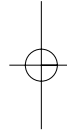

10

How can body
language help me work
with people from
different cultures?



What do you need to know to work with people from other cultural backgrounds and to be successful in international business ventures?

The major continents of the world, their countries and the countries' regions all have their own cultural differences. This is due to the topography of the land and its climate; the historical colonisation of the land by people; and the national, religious and other cultural factors that influence traditions and customs.

Cultural diversity

Today, global integration and the ease of international travel is allowing people to move to countries that have different cultures,

and, as they live, work and integrate into the new societies, they create a diverse cultural richness. This movement of people brings benefits to the communities but may also bring problems when their cultures clash.

To do business with other countries and cultures, you need to understand the basics of their cultural etiquette. Even people who do not conduct business in other countries, are working in increasingly diverse multicultural environments, where an understanding of the rudiments of accepted behaviour will be of value to establish rapport, manage and lead people.

Protocol

To be successful in working with people from other cultures, you need to understand the essentials of their social cultural norms, so as not to offend them through poor etiquette, including the inappropriate use of non-verbal gestures. When greeting and relating to people from other regions of the world and other cultures, the important cultural aspects of etiquette are termed 'protocol' and set the behaviour that is expected if a positive relationship is to be established.

Before visiting a foreign country to do business or when receiving foreign visitors, do some background research on the protocol to be used. You can purchase books that provide information and sources of information for country-by-country briefings on key aspects of the history, culture, etiquette and business practices (such as: *Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands* by Morrison and Conway (2006) and *Cultural Intelligence* by Thomas and Inkson (2003)), or you can find similar information using the internet. The key body language aspects of protocol to take into account are greetings, dress, proximity and gestures.

Greetings

The purpose of a greeting is to recognise the other person and to introduce yourself by giving your name and, where relevant, your job title and organisation. This may be followed with your reason for greeting the person, such as to act as an interpreter, guide, host, sales person, negotiator etc. The adage, that '*you never get a second chance to make a good first impression*' is particularly true for your first greeting to another person. The greeting often sets the tone and expectation on both sides for the relationship that is to follow. Normally, we want our greeting to be the first step in creating rapport with the other person so that we may be influential with them.

Dress

As an initial indicator of sameness or difference, dress either sets us apart when style and quality are very different or brings us closer together when style and quality are similar. Even before any greeting or words are exchanged, our dress is speaking volumes about who we are, what we stand for and our pretensions of or actual status. To work effectively with other people, you should try to emulate similarities in dress to help you establish rapport and co-operation. This does not mean copying national styles of dress when working with people from different world regions but it does mean emulating the formality or informality that their dress code is indicating. Sometimes we want dress to set us apart, as in the different modes of dress between the sexes, and when we want our dress to indicate status or role or to help us to be more influential.

Proximity

This relates to the distance you maintain between yourself and the other person, especially during the greeting. In many informal cultures and especially in warmer countries, such as southern Europe, Latin America and parts of Africa, the greeting will be informal, with close proximity, and may even include a prolonged body hug or handshake. In formal cultures and in many colder countries, the greeting will be formal, with distance between the bodies and touching or handshaking kept to a minimum.

Always bear in mind that people will feel uncomfortable and possibly intimidated if you sit or stand too close to them. Similarly, they may find you cold and aloof if you maintain too much distance. The amount of personal space needed is derived from personal preferences and cultural norms. Unless you know otherwise, it is better to keep a respectful distance until you observe what is comfortable for the other person. If you notice that the other person's colleagues maintain a close distance, this does not mean that it is acceptable for you to follow their lead. Allow the other person to dictate the acceptable amount of social distance as the relationship develops.

Proximity may be considered in terms of the amount of *personal space* we like around us at any given time. The personal space we need will vary according to our personality, cultural upbringing and to the situation. With friends, we will usually have no problem with close proximity and possibly even touching, but in most other situations we need more personal space until we become comfortable and relaxed.

There are three zones of personal space to consider. For people who live in more reserved cultures, these zones are:

- **Public zone** – around 4 to 6 feet (1.2 to 1.8 metres) when we are in situations where we do not know the other people.

- **Social zone** – around 2 to 4 feet (0.6 to 1.2 metres) in situations where we are on good terms with the other people.
- **Intimate zone** – less than 2 feet (0.6 metres) is reserved for people with whom we have a close relationship.



Figure 10.1: Personal space zones

For people in less reserved cultures, the above distances may be halved.

Getting closer to someone than they feel comfortable with will break rapport and may be interpreted as threatening behaviour, requiring a defensive response. Of course, the situation will have a bearing on the personal space we demand. People who live and work in urban areas will usually require less personal space than people who live and work in rural areas. Also, in crowded commuter situations and at large public gatherings a smaller amount of personal space will usually be tolerated.

Is touching acceptable? As a general guide, apart from the brief greeting ritual, it is advisable to avoid touching, especially members of the opposite sex.

Gestures

All effective communication includes gestures using the face, hands and body that support the verbal messages being communicated, and in some cases provide the whole message. Facial gestures are fairly universal and have similar meaning in most parts of the world, especially expressions related to joy, fear and anger. Other gestures, especially those involving the hands, can have very different meanings in different cultures, so you are advised to avoid hand gestures until you have ascertained their meaning in the cultural context they will be used. For example, forming an 'O' with the thumb and forefinger means 'OK' (okay) in much of the world, but can also mean zero, money, worthless, homosexual, or be a rude insult, depending on the regional and cultural context in which it is used.



Figure 10.2: This 'O' gesture means different things in different societies

In the next section, we will use this common 'OK' gesture as an example to show how gestures can have very different meanings in different parts of the world.

International protocol

In this book, we do not have the space to provide a complete coverage of body language protocol in all the countries of the world.

We will, however, endeavour to provide guidance on some of the key aspects of body language etiquette you need to pay attention to when interacting with people from other countries and cultures. We shall consider this in relation to the main continents and cultural areas of the world, shown on the world map in Figure 10.3.

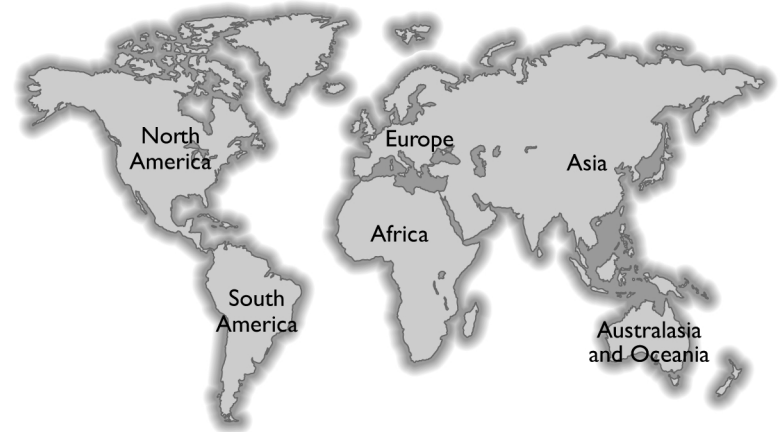


Figure 10.3: World regions

We will take each world area in turn and make you aware of the similarities and differences in terms of the protocol for initial business greetings, dress, proximity and gestures for the larger and/or more significant trading countries in the area. In most cultures, greetings may become more informal, friendly and close as the relationship develops.

We stress that the guidance given is for *business situations*, because some aspects of greetings, dress and proximity are likely to be different in a less formal, non-business context.

North America

North America is made up of the United States of America (USA), Canada, Mexico, the countries south of Mexico that border on South America and the countries that make up the Caribbean Islands. In terms of trade, North America includes the well-developed countries of the USA and Canada, and some moderately developed and developing countries in the south and in the Caribbean Islands.

Greetings

North Americans are largely open and friendly people. They will exchange a short-firm handshake, possibly with a head nod, good eye contact, and a friendly greeting, such as saying, 'Hi', 'Hello', 'Good to meet you'. The verbal greeting will usually include title and family name but expect soon to be on first name terms.

In **Canada**, **El Salvador** and **Mexico** men should wait for women to initiate a handshake. Also, in **Mexico** women may greet by touching the right forearm or shoulder.

In **El Salvador**, the handshake is gentle and may last more than a few seconds. The verbal exchange of title and family name should be in a soft tone, as loudness is disliked. Sometimes a nod is given in place of a handshake.

In **Guatemala**, people are softly spoken, will give a gentle handshake and may utter the greeting, 'Mucho gusto'.

Dress

For most of the region there are no special rules to follow regarding business dress, as casual dress is accepted in much of the business world, but some organisations have a more formal dress code for work. We advise you to check on dress code before you visit.

In **Canada**, **Mexico** and the southern countries, business dress is more formal and jeans are best avoided.

Proximity

As North Americans are generally open, friendly and often gregarious people, they do not need a large personal space; indeed, if you maintain too much space you may be regarded as aloof or as regarding yourself superior in some way.

In **Mexico** and countries in the south, personal space is usually much smaller than in other parts of the region and touching is usually acceptable. Maintaining too much distance is likely to be interpreted as unfriendly.

Gestures

North Americans may be moderately expressive with their hand gestures when talking and when making non-verbal signals and, due to the North American film and television industry, most people have become accustomed to the most typical gestures North Americans use.

In **Canada**, maintain friendly but reserved behaviour and follow good rules of etiquette. If you tend to use expansive arm gestures when talking, restrain yourself when talking with Canadians – except with French Canadians who speak in a more demonstrative fashion.

In **Costa Rica** and **Guatemala**, making a fist with the thumb sticking out between the middle and index fingers is obscene. In **Guatemala**, the 'OK' gesture is also obscene.

In **El Salvador**, although people are expressive with their hands, it is rude to point your finger at another person. Yawning in public should be avoided.

Mexicans may not make eye contact. This is a sign of respect and should not be interpreted as evasiveness or low self-esteem. Mexican men are generally open and friendly, and make a lot of physical contact. Touching shoulders or holding another's arm is common and to withdraw from this touch may be taken as an insult. Mexicans use a 'psst-psst' sound to gain another's attention in public, so do not be affronted if it is used on you.

In the **USA**, the 'OK' gesture means 'okay'. Do not use an upward pointing middle finger with closed hand, as this will be regarded as an insult. Some eye contact is expected but the gaze should not be held for too long.

South America

South America comprises a climate ranging from very hot in the north to cold in the south and in the mountain areas of the East coastal region. The large countries of Brazil and Argentina dominate, with the other countries mainly bordering the edge of the continent. In terms of trade, South America is made up of a small number of mainly moderately developed countries.

Greetings

In the north of the region, greetings are friendly and effusive with a light handshake lasting several seconds and with good eye contact. Women may cheek kiss on one or both cheeks, or may hold forearms. The verbal greeting will usually include title and family name.

In **Argentina**, greetings are a formal handshake and nod between both sexes. Verbal greetings include title and surname.

In **Chile**, when a woman enters a room men should rise and be prepared to shake her hand if she offers it. A seated woman need not rise and is not obliged to offer her hand. Verbal greetings include title and surname.

Dress

Business dress is conservative and smart, especially in **Argentina** and **Venezuela**, where appearance is important. Avoid wearing jeans unless they are well tailored and of smart appearance.

In **Brazil**, three-piece suits are an indication of executive status and two-piece suits an indication of office workers.

Proximity

As people in South America are generally very friendly, personal space is much smaller than in North America. Touching is to be expected and will be considered an insult if it is rebuffed.

Chileans and **Venezuelans** converse in close proximity, with good eye contact used to show interest and sincerity. In Venezuela, touching the other person's arm is common.

Colombians and **Ecuadorians** stand in close proximity when conversing but engage in less physical contact during conversation than other South Americans.

Gestures

South Americans may be quite expressive with their hand gestures whilst talking and good eye contact is expected. In some of the countries, the 'OK' gesture is a vulgar gesture and winking has a sexual connotation.

In **Brazil**, to indicate appreciation, pinch your earlobe between thumb and forefinger. To indicate good luck, make a fist with the thumb sticking out between the middle and index fingers. To indicate that you do not know the answer, flick your fingertips underneath your chin.

In **Argentina**, make good eye contact. Do not put your feet on furniture. Cover your mouth when you cough or yawn. Do not eat in the street or on public transport.

In **Chile**, cover your mouth if you yawn. Keep your hands above the table at all times during meals and never eat with your fingers. Do not pound your right fist into your left palm, as this is obscene. Holding your hand up with palm outwards and fingers spread means 'stupid'.

In **Colombia**, the 'OK' gesture, when placed as a circle in front of the nose indicates that someone is homosexual. Holding hands apart with two outward pointing fingers is obscene. It is impolite to yawn in public. Avoid putting your feet on furniture.

In **Costa Rica** and **Ecuador**, fidgeting with hands or feet is distracting and considered impolite.

In **Ecuador**, it is considered impolite to yawn or point at others in public.

Europe

Europe is divided mainly into the countries that make up the European Union and the former Soviet Union countries located in Europe. In terms of trade, Europe is made up of a large number of well-developed countries and some moderately developed countries.

Greetings

In the colder northern regions, greetings are confined to a short light-to-firm handshake between both sexes; brief eye contact and possibly a nod, especially in **Germany**, may be used. The verbal greeting will usually include title and family name. Also, a brief greeting such as, 'Good morning/afternoon/evening'. 'How do you do?' is acceptable, apart from in **The Netherlands** and **Ukraine**, where the only verbal exchange is your family name. Be aware that in **Hungary** the family name is listed before the other names. In **Russia**, do not shake hands with gloves on, as this is considered poor manners, and in **Germany**, shaking hands with the other hand in your pocket indicates a lack of respect.

In the warmer southern countries, greetings are more close and effusive and may include arm-clasping, hugging and cheek-kissing. In **Turkey**, a male should wait for a female to offer her

hand, and some **Muslims** may avoid contact with the opposite sex altogether. Generally, throughout the region, verbal greetings include title and family name. Do not use first names until given permission to do so. You should be aware that the **French** sometimes introduce themselves by giving their family name before their first name – if in doubt, ask for clarification.

Dress

In the north, dress is usually conservative and formal or smart and casual. In the major cities, and especially in **France**, **Italy** and **Spain**, dress is often more expensive and fashionable. In **Russia**, women should dress conservatively and refrain from wearing trousers.

In the south, dress may be more relaxed and comfortable to suit the warmer climate, apart from **Portugal** and **Turkey**, where conservative, formal dress is worn throughout the year.

Proximity

In the colder north, people usually need a fairly large personal space and touching is generally to be avoided. In the warmer south, the opposite is usually true.

Gestures

People in the colder climates tend to be more reserved, are restrained in their use of gestures and speak more quietly than people in warmer climates. Speaking with hands in pockets or whilst chewing is impolite and pointing with the index finger may be considered rude. Sitting with an ankle resting on knee will be interpreted as being conceited. Some eye contact is expected but the gaze should not be held for too long, apart from in Ireland, where it is considered polite to do so. Winking is considered an inappropriate gesture in many of the countries.

The 'OK' gesture is a vulgar insult in **Belarus, Denmark and Norway**. In **Belgium and France**, the 'OK' gesture means zero or worthless.

In **Bulgaria**, the head nod signifies 'No'.

In **Romania**, making a fist with the thumb sticking out between the middle and index fingers is an insult but signifies 'Nothing' in **Belarus and Ukraine**.

In **Finland**, standing with arms folded is likely to be interpreted as arrogance. When sitting, do not cross your legs at the ankles or place an ankle on the knee. In **Finland and The Netherlands**, only take small portions of food, as it is rude to leave unconsumed food on the plate.

In the **Czech Republic**, higher-ranking and older people enter a room first and, where status is equal, men precede women. When eating, do not place your elbows on the table as this is poor etiquette.

In **Denmark**, women enter a room first and go down stairs before men but up stairs after men. Try not to turn your back on people, especially if having to squeeze past someone.

French people tend to be softly spoken and dislike loud voices. They have a great appreciation for the art of conversation and frequently interrupt each other, as polite argument is a form of entertainment to them.

Italians are very expressive with their hands when talking, so you should not place too much significance on this form of gesturing. Tapping the nose with the index finger signals a friendly warning to 'take care' because of danger or deceit. Flicking the chin with a finger signifies impatience but in **Portugal**, this gesture means the person does not have an answer.

Germans view business as being very serious and do not appreciate humour in a business context. In business meetings, age takes precedence over youth and older people are given precedence when entering and leaving the room. Chewing gum whilst holding a conversation is considered rude. Although Germans can consume large quantities of alcohol, public drunkenness is frowned upon.

Greeks may toss their head upwards to indicate 'No', which can be confused with a nod meaning 'Yes', so ensure you obtain a verbal agreement also. Be aware that Greeks may smile when they are angry. Greeks do not have a tradition of queuing, so do not show offence if you experience this.

Russians do not usually raise their voices, being generally reserved and sombre, and may be offended by loud and gregarious behaviour. If offered a drink by your Russian host, do not refuse, as this is a serious breach of etiquette. Try not to turn your back on people, especially if having to squeeze past someone.

In **Spain**, crossing your fingers is a friendly gesture and means 'good luck' or 'protection'. Pulling down on your eyelid means 'be alert' or 'I am alert'. Business negotiations are often long, arduous and chaotic, with much over-talking, and reverting to procedure and rules only as a last resort.

In **Sweden**, face a person who is talking to you, cross your arms as a sign of listening, and do not interrupt them. Swedes tend to be rather serious people and do not appreciate loud, extrovert behaviour.

In **Switzerland**, maintaining a good posture when standing or sitting is important and keep your hands out of your pockets. Do not chew gum in public and be aware that dropping litter is offensive and carries heavy fines.

In **Turkey**, 'No' is indicated by a backward tilt of the head with eyes half closed. Showing the soles of your feet is insulting. When facing another person, crossing your arms is rude. Women should not cross their legs.

In the **United Kingdom**, keep your gestures moderate and avoid gesturing with the index and middle fingers raised in a 'V' shape with palm facing you, as this is insulting. Tapping the nose with the index finger signals that something is to be kept secret. Personal space is important, so you should not stand or sit too close when conversing, and touching is generally inappropriate.

Asia

Asia is the most diverse of the continents in terms of races, religions, politics, cultures and languages. The region is made up of China, Japan, the Russian Federation, India, Pakistan, most of the Arab nations and a large number of smaller nations that make up the remainder of South East Asia.

Most Asians place a great deal of importance on relationships and building long-term relationships is essential for business success. The concept of 'saving face' is important and Asians will go to great lengths to save face and avoid embarrassment. Being made to 'lose face' is not easily forgotten or forgiven.

In terms of trade, Asia is made up of a mixture of well-developed, moderately developed and developing countries.

Greetings

The north contains the **Russian Federation**, whose people display little sign of affection in public and greetings are a short but firm handshake with exchange of title and family name only.

The **Arab nations** will generally use a light handshake when greeting non-Arabs. Their traditional greeting between males involves clasping the right hand and placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder whilst cheek kissing on both cheeks. Women accompanying Arab men may not be introduced, especially if they are wearing a veil. The greeting will usually be quite friendly and title and family name are given.

In **Israel**, women should wait for a man to offer his hand and should be aware that Orthodox Jewish males are unlikely to shake hands with women.

The **Chinese, Koreans and Japanese** traditionally bow or nod their head in a respectful manner, but when greeting people from other countries they will usually offer a light handshake and give title and family name. Be aware that, in **China, Korea and Vietnam**, the family name is listed before the other names.

In **China**, if you are welcomed with handclapping when visiting a gathering of people, the etiquette is to respond with handclapping also.

In **Indonesia**, greetings carry importance and formality and should not to be rushed. The traditional greeting is '*Selamat*', which means 'peace'. The verbal greeting may include title and family name. If given a business card, read it carefully, never write on it and do not put it in your back trouser pocket.

In **Japan**, if you are greeted with a bow, return with a bow as low as the one you received. The level to which you bow determines the status relationship between you and the other individual – a lower bow means a lower status. Bow from the waist with a straight back and keep your eyes lowered. Men should hold their palms flat against the sides of their thighs and women should hold their palms together pointing downwards in front of their thighs. There are many types and uses for bows in Japan, so if you will be doing business with the Japanese, make yourself familiar with bowing etiquette. The verbal greeting will usually include title and family name. Business cards are exchanged using both hands with a degree of reverence. The card should be examined carefully as a sign of respect and you should take special care in handling it. Do not write on the card or put it in you pocket or wallet, as these actions may be interpreted as defacing or disrespecting the card.

In **Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan**, the handshake is gentle, sometimes involving both hands and may be prolonged for around ten seconds. The traditional **Malay** greeting is the *salaam*, which involves one or both hands gently touching but not clasping the other person's hands and then withdrawing to rest over their heart. The verbal greeting may include title and family name.

In **Taiwan**, you may be asked, 'Have you eaten?' as part of the greeting. This is a rhetorical question and the polite response is to affirm that you have eaten.

Most **Indians** will use the handshake but the traditional *namaste* of palms together beneath the chin as if praying in a reverent manner may be used. Generally, there is no public contact

between men and women, so the *namaste* is a good alternative when greeting members of the opposite sex.

In **Thailand**, they use the *wai* greeting, which is similar to the *namaste* but with the palms held together in front of the face and the higher the hands are held the more respectful the greeting.

In **Pakistan**, the family name may be listed first or last. Often, the combination and order of the individual names that make up the complete name has a special meaning. Be aware that the use of a single name taken out of context of the full name may alter its meaning, so always ask how the person should be addressed.

Dress

In most of Asia, conservative, formal dress is worn throughout the year. In **Indonesia**, **Malaysia**, **Singapore** and many other countries in South East Asia, smart but less formal clothing may be worn to take account of the extreme heat and humidity.

In **Saudi Arabia** and many of the **Arab nations**, most of the body must be covered despite the heat. It is common to remove shoes before entering a building, so follow the lead of your host.

In **China**, women should avoid wearing revealing clothing, short-sleeved blouses and high-heeled shoes.

In **Japan**, the quality of your clothes will indicate your status, so 'dress to impress'. Wear shoes that are easy to take off and put on when visiting Japan, as you will do this often. Women should dress conservatively with minimum accessories, and should avoid wearing trousers and high-heeled shoes.

Proximity

Most **Russians**, **Chinese** and **Japanese** prefer a large personal space and do not like to be touched.

The other nations in the region are more expressive and overtly friendly, and close proximity and even touching may be acceptable as the relationship develops.

Gestures

Russians and **Chinese** gesture little and see no need for this form of flamboyance. In **China** and **Japan**, finger-pointing is considered rude, and the **Chinese** find placing fingers in the mouth revolting.

The **Japanese** do not like to say 'No' and will often say 'Yes' when they mean 'No'. To the Japanese, 'Yes' is an acknowledgement that they heard you. It is not an acknowledgement that they agree with you. If they indicate that 'it is difficult' or 'we need to consider it more carefully', they are probably saying 'No'. The Japanese read great significance into all forms of gesturing, so use gestures sparingly. The 'OK' gesture means 'money'. You should avoid pointing at people. Do not blow your nose in public. Keep eye contact brief. Facial expressions can have different meanings from those in other parts of the world and should be interpreted within the context of the other gestures. For example, a *smile* can mean either *joy* or *displeasure*, so use and interpret facial expressions with caution. The Japanese are quite comfortable with silence and use it to their advantage in many situations, especially when negotiating.

In **Hindu** and **Muslim** cultures, the custom is to use the right hand for food preparation and eating. The left hand is considered unclean due to its use in bodily hygiene and using it in social situations should be avoided as much as possible. Pointing the soles of your feet towards another person is offensive.

In **Saudi Arabia** and many of the **Arab nations**, gesturing is frequently used when speaking but pointing at another person is rude, as is an extended thumb with clenched hand gesture. It is not uncommon to see men walking hand-in-hand, as this is a sign of friendship. Conversations often go at a slow pace and you should not feel you have to speak during periods of silence. Do not forget that in Saudi Arabia, 'Yes' usually means 'possibly' and tipping the head back with a click of the tongue means 'No'.

In **India**, never touch another's head; finger pointing and beckoning is rude; never whistle, wink or point your feet at

someone; always apologise if your foot touches another person; and leather accessories may cause offence, especially to **Hindus**.

In **Indonesia**, **Malaysia** and **Singapore**, bouncing the fist in the palm of the hand is an offensive gesture. Also, do not point with a finger or gesture with a closed hand and extended thumb. Never touch another person's head, especially children's heads.

The **Indonesians** are a softly spoken people, so do not raise your voice. It is not acceptable to express anger in public through tone of voice, loudness or body language. In conversation, if you hear 'Yes, but' it means 'No'.

In **Taiwan**, do not touch another person's shoulders or head, especially with children. Do not touch or point with your feet, as feet are considered dirty. Also, do not discard food from your mouth back to your plate or bowl.

Africa

Africa is made up of countries with inhabitants of mainly Arab origin in the north, of mainly black African origin in the central to southern regions and of mainly mixed black and white origin in the extreme south. In terms of trade, Africa is made up of a large number of developing countries, some moderately developed countries and a few well-developed countries.

Greetings

The **Arab nations** will generally use a light handshake when greeting non-Arabs. Their traditional greeting between males involves clasping the right hand and placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder whilst cheek-kissing both cheeks. Women accompanying men may not be introduced. The greeting will usually be quite friendly and title and family name are given.

The many **Black African nations** have their own forms of greeting but a long gentle handshake and name will usually be offered to non-Africans.

In the developed areas of **South Africa** a short firm handshake with title and family name will be given.

Dress

In **Egypt** and the **Arab nations**, modest formal clothes covering most of the body should be worn and wearing jewellery, especially necklaces, should be avoided by men.

The **Black African nations** will wear either formal clothing or their traditional local dress. You are advised to wear conservative formal clothing suitable for the hot climate.

In **South Africa**, dress is fairly casual but for business you should wear conservative clothing suitable for the hot climate.

Proximity

People in the region are generally open, expressive and friendly, and close proximity and touching are usually acceptable as the relationship develops.

Gestures

In the **Hindu** and **Muslim** world, the custom is to use the right hand for food preparation and eating. The left hand is considered unclean due to its use in bodily hygiene and using it in social situations should be avoided as much as possible. Pointing the soles of your feet towards another person is offensive. In much of **South Africa**, the feet are also considered unclean and should not be used to touch or move things.

In **Egypt** and many of the **Arab nations**, gesturing is frequently used when speaking but pointing at another person is rude, as is the thumb up with clenched hand gesture.

In **Egypt**, when dining, leaving some food on your plate symbolises abundance and is considered a compliment to your

host. Do not tap your two index fingers together as this is a crude gesture meaning 'Will you sleep with me?'.

Despite the political and tribal difficulties in many of the **Black African nations**, the people are usually hospitable, friendly, gentle and courteous. To be successful with them, demonstrate the same qualities to establish empathy and rapport.

In many of the **African nations**, as in the Muslim world, there is a preference for using the right hand, so use this hand to give and take things.

Australasia and Oceania

Australasia and Oceania comprises the countries of Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and the Oceanic Islands of the southern Pacific Ocean. In terms of trade, the region is made up of the well-developed countries of Australia and New Zealand and developing countries such as New Guinea and the islands of Oceania.

Greetings

In **Australia** and **New Zealand**, a moderately firm, brief handshake with good eye contact, and giving title and family name is the norm. Women may shake hands or, in **Australia**, may give a cheek kiss. In the greeting, avoid the overuse of 'G'day': use 'Hello' or some other verbal greeting.

In **New Guinea** and the **Oceanic Islands**, people will have their own forms of greeting but they will usually offer a light courteous handshake to foreigners and give their name.

Dress

In **Australia** and **New Zealand**, business dress is conservative but clothing should take account of the seasonal climate.

In the other countries, dress conservatively and to suit the hot climate.

Proximity

Australians are generally open, friendly and direct but reserved in terms of the personal space they require, so do not stand or sit too close.

New Zealanders are often softly spoken and are more reserved than Australians, so use a moderate tone of voice and allow them ample personal space.

Gestures

In **Australia**, extended eye contact is the norm and indicates the person is trustworthy. Do not gesture with one or two fingers, as this is considered rude. Also, avoid winking and touching.

In **New Zealand**, keep your gestures moderate and avoid gesturing with the index and middle fingers raised in a 'V' shape, as this is considered rude.

INSTANT TIP

Do not lose business and make enemies: body language is just like a foreign language – the wrong gesture is as bad as the wrong word.