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Get a firm grip on your handshake before you meet Jim Apthorp.

The Tampa development manager trusts first impressions and he doesn't think much of people with wimpy handshakes. They make him uneasy.

If you call a meeting with Thomas Huggins III, be ready to get to your point quickly. The bay area minority business development official says he has little time for gatherings without agendas.

And beware if you put Pat Fleck on hold. The Spring Hill real estate broker isn't likely to wait if she has to sit through audio commercials about your company. In short, mind your manners; it could cost you.

Business etiquette and professional courtesy mean more than they did a few years ago, say consultants in etiquette and image. Jan Gallagher, chairman and chief executive officer of a Brandon health-care company and an expert on etiquette, calls the change a revival of professional protocol.

"From the mid-1960s to the mid-'80s, any 'proper' behavior seemed out of vogue," she says.

"Now men and women are struggling with how to treat each other in the workplace and they have asked someone to tell them the rules. Baby boomers have begun searching for the more genteel elements of their past."

Some of them may be in for a rude awakening.

For instance, the sexual politics of the workplace have changed. Women in the workplace are equal to men and should be treated as such, the experts say. That means men shouldn't pull out chairs or open doors for women in business settings.

Other changes have followed technological advances in business communication. There are new rules for the use of telephones, computers and facsimile machines. Faxes, for example, should never come unsolicited or without warning.

And the increasingly global business arena requires that American managers become versed in customs and courtesies of other cultures. For instance, Americans should learn how to bow to Japanese people, rather than shake hands. And Americans should refrain from drinking alcohol in some Islamic countries but should accept alcoholic drinks if offered them in some European nations.

"With a global economy, we have to be more sensitive to different cultures," says Angie Michael, a Washington, D.C., image consultant who instructs other consultants on etiquette. "We have to deal with people in business who are not from our small town, but from all over."

Business etiquette consulting is becoming a profitable industry. There are about 2,000 professional image consultants nationwide, but only about 100 or so are experts in etiquette, says Donna Silliman, a Maryland consultant who heads the Association of Image Consultants International.

The association's hot line - (800) 383-8831 - receives several calls a day from businesses and individuals seeking referrals, she says.

"When we had one-career families, a lot of mothers taught etiquette at home," Silliman says. "Now parents have less time to do that."

In addition, people used to learn executive politesse while climbing the corporate ladder; now, with people changing employers more often, that opportunity is lost, she says.

Consultation on corporate courtesies can be pricey. A widely known consultant may charge from \$350 a half-day to \$2,000 a full day, Silliman says. Michael, who has more than 10 years of experience, charges \$2,500 a seminar. No substitute for human touch. There are plenty of rules for the experts to teach. For instance:

First impressions often start with a handshake. Sidney Bayne, a Clearwater consultant, suggests that you extend your hand and grasp, meshing web to web, then pump your hand up and down a few times and let go. At a cocktail party, learn to carry your glass in your

left hand, to avoid giving someone a cold, wet hand-shake, adds Gallagher of the Brandon health-care company.

A few years ago, it was considered rude for a man to extend his hand to a woman unless she initiated the handshake. Now either can make the first move, Michael says.

"Handshakes today are more important than before because everything else is high-tech and low-touch," she says. "A handshake is almost a trust signature that machines can't do."

The use of telephones, fax machines and computers has reduced the face-to-face business meetings, complicating the rules of proper business communication. The new telephone etiquette, for instance, requires that you leave a message if you reach someone's phone mail or answering machine. As always, the person receiving the message is obligated to respond within 24 hours; the same applies to messages transmitted via computer.

And faxes should always come with a cover letter and with fair warning. No comical cover letters or joke faxes, please, Gallagher warns. Deference yields to the team

As corporate America's emphasis changes to that of a service-based economy, the rules of etiquette in the workplace change, too.

"All business etiquette," Gallagher says, "is founded on rules of deference: deference to superiors, deference to outside guests."

Now, as many companies make moves to promote teamwork over hierarchy, it's not uncommon for a CEO conducting a meeting to urge underlings to voice their opinions.

In addition, with increased emphasis on customer service, it no longer is appropriate to introduce your boss to your client. A good sales representative introduces the client first to the boss, Michael said.

Business people also should be sensitive to what people call themselves. For instance, Gallagher calls herself chairman of her company, Medical Dynamics Inc. Some women executives prefer the title chairwoman.

And some women, like Fleck, the real estate broker in Spring Hill, still prefer for male associates to open doors and carry heavy bags for them.

"I appreciate the little niceties," she says.

Diversity in the workplace increases the need for courtesy.

For instance, a business executive should not invite a female client to sit on an office sofa, but instead should offer a chair. Not too long ago, it was common for some businessmen to proposition female secretaries on their sofas, Gallagher says.

"Women are particularly uncomfortable on sofas because of past underlying insinuations," she says.

"Also, there's no way to hold and open your briefcase on your lap."

Even though women are equals in business settings, women are under more scrutiny than men, Gallagher says.

"A woman's good manners are as important as her work performance," she said. "Because of her sex, she's supposed to have better manners" in the eyes of male colleagues.

Another potentially awkward situation arises when an executive or client makes an off-color remark. He or she should be ignored and perhaps gently corrected in private later, says Bayne, the Clearwater consultant. But Huggins, the minority business development official, who is black, disagrees. In the rare cases he has heard such remarks, Huggins says, he has reproached the offender respectfully on the spot.

"You have to earn respect," he says. "If people think they can take you for granted, they'll say anything in front of you."

The Golden Rule applies as much in business as outside, says Apthorp, the Tampa official.

"Whether you call it etiquette or normal manners, it is being decent to people," he says. "People feel better if they're treated with dignity."