

# PRACTICAL ASPECTS IN DOING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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# Chapter 1

# **Business etiquette**

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"Courtesy is not a science too easy or small".

A. Mickiewicz, Pan Tadeusz

# 1.1. What is etiquette and why do you need to know and observe it?

The word "etiquette" in the context of this discussion means "the rules of behaviour standard in polite society" (The New Lexicon 1988, p. 325). Commonly, etiquette is interpreted as good manners, which may apply to various social settings with the business setting being one of the most important. The latter is also an ambiguous term that for the needs of further considerations will be understood as a "workplace", within which, and in relation to which, we establish relationships with other actors of economic transactions. It may be an enterprise, an office or a law firm, but also a public institution, research centre or university. The staff and clients of all these establishments should exhibit good manners.

By following etiquette, we show respect to others. Such an attitude serves well the interests of employers and employees as, on the one hand, it is relevant for the smooth operation of each and every institution and, on the other hand, it facilitates a successful professional career. Firstly, mutual respect favours a good organisational atmosphere which is vital for the commitment of employees, their honesty, proper time management and identification with the firm, etc. Such attitudes impact reasonable use of the raw materials, materials, machinery and knowledge that the organisation possesses. The good manners of the employees may attract clients more easily and encourage them to stay instead of choosing competitors. Consequently, the market position of an organisation gets

reinforced. Secondly, practising etiquette boosts your self-confidence. When you know how to behave in a particular setting, you are more relaxed and can better focus on substantive issues. Thirdly, observing etiquette is a way to be respectful and trustful in the eyes of other people, which helps in professional development although, obviously, we must remember that having good manners does not necessarily go hand in hand with professionalism and high moral standards.

According to sociologists, good manners belong to social norms while economists categorise them as informal institutions. They originate from tradition, culture and customs and are neither codified nor written down. Manners provide a code of conduct and tell us what to do and what not to do in various social settings. Usually, they concur with the norms that regulate the lives of individual communities (legal, moral) but sometimes they contradict them. For example, while legal and moral norms impose the duty of truth telling, a comment addressed to a co-worker who takes little care of their personal hygiene may be a reason for a decline in mutual relations. Not observing etiquette often means committing faux pas. Although that itself does not imply legal sanctions, sometimes not even reprehension by others, the act may have unpleasant consequences, such as critical remarks, being ridiculed, embarrassed or looked down on by colleagues. That is why one should not ignore or disregard etiquette.

Due to their origin, good manners are general or universal only to a very limited extent. In most cases their scope is limited by place, time and social environment. Discussing them all would be a near to impossible task<sup>1</sup>. Punctuality, for example, is understood differently in countries of Latin America and in Anglo-Saxon countries; a visiting card was once used when paying visits while nowadays it does not perform this role anymore; addressing others by their first names is natural among students, but less popular among slightly older people. These rules evolve. Dress codes have become more flexible in recent years. Technical progress has also brought new rules, like those connected with using mobile phones or e-mails.

Considering the above circumstances, one may say that, firstly, we should be flexible in our approach to good manners and show understanding for cultural differences; and secondly, it is simply impossible to learn business etiquette in full. In fact, both comments are correct. Nevertheless, one should at least try to learn as many rules as possible,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Due to limited space, we shall limit ourselves to some of the most important norms approved of in Poland and in Western culture.

which will facilitate making a good impression in dealings with business partners. It is especially true when meeting people from other countries. One should also bear in mind that changes and new phenomena are true of the forms rather than of the building blocks of etiquette. The latter are stable and can be best illustrated by the old Polish saying "do as you would be done by".

#### 1.2. Greeting someone and saying hello. Saying goodbye

Greeting someone and saying hello are the first opportunity for personal contact which makes a lasting impression on interlocutors, often decisive for further relations between the parties involved. When meeting people you already know, both are usually automatic, you do not analyse why they take one form or another. But when it comes to people you do not know, the issue requires a little more attention and taking account of various circumstances.

Greetings come in two forms: verbal, which is mandatory, and non-verbal, which does not always accompany the first one. There are some differences between the two which are worth highlighting to avoid misunderstandings. They are connected with the principle of precedence.

The verbal part of a greeting is a greeting phrase. It may take various forms. If you know the other person sufficiently well, you may say, e.g., "Hello". In other cases you usually say "Good morning (Good afternoon, Good evening)". If you want to sound more polite, you may personalise the greeting by saying, e.g., "Good morning, Madam", "Good morning, Doctor", "Good Morning Madam Director", etc. In some languages (French, English) you may also add the person's last name, but in Polish culture addressing someone by saying "Good morning Mr. X" is not in good taste and may be considered offensive.

Etiquette strictly requires us to greet people we know and respond to greetings of others without any exception. When it comes to precedence, in accordance with the principle universally acknowledged in everyday life, the relationship of the status of the two people, referred to as seniority in etiquette, decides. The person of lower status always greets first, i.e. a man greets a woman; a younger person greets an older person; a student greets a professor, etc. Things get more complicated when the dividing lines are not exclusive and a younger woman meets an older man. In business, the principle is easier, precedence is based on hierarchy, i.e., sex or age are irrelevant. Thus, a female employee should

greet her superior first and a shop-assistant should greet her/his client independently of how old they are. However, also in these cases some doubts may arise, especially when age differences are substantial, e.g., a woman who is a shop assistant who is much older than her male client. All these complexities should be dispelled by the use of common sense: there is nothing wrong in a superior greeting his employees first. This is one of the cases to which an old principle applies, according to which the more polite of the two says "Good morning" first.

It may also happen that a particular setting takes precedence over seniority. And thus:

- people inside a room (conference room, class-room, waiting room, reception, on-call room, lift, etc.) should no doubt be greeted by those who enter;
- people who are standing (in the corridor, on the pavement, etc.) should be greeted by those who are walking (riding).

A non-verbal element of greeting is, depending on the circumstances, a bow, a nod, tipping a hat, a kiss but most often a handshake. And the precedence here is the reverse to the one for verbal greetings. Customarily, a woman extends her hand first to a man, an older person to a younger, a professor to a student, etc. A similar sequence applies to saying goodbye. However, in business settings, the rules are suspended, making room for hierarchy. Hence, it is appropriate when a younger director extends his hand to an older employee or to a female receptionist. When ranks are equal, it does not matter who does it first, the man or the woman (but a host should do it first to a guest). Unlike when saying hello, in doubtful situations, especially at the beginning of an acquaintance, it is worth remaining slightly reserved and not extending a hand first.

Extending a hand in itself is almost instinctive and we do not always pay attention to how we do it. Hence, we should, first and foremost, remember that:

- the palm must be clean and dry (something to be remembered, e.g., when you are holding a glass with cold drink at a party, as the hand gets damp);
- when extending the hand, you should briefly make eye contact with the other person (in some cultures, e.g. in Japan, this is not practised).

Depending on the circumstances, it is nice to include a pleasantry (e.g., when we have not seen each other for a longer period or this is the first meeting ever);

- the palm should be held perpendicular to the floor (some people, women in particular, extend the hand parallel, "covering" the palm of the partner);
- you do not want to offer a limp hand "to be held", but you offer a firm grip, not overpowering and not too long;
- the refusal of a handshake is a serious insult to the other person;
- in the workplace, you do not have to shake hands every day but you should do it after, e.g., a longer period away.

To finish the subject of saying hello, it is necessary to comment on hand-kissing. This custom, still alive in Poland and also practised in, e.g., France, provokes no embarrassment in private relationships but it does not fit business and official contacts although some women tend to extend their hands in a way suggesting that they simply expect the gesture from the man. Thus, remember that in official relations:

- if you want to practise this form of courtesy, you should kiss the hands of all women at a particular gathering, not only some of them (depending on the age, position, appearance or any other criteria);
- you should not do it in a hurry, mechanically, by dragging the hand up to your lips (which, as we can sometimes see on TV, some politicians do) but you should bow a little;
- the custom does not match situations such as receiving awards, diplomas, nominations and also, as once playfully observed by Ambassador Pietkiewicz, fines for the infringement of traffic rules (Pietkiewicz 1998 p. 103).

Saying goodbye, similarly to saying hello, may also consist of two parts: verbal and non-verbal. The only difference being that it is initiated by the person in the higher position of authority (someone older, a superior, a woman) by saying, e.g., "Goodbye" and possibly extending a hand.

#### 1.3. Introducing people

In private life, and almost everywhere in work-related situations, we regularly meet new people and establish relations with some of them that are continued for a longer or shorter period of time. In accordance with etiquette, an acquaintance starts with an introduction. It is customary to be introduced by a third person, e.g., by the host (or hostess) of the meeting or someone who knows both sides; you may also introduce yourself.

If you are the intermediary, you need to pay attention to the following circumstances. First, you need to find out who you are introducing to whom. In social relations we follow the same order as when saying hello, i.e. a younger person is introduced to the older, a man to a woman and an employee to a superior. Similarly, in business relations, precedence in introductions is not based on age or sex but on the position in the hierarchy and, as always, on common sense. Secondly, it is polite to give not just their names but also where they work and their positions (also scientific degrees or titles). If memory fails you, which may happen to anyone, you must subtly overcome the problem, which is a challenge requiring a combination of finesse and a sense of humour. Thirdly, the rule is that we introduce a newly arrived person to those already present, with the exception of a situation when the newly arrived person clearly dominates when it comes to her/his position. Fourthly, following the introduction and a handshake, you should also exchange pleasantries while the initiative to have a conversation rests entirely with the person in the higher position of authority.

If at a particular meeting you may not count on anybody's assistance, it is always polite to introduce yourself, remembering the principle of seniority. The only difference is that when giving your first and last names, and possibly the name of the organisation which you represent, you never give your position or scientific degrees or titles. These details may be revealed later in the course of conversation.

### 1.4. Visiting cards

Usually when meeting someone in a business situation we exchange visiting cards, commonly referred to as business cards. They were invented in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Chinese, still before the invention of print, and then they reached Europe. Nowadays, in classic form, they are paper

cards the size of a credit card which give the bearer's personal data. The cards spread globally and still survive in the times of the e-economy, which is remarkable. Despite some attempts, they have not been successfully replaced with any kind of digital business cards (The Economist 2015).

There is a variety of cards in use: business, private individual and private collective (for married couples). In this section we shall focus on the first type.

The layout and design of a business card for an organisation is decided by the top management and an employee has no impact on it. In real life we can come across all sorts of ideas, not all of which are practical (especially when it comes to size) or in good taste. Simplicity is highly recommended.

As we have already mentioned, a classic card should be of the size 5 cm x 9 cm. The reason behind this is simple: this is the size of most business card holders, where you store them. Preferably of high quality white card, it should include the logo of the organisation, the first and last names, position (possibly scientific degree or title), business address (mail, e-mail, fax), and telephone numbers for contacting the bearer. Top managers usually give the telephone numbers of their secretaries, not their direct phone numbers. Information should be arranged in a clear and easy to read manner, which depends, inter alia, on font face and size. You do not have your private telephone number or address printed on a business card. If necessary, any additional contact data can be handwritten on it or you may use your private card.

The most often committed mistakes when designing business card layouts include:

- using bilingual cards where, e.g., on one side the text is in Polish and on the other in English. The back of the card should be left unprinted. Etiquette admits "translated" cards only when we are dealing with a language with a little known alphabet (e.g. Chinese);
- making the card unusual, e.g., by laminating it, using a different format, including the holder's photo, mottos, sayings, etc.;
- giving the address in a foreign language instead of Polish, e.g., Warsaw instead Warszawa, Rewolucji St. instead ul. Rewolucji;
- not clear layout due to too many details, fancy font face or too many colours.

Visiting cards were used when paying unexpected visits (hence the name). Leaving a visiting card at someone's home with its corner folded (upper left-hand) was a clear sign of paying a visit. Nowadays, a visiting card is used to quickly establish and maintain contacts. It reminds you that you have met the person in real life rather than over the Internet but also, by informing us about the position of the individual, it highlights the importance of hierarchy in business life. The card is also used for correspondence purposes. We may attach it to a bunch of flowers or any other gift when expressing our gratitude for a party, assistance, wishes, etc., with the message written in the first person and on the reverse (this is one of the reasons why it should be left unprinted).

Using business cards is a vital business ritual. First of all, you should have them in sufficient numbers to avoid apologizing to your interlocutors for why you do not have one. That would only show your poor preparation for the meeting. Cards should be carried in business card holders, special little wallets or cases, rather than in bags and pockets. That helps to avoid creasing and getting them dirty. Business card holders are also used to store business cards you have received. The business card should be handed over to an interlocutor in a way that enables her/him to read your data immediately. Upon receiving a business card, you are expected to read it and then put into the holder. Never ever fiddle with the card you have received. Business cards are presented and received with one hand but in some countries (China, Japan) they use both hands and bow a little. This is a way of showing respect to the other person, since the card is a part of their identity.

Business cards are exchanged according to the circumstances. When a client comes to your office, business cards are exchanged at the beginning of the meeting. If the meeting is attended by a bigger group of people, everybody can put their cards on the table in front of her/him so that names and positions could be better memorised, which improves the overall atmosphere of the meeting and future business contacts. When taking part in a conference or a party, business cards are exchanged at the end of the conversation as a sign that we wish to continue the newly established relation. If this is a seated event, the exchange of business cards must be postponed until you leave the table.

In business situations, the sequence in which cards are exchanged is the same as for shaking hands. Seniority is decisive, i.e., it is initiated by the person in the higher position of authority; in private settings also,

it should be the one who is older or a woman. When in doubt, a person at a lower level of hierarchy ladder should be more reserved and refrain from handing in his/her card.

#### 1.5. Having a conversation

In Polish culture, a face to face conversation that gives an opportunity to look the other person in the eye is the most direct form of communication, possibly the most fundamental for building trust not only in professional relationships<sup>2</sup>. That is why now we shall focus on having a conversation, which is a daily activity carried out without realising its importance or considering its course when we have them when taking care of the business of our organisation.

When business partners meet, the main topic for discussion is usually preceded by so called *small talk*, meaning a brief conversation "about everything and nothing", to build up a good atmosphere and positive feelings. The same sort of conversation accompanies most social meetings. It has got nothing to do with business. Its subject should not be controversial or relate to politics, religion or ideology. The same is true of anecdotes or jokes. Caution is also required when touching upon issues that imply some judgement, e.g., artistic or sports events, books, films, or other people's behaviour, as they may provoke unexpected objection of the interlocutor when formulated in a harsh way. Similarly, one should not expect an interlocutor who turns out to be a doctor to diagnose health problems. The list of relatively safe topics includes holiday plans, traveller's impressions, culinary experiences, and weather. Of course, we should not restrict ourselves just to them but an intelligent, educated and cultured person can surely continue an already started conversation.

We need two parties to have a conversation, as it is supposed to be a dialogue rather than a monologue. When you talk you should also let other people do the same. That is dictated by good manners and it gives an opportunity to win the sympathy of the interlocutor, as many people like talking and they feel more important when somebody listens to them. While listening, you should not interrupt but you must show interest in the issue by looking the other person in the eye, asking a question, nodding, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In Japan or Korea, looking the other person in the eye during conversation is not accepted, especially when the person is older or has a higher social position.

While talking, use a friendly tone, do not make energetic gestures, avoid colloquial, not to mention vulgar, language and do not throw in foreign words or phrases, as that might embarrass the interlocutor who might not know them. If you do not agree with her/him, you do not protest by saying "you are wrong" but you can object more mildly, e.g., "your opinion is interesting, however...". To show respect, using titles is recommended when addressing other people (in female and male versions), especially when the seniority gap is substantial. Titles are linked to the position in a hierarchy and military grades (e.g., president, minister, director, colonel), scientific achievements (doctor, professor) or are a matter of courtesy (e.g. excellence, eminence, magnificence). Good manners tell us to call a deputy-minister a minister. The most important thing, however, is a nice smile when addressing the interlocutor.

Besides face-to-face meetings, we often talk on the phone or over the Internet to make a lot of arrangements. In accordance with the advertisement of one of the US telecommunication companies, a phone call is the next best thing to being there. Mobile telephony has enabled us to contact people practically anywhere. Hence, we need to take care **not to disturb others** (e.g., in a cinema, church) and, in our own interests, we should be discreet. We mean here public places and, e.g., in Japan using mobile phones on public transportation and on trains is forbidden. Answering a phone during business meetings is impolite as it implies disrespect to the other party.

When calling people at their private (home) number, you say hello and introduce yourself. Otherwise, if the call is answered by somebody else, he/she may refuse to share any information. If the person is not a good friend of yours, you should not call on business matters between 10 P.M. and 8 A.M. on weekdays, on weekends, at breakfast/lunch/dinner times or when important events (sports events, concerts, etc.) are broadcast.

When calling an institution, it is usually the answering party that introduces itself by giving the name of the organisation, her/his first and last name and offering a greeting. They may say, e.g., this is XYZ company, John Smith, how can I help you/ what can I do for you? Then, they either solve the problem themselves or put us in touch with a competent person. The one who is calling must also introduce themselves if they wish to get information or contact the management. A telephone conversation must be prepared, as you will probably need details that you wish to explain. Coming back with the same questions makes a bad impression.

#### 1.6. Correspondence

Writing letters is an art and often a record of developments, which is why published collections of letters written by personalities from the world of culture or politics are so popular. Skills in writing business letters are by no means a trivial matter. Although technological progress has simplified written communication (by introducing a cable in the past and a text message now), the letter has retained its position, mainly as a means to confirm oral arrangements and as the most formal way to communicate decisions concerning an order, offer, complaint, invitation, etc. For this reason, its form, content and rules governing business correspondence are matters of great care.

The proper form is achieved through carefully and precisely composed content and politeness vis-à-vis the addressee. This is a way to win their favour, while by breaking the rules you show disrespect and give the addressee the right to ignore your letter. On top of that, while an unpleasant conversation slowly fades away in memory, a letter stays for longer as a reminder of tactless behaviour and casts a shadow over future relationships.

Each letter must contain basic information (sender, addressee, place, date, the matter that it relates to, attachments). To be easy to read, the body of the text must be divided into paragraphs and aesthetic. Spelling mistakes are unacceptable since they are signs of the carelessness of the author and the organisation they represent. Using bold letters or underlining selected fragments is not recommended as this is a way of indirectly admitting that your message is unclear or that you do not expect much perspicacity from your addressee.

In Poland it is customary to place the addressee's data in the upper right-hand corner. First and last names, possibly the title and position, the name of the organisation and its address are all given in full, without abbreviations (the only exception being *Dr.*). Hence, we do not write *Mr. J. Smith Dir.*...

A formal letter starts with the greeting (salutation), which depends on the addressee's position and the relationship between the sender and the addressee. For example, it reads *Dear Mr/Ms*, followed by the title or position, such as *Professor*, *Barrister*, *President*, *Manager*, etc. or *Dear Sir/Madam*. Titles are also used in the body of the text. The letter ends with proper complimentary close, e.g., (*Very*) *Sincerely yours*, *Yours truly*. *Respectfully yours*, quite commonly used by Polish public administration,

is considered impolite and a little inelegant in business correspondence. Both the greeting and the closing are handwritten, preferably with a fountain pen rather than a ball pen. Obviously, the signature is also handwritten and it provides the full name of the sender.

Business stationery should not be creased or dirty and the stamp must not be placed upside down. The text of the letter covers only one side of the sheet.

Sometimes drafting a business letter correctly is a real challenge. Firstly, it is not easy to convey the content within several to a dozen sentences. Addressees usually do not want to spend too much time studying long essays. Secondly, facts must be rendered precisely and author's intentions should be reflected faithfully. Differently from a conversation, in this case factual mistakes cannot be corrected: dates and places of meetings, quantity of ordered goods, expert's personal data, etc. Neither is it possible to deploy a gesture, tone of voice or a smile to mitigate the addressee's reaction to the letter if they misunderstand what you really wanted to communicate. Thirdly, letter content should be concrete and close with the sender's expectations regarding the addressee.

The exchange of letters is governed by specific rules. The first and the most important one is that business letters must be answered (with the exception of a thank-you letter). Usually, the answer should be given within a week. We must also remember to send Christmas and New Year wishes to maintain relations with business partners, and that not all of them celebrate these as religious festivals, a fact ignored on Polish Christmas cards which tend to show religious themes. It is worth remembering that private letters should be handwritten, similarly to condolences and congratulations.

For business purposes, we increasingly often use **electronic mail** rather than traditional one. It is quicker, cheaper and more convenient. Emails can be exchanged a few times a day and, besides the body of the text, they may include an attachment of almost any type (a book, a photo, architectural design, scan of a document). **Emails are less formal**, and due to the possibilities offered by technical progress, it seems just impossible to work out universal and relatively stable rules with respect to them.

Nevertheless, general comments concerning the form and the content remain unchanged also for electronic correspondence. Its specificity has added some new requirements, such as:

- answer within 24–48 hours at the latest:
- try to be as brief as possible because, due to multitude of emails, people often read only the few first sentences of longer letters and do not pay attention to the information at the end; in general, an email should be shorter than paper business correspondence;
- provide the subject of email in the specially designated field to facilitate further exchange;
- avoid exposing email addresses (names) by listing them all in the *To:* field as that may infringe their privacy;
- · ask for receipt confirmation only when you need it, not regularly;
- select the content carefully, as for all sorts of reasons unauthorised persons get much easier access to them than in the case of traditional mail;
- think the content over thoroughly and control emotions: emails reach addressees almost immediately and are irrevocable while traditional letter offers more possibilities to change it or even withdraw it.

# 1.7. Business events and receptions

Receptions are inherent elements of social life. You are invited or you invite others on the occasion of name days, birthdays, weddings but also for no particular reason. Parties bring entertainment into everyday life and are a great opportunity to have a good time with family and friends. In professional life, as in private situations, receptions play a similar role. On top of that, however, they make a part of the business duties performed e.g. behind a table, not behind a desk. Thus, **business receptions can be divided into working and social events**, differently from private parties organised solely for social purposes. Their organisation and pattern are slightly different, which shall be explained below.

There is a variety of receptions and events that may be organised in relation to formal functions. They vary in importance. Seated parties, such as lunches, dinners and banquets, rank higher in the hierarchy than standing ones such as cocktail parties, cocktail buffets, aperitifs or a glass of wine. Evening events (dinner) are more important than those organised in the afternoon (lunch). Parties differ with incurred expenses,

which depend on how rich the menu is and how costly the service. Calculating per person, standing receptions are cheaper and lunch usually costs less than dinner. Another reason for differences is the number of participants. With enough space, we may host more people standing than seated at the table. All of the above (importance of the event, cost, available space) should be considered when deciding what kind of event will be organised.

#### 1.7.1. Invitations

No matter what format we choose, guests must always be invited. Depending on the circumstances (number of people, importance of the meeting, date), invitations may be extended personally, on the phone or in writing. Forms of invitations may be combined by, e.g., confirming an oral invitation in writing.

An invitation in writing is a letter or, most often, a special invitation card (with the logo of the organisation) where the first and last names of the guest are **handwritten**. For obvious reasons, an invitation must provide two groups of information: (1) who invites, on what occasion, whom and to what (event format); (2) where and when the event will be held (name of the location and detailed address, date and time).

Invitations can be complemented with the following:

- a request to confirm one's attendance included in the R.S.V.P. (répondez, s'il vous plaît) abbreviation, usually placed in the lower left- or right-hand corner, together with the telephone number or email address of the organiser. Another option is a note saying regrets only, which is a request addressed only to those who are not coming. Knowing how many people are going to come largely facilitates the planning of the event;
- a reminder that the guest has already been invited earlier (e.g. orally). This is why the PM (*pour mémoire*) abbreviation is used;
- the event dress code, e.g., business suit, informal or semi-formal dress, black tie (tuxedo), white tie (tails). Suggestions are addressed mainly to men since everyone assumes that based on them, women can easily adjust their outfit to the occasion;
- information that it is a personal invitation, which may not be passed on.

When preparing invitations, you should remember that:

- it should reach the guests at least 2 weeks before the event so that they could be available. Late invitation may be considered an affront;
- one invitation can be used to invite no more than two people (e.g. a married couple);
- guest data should be double checked (e.g., have they changed the address, marital status, name) to avoid making a gaffe;
- hosts always "have the honour to invite" not just "invite";
- for standing receptions, beginning and end hours are given, for seated parties just the time when they start;
- sometimes, especially for standing receptions, we should send more invitations (by 20–30%) to have the expected number of guests. An empty room never makes a good impression.

#### 1.7.2. Cocktail party

The cocktail party is one of the most popular types of reception, due to their associated practicalities. Usually, it is organised in the late afternoon, at the end of a business day (e.g. from 5 P.M. till 7 P.M. or from 6 P.M. till 8 P.M.). From the organisers' point of view, it allows quite a substantial group of people to be hosted at the same time, implies relatively little cost, saves time, offers a more relaxed atmosphere and provides an opportunity to renew or establish new contacts with people from other fields (business, the media, administration, science, politics, art, etc.). Advantages to the guests are that they do not have to come precisely on time, may leave whenever they wish, are entirely free to choose their interlocutors, and do not have to be dressed very formally.

The cocktail party has also got its weaknesses, such as standing for quite some time, eating food while you are standing up and holding a drink (small, high tables may be of some help), being exposed to risk of stains on the clothes because the crowd is so dense, and rather moderate amounts of food that will not satisfy hunger.

When planning a cocktail party, you must take care of some issues. Firstly, the room<sup>3</sup> where it is taking place should be empty, no chairs or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A cocktail party may be organised in a garden.

other places for seating. Otherwise, some guests will be sitting, some standing, which does not provide a convivial atmosphere. Hosting an elderly or disabled person is an exception.

Secondly, guests should be able to avail themselves of **the bar**, either a self-service one or preferably with the assistance of professional bartenders. The bar must offer a variety of alcohols and soft drinks used to make cocktails, such as vodka, gin, tequila, whisky, cognac (brandy), champagne, white and red wine, beer, wine made of herbs, juice, soda, mineral water and other sweet and dry sparkling drinks. Ice must be provided in sufficient quantities together with slices of lemon or lime. Ensure the required range of glassware used for drinks you plan to serve. A substantial stock of napkins is vital as they will be used to hold glasses with ice-cold drinks.

Thirdly, a cold fork buffet is a must. Hot appetizers will be served by waiters. Independently of what is served, and food imagination being the only limit, these should be bite-sized portions that do not require the use of a knife. Hence, we may serve small sandwiches, canapés, mini pizzas, mini quiches, mini shish kebabs, roulade, and cheese. Olives are also frequently on the menu, as are dips with chopped raw vegetables (carrot, cauliflower, celery) and fruit (slices of pineapple, water melon, strawberries, seedless grapes). They are eaten with fruit forks or special picks. Avoid stone fruits as getting rid of stones is troublesome for guests. Although there is not much food at a cocktail party, the menu must be of top quality, unusual, diversified and nicely served. Planning an intriguing buffet is far from easy.

Fourthly, during the party waiters should regularly clean away plates, glasses, napkins, etc. used by the guests, otherwise their omnipresence may spoil the taste and aesthetic experiences.

It is polite when the host of the cocktail party, possibly with a colleague or companion, greets arriving guests in person and welcomes them in. That is why when the cocktail starts they should spend ca. 20 minutes at the door shaking hands with guests. Also, ca. 20 minutes before the end of the party, they should be at the door again to say goodbye to those who leave. Remember, at a party the guests are having fun and the hosts work. One of their duties is to ensure the smooth course of the meeting in a pleasant atmosphere and, e.g., introducing people to each other or starting a conversation. Guests coming late and leaving before the end of the meeting have the duty to find the host to greet/say goodbye.

#### 1.7.3. Seated parties

All seated parties are organised in a similar way, the only difference being that a lunch menu is less sumptuous than that of dinner. Planning a seated party, you must solve two issues: **seating arrangements and the menu**. The former depends on the room where the party is to take place, the number of guests, shape of the table (round, rectangular, oval), number of tables, and the nature of the meeting (working, social). The latter needs to take account of the season, products typical of it, culinary preferences (some guests may be vegetarian), cultural restrictions (e.g. there are nations who do not eat pork or beef), the variety of food (potentially we may choose to serve: cold starter, soup, warm starter, main course, cheese, dessert and fruit), calorie counts for the meals to be served (light and heavy food), and the selection and sequence of alcohols.

The proper seating arrangement depends on concrete circumstances and due to the limited size of the chapter, numerous options available will not be discussed and we will focus on general principles. However, we must bear in mind that they do not always unambiguously inform who should be seated where, and for such cases common sense is the ultimate criterion<sup>4</sup>.

The first rule is that the principal guest should be placed in the most prominent seat. Traditionally, it is the one facing the door or windows. In practice, it is important not to offer them a place next to the kitchen. Seniority is the second rule. For working functions, it is decided just by the position – sex and age are irrelevant. In social settings, when accompanying persons may be involved, sex may determine where you are seated. The third rule is right hand precedence, as the seat on the right of the host, hostess or the principal guest is more prominent than that on the left. These people are points of reference for other guests. Alternate seating is the fourth rule. For working functions, it means alternate guest-host seating, and for private events, men and women alternate.

Below, please find two of the simplest examples. At a working event and at a rectangular table, the host may be seated in the middle of the longer side, with the head of a foreign delegation opposite. This

E.g. precedence of women in social settings depends on whether they are single, married or widowed and among married women on their husbands' hierarchy. In most cases taking care of all these nuances would greatly complicate organising dinner, offering little improvement of the overall atmosphere.

is the so called **French table**. The deputy-head of the delegation will sit on the host's right while the third member of delegation will be placed on the host's left. The head of the foreign delegation will, in turn, have the deputy of the host on the right and the third in the hierarchy representative of the hosts on the left. By applying the right hand rule, alternate seating and seniority, the Reader will surely be able to place other quests at the table.

At a social event with the involvement of married couples, the host may be seated in the middle of the top of the table with the hostess seated opposite. This is the so called English table. The principal male guest is placed on the hostess's right and the second in the hierarchy on her left. The principal guest's partner will be placed on the host's right, and the partner of the second most prominent guest on the left. The order will be the same when, as in the above example, the female head of the delegation is the principal guest. She is placed on the host's right and her partner on the right of the hostess.

A seated event is usually preceded by an aperitif<sup>5</sup>, which is a standing reception of approximately twenty minutes, when dry drinks and snacks like peanuts and almonds are served to stimulate the appetite. It is an opportunity to initiate conversations, wait for all the guests to arrive and ensure that they are all seated at the same time. Although everybody is expected to arrive on time, in real life it is not always feasible for all the guests to reach the place exactly at the time indicated on the invitation.

For reasons pertaining to protection, the table is covered with a protective pad and then with a tablecloth, usually white or cream and big enough to hang over the table sides by 30 cm, perfectly ironed and, of course, with no signs of previous use. The setting starts with placing salt and pepper shakers and flowers to decorate the table. Then place settings for guests are prepared around the table leaving a space of 60 cm for each person. The main table has no space for alcohol bottles, which are placed on a side table together with mineral water and fruit juices, served in decanters or glass jugs (never ever in tetra packs or pet plastic bottles).

The setting includes a big, so called **base plate**, covered with a small napkin on which plates with dishes will be placed. It is positioned in the centre of the cutlery setting, arranged in the order for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The word "aperitif" means also "a short alcoholic drink taken before a meal to whet the appetite" (*The New Lexicon*, 1988 p. 42).

which it will be used. If, for example, the menu includes soup, fish and meat, on the right side of the base table and positioned the closest to it will be the meat knife, which will be used last, then the fish knife and a spoon, while on the left side of the plate there is a meat fork with a fish fork on the outside. Knives are placed with blades facing the plate, forks with the tines facing upwards. The dessert fork and spoon (or knife) are placed parallel to the edge of the table above the plate; the fork is laid below the dessert spoon, handle facing left while the spoon has the handle facing right. Glassware is positioned above the plate in the order for which it will be used. For the particular case mentioned above, the white wine glass would come first on the right, as white wine goes well with fish, followed by the red wine glass to accompany the meat and, possibly, a champagne flute for dessert. Glassware also includes a water glass and a glass for juice. Above the base plate, opposite the glassware, there is a side plate with a side (or butter) knife. Cloth napkins are indispensable; they are placed folded on the base plate or to the left of it. A napkin is placed on the lap to protect clothes and used to discretely and regularly wipe your mouth. The setting may be supplemented with the menu and a place card with the quest's name.

It is hard to imagine any such event without **alcohol**. There are certain general rules that govern its selection. Firstly, white vodka is basically served only with the starter. Secondly, white wine is served before red, and dry before sweet. Thirdly, if possible, the choice "white or red" should be left to the guest, remembering, however, that white wine is served with white meat (poultry, veal), fish, and egg dishes while red with red meat (deer, beef, lamb) and dry champagne matches any dish. Fourthly, cognac and liqueurs are served at the end of the event, together with tea and coffee. Fifthly, getting the real taste of some alcohol beverages requires proper glassware and serving temperature.

Table manners are vital, as their absence is clearly visible. Let us remember that a dinner, besides satisfying hunger, is also a social event where we are expected to have conversations with other guests. Sitting at the table, keep your elbows close to your body with only wrists touching the table. When eating using one hand only, e.g., soup, do not put the other elbow on the table. Never tuck a napkin into your collar. Bread is eaten in bite-sized pieces, spread with butter and placed in the mouth. Never ever lick the knife. Hold your wine glass by the stem, not the bowl. To signal you have finished eating to the waiters, your fork and knife

should be left parallel at 3:15 position on the plate<sup>6</sup>; if you intend to continue the meal cross knife and fork centrally on the plate but do not rest their handles on the table. Alcohol should be consumed moderately. When in doubt how to eat a particular dish (e.g. oysters, crayfish, caviar), observe the host/hostess discretely and follow them.

#### 1.8. Personal appearance and dress code

There is a Polish saying which can more or less be rendered as "fine feathers make fine birds", which best demonstrates the importance of this element of etiquette in professional relationships. Personal appearance is decisive for making the first impression, it builds up our credibility and informs others about our attitude to hygiene and tidiness. It also shows respect to others. It is not just an issue of individual image, as the personal appearance of employees contributes to the image of the organisation that they represent. That is why an employer is fully authorised to set and enforce a certain dress code or even fire a person for sloppy appearance. That refers in particular to those who are in direct contact with customers.

Among various aspects of appearance, clothes, makeup and hairdo are those that we can control the most (Mruk ed. 2004 p. 304). They should complement physical aspects such as height, features, complexion, figure as well as age and weight. Complementing consists in highlighting positive features and hiding less positive ones. Personal hygiene in a broad sense, i.e. washed hair and body, no unpleasant body odour, brushed teeth and fresh clean, unbitten nails, clean and ironed clothes, clean shoes, etc., is always a point of departure.

Being *dressed* not *clothed* is an art, hence public personalities for whom image is vital for winning credibility and sympathy often use the advice of stylists. The multiplicity of details encourages the publishing of all sorts of guidelines and advice on the subject, especially in lifestyle magazines. Here, however, we will discuss only basic and general principles.

As we have already stated, clothes which are tidy and complement the wearer's features are the main requirement. A corpulent person, for example, should avoid big prints or horizontal stripes and a pale complexion does not go well with dark colours. The second principle

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> In other countries, e.g. in Great Britain, it may be the 6 o'clock position.

reminds us to consider what event we are going to attend. Black, rather than beige or any other bright colour, is appropriate for funerals, for meetings held after 6 P.M. we should not wear a bright or brown suit, or a black suit before 8 P.M. The third rule speaks of harmony. The point is to adequately choose elements of the outfit and match colours. For example, a bag used when going shopping is not appropriate at a party, and sports shoes should not be worn with a suit. It is risky to wear a suit, shirt and a tie which are all striped as is to trying to match more than two colours. Attention must be paid to change elements of our attire so that we are not identified with just one jacket or dress, and we should also consider the quality of the clothing, the accessories and their sizes.

In the workplace we can practically choose between three styles (Kędziora 2013). Firstly, formal one. For a man it means a grey or dark navy blue suit, a white shirt with a tie, and lace-up leather shoes, so called *oxfords*. For a woman, a dark navy blue or dark grey two-piece suit (skirt or trousers) and a blouse, a little black dress, and leather midheeled court shoes. The second style could be termed semi-formal (*smart casual*, *business casual*). In this case, a man may wear a jacket made of a different fabric than the trousers, a coloured plain, striped or checked shirt with or without a tie, a T-shirt, and leather shoes. A woman may choose between a suit, a long-sleeve shirt dress or a skirt and a blouse, and high-heel leather court shoes. The third category, casual, for a man provides for cotton (corduroy, jeans, chinos) trousers, a coloured sports shirt or a T-shirt, a turtleneck, jacket and sports shoes. Women wear similar clothes but they can opt for a skirt instead of trousers.

The above characteristics have been given as very general guidelines only. Nothing has been said about outerwear (coat, jacket). All styles come in varying degrees of sophistication, for example the semi-formal style includes a brown suit, a blazer and grey trousers, a tweed jacket and wool trousers, a wool jacket and cotton chinos-style trousers. Shirts, T-shirts, shoes and accessories (tie, handkerchief, cufflinks, belt) may make the outfit more or less sophisticated to tailor it to a particular occasion.

To conclude, we will list the most often made business clothing mistakes. For men these include:

 the tie: worn with a short-sleeved shirt, with a shirt unbuttoned at the neck, too long or too short (it should reach the top of the belt); made of the same fabric as the handkerchief (pocket square);

- socks: too short, exposing bare leg; made of thick fibre and worn with a suit; not matching the colour of the shoes; worn with sandals;
- ball pen, glasses placed in a suit pocket;
- jewellery: anything other than a watch, wedding ring and cufflinks;
- wearing an unbuttoned suit jacket; trousers with crease marks in the crotch and under the knees; a short-sleeve shirt worn with a suit.

#### For women:

- too strong makeup, too low neckline, above the knee skirts, transparent blouses;
- cut out shoes (toes, heels), high heels;
- · going bare-legged or wearing patterned tights;
- too much jewellery, especially rings; mixing gold and silver jewellery.

#### **Questions and assignments**

- 1. Plan a dinner menu for June for delegations from India and Israel.
- 2. Propose snacks for a cocktail party to be thrown in September.
- 3. A person is calling and demanding to be put through to the CEO of the company but he/she refuses to introduce her/himself. How should the secretary who answers the call react?
- 4. What would you say to your colleague at work who: (a) does not use deodorant? (b) uses vulgar expressions?
- 5. From the hosts' point of view, what are the advantages of French and English table seating arrangements?
- 6. How do labels inform consumers about the quality of wine? cognac? whisky?
- 7. A girl-friend shows you her new blouse. You think it looks awful on her. What would you say?

8. Should there be any *dress code* at university, and if yes, what, for: a) male lecturers?; b) female lecturers?; c) male students?; d) female students?

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Running a business on an international scale requires not only a substantial body of knowledge but also the ability to apply it in practice. That is why our textbook, with a vast collection of practical examples, discusses a wide variety of pertinent issues connected with business operations in international markets, from international market analysis, drafting business plans, concluding business transactions and the insurance of goods through to customs clearance procedures and professional etiquette. We also explain the specificity of doing business online.

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