The bottom line: In most parts of North America touching is suspect, and can be misleading. But if you travel or do business with people from other cultures, you may find that a kiss on the cheek is a normal greeting, and doesn't mean anything more than a handshake would. Be aware of cultural differences, and follow the cues of the people you meet.

You are invited to use these guidelines to add the right touch to your business communications.

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