

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

EXPECT TO GET PERSONAL

Building relationships goes a long way towards smoothing out business dealings, so take time to get to know potential partners. Rather than relying on financial records or other “objective” measures to assess a business, Indian business partners are more likely to base a decision to work together on whether they can trust you. And you should do the same.

MIND THE NAMES AND TITLES

Expect to use courtesy or professional titles unless your counterpart initiates the change to first names. Naming conventions also differ between northern and southern India, so brush up on the local usage.

BE POLITE!

Indians are very polite in their business dealings, partly due to the historical British influence, as well as the inherent respect they show towards authority figures. So courtesy is important at all times, and expect to make a lot of small

talk before you get down to business.

On a practical note: always accept tea when it is offered, and you can never go wrong with a chat about cricket!

TAKE LOCAL MORES INTO ACCOUNT

Although the caste system is loosening, particularly in cities, Indian society is still based on hierarchy. It is not unusual for a businessperson to have both a driver and a domestic servant who does everything from paying the household bills to bargaining at the market. Going against this system by trying to ‘do it yourself’ is seen as an affront, so it’s better to go along, even if it takes getting used to.

GET INTO THE SPIRIT OF LOCAL HOLIDAYS

The year’s high point for many Indians is the Hindu celebration of Lights, called Diwali, which takes place in October. You will be expected to distribute sweets to all manner of service providers, and many employees still get a month’s pay in bonus at this time.