



Voicing your opinions at work

How senior management perceives you as a leader depends on how effectively you communicate your professional opinions, ideas and needs. Speaking up isn't always easy or even appropriate when working abroad, but it's important in order to:

- Demonstrate the value you bring to the organization.
- Garner respect for your abilities.
- Establish you as an expert in your field.
- Create professional development and advancement opportunities.

Here are some tips to help you tactfully add your voice to any professional discussion:

- **Know when it's appropriate to voice your opinion.** In many large economies, including China, India, and Russia, there is a more autocratic management style and employees are not expected to question their superiors. Formal meetings are usually held to ratify decisions and to give instruction on tasks to be performed. Any discussion is done elsewhere in one-on-one meetings or in smaller groups.
- **Understand cultural expectations.** In many Asian countries, people will go to great lengths to save Face, or public embarrassment, and they expect others to do the same. Causing people to lose Face by rejecting or dismissing their ideas publicly, can damage relationships and reputations. Instead, ask gentle and polite questions or meet with people one-on-one to build relationships and minimize the risk of anyone losing Face.

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- **Pay attention to non-verbal communications.** For example:
 - **Eye contact.** In many Asian cultures, avoiding eye contact is seen as a sign of respect. However, in North America, eye contact is important for conveying equality among individuals.
 - **Gestures.** In the U.S. the hand gesture where thumb and middle finger touch and the other fingers are raised means OK. But in many other countries it is considered extremely offensive.
 - **Posture.** Slouching in Taiwan is considered disrespectful while crossing your legs and showing the bottom of your shoe is frowned upon in many Arab countries.
 - **Voice.** How loudly you speak, your pitch and the stress you place on certain words play an important role in every culture. In North America, a raised voice conveys anger, but in India speaking loudly is used to command attention.
 - **Silences.** North American's are uncomfortable with long silences in conversations but it's a normal part of any conversation in many Asian countries.

Contact us for resources and more information on effective global business communication, conflict resolution and developing other leadership skills.

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