

## Guidelines for Professional Interpersonal Communication and Behavior

. . . at least with native English speakers.

If the following advice sounds painfully obvious to you—congratulations!

As you may have noticed, there are a lot of people—from all countries—who haven't a clue.

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- ❖ **Be self-aware** but not self-conscious. Pay close attention to how you're behaving.
- ❖ **Make eye contact.** Smile and be friendly!
- ❖ **Don't interrupt when someone else is speaking.**
- ❖ **Make liberal use of "please" and "thank you."** They're absolutely essential for comfortable, pleasant, polite communication.
- ❖ **If someone holds a door open for you, say "thank you."** Hold doors for people walking behind you.
- ❖ **Chew with your mouth closed.** Making noise while you eat is considered rude.
- ❖ **Have a nice, firm handshake**—but don't break the other person's hand.
- ❖ **Push your chair in** when you leave a table.
- ❖ **Never reach across someone** to get something without either saying "excuse me," or asking them to hand it to you (or, at a meal, "pass" it to you).
- ❖ **When someone asks you a question, answer them immediately.** It's okay to think for a second before you respond, but if you find people frequently saying "Hallo!" after they ask you something, then there's a serious problem—either with your hearing, or with how you value good communication.
- ❖ Native English speakers tend to **avoid silence** in groups, mainly because it's boring. If you're in a group discussion with native English speakers, you'll be expected to speak almost immediately if the teacher/group leader invites comments or questions. (The speaker will likely only wait for input for as long as it takes to look around the group once, maybe three full seconds.) If you're speaking to a group of native English speakers, they'll expect you to keep things moving, and not leave lengthy silent gaps in your presentation.
- ❖ Most native English speakers use **rising intonation** at the end of a sentence only when they
  - ask questions
  - want to sound disdainful or condescending
  - speak to a misbehaving child, subordinate or animal

This is especially important for Swedes to know since, in Swedish, it's completely acceptable to use rising intonation at the end of declarative sentences. This phenomenon results in good-natured, courteous Swedes' sometimes appearing rude when they don't mean to.

An important example is that the way some Swedes end conversations (whether in person or on the phone) can occasionally seem too abrupt and curt to native English speakers. The

tone used in these situations is important—it's easy to come off as hasty and unfriendly. That's especially the case on the phone, since you aren't talking face-to-face.

Many Swedes tend to use rising intonation when quickly saying "Tack, hej," which can come off as brusque to native English speakers. In English we tend to use falling intonation when we say, for example, "Thanks very much. Bye bye."

- ❖ Generally, **the longer your statement is, the more polite it sounds.** For example:

A: Hello *or* Hi, how are you today?  
B: Fine, thanks—how are you doing?

sounds even friendlier and more polite than

A: Hi, how are you?  
B: Fine, and you?

***How do you do?*** is only very rarely used these days in greeting others. It sounds excessively formal to most modern ears.

- ❖ It's a good idea not to call an older non-Swede by his or her first name unless they invite you to. (This is particularly true with elderly people.) Using titles such as *Mr.*, *Dr.* or *Ms.* is taken as a sign of deference, politeness and respect, as is saying "sir" or "ma'am." Use *Ms.* if you don't know whether woman is married (*Mrs.*) or not (*Miss*). The plural of *Mr.* is *Messrs.* (pronounced "messers.") When speaking or referring to non-Swedes, use *Dr.* when appropriate; in English-speaking countries, students only rarely call professors by their first names.
- ❖ If you're speaking with a non-Swede, avoid answering questions with the Swedish "ah!" meaning "yes." Non-Swedes often just don't understand what this means. Never use this on the phone with a non-Swede. English speakers generally find it much more polite when things are said using actual words. (You would want to avoid saying say the English "uh-huh" for the same reason, though it's very common in informal situations.)
- ❖ Beware the Swedish blink. If you want to show a non-Swede that you understand what they're saying or that you agree with them, don't just blink at them. This is extremely common behavior among Swedes, and there's nothing wrong with it at all; in the English-speaking world, however, this may be interpreted as a kind of dismissal.