

ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

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## Искусство ведения деловых переговоров на английском языке

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### АННОТАЦИЯ

Данная статья является вводным разделом к курсу по бизнес-коммуникации на английском языке. Затронуты особенности менталитета и этических норм у переговорщиков ряда стран. В краткой форме обобщены алгоритмы и нюансы межличностной деловой коммуникации. Терминология делового стиля и тактика переговоров структурированы в программу занятий и ролевых игр на семинарах. Предложен ряд базовых практических рекомендаций для успешной стратегии при ведении деловых переговоров.

**Ключевые слова:** искусство общения; деловой этикет; коммуникативные навыки; стратегия переговоров; невербальные сигналы; психология в переговорах

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ORIGINAL PAPER

## The Art of Business Communication in English

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### ABSTRACT

The following article is part of *The Course of Business Communication in English* based on the author's personal experience and research. It incorporates a survey of trends and nuances, business etiquette and negotiation style in various countries. It also provides tips on strategy, written and verbal communication, as well as nonverbal cues of negotiation which are effective for practical needs.

**Keywords:** the art of communication; business etiquette; communication skills; negotiation strategy; nonverbal cues; the psychology of negotiation

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**“You can’t compete globally unless you have appropriate communication skills.” James Wolfensohn (President of the World Bank Group)<sup>1</sup> “Business starts and ends at the negotiating table” — (NN)**

### INTRODUCTION

I have always been fascinated by the art of communication. We socialize, inform, interact, entertain, find friends, or partners. Newcomers can be lost in the crowd of strangers at a global business forum. However, communication skills help them solve conflicts or find a common language with people of different

culture and mentality. Communication allows us to learn more about people, business, culture, lifestyle etc. Communication is a key to relationships, knowledge and story-telling.

Based on my experience as an interpreter, writer, publisher and film producer, this article is an introduction to my Advanced Course of Business English. It is a digest of know-how, guidelines and tips of communication for negotiations, report writing, business etiquette, social media, etc. summarized for reproduction at lectures, workshops and role-playing games — this knowledge will help potential communicators engage in business talks using English.

This article is organized into the following sections:

- Nuances of mentality and ethical standards.

<sup>1</sup> URL: <https://www.9quotes.com/author/james-wolfensohn>.

- Communication principles in business, politics, etc.
- Verbal, non-verbal and written communication: patterns, rules and tips.
- Practical recommendations for amicable partnership.

## NUANCES OF MENTALITY AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

20% of the world's population speaks English. The most numerous, active and prosperous subculture in the world is political and the business community. The predominant majority speak their versions of native English, whether British or American, global English or lingua franca spoken by non-native speakers of English is the predominant language in that world. Global English vocabulary is continuously growing. In every country, in any political or business sphere, speakers of English add their diverse culture to the global language with their neologisms, jargon, or slang from their cultural, social and ethnic realities. Hip Hop, Jumbo Jets, computer software are examples.

All members of the British Parliament maintain the tradition of addressing each other only by way of the speaker at the House of Commons in a very high-style eloquent way following **official communication standards**: "Honorable friend from Winchester," "Dear Winchester representative," "Dear Gentleman/Lady," etc. They never use surnames, even if they have known each other for years, or involved in heated debates. However, when they leave the Chambers, their manners become informal, and they address each other by first names.

British people also respect the personal space of other people and their privacy. The notion of privacy means a lot in this country. For example, two strangers in a London pub may have a small talk for the entire evening. Before they part, they may introduce themselves and exchange names, or contacts — only if they wish to. It is a very British tradition: 'to keep distance', which literally means protecting one's privacy. People engaged in conversation keep 'safe' personal/private distance: keeping an arm's length distance between them. Staying at a closer distance is regarded as uncomfortable.

Nowadays, the British social etiquette is more informal; however, **conservative business etiquette** is common for such spheres as politics, finance, investments, administrative and professional services. Good manners, formal darker suits, shirts and ties are traditional aspects for those industries, where people often contact each other by surnames and appropriate titles until they are invited to quit formalities and friendly use the first names. People from the British film industry

or mass-media make a different impression: They have the same sense of dignity, but they can't afford time on formalities. They use the first names right away after an initial introduction and handshake.

Americans avoid formalities, except in the military. But in England, the US and the rest of the world, they keep to **business etiquette in written communication**. For example, they start emails or letters with "Dear Sir" and end with "Best regards" or "Sincerely."

For **verbal communication**, it is always vital to plan negotiations in detail. It is good to know the mindset of the other person to deal with. For example, some Americans demonstrate their business-like manner and start negotiations right away with "So, what's the deal? Let's get down to business". Their British counterparts, on the other hand, would strike up an informal conversation, a so-called **small talk**: they discuss the weather, sports, etc. Interestingly, it is taken as a ritual greeting from the host aimed to help the guest overcome natural discomfort prior to **business talk**, a sort of polite conversation-starter to 'warm-up'. What is not acceptable in Britain is to discuss private matters like health problems, people's background, age, religion, marital, gender or financial status, political preferences, sexist or racist issues.

In the Arab world, small talk lasts a long time with mandatory coffee and sweets. Guests are supposed to show courtesy to the host as they express their delight of the treat. Both parties ask each other only general questions about health and success in business. The host is delighted when someone asks him about the health and prosperity of his eldest son.

However, the highlight of the small talk could be a question about the eldest son, if the guest articulates his name unofficially precisely the same way as the father calls him. On the other hand, it is not polite to inquire about the health of women or daughters in his family: this may hinder business relationships. Arab and British people are quite good at hiding their thoughts and emotions behind '**a poker face**.' Sometimes when a politician feels exasperated in the midst of the heated debate, he would calmly get up, to stretch muscles and announce a coffee break.

Sometimes negotiations with business people from Japan and South Korea can be complicated for newcomers. Imagine a delegation exchanging remarks in their language and avoiding eye-contact. Rather than directly respond to a business proposal, they remain silent instead or reply in a courteous vague manner: in their culture, it is impolite to refuse. It often leaves Western negotiators bewildered. In fact, to save time a British person would say politely: "I'm afraid this is not

feasible / It doesn't work for me" and US businessmen could react briskly: "I don't buy it!"

One of the most memorable episode of aggressive communication took place during the Cannes Film Festival in 1996. I visited Miramax office with my British editor-in-chief of the London-based Moving Pictures magazine. He offered a discount deal to the well-known producer Harvey Weinstein to promote his new film before the festival premiere. Weinstein instantly made a counter-proposal: "Okay! I agree, only if you pay me for this ad." My friend gasped at such impudence and turned to leave. Weinstein snapped: "What? Don't you see? — I am Weinstein, not someone else, and my film is a masterpiece that will go down in history!"

Curiously, his professional instinct of producer has not let him down: a few months later, his magnificent love story "The English Patient" won nine Oscars and two Golden Globes. But such impudent manners hopelessly ruined his career: 20 years later Weinstein was in the top-list of Hollywood sexual harassment scandals and was recently sentenced to 23 years in prison.

Moreover, these scandals sent ripples across the US and Western Europe and, most importantly, they have changed some etiquette norms in business and social life. Nowadays, prolonged eye contact between men and women is not welcomed during business negotiations. Gentlemen prefer to keep a safe distance from ladies in a crowded elevator or on public transportation<sup>2</sup>.

A friendly touch of a female employee may ruin the career of a boss. And the best is yet to come...

At first glance, the typical American style of 'aggressive' salesman looks quite impressive: US negotiators speak loudly and assertively with business acumen, strong determination with no complexes. They enjoy arguing the right to the brink of business etiquette. They typically wear a dark suit and bright red tie, like a red flag (muletta — in Spanish, which mesmerizes a bull) — to attract attention. At the same time, Americans may surprise you: they might interrupt the conversation to proudly show photos of his wife, children, home and cars in the garage.

Sometimes Americans would banter British aristocratic restraint and conservatism, their speech and dressing manners. But they also admit that 'these guys from old British school play hardball.' In fact, British business people are quite strong competitors at the negotiating table: they have accurate analytical information and forecasts. They also outsmart the other party with their ability to turn the conversation into

an erudite discussion and skills of reading non-verbal communication and body language.

Japanese negotiators are famous for super-punctuality; they are disciplined and diligent. One of the most popular Japanese sayings is "Work is the first priority (Shigoto wa daichi des)." It is the only country in the world, which has official statistics for the death of overwork ('karosi') at a workplace. Therefore, it never happens that someone from a Japanese delegation is late for a meeting, or has forgotten his business cards or negotiation documents. Japanese businesspeople are well-known for their passion for building their working process in harmony like ikebana. It is why they often delay negotiations by paying attention to the smallest details of the agenda. Not surprisingly, Europeans find this painful workstyle excessively methodical. However, exceptional Japanese courtesy may make the negotiation process more exotic. Germans business people are very much like Japanese: they are also extremely punctual. They are pragmatic about their dress code: they prefer conservative suits, shirts and ties. They are well-disciplined, strictly follow the rules and regulations. German subordination means that emails or messages, as well as plans to arrange a meeting, should be strictly forwarded only to the top-level decision-maker. Notably, if a German counterpart officially agrees and shakes hands, he has accepted the deal, and the decision will not be changed. Reaching for high standards, they organize their working process in perfect '**Ordnung**' (**order**). German protocol specifies topics of discussion in detail the next morning after negotiation. So, it is essential to take notes as well for comparison.

## OVERTURE TO NEGOTIATIONS

**SCENARIO # 1: Email, Social Media.** Informative, laconic and easy to read emails work well if they are directly addressed and have a touch of formality. One can not expect a prompt reply, but it is the most effective way to arrange a meeting. The other party will see the reason and agenda of the meeting, more background information in the attached file(s) and will have time to prepare.

Check their email address on the company's website for the field ("To"). Use ("BCC") to forward this message to other recipient(s), so that the main recipient is unaware of it. Briefly indicate the reason for the meeting — maximum 5–6 words in the subject line field ("Subject").

Check the spelling of the recipient's full name for a formal greeting: "Dear Mr / Ms / Mrs Owen." Do not confuse Mrs (to a married woman) with Ms (unmarried), and if the marital status of the recipient is unknown, it is

<sup>2</sup> British Culture and Social Norms. URL: <https://www.studying-in-uk.org/british-culture-and-social-norms/>.

better to use Ms Owen in your business correspondence. If the recipient has a degree, it is better to write Dear Dr / Prof. Owen. If it is difficult to find out the recipient's surname, just use "To Whom It May Concern", or a less formal greeting: "Dear Sir / Madam". Greetings "Hello" / "Greetings" / "Hi" in this email are too informal.

The first paragraph presents a brief introduction, e.g.: "My name is Igor Petrov, and I work in financing at ... in Moscow, Russia." Next paragraph informs on the goal of this email: the reason for the meeting, the Agenda — maximum 5–6 sentences. Make sure, all additional information is attached and separately mentioned at the end of the email: "Please, find enclosed...", "Attached you will find..."

Even if you are short of time and the situation is complex and controversial, use polite informal message: "I look forward to your reply / to hearing from you", or "Waiting for your reply", or "I look forward to meeting you at your earliest convenience" followed up by a mandatory ending: "Best regards", or "Sincerely" with your full name, position, company, contacts etc.

Proofread email carefully for grammar, punctuation and typo mistakes before you send it. Avoid common acronyms in formal messages, like FYI ("For your information,") BTW ("By the way"), IMHO ("In my humble/honest opinion"), TBD ("to be determined later"), or TBA ("to be announced later"), as well as informal humour, emoticons and smiley faces. Also, it is important to remember that exclamation marks or all capital letters is taken as a loud message and can cause an adverse reaction.

Social media is a highly effective tool for interactive networking and targeted communication with people via the Internet. One can post a cell phone message/video, publish projects and reach the target audience via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or professional sites like LinkedIn etc. One can also post pages, blogs, podcasts, websites or platforms etc. It is a particular topic to be discussed separately.

#### **SCENARIO # 2: Phone call to the company.**

The receptionist answers your call: "Thank you for calling, TCV Company, Maria speaking". A standard reply is: "Hello, this is Igor Petrov from WICT based in Moscow". The introduction should be brief and precise: name, position, company, city of the head office and country, the spelling of the full name and mobile number. Check if the receptionist jots it down correctly. Then explain the reason for the visit, the agenda of the meeting.

You might ask: "May I please speak with someone in your office?" The receptionist will ask, "What is this about?" You need to explain very briefly what you are

calling about. It does not hurt to find out the name of the receptionist and thank her for the assistance: if the information is lost, it is good to have her name for reference.

The receptionist may ask to send all this information by email. Jot down her full name and email address, and then "Thank you. Please, text me a message/ or call me to acknowledge that you have received my email and, especially if you have any news about my meeting with Mr Owen".

**SCENARIO # 3: Phone call — answering machine/ beeper.** After the greeting, dictate and spell your full name clearly and slowly, position, company, city of head office and country. Explain the purpose of the requested visit, agenda of the negotiation, possible time for the meeting, your phone number, email and name of the hotel where you stay. If no one calls back, repeat a short message for the answering machine a bit later: your full name, your company and the purpose of the visit.

If it is a big company, the answering machine offers options to connect to various departments with a push-button dial (beeper). When a receptionist replies, provide him/her with information. Wait till he/she connects you with a proper person, however, first of all, write down the full name of that person to speak and the extension number. It will save time to call again directly if the person's line is busy, or if only the answering machine responds.

### **THREE PHASES OF NEGOTIATION**

**Preparation** starts with drawing up a business plan and strategy. Now that you are well-prepared, you enter the office to exchange handshakes, smiles, business cards and formal phrases like "Pleased to meet you." Small talk starts with a discussion of the weather, jetlag, etc. It is an excellent opportunity to take a closer look at the negotiation team in such informal circumstances.

Every corporation, branded company and call-centre publish scenarios "How to talk to customers," "How to engage in negotiations," etc. strictly for their receptionists and employees. These are detailed instructions, how to greet or transfer a customer to another chat or phone call, how to deal with angry people and how to tactfully let them know they are mistaken, etc. Every international company has 'seasoned wolves': pragmatic, smart and experienced professionals for negotiations. So, joking apart, be well-prepared to meet such interlocutors at the bargaining table.

**Development: one-on-one/group negotiation.** Exchange of courtesies is over. Who starts first?

Option 1: meeting face-to-face someone new. The safest way to start is to ask your vis-à-vis about his/

her experience in this business or this company. Most people always like to speak about themselves. That is why it is much better to listen and smile in a friendly manner than to resort to hard-sell tactics. And in fact, very often people get straight to the point to say what they need and later feel surprised that the negotiation has not worked well, especially, if these tactics run into a British stonewall of excessive politeness.

Notably, a vital aspect must be clarified before the start of negotiation: Is there a competent decision-maker, or head of the company at the bargaining table? It will save time: the other party may drag out the process — now and then they would need a time-out to agree and coordinate terms.

When the mutual presentation is over, articulate the purpose of your visit and suggest the agenda.

Option 2: meeting friendly people / old partners. When both parties know each other well, including strong and weak points, no one hastens negotiation process. At first, they recall some old good time memories, inquire about families, veteran employees, etc. Good-will communication helps to start a business talk smoothly. However, even if many aspects are well known to both parties, including rates, conditions, etc., there exist many rules, improvisations and tricks which may lead negotiation into an **unexpected deadlock**. Below is a list of recommendations to avoid it:

A well-developed strategy is always based on an effective scenario with knowledge of the following aspects, namely:

- (a) the most realistic prices, conditions and attractive terms
- (b) the best time frames for the execution of the contract
- (c) a set of legal and economic warranties and remedies
- (d) and, importantly, interests and preferences of both parties

(2) Take notes to keep a record of negotiation: this helps to correct and update the final documents (drafts should be developed before negotiations)

(3) Avoid making the first offer/conditions, wait till they do it

(4) Never agree to the first offer: it is always a modest minimum

(5) Avoid manipulation: it is nothing like open and sincere tactics, which is proved to be eventually effective and fruitful

(6) The other party should feel your intention is friendly and of mutual interest

(7) Do not give in to tricks, e.g. if they know, you are under time pressure, and they try to drag out ne-

gotiations, just say: “I like it here so much! I’m ready to spend my whole life here. I have unlimited time and budget for this trip...”

(8) Flexibility is very important; however, if someone ignores your principles, it is better to stop the negotiation and walk away

(9) Prepare alternatives in case if the negotiation is not very successful

(10) Prepare a few options of solutions, or concessions to build a relationship for long-term cooperation and new profitable deals

(11) If you succeed with “win-win deal”, don’t forget to congratulate and thank your vis-à-vis/new partner(s) for constructive negotiations and also mention, that you look forward to furthering collaboration in the future

(12) Never regret that you could have maximized the expected profit in bargaining; further collaboration based on respect is much more valuable.

A few more **efficient tips of tactics** based on psychology:

(1) Address the interlocutor by surname during the small talk.

(2) Start listening to your vis-à-vis in a very engaging way, reveal your interest (A) nodding, or (B) giving thumbs-up, or (C) with an understanding smile, or (D) encouraging comments like “right”, “sure” or “yes” etc.

(3) Repeat the interlocutor’s poses and gestures discreetly. Use positive body language to signal good-will confidence. It allows you to smoothly take the initiative as you follow up with: “As far as I understand you...”, “Correct me if I am wrong...” and then give your own arguments.

(4) Delicate and polite manners may be misinterpreted by tough negotiators (“seasoned wolves”) from the world of big corporations.

(5) Do not rush to use all trump cards at the table in one go. The best psychological effect will have the following tactics: strong arguments, then a regular one and finally, the most reliable trump card.

(6) If you casually mention competitors of your interlocutors, this may change the course of negotiations in your favour: they might suppose you may have reached more productive talks with those competitors.

(7) Focus on nonverbal cues of negotiators to detect hidden emotions. According to Allan and Barbara Pease, who published their best-selling *The Definite Book of Body Language*, eight (!) nonverbal cues would inevitably help to discover when people stretch the truth or lie [1].

**Closure of Negotiation, informal events.** Once the deal is inked, and all aspects are recorded in writing, nevertheless, professionals will thumb through their notes and scroll their computer files once again.

They cross-check that no clauses, no binding terms are missing [1].

In the meanwhile, the atmosphere in the company has changed, as if someone waved a magic wand: no stress, formalities are gone, people are friendly and have fun, subordinates are preparing a wrap-up corporate party. Coffee breaks, cocktails, or closing parties in the office often allow having a good feedback: for example, who plays a key role in the company. It's the right time to find new friends, share ideas with top managers or enjoy tête-à-têtes with their subordinates. To cultivate team spirit, camaraderie and collaboration, companies often invite all participants of negotiations to a farewell party or evening dinner. It is usually held at a posh restaurant in the USA or some private club in London famous for a Candle Light Dinner. In Japan, such events are often held in a Geisha House with traditional songs and music. The hosts invariably pay all the costs. German companies throw night parties in good restaurants too, however, sometimes guests are informed, that all of them are "Going Dutch" which means that everybody pays their bills. Punctuality and diligence are essential in the business world, whether it is formal or informal party, dinner, business lunch, an appointment for negotiation, or just a matter of diligence in response to a written invitation to an event that says "RSVP," — please respond immediately to the sender.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Browsing through the global web, I was surprised to find dozens of reviews, analytic stories in the print media,

as well as a variety of blogs and public lectures about how to communicate successfully and sign excellent deals. Some of the best-selling US books of this kind were almost like Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. Anyway, all the literature mentioned above and Internet-based information have only confirmed my points of view. No wonder: we all have a similar experience of negotiations.

However, I would only recommend to business or diplomacy professionals, students and common readers a very useful and informative non-fiction best-seller *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* co-authored by Roger Fisher and William L. Ury (revised edition of *rh Business Books*, USA), or its subsequent reprints. Robert Fisher is a professor of law and William Ury is deputy director of the Negotiating Program at the Harvard Law School. Both of them are members of the Harvard Negotiation Project, an analytic think tank set up at the School to develop negotiation rules.

Focused on the psychology of negotiation, they've developed the **Principled negotiations** method for regulation of political conflicts with a flexible approach towards negotiating parties. It determines "amicably and efficiently" fixed and flexible aspects for negotiators so that they remain within the boundaries of decency. Their method was effectively administered during the US-Soviet summit talks on arms reduction and disarmament. They suggest **brainstorming** "to find a solution based on principle, not on pressure" and "concentrate on the merits of the problem, not the mettle of the parties. Be open to reason, but closed to threats" [2].

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