

lingua business

Business Protocol

By Paul Gibson



Should I shake his right hand, kiss him twice or take a bow?

Every country has an established “business protocol. For example, in the U.S. most business is discussed either in the office or on a golf course, but NEVER in a bar. This is clearly not the case in Europe, where some business deals are sealed by a celebratory dinner. Each culture carries out business in a different way.

One of the basic protocols that is common is the so-called business meeting. Meetings are the time and place to present new projects, ideas, rehash important issues, take disciplinary action, refuse or reject proposals, make productivity and budget assessments, and even define the future strategy a company will follow.

Each meeting normally has someone who “calls the meeting” or the person who decides the time and place when and where everyone might be able to meet. A person “calls” a meeting. This means that he sends out written notification, via fax, e-mail, etc. formally inviting his colleagues to participate in said meeting or asking them if they will be able to “meet” at that specific time. When a meeting is called, an agenda for the meeting normally should accompany the invitation. For example, I can call a meeting to talk about new product lines. The agenda I send out might look like the one on the right.

This “invitation” gives us the agenda for the meeting. This assists managers, etc. in “prioritising” their time. Sometimes, meetings will be considered ‘mandatory’ or ‘obligatory’. Other times, meeting attendance is left open to those employees who might be interested in a certain topic.

If you are unable to attend a meeting, the normal thing is to at least ask for a copy of the “meeting minutes”. The meeting minutes are a written record of topics dealt with, opinions expressed and any resolutions or conclusions that may have been drawn from the meeting. Normally, a written account of a meeting or the minutes to a meeting, begin by telling us who the “attendees” were.

TO:	All TFC Employees Date: February 14, 2005
FROM:	Management
RE:	Monthly Meeting on New Business
I. Presentation of New Product Lines	11.00 AM
II. Advantages/Disadvantages of Product Innovations	11.30 AM
a) International Brand Names	
b) Domestic Brands	
c) Distribution Channels	
d) Ramifications on Pricing	
III. Open Debate / Discussion	12.00 PM
IV. Conclusion	12.30 PM
If you are unable to attend, a transcript of the <i>meeting minutes</i> will be sent out tomorrow morning. Please see accompanying documents for further details regarding the topics discussed.	

An Agenda

The tendency in Europe may seem a little bit disheartening at times for Americans or foreigners. Here, a meeting can last five minutes, or five hours. There is no real organisation regarding when or how a meeting takes place, nor when it ends (this depends on the organisation, but given the majority existence of family-owned

businesses, this tends to be the case.) If you belong to a large corporation or multinational company, this is evidently not the case.

As is the case in any business, never speak out of turn or when not called upon. Employees are always expected to be on the “receiving” end of things and not on the “giving” part. In fact, one of the biggest white lies spread around the corporations is the existence of an environment where every employee “has a say” in things. Someone should have corrected those who talk about this in business textbooks: what they really mean is that employees are told that their opinions and viewpoints are expected, valued and taken into account, but really management is the one who decides the ultimate course of action, and that normally does not take into account an employee’s viewpoint. A manager is responsible for providing solutions and will always “listen” to employees, but will never let that employee provide the solution for them. (If they did so, they would be putting their jobs in danger). In the real world, the good ideas are accepted, maybe even changed a bit to not seem the same, and others are immediately discarded. This of course is a generalisation and it is always bad to generalise, but yes, this is true in general.