

Cultural Etiquette in the Philippines

The People

Filipinos are casual, fun loving, sensitive and hospitable people. Personal and family honor are stressed, as well as dignity and pride. Education is highly valued and families make great sacrifices to educate their children. Hiya (shame) is instilled in Filipinos at an early age. To be shamed is the greatest form of disgrace.

Meeting and Greeting

Men and women shake hands with everyone present at a business meeting or social occasion and when saying "goodbye." Handshakes should be friendly and informal, but limp. Men should wait for women to extend their hand.

Body Language

If Filipinos don't understand a question, they open their mouths. Raised eyebrows signify recognition and agreement.

Laughter may convey pleasure or embarrassment; it is commonly used to relieve tension.

"Yes" is signified by a jerk of the head upward. "No" is signified by a jerk of the head down. Since the Filipinos rarely say no, the non-verbal sign for "no" is sometimes accompanied by a verbal yes, which would still indicate "no."

Staring is considered rude and could be misinterpreted as a challenge, but Filipinos may stare or even touch foreigners, especially in areas where foreigners are rarely seen.

To Filipinos, standing with your hands on your hips means you are angry.

Never curl your index finger back and forth (to beckon). This is an insult.

To indicate two of something, raise your ring and pinkie fingers.

To beckon, extend arm, palm down, moving fingers in scratching motion. Touch someone's elbow lightly to attract attention. Do not tap on the shoulder.

"Eyebrow flash" -- a quick lifting of eyebrows -- is a Filipino greeting.

Corporate Culture

Filipinos are relaxed about time. Meetings and appointments often begin late. Foreigners are supposed to be on time.

A personal introduction by a mutual friend or business associate makes business arrangements much smoother.

Establishing a personal relationship is important to the success of a business relationship. Trust and loyalty are central to developing relationships. Insincerity is easily detected and can ruin the relationship.

Filipinos often have a "take it or leave it" attitude when it comes to selling prices. They may also place less stress on the absolute selling price and place more emphasis on percentages, unit cost or rounded figures.

Casual conversation may precede business discussions during meetings.

Negotiations and business deals move slowly. A third-party go-between may be a good idea to relieve tension or give criticism. Do not allow meetings to go too long. Filipinos love to eat and their enthusiasm wanes when they are hungry.

Communication is indirect, truth is diplomatically presented, manner is gentle, and the perception of the recipient is considered in all communications. All communication should be courteous, regardless of its content. The Filipino attempt to please may result in many unfinished projects.

Filipinos find it difficult to say "no," disagree, reject or be confrontational, especially when a superior is involved. Expect an ambiguous or indirect answer -- not to deceive, but rather to please and avoid confrontation.

Face-to-face meetings are preferred. Written communications might not be answered. Communication by mail or telephone is unreliable at best.

Small bribes are occasionally used to cut through bureaucracies. This is illegal, but done quietly and often. Participate with caution.

Dining and Entertainment

Most business entertaining is done in restaurants or clubs, preferably a good restaurant in an international hotel. During business entertaining, you may be asked to sing. Try to join in.

A dinner invitation to counterparts and their spouses is appreciated before you leave the country. Don't bring your spouse to a business lunch. Lunches are generally for business discussions.

Filipinos may view a dinner/party invitation as just a passing thought. They may answer "yes," but not take an invitation seriously. Phone to re-invite and remind. An R.S.V.P. may not be answered. It must be reiterated to be taken seriously. Don't accept an invitation unless repeated at least three times.

People who have not been invited may turn up at dinner. They should be included graciously.

Punctuality is appreciated but not demanded when attending social affairs.

Getting drunk is considered greedy and rude.

Toasts are common in the Philippines, especially at business meetings. Usually the host or lead of the visiting party initiates a toast.

It is polite to decline the first offer of seating, food, drink, etc. Accept the second offer.

Keep your hands above the table during dinner.

Leave a small amount of food on your plate when you are finished eating. When finished eating, place your fork and spoon on your plate.

The person who invites pays the bill.

Dress

Filipinos are some of the smartest dressers in Asia. Dress well for most occasions.

Men should wear a jacket and tie for initial meetings.

Women should wear western dresses, skirts and blouses.

Gifts

Gifts are not expected, but are appreciated. You may want to bring a small gift to your first meeting.

Gifts are not opened in the giver's presence. Thank the giver and set it aside.

Helpful Hints

Speak softly and control your emotions in public. Make requests, not demands.

Don't be offended by personal questions. These are asked to show interest. Feel free to ask the same questions in return, especially about family.

Verbal assault is a crime for which you can be charged.

Never bring shame to a person. This reflects on his family. Personal goals are sacrificed for the good of the family.

Never directly criticize anyone, especially in public. Never offer insincere comments or compliments.

Especially for Women

Foreign women will have little problem doing business in the Philippines.

Men may make comments about women walking on the street. These should be ignored.

A foreign woman should not pay a bill for a Filipino businessman. It would embarrass him and might harm the business relationship.

Ref.: http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_ph.htm