

Walk the talk

Besides dressing well, you also need to make yourself heard. Instead of simply introducing yourself at business functions, try harder to make others remember you after the event.

There are a few things you can do to stand out from the crowd:

- Be bold. Walk up to people and start a conversation. Don't wait for others to do so.
- Be familiar with current news and social issues to help you initiate small talk.
- Do not dominate a conversation. Listen attentively and contribute accordingly. Whenever necessary, change the subject to a common interest that everyone shares. Put everyone at ease, and always try to involve the quieter ones.
- Network. Make sure you bring sufficient name cards and mingle with everyone to leave a lasting impression.
- Be generous with your compliments, acknowledge everyone with sincerity and bid farewell to everyone when you leave.

Most importantly, "Be there with an open mind and heart. Networking is about giving, not receiving," says Sharlyn Stafford, corporate consultant and director of Stafford & Chan Pte Ltd.

Get the right attention

You've done your part to stand out, but hopefully not in the wrong way. There are no hard and fast rules to follow when it comes to attending business events, but taboos do exist. Here's how not to break them.

Firstly, don't talk with your mouth full! It's one thing to have people not understand what you are babbling about, and quite another to rain bits of food on their faces. If you're mingling in a big group, do not offer handshakes to only some people and not the others; it will seem incredibly rude and you might offend some people.

While being the centre of attraction, do not focus the conversation on yourself or impose your opinions on other people. "If there is ever one thing to avoid doing, it is not to brag and be too loud," says Joshua, who is also a lecturer on International Certified Diploma in Image Consultancy. Also, when networking, do not intimidate,



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Certified Consultant in Corporate Etiquette

put others down, gossip or divulge confidential information about your company. If you're not sure whether the information is safe to share, it's better not to talk about it.

It is also imperative to have enough business cards with you, but make sure you give it out sincerely after having a good chat and understanding the need to network with that particular person. Do not give out your name cards randomly like flyers, says Ser Lee, a certified consultant in corporate etiquette.

That said, it also pays to observe how people interact at such functions. You will gradually learn how to behave appropriately in different business scenarios by gaining first-hand experience.

Enter the experts

It's never too early to start learning about business etiquette, and

tertiary institutions like the Singapore Management University have been organising compulsory etiquette classes for their students to prepare them for the business functions they will be attending in the future.

"Understanding many of the unwritten rules, expectations and cultural differences will empower you to be a lot more confident and comfortable," explains Sharlyn, whose clients include the National University of Singapore. "Knowing business etiquette prevents people from making unnecessary mistakes which may jeopardise their chances of propelling their career or business forward," adds Joshua.

This is where image consultants come in. Ranging from three-hour programmes to two-day workshops, Image Revelation Consultants International, whose client list includes academic institutions such as Management Development University of Singapore, holds public workshops as well as personal consultations.

Protocol Academy also provides training on Corporate Etiquette, Dining Etiquette and Projecting a Professional Image, for example. These are just some of the workshops available for those who wish to learn more about business etiquette. Students will learn how to dress professionally, how best to put on make-up and how to mix-and-match accessories. They will also learn colour theory to help them match colours properly.

"Business etiquette is all about presenting yourself with confidence and competence. Someone else may be as smart as you and may have equally good, if not better results than you. Ultimately, the candidate who gets the job is the one who presents himself well and stands out from the crowd. In other words, you need to project a positive image no matter where you go. You are your résumé!" says Ser Lee with a smile.