

Top 12 Tips on Doing Business in the Middle East

1. Relationship building!
 - a. Relationships are crucial and are foundational in business.
 - b. There will be much time and effort that goes into the development of these relationships, but once you have earned trust, deals can be closed quickly, with room for further growth.
2. Understand political & social issues especially in terms of those making decisions that affect your work, such as dynamics on the boards of business/government entities.
 - a. Stay in tune to this changing landscape.
3. Understand some of the unique sensitivities to the Muslim world.
4. Different cell phone etiquette includes typically texting, not having voice mail, using the missed call feature.
5. Appreciate the emphasis on:
 - a. Family
 - b. Living in the present
 - i. Be okay with a more fluid sense of time.
 - ii. Be patient. The timeline to close a deal may be longer, but the deal can dramatically increase in size once won.
 - c. The sense of connection with God/Allah
6. Don't call or schedule on Fridays. This is like Sundays in many Western countries
7. Pay attention to fundamentals of Etiquette:
 - a. Pass and receive with your right hand.
 - b. Be open to eating without utensils.
 - c. Watch how you use your finger. Don't point.
 - d. Don't point with your foot.
 - e. Don't throw a shoe at someone – huge insult!
 - f. Gesture/Wave someone towards you by waving down or circular motion.
 - i. Don't wave up. This can be seen as having a sexual connotation.
8. Question your perceptions.
 - a. Just as it is in the United States, the "proper" role of women is a subject of debate.
 - b. Not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs.
 - i. What is the identity of an Arab?
 - ii. Sub-regions have different accents. For example: the Gulf, the Levant and North Africa
 - iii. Many Arabs have non-Arab descent.
 - c. Don't think Islam is against western principles.
 - i. Islam was first religion to increase strongly rights for women, including the right to agree to their marriage partner, right to education and inheritance rights. The Prophet Mohamed's wife was involved in business and the military.
 - ii. Muslim societies may interpret those rights differently.
 - iii. Don't confuse culture with religion.
9. Understand that the Middle East and Islamic world are diverse.
10. Consider the stereotypes those in the region have of Americans.
11. Understand the GCC is a land of juxtapositions and how this impacts the society today and in the future.
12. Enjoy, practice good global business practices and be open to different viewpoints.