



Dear Betty Sue,

Did you know there are over 300 types of seaweed? We manufacture a line of spa products utilizing our local seaweed here in Steilacoom (pronounced STILL-a-come), Washington. Last month an executive from a Colombian company tried our product while visiting on vacation. It made her look years younger. She loved it!

Little did we know that she is the Sr. VP of marketing for one of the largest beauty companies in Colombia. She wants to bring the CEO to meet us! We are so excited but so nervous. Betty Sue, this is bigger than big and we don't want to mess up. What do we need to know to start off the meeting right and carry it through? Our future may depend on you, please help!

Signed,

Rhonda Rhodophyta

Dear Rhonda Rhodophyta

We are as proud as plump peaches for your success! International will be just one more feather in your cap. Being from the Dallas area, home to Mary Kay, we all know her famous quote, "You have only one chance to make a good first impression", so of course, that is what we want you to do!

As my Mama said, if you don't know how to dance, best find ya an expert to teach ya before ya step on any toes. Our expert knows ALL the steps. My friend and colleague Patricia Moore, CEO of Sentrum International has had years of protocol experience serving as Consul of Colombia to Norway and Iceland. She deals with all aspects of export services for her international clients and of course cultural questions do arise. Let's ask Patricia what we need to know to make a great first impression and carry it through.

Signed,

Betty Sue, a proud plump peach

Dear Rhonda Rhodophyta,

Mary Kay is absolutely right; this is your chance to make the right impression as long as you know which one is it. First, get rid of any stereotypes you may have about the local culture in order to make a long lasting and productive relation with the locals of that Colombia.

E-mail first:

Most South Americans will not take a cold call from an unknown person, but since you met the VP of Marketing you may email her back and make any introduction you need to. Now you have a personal relationship that will help you “open that window”

When emailing salutation is a must. Always address people in proper form and depending on which culture. Use Mrs. or courtesy titles until invited to do otherwise. Open with a nice and honest concern on a safe trip back and that all was well upon her return. When using the subject line be friendly and direct. Ex: A pleasure reviewing a mutually beneficial opportunity.

Request a mutual date and time to have a conference call and specify the reason and time needed. Looking for foreign representative is a delicate subject and you want to take your time to go through details.

For the Conference Call Meeting: call the assistant ahead to remind and confirm the call. Punctuality in Latin America is not as important as it is here. If she wants to reschedule don't take it personally and respond in a cordial way.

Conference call: It is most probable that Mrs. VP had invited others to participate in the conference call without letting you know in advance. Let everyone introduce themselves and be mindful with their names and referring to them occasionally. You might end up working directly with one or all of them.

Meeting with the Client: If you were able to confirm that the CEO wants to visit your factory send a tentative agenda for her confirmation (you may find early at this stage how future negotiations will work). Complement the agenda with the list of staff and guests participating in the meeting and include general information (weather, shopping, art and culture, etc.) Here is a good moment to ask about special meals, allergies, or other relevant information that will make her visit unforgettable. As a host you, or someone from your team, is expected to pick her up at the airport and drive her around your visits. Cultural issues will impact on the success of the negotiation.

At this point you should have already identified your purpose and informed yourself of the seaweed market in Colombia including possible competitors*. Plan accordingly for the desired outcome. Such issues may provide constraints on where and how the meeting may be held; who should be invited; who should speak and in what hierarchy order; and what food and drinks should be served if any. For Colombians, and in general for South Americans, coffee, water and herbal teas is good enough. Mugs are not as common as in the U.S. so if possible, serve them the old way with cup, saucer and spoon.

Be aware of different greeting rituals such as kisses, handshakes or bows. There are differences in how close people stand to socialize, how loudly they speak. Your interest and concern in learning a different culture is graciously accepted. Meaning of words differ from culture to culture and “casual dress” almost never means jeans or flip flops in countries outside the U.S.

Meet your guest and introduce yourself by stating your name and title, shake hands and welcome her. As a host point out a chair for her saying “please sit here”. In a working meeting, the guest of honor should be seated across the highest executive in the room and looking towards the door. No purses or briefcases should go on the table. Keep your papers organized. If she has brought a small gift or souvenir open it up immediately, thank her and, if it is the case, share it with everyone in the table.

Start the conversation by asking about her trip and her family members. Be sure to communicate that you will be glad to accommodate the agenda to any changes she might need.

To the Point: Make a brief introduction of your seaweed products with compelling reasons on why you believe its distribution will benefit both parties. Then, listen to her thoughts and address her concerns in a professional way. As a host you will kindly close the meeting to move on to your next commitments. Take Mrs. VP back to the Airport and follow up with an email asking about her joyful return back home.

You will want to become a student of ongoing relations and negotiation but we will save that for another time.

Yours truly,

Patricia

*Seaweed (marine algae), primarily for human consumption is a large and expanding industry in Japan. In contrast, seaweed culture is still in a research phase in the United States while in South America different scenarios can be observed. There is production in Peru and Brazil, while Chile has succeeded in establishing a sustainable seaweed-harvesting plan for most of the economically important seaweeds.