

# All You Ever Wanted to Know About Shaking Hands

## Why all the Fuss?

In my job I get to travel around a fair amount, visiting different countries and speaking to a great variety of people. Last week, I was in Munich speaking to 50 salespeople from around the world who were about to run their company's stand at an international exhibition. The subject of shaking hands came up and, within a minute, questions were being fired at me from all over the room. For something that we do every day, there is a surprising lack of information or "how to's" available. I'd like to put the matter straight once and for all so here's a few tips and reminders on shaking hands.

## Why is Shaking Hands important?

Shaking hands is a ritual that goes back hundreds, if not thousands of years, as a way of greeting someone. The origins of hand shaking come from the days when we all carried around weapons. Your knife or sword was generally held in your right hand so offering this hand to someone else to shake was a way of showing that you were not armed. A gesture of peace and openness. Nowadays shaking hands is embedded into our culture.

## How do we do it in the UK?

It's worth practising these steps:

- Walk towards the person or stand up, if you're sitting down.
- Extend your hand from your elbow slightly across the chest
- Keep your thumbs pointing upwards and your hand vertical
- Catch the person's eyes and smile
- Keep your weight on your feet in an even balance
- Grip the other person's hands palm to palm in a sure manner
- Give 2 or 3 shakes and withdraw.
- Whilst shaking offer your name, first name followed by surname.

It's that simple really

## How do other people around the world shake hands?

Now that's for people from the UK. What about around the world? The majority of the world's population don't actually shake hands. Here's a small selection of the people in my training room in Munich last week.

- Germans like their hand shake to be firm. Shake once only
- The French prefer a light grip and also with one shake. Like the Germans, any more than one shake is regarded as aggressive.
- Italians shake hands and then will hug their friends or kiss cheeks

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- In Asia it is uncommon to shake hands. Bowing is the common greeting. In Japan, the length of your bow indicates the respect you have for the other person.
- In China they shake hands and also nod

### Pitfalls to avoid

Here's a few of the common problems in shaking hands:

- If you're at a party or networking event, hold your drink in your left hand. Not only will this make it easier for you to shake hands but it will prevent your shaking hand from getting too hot or cold from the drink.
- If you find your palms get a tad sweaty, invest in an odour free spray-on deodorant. You can get really tiny ones in travel sections of supermarkets. Give your hands a quick spray before the event.
- Try not to crush the other person's hands, especially if you have rings on your fingers. This will hurt.
- Likewise a limp hand shake should be avoided.
- And steer away from shaking the fingers only – the palms should touch
- To shake hands and then wrap your other hand around your first hand should be avoided unless you are close friends.