

Kiss and Tell

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While kissing is usually associated with pleasure, not business, there are international settings where kissing is an essential part of a proper greeting. Especially in a business environment, where decisions can be made in just a couple of seconds based both on number and interpersonal relationships, it is extremely important to be well-informed regarding the traditions of your business partners.

There are many elements in a greeting sequence, and in many cultures it includes a kiss as a traditional greeting. In other cultures it can be a sign that you are well-respected and accepted in your partners' social circle. Nevertheless, besides knowing when and who to kiss, an essential detail in demonstrating your business kissing skills refers to how and how many times. And believe me, it is in no way pleasant to prepare for a kiss on both cheeks and then be left "in the wind" because your partner comes from a culture where they kiss just once. And it also happened that I left people "in the wind", because I did not know about the 3 times rule. While some persons would kindly explain you how you should have done it, others just leave it alone as a slightly embarrassing moment. However, in an international business environment nothing says that you are a well-prepared, thoughtful and respectful individual than knowing the habits and traditions of your discussion partners.

So, just a few examples from around the world can show you how complicated the world of kissing is. For example, in some regions of France, such as Burgundy, a proper greeting includes 3 kisses on the cheek, while in other areas of the country, including Paris, 2 kisses are enough. The same happens in Brazil, some of my students told me in class. The 3 kisses rule can also be found, for example, in Serbia or in different countries in the Middle East. The kiss on both cheeks rule is rather common around the world, even though, there might be differences regarding on which side to start. Hungarians, for example, start from right to left, while in Portugal from left to right. Other cultures, like the United States, the UK, Belgium and the list can go on, use the one kiss rule.

Other details refer to how formal or informal this form of greeting is considered, how much contact is expected and who initiates the greeting. Nevertheless, cultural differences also reflect on the role of genders in this non-verbal communication act.

Therefore, when discussing about business and formal settings, please remember to do your homework ahead of time. And if you kiss, please tell. Tell us how you do it.

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