

to assume that absence of a private office indicates that the person one is dealing with is of junior rank. A sensitivity to such differences in Japanese and Canadian styles and consideration of the information provided on business cards will help prevent such misjudgments.

Business styles

A low-key, modest approach generally works better than an aggressive sales pitch, with which many Japanese are uncomfortable.

It is best to minimize use of the pronoun "I" when speaking on behalf of your organization. The corporate "we" is much preferred by the Japanese for a number of reasons, including a tendency to see the individual primarily in the context of the organization of which he is a part. Excessive use of "I" can lead to uncertainty over whether the views you express are yours personally, or those of your company. If they are considered the former, they may be given little weight.

Nodding of heads or uttering "yes" is evidence that a Japanese person is listening, but may not indicate comprehension or agreement.

Reaching agreement, especially on complex matters, may be more time consuming than might be the case in a Canadian business context. This reflects, in part, a tendency to study matters thoroughly before making a decision. It also reflects the fact that the Japanese negotiator is usually less empowered than his Canadian counterpart to make decisions. The consensus oriented Japanese business style usually requires that, following discussions with the outside party, a fairly extensive process of internal consensus building may be required in order to bring everyone onside. The Japanese will usually be unwilling to discuss this internal process with outsiders in any depth. Patience is required.

Business meetings can usually be held between 9:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Meetings can also usually be arranged over lunch, although generally not for first meetings. Breakfast meetings are rare among Japanese businessmen (most of whom have a very long commute and do not reach the office until about 9:00 a.m.) and should not generally be proposed. Evening meetings are possible, but are generally reserved for forging closer personal ties after the decision to establish business ties has already been made. On such occasions little, if any, actual business is discussed.