

An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication in Japan



Source of information and image:
Point Park University Online

<https://online.pointpark.edu/business/nonverbal-communication-japan/>

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“High Context” Culture

- Japanese people rely more on nonverbal cues than words for communicating meaning.
- They value group needs above the individual and place a strong emphasis on social harmony.
- Interactions are defined by some degree of vagueness and ambiguity because of these.

General Tips

- Maintaining a passive expression while speaking is common.
- Exhibiting negative emotions is considered a burden to others
- Smiles can have a range of meanings
 - Happiness
 - Agreement
 - Masking feelings of anger, displeasure, or grief
- Negative emotions are done subtly, such as (Inhaling through clenched teeth, tilt of the head, scratching an eyebrow)

More General Tips

- Eye contact for a long time is considered disrespectful, and avoided in crowded situations to preserve personal privacy
- When in an audience, attention and sometimes agreement can be shown by looking away and/or sitting silently with eyes closed.
- Silence is common in conversations. Holding back is considered preserving harmony and demonstrating trustworthiness and reliability
- Personal space may be important when in uncrowded situations, but in a crowd (such as on a bus) it is common to accept less space.

Business culture is taken seriously

- Very hierarchical and affects everything
 - Addressing a stranger
 - Where you sit in a meeting
- High value on personal relationships and is expected
- Business Cards are very important
 - Exchanged regularly and with ceremony
 - Must be high quality and printed with bilingual information
 - Give and receive them in two hands with a slight bow
 - Treat them with utmost respect (no folding, bent, stuffed in a briefcase)

Gifts

- Gifts are a highly ritualistic and important activity
 - Ceremony of giving a gift can be more important than the gift itself
 - Gift should be wrapped nicely and given at the end of an exchange or event
 - Taboo gifts: white flowers or items in groups of four or nine
 - Normally opened in private after the giver leaves to save face should the receiver dislike the present

Meetings and Negotiations

- Be mindful of hierarchical structures in all business settings
- Wait to be introduced
- Bow before shaking hands
- Always appear to be interested when in a meeting
- Conservative manner and dress is required.
- The highest-ranking person is placed farthest from the door, the rest in descending order.
- NEVER lose your temper or raise the voice in negotiations.
- Group consensus is highly valued for decision making

Credits

- Our thanks to

[Point Park University Online](#) for their article

and their **Sources:** [World Bank](#), [Commisceo Global](#), [Intercultural Communication: A Reader \(11th Ed.\)](#)

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