
Press Releases - 2007 Nov 26

YOU'RE FOREIGN? THEN I'LL SHOUT MORE LOUDLY, SAY BRITISH EXECUTIVES

- 97 per cent of British bosses think that they should make an effort to learn about business etiquette in other countries when travelling abroad
- But over two thirds (68 per cent) are embarrassed by their lack of knowledge of other cultures
- 96 per cent rely on the fact that most people in business can speak English, with only 21 per cent able to use another language
- Almost a quarter (23 per cent) have made a slip-up or had a bad experience in business etiquette when doing business abroad or with people from overseas.

British business executives are struggling to keep abreast of the complexities of business culture overseas, even though they are travelling abroad for business more often than ever before, according to research by executive communications consultancy, **The Aziz Corporation**.

According to the research, 88 per cent believe that people make more foreign business trips than ever before. Of the survey respondents, 82 per cent state that they often do business with people from other cultures, with 66 per cent regularly travelling abroad on business.

The survey found that almost all executives (97 per cent) consider that Britons should make an effort to learn about business etiquette in other countries when travelling abroad for work. 96 per cent believe that knowledge of culture in other countries can make a business meeting much more successful.

Despite this, 68 per cent admit that they sometimes feel embarrassed by their ignorance of other cultures, while 23 per cent have personally slipped-up or had a bad experience in business etiquette when doing business abroad or with people from overseas.

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, Chairman of The Aziz Corporation, commented: "The fact that top level executives are not sure how to behave when doing business overseas is very worrying for British business. If we are to maintain our position as a leading player in the global economy, we simply cannot afford to be dropping the classic British clanger left, right and centre."

While most businessmen would be confident in visiting Western Europe or the United States, over half admit they would be daunted by the prospect of visiting countries with a perceived difference in business cultures, such as Japan, Asia or the Middle East. Before embarking on a business trip, 74 per cent seek advice on rules or etiquette with which they may not be familiar. Despite this, 52 per cent admit they find themselves 'playing it by ear' and taking the lead from those they are meeting or travelling with. 14 per cent claim they have no time or resources to undertake any preparation. Only 13 per cent of British companies offer training to help bridge the cultural gap.

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, explained: "British bosses are obviously aware of the need to learn about other cultures - and pay lip-service to its importance - but are time-pressured, unsupported, and tend to 'wing it' in practice. Imitating others around you is never a foolproof strategy, not

least as our study suggests it may be a case of the blind leading the blind. Colleagues and associates are probably just as clueless as you are and hoping they can copy you too!”

Professor **Khalid Aziz** concluded: “Just because people in other cultures are able to speak to us in English, doesn’t mean that we can rest on our laurels assuming that there is no more to be done or that our well-meaning nature will get us through. If anything, British bosses hoping to be a success in a globalised economy should make all the more effort to be knowledgeable about foreign etiquette, since it’s unlikely we are going to become multilingual in a hurry.”

Despite their cultural ignorance, the survey finds that most Britons are keen to provide a welcoming and tolerant atmosphere for overseas visitors. Indeed, the British place more value on the comfort of foreign visitors than they do their own. 79 per cent of respondents believe people from other cultures visiting Britain should have the right to feel comfortable dressing as they would at home, whilst 70 per cent feel that the British should receive the same treatment when abroad themselves.

The vast majority of business people would feel entirely comfortable doing business with people in a wide range of dress or wearing religious symbols, including a crucifix, head-scarf, skull-cap or turban. Only in the case of someone wearing a burqa, covering the face as well as the body, do a clear majority (85 per cent) believe that they would find it difficult to form a business relationship.

The British consider themselves to be so welcoming that 57 per cent feel we tend to treat people from overseas with more tolerance than we expect to receive in return. We are also relaxed about multiculturalism on our own shores, with 93 per cent believing that Britain’s economy has benefited from the influx of skilled workers from overseas in recent years.

- Ends -

Professor **Khalid Aziz** of The Aziz Corporation is available for interview on this story. If you would be interested in speaking with Khalid then please visit our [Contact us](#) page.

Notes to Editors

The Aziz Corporation

The Aziz Corporation is the UK’s leading independent executive communications consultancy. Its mission is to add value to businesses by ensuring their people are effective communicators. Consultancy services offered by the Aziz Corporation include presentation skills, cross cultural communications, media training, crisis management, image consultancy and voice development.

About the survey

This survey was completed by 205 senior managers and directors of major companies based across the United Kingdom.