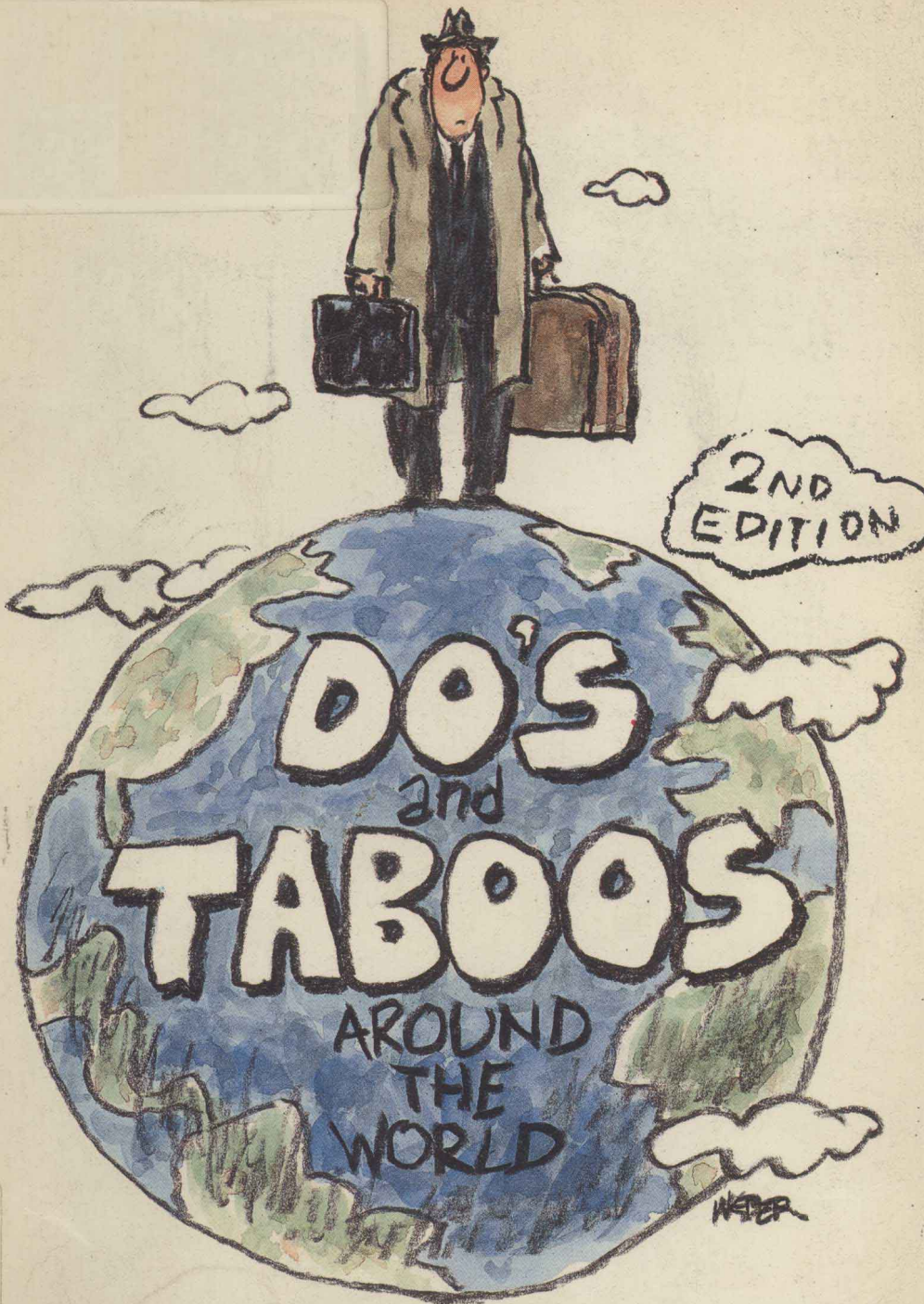


A GUIDE TO INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOR



- Protocol, Customs & Etiquette
- Hand Gestures & Body Language
- American Jargon & Baffling Idioms
- Gift Giving & Receiving

Do's and Taboos Around The World

2nd Edition

Edited by Roger E. Axtell

Compiled by  THE PARKER PEN COMPANY

with offices in 154 countries

A **BENJAMIN** BOOK

JOHN WILEY & SONS, Inc.

New York • Chichester • Brisbane • Toronto • Singapore

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Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Do's and taboos around the world / edited by Roger E. Axtell; compiled by the Parker Pen Company. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

“A Benjamin book.”

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-471-52119-1

1. Business etiquette. 2. Intercultural communication.

I. Axtell, Roger E. II. Parker Pen Company.

HF5387.D66 1990

395'.52—dc20

89-37093

CIP

Illustrations by Robert Weber
Howard Munce

Designed by: Bass & Goldman
Typography by: Fry Communications, Inc.

Cover Illustration by Robert Weber

Managing Editor: Virginia Schomp
Research asst., 2nd ed.: Eben Schwartz

Produced by The Benjamin Company, Inc.
One Westchester Plaza
Elmsford, New York 10523

Parker edition ISBN 0-87502-241-3
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface to The Second Edition

Since the first edition of this book was published in 1985, the globe has revolved over 20,000 times: meaning the world has changed, more people have traveled, new customs and behavior have been uncovered, and with every turn the need for even more global understanding has continued unabated.

This new, revised edition endeavors to keep pace. It includes updated and additional information from numerous sources. First, a number of helpful pieces of information were contributed by readers of the first edition. (Happily, corrections were few in number.) Second, eighty-five embassies and consulates were contacted to verify and amplify on information for the "Quick Guide" section.

New text has been inserted to reflect shifting world currents. For example, information on jargon has been updated, befitting that always-moving target. As another example, the changes in the Soviet Union spawned by the *glasnost* movement warranted special comment and advice for travelers scrambling over the wall, crumbling as we go to press, that has encircled the USSR for the past four decades.

Finally, the section containing sources for further assistance and information has been expanded along with the recommended reading list.

In summary, this book—and this revised, second edition—are testimony that readers from far and wide share two essential qualities. These qualities are cited by the American Field Service, a group responsible for sending thousands of exchange students all over the world, as the two vital characteristics required for success when traveling and living with people of other cultures. They are: 1) the willingness to make mistakes in order to learn more, and 2) the ability to laugh at oneself.

Accordingly, if there is just one point of light coming from these pages, it shines out on you, the reader, and says, "Learn from our mistakes, laugh at ourselves, and then score one for more worldwide understanding!"

ROGER E. AXTELL

Preface

It was the mid-1960s and the voice of Gamal Abdel Nasser issued from the radio while a fan waved slowly overhead. The house was large, white, and stucco, with marble floors providing some coolness.

Eight men were seated in a circle, some on overstuffed cushions, some on thick frieze chairs reminiscent of a Ginger Rogers movie.

Someone passed the wooden mouthpiece of the hookah, a water pipe with a long hose not unlike a vacuum cleaner hose. The hose was connected to a large bubbling beaker with tobacco burning in a bowl situated on top. The pipe was passed slowly around the room, mouth to mouth.

The group comprised seven brothers and one young and rather naive American businessman. The brothers all wore long Arab robes and were important customers. No women were in sight. No alcohol. And Nasser's emotional Arabic coming from the radio reminded the young American of the delicate politics hanging over the occasion. For someone born in Wisconsin, this was a most unfamiliar setting and an extremely important business occasion.

Two thoughts prevailed. First, avoid any social blunders in this most important moment. Second, get back to the hotel room and make notes on proper behavior and this extraordinary evening.

That vignette — the hookah, the robes, the need to make notes — was, perhaps, the origin of this book.

The need and opportunity for Americans to travel abroad are even stronger today than in the 1960s. And so is the need to avoid faux pas. More than ever, the marketplace is global. Americans *must* move abroad, and move effectively, comfortably, and with the highest respect for other cultures.

The problem is that the rules for proper behavior are not very exact.

This book is *not* an anthropological study of *why* different peoples around the world behave in different ways. Instead, its purpose is to create an awareness of, or sensitivity to, behavior when one is traveling outside the United States or dealing in this country with a visitor from overseas. (Notice the word "foreigner" has been avoided? Who likes to be called a "foreigner"? We might label that as lesson number one.)

Ideally, this book will help each world traveler grow little invisible antennae that will sense incoming messages about cultural differences

and nuances. An appreciation and understanding of these differences will prevent embarrassment, unhappiness, and failure. In fact, learning through travel about these cultural differences can be both challenging and fun.

This book is not — repeat, not — the definitive book on proper behavior. Some readers will say, “Oh, but that gesture or that practice may apply in the North of that country, but not in the South.” And they may be right. This book is a compilation of surveys, research, and personal experiences in an area of study — human behavior — where there is never precise definition. You’ll also find, because of our diverse sources, some variations in writing style.

Corrections, refinements, improvements, or additions are encouraged and welcomed. Send them to:

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ROGER E. AXTELL

Acknowledgments

A compendium like this could not possibly be completed without the minds and hands of many people. The following alphabetical list acknowledges the contributions of those foremost among our contributors.

Brigham Young University's Center for International Area Studies is one of the few — and finest — resources available for the type of cultural information offered in this book. Such conscientious research and sensitivity to national behavior is a tribute to the evangelical work of the Mormon Church.

Scott M. Cutlip had no direct involvement in this book. Instead, as the “grand seigneur” and dean of educators in public relations, he has instilled a profound responsibility within anyone who has practiced that craft since World War II. Coauthor of the first comprehensive textbook on public relations, he has been mentor, friend, and inspiration to the editor of this book.

Richard W. Holznecht was both supporter and contributor. He has a unique capability for nonconventional expression and his credo has been, when weaving words, strive for uniqueness and grace. He possesses that talent in unfair abundance.

Ian Kerr, Chairman, Kerr Kelly Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut, is a public relations consultant for major companies on both sides of the Atlantic. Born and educated in England, he has spent his career educating and serving clients in all forms of communications — with words and all other wisdom. He contributed large portions of both those commodities to this book.

Daniel Parker, former Honorary Chairman of The Parker Pen Company, not only guided the company until 1966 but then headed the prestigious National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and later directed the U.S. government's Agency for International Development under Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In those roles he has traveled the world extensively and imbued everyone around him with a strong sense of internationalism.

George Parker is former Chairman of The Parker Pen Company. In 1902 his grandfather foresaw the need for American businessmen to travel and sell their products outside the U.S. During the past 20 years, George caused the greatest growth cycle in Parker's near 100-year history and was responsible for sending Parker products and Parker travelers into every market

of the world where hands hold writing instruments. His success in the tough field of consumer goods, competing against all nations, is an example to all in American business.

Cynthia Proulx and Ian Keown provided the finished writing of the manuscript plus some additional research. Each has spent the last dozen or so years traveling far and wide and writing about it: Ian in frequent magazine features for *Travel & Leisure*, *Esquire*, and the airline magazines as well as in his own guidebooks *Caribbean Hideaways*, *Very Special Places*, and *European Hideaways*; Cynthia as a contributor to those guides and in her own magazine and newspaper articles.

Lois Puerner would have made one of the world's best mediators or negotiators because of her boundless patience, dedication, and pleasant disposition. Instead, she is only the finest secretary in the Western Hemisphere and silently suffered through surveys, rewrites, more rewrites, correspondence, and chaos. As the reader skips across the words in this volume in microseconds, pause occasionally in respect to the many times Mrs. Puerner struggled with each one.

Kathleen Kelley Reardon, Ph.D., conducted a survey sponsored by The Parker Pen Company from which the section on gift giving is derived. She is an associate professor of interpersonal and mass media communication in the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Connecticut.

Eugene G. Rohlman was responsible for much of the text derived from Dr. Reardon's extensive research, plus ideas, support, and enthusiasm over several years. Gene was Public Relations Manager of The Parker Pen Company and is the winner of numerous awards for writing, employee publications, and photography. This book would still be in its original womb — an overstuffed cardboard box — without the work and help of Gene Rohlman.

Nina Streitfeld, formerly Vice President of Kerr Kelly Inc., and now President of Nina Streitfeld Inc. and of the Westchester/Fairfield (N.Y.) chapter of the PRSA, has served for two decades in a variety of executive and consultant positions for corporate, government, and nonprofit institutions. With the help of Research Assistant Sherry Ek, Nina was responsible for the survey and research in this book's "American Jargon" section.

Robert R. Williams is a bright, witty, and intelligent public relations resource (Idea Associates, Stevens Point, Wisconsin) who provided encouragement and ideas for this volume.

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CHAPTER 1



Protocol, Customs, and Etiquette

Three Great Gaffes

or

One country's good manners, another's grand faux pas

In Washington, they call protocol "etiquette with a government expense account." But diplomacy isn't just for diplomats. How you behave in other people's countries reflects on more than you alone. It also brightens — or dims — the image of where you come from and whom you work for. The Ugly American about whom we used to read so much may be dead, but here and there the ghost still wobbles out of the closet.

Three well-traveled Americans tell how even an old pro can sometimes make the wrong move in the wrong place at the wrong time.

A partner in one of New York's leading private banking firms

When the board chairman is Lo Win Hao, do you smile brightly and say, "How do you do, Mr. Hao?" or Mr. Lo? Or Mr. Win?

"I traveled nine thousand miles to meet a client and arrived with my foot in my mouth. Determined to do things right, I'd memorized the names of the key men I was to see in Singapore. No easy job, inasmuch as the names all came in threes. So, of course, I couldn't resist showing off that I'd done my homework. I began by addressing top man Lo Win Hao with plenty of well-placed Mr. Hao's — and sprinkled the rest of my remarks with a Mr. Chee this and a Mr. Woon that. Great show. Until a note was passed to me from one man I'd met before, in New York. Bad news. 'Too friendly too soon, Mr. Long,' it said. Where diffidence is next to godliness, there I was, calling a roomful of VIPs, in effect, Mr. Ed and Mr. Charlie. I'd remembered everybody's name — but forgot that in Chinese the surname comes *first* and the given name *last*."

An associate in charge of family planning for an international human welfare organization

The lady steps out in her dazzling new necklace and everybody dies laughing. (Or what not to wear in Togo on a Saturday night.)

"From growing up in Cuba to joining the Peace Corps to my present work, I've spent most of my life in the Third World. So nobody should know better than I how to dress for it. Certainly one of the silliest mistakes an outsider can make is to dress up in

'native' costume, whether it's a sari or a sombrero, unless you really know what you're doing. Yet, in Togo, when I found some of the most beautiful beads I'd ever seen, it never occurred to me not to wear them. While I was upcountry, I seized the first grand occasion to flaunt my new find. What I didn't know is that locally the beads are worn not at the neck but at the waist — to hold up a sort of loincloth under the skirt. So, into the party I strutted, wearing around my neck what to every Togoese eye was part of a pair of underpants."

An account executive at an international data processing and electronics conglomerate

Even in a country run by generals, would you believe a runny nose could get you arrested?

"A friend and I were coming into Colombia on business after a weekend in the Peruvian mountains touring Machu Picchu. What a sight that had been. And what a head cold the change in temperature had given my friend. As we proceeded through Customs at the airport, he was wheezing and blowing into his handkerchief like an active volcano. Next thing I knew, two armed guards were lockstepping him through a door. I tried to intercede before the door slammed shut, but my spotty Spanish failed me completely. Inside a windowless room with the guards, so did his. He shouted in English. They shouted in Spanish. It was beginning to look like a bad day in Bogotá when a Colombian woman who had seen what happened burst into the room and finally achieved some bilingual understanding. It seems all that sniffing in the land of the infamous coca leaf had convinced the guards that my friend was waltzing through their airport snorting cocaine."

Cuddly Ethnocentrics

If only the world's Customs inspectors could train their German shepherds to sniff out the invisible baggage we all manage to slip with us into foreign countries. They are like secret little land mines of the mind. Set to go off at the slightest quiver, they can sabotage a five-minute stroll down the Champs Elysées or a \$5,000,000 tractor sale to Peking. Three of our most popular national take-alongs:

Why Don't They Speak English? For the same reason we don't speak Catalan or Urdu. The wonder, in fact, is that so many people do speak so many languages. Seldom is a Continental

European fluent in fewer than three, often more. Africans grow up with the language of the nation that once colonized theirs plus half a dozen different tribal dialects. Japan has three distinct Japanese languages, which even the lowliest streetsweeper can understand. Middle Eastern businesspeople shift effortlessly from their native tongue(s) to Oxford English to Quai d'Orsay French. Yet most of the English-speaking world remains as cheerfully monolingual as Queen Victoria's parakeet. If there are any complaints, then, it is clear they should not be coming from the American/English-speaking traveler.

Take Me to Your Burger King. In Peoria, a Parisian does not go looking for pot-au-feu. Alone among travelers, Americans seem to embark like astronauts — sealed inside a cozy life-support system from home. Scrambled eggs. Rent-a-cars. Showers. TV. Nothing wrong with any of it back home, but to the rest of the universe it looks sadly like somebody trying to read a book with the cover closed. Experiment! Try the local specialties.

American Know-How to the Rescue! Our brightest ideas have taken root all over the world — from assembly lines in Düsseldorf to silicon chips in Osaka to hybrid grains that are helping to nourish the Third World. Nonetheless, bigger, smarter, and faster do not inevitably add up to better. Indeed, the desire to take on shiny new American ways has been the downfall of nations whose cultures were already rich in art and technology when North America was still a glacier. As important as the idea itself is the way it is presented.

A U.S. doctor of public health recently back from West Africa offers an example of how to make the idea fit the ideology. "I don't just pop over and start handing out anti-malaria pills on the corner," she says. "First I visit with the village chief. After he gives his blessing, I move in with the local witch doctor. After she shows me her techniques and I show her mine — and a few lives are saved — maybe then we can get the first native to swallow the first pill."

This is as true at the high-tech level as at the village dispensary. "What is all this drinking of green tea before the meeting with Mitsubishi?" The American way is to get right down to business. Yet if you look at Mitsubishi's bottom line, you have to wonder if green tea is such a bad idea after all.

It should come as no surprise that people surrounded by oceans rather than by other people end up ethnocentric. Even our biggest fans admit that America often strikes the rest of the world as a sweet-but-spoiled little darling, wanting desperately to please but not paying too much attention to how it is done.

Ever since the Marshall Plan, we seemed to believe that *our* games and *our* rules were the only ones in town. Any town. And that all else was the Heart of Darkness.

Take this scene in a Chinese cemetery. Watching a Chinese reverently placing fresh fruit on a grave, an American visitor asked, "When do you expect your ancestors to get up and eat the fruit?" The Chinese replied, "As soon as your ancestors get up and smell the flowers."

Hands Across the Abyss

Our bad old habits are giving way to a new when-in-Rome awareness. Some corporations take it so seriously that they put employees into a crash course of overseas cultural immersion. AT&T, for instance, encourages — and pays for — the whole family of an executive on his way to a foreign assignment to enroll in classes given by experts in the mores and manners of other lands.

Among the areas that cry out loudest for international understanding are how to say people's names, eat, dress, and talk. Get those four basics right and the rest is a piece of kuchen.

Basic Rule #1: What's in a name?

Goodbye, Notowidigeo. Hello, Sastroamidjojo. At the U.S. State Department, foreign names are almost as crucial as foreign policy. The social secretary to a former secretary of state recalls that even in the relatively unselfconscious 1950s she put herself through a rigorous rehearsal of names before every affair of state. Of all the challenges, she says, the ambassador from what was then Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) was the toughest. After days of practicing "Ambassador Notowidigeo," she was informed that a new man had the job — and was on his way to be received. "You'd be surprised how fast you can memorize Sastroamidjojo when you have to," she adds.

The first transaction between even ordinary citizens — and the first chance to make an impression for better or worse — is, of course, an exchange of names. In America, there usually is not very much to get wrong. And even if you do, so what?

Not so elsewhere. Especially in the Eastern Hemisphere, where name frequently denotes social rank or family status, a mistake can be an outright insult. So can switching to a given

name without the other person's permission, even when you think the situation calls for it.

"What would you like me to call you?" is always the opening line of one overseas deputy director for an international telecommunications corporation. "Better to ask several times," he advises, "than to get it wrong." Even then, "I err on the side of formality until asked to 'Call me Joe.'" Another frequent traveler insists his company provide him with a list of key people he will meet, country by country, surnames underlined, to be memorized on the flight over.

Don't trust the rules

Just when you think you have broken the international name code, they switch the rules on you. Take Latin America. Most people's names are a combination of the father's and mother's, with only the father's name used in conversation. In the Spanish-speaking countries, the father's name comes first. Hence, Carlos Mendoza-Miller is called Mr. Mendoza. *But* in Portuguese-speaking Brazil, it is the other way around, with the mother's name first.

In the Orient, the Chinese system of surname first, given name last does not always apply. The Taiwanese, many of whom were educated in missionary schools, often have a Christian first name, which comes before any of the others — as in Tommy Ho Chin, who should be called Mr. Ho or, to his friends, Tommy Ho. Also, given names are often officially changed to initials, and a Y.Y. Lang is Y.Y.; never mind what it stands for. In Korea, which of a man's names takes a Mr. is determined by whether he is his father's first or second son. Although in Thailand names run backwards, Chinese style, the Mr. is put with the *given* name, and to a Thai it is just as important to be called by his given name as it is for a Japanese to be addressed by his surname. With the latter, incidentally, you can in a very friendly relationship respond to his using *your* first name by dropping the Mr. and adding *san* to his last name, as in Ishikawa-san.

Hello. Are you still there? Then get ready for the last installment of the name game, which is to disregard all of the above — sometimes. The reason is that many Easterners who deal regularly with the West are now changing the order of their names to un-confuse us. So, while to each other their names remain the same, to us the given name may come before the surname. Then again, it may not.

The safest course remains: ask.

Don't Leave Home Without It

Overseas, the ultimate passport is the business card —proof that you really do exist. Even a casual exchange of names between tourist and native usually calls for it. Any business contact demands it. Not just because, to a foreigner, your name is foreign and hence easier to absorb in writing, but particularly because rank and profession are taken so much more seriously than here at home. A reporter, for instance, is never called a mere reporter but a *journalist*, with the lofty implications of a James Reston or Eric Sevareid. In Italy, even a bachelor's degree entitles you to put a *Dr.* in front of your name. *Professor* is also used much more loosely than in the U.S. In Asia, it is not so much *who* you are as *where* you are in the pecking order of any given meeting or transaction. Suggestions:

- On the card, include your company name and your position plus any titles such as vice president, manager, associate director. Don't use abbreviations.
- If you are going where English is not widely spoken, take your cards to a printer when you get there and have the reverse side printed in the local language. (In Hong Kong and Tokyo, overnight service is available.)
- In most of Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (except Israel), never present the card with your left hand.
- In Japan, present it with both hands, and make sure the type is facing the recipient and is right-side-up.

Basic Rule #2: Eat, drink, and be wary.

Pass the gorilla, please. Away from home, eating is more than just a way to keep your pin-striped suit from falling off. It is a language all its own, and no words can match it for saying "Glad to meet you . . . glad to be doing business with you . . . glad to have you here in the beautiful Rann of Kutch" or wherever.

Clearly, mealtime is no time for a thanks-but-no-thanks response. Acceptance of what is on your plate is tantamount to