

### Saudi Business Etiquette

The etiquette of doing business in any country is important, although there is a shared culture in some common cultures and even continents, the Kingdom Saudi Arabia, is quite unique even within its closely related GCC cousins.

This briefing note is drafted with a view to educate the uninitiated to the way things are done in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Some of the things might be common sense, but it is amazing how often we all seem to forget the basics.

Below is a gentle reminder of how to deal with things from the moment you land, remember this is a very different culture and environment to the one that you are used to.

#### **1. Arrival**

As you'd expect to anywhere, arrive promptly, but do not be surprised if your host is late and indeed do not comment on it. Commenting on such matters may make you appear to be "too hasty" and "judgemental".

#### **2. Appearance**

Non-Arab businessmen are expected to wear a suit and a tie. It is very important to ensure that the suit and shirt are well pressed and that the appearance does not appear dishevelled. Ensure that you have carried out your usual basic grooming. Cleanliness is a must.

#### **3. Fragrance**

Saudi Arabian nationals take pride in being fragrant. It is very important that one is fully 'perfumed'. In the West, too much is frowned upon, however the right perfume in Saudi Arabia is prized and such attention to detail is very much appreciated and respected by your host.

#### **4. Greetings**

The common greetings you will hear is "Assa la mou alikum". This basically translates to " May peace be upon you". This is used universally. When you meet someone for the first time, you may either use this term or use common phrases as used in the West such as "Good Morning etc".

#### **5. Handshake**

Similar to the West, keep the handshake firm, friendly but not hard. Do not offer to shake the hands of women except when they offer it to you.

## 6. Embrace

It is very common to embrace and kiss the cheeks. The embrace is holding the right hand and moving to the right shoulder, kissing the right cheek and then repeating on the left. Note to self. Kissing does not involve the touching of the lips; it is only the touching of the cheeks.

## 7. Sitting

Sit directly facing your host; ensure that under no circumstance that you place “one leg over the other”. This is considered of the utmost disrespect.

## 8. Proximity

Saudi businessmen tend to stand very close to each other when they are discussing business with each other. Do not try to move away, this will be taken as a sign of insensitivity as a bare minimal and as an insult depending on whom you are meeting.

## 9. Subjects to avoid

We all have our views about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and they have their views about us. In business conversation, focus on the matter at hand and avoid discussing about issues that pertain to culture, religion, marriage, and capital punishment.

As a final thought, understand that the pace of business can be very slow and it may take many meetings before a matter is concluded, so the key factor to success in Saudi Arabia is patience and patience over an extended period of time.

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At the age of 28, Siraj Al Islam was appointed to and served as the United Kingdom General Counsel for ISS, a global organization listed by Forbes as the world's 5th largest private employer.

Prior to founding **One 2 One Legal LLP**, Siraj Al Islam worked with UK “Magic Circle” and USA “White Shoe” law firms, some of the largest law firms in the world.

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