

## Example 1

*Target Audience: Cross-Cultural Managers who regularly work in India*

# Should You Shake a Woman's Hand in India?

Karl, a large man from Canada, was visiting an office in India for the first time. He was led around by Maneesha, a smartly-dressed, super-punctual woman who made sure Karl was at all of his meetings on time. Towards the end of the first day, she took Karl to meet a group of brand-new **freshers** who were going through some technical training. Karl joked about looking like a huge white monster, and promised not to be too scary.

Karl walked along behind the trainees and stopped behind Sangeetha. He noticed a few mistakes in a sentence she was typing and asked her in a friendly tone to “just fix it quickly”. She stared straight ahead at her screen. Karl said, “No, it’s easy, just erase that word and add a period.” Sangeetha’s eyes grew even bigger than before; she asked to be excused, and hurried to the bathroom.

Megan had just arrived for a one-year internship in India. She was put in a small group of desks with three younger single guys. Her first week went well, and she enjoyed working with her colleagues. On Friday, one of the guys mentioned at lunch that they were going out to a bar that night. Megan said, “Sounds like fun, can I come? I don’t have anything to do.”

The guys looked at each other and nervously agreed. Later in the day, one of them said he was not feeling well and might go home for the night, and the other two slowly dropped out as well, leaving Megan without any plans, and wondering what happened.

Nothing is higher on the list of ‘I-don’t-want-to-look-like-a-fool-in-a-new-country’ than knowing how to interact with women and men, specifically the opposite gender. It can seem extremely simple when done right, but extremely devastating when done poorly. In this article, we’ll explore how gender affects relationships in the workplace for an outsider in India.

### **For the businessman traveling to India:**

If you are used to traveling in Asia, you know that you tend to get treated a little more like a king than you are used to. India is no different, but nothing off the charts. Foreign businessmen have been coming here for ages. Most people will assume that you are quite wealthy and have a good amount of authority behind you.

#### *Interacting with Indian Men*

There are two main types of Indian men.

Type A is the seriously spiritual man. We shall call him 'Uncle'. He is strictly vegetarian, perhaps a little older, wears traditional markings on his forehead, and is a little nationalistic. He is good-humored, but doesn't participate in crude jokes. In his spare time, he attends Indian music concerts or religious discussions. He welcomes you as an outsider to India, but is not worried about trying to impress you.

Type B sees you as the perfect opportunity to engage in any kind of vice available. We shall call him 'Bhai' [meaning younger brother]. He will invite you to go out for a drink, smoke, swear, eat red meat, or anything else he is not technically supposed to do. He is also nationalistic, but might complain openly about India and hopes to get a job in Europe or North America.

These are two ends of the spectrum. Most men fall between the two, but some fit the [generalization](#) very well.

If your Indian colleague is more like Uncle, treat him with a lot of respect. Enjoy coffee with him and engage in lots of small talk. If you bring a gift, make it elegant and classy. Ask about his extended family, especially parents and children. Don't order meat at a restaurant if you can help it.

If your Indian colleague is more like Bhai, he is looking to have a good time. He will probably be eager to ask you lots of questions and hang out very late into the evening. It will seem like he has no family responsibilities while you are in town. Bhai tends to be more sentimental than Uncle, and will treasure any gift from you as well as the time you spend together outside the office.

Regardless of the type of Indian man, cricket and family are your two go-to [small talk topics](#), which should provide enough conversation for a few hours.

### *Interacting with Indian Women*

While men still dominate the business world, it is very common to interact with a lot of women, even in senior positions.

Once again, there are two extremes when it comes to professional Indian women. The first is like Maneesha, the fully corporatized woman who dresses in professional saris, looks you in the eye, shakes your hand firmly, and speaks in impeccable English. She is often the most aware of the power-balance of the office and knows all the drama and backstories, but never mentions them in public.

With her, you should be very polite and proper. Shake her hand firmly and do not treat her differently than a man, except by acknowledging that she is likely juggling seven different worlds under that cool, collected smile. (See [Indias by Gender](#).)

The other end of the spectrum is like Sangeetha. She is small, inconceivably quiet, and incredibly submissive. She does not make eye contact, occasionally smiles, and generally avoids you at all costs. Yet, you may stumble upon her giggling uncontrollably with her friends about something you will never understand.

Don't force a handshake with her; but if you do, be prepared for the definition of a 'dead fish'. In fact, your best method is not to force anything. Just speak slowly and politely. Some women on this end of the spectrum gradually become more like Maneesha, but others work for a few years, get married, and leave their jobs.

If you are interacting with women outside of the office (wives or mothers), your best bet is to be extremely polite, hungry, and complimentary.

## **For the businesswoman traveling to India:**

Due to the large number of foreigners coming through India, and the increasing prominence of Indian women in the workplace, India is not as difficult as it used to be for a foreign woman. But that doesn't mean it's easy. You will likely need to work harder to establish a position of authority since it won't be given to you outright.

### *Interacting with Indian men*

If you are interacting a lot with 'Uncle', your relationship will likely be very professional and to-the-point. He may or may not hold some sexist views on women in the workforce, but either way, your best bet is to be straightforward and hardworking. There are very few examples of a male-female mentor relationship; if you have a senior man you are reporting to, don't expect him to get very involved.

Things are more difficult with 'Bhai'. He might openly goof off and laugh at things that he will never let you in on. You will not be invited to any after-hours events where a lot of the real bonding happens. With him, you should be confident and businesslike. Trying to join in with the joking and teasing will do no good, as he'll either get the wrong impression or feel insulted that you are making fun of him. ([#Thinskinned](#)) Definitely stay away from any romantic or sexual jokes; they will only feed into stereotypes you are hoping to break.

### *Interacting with Indian Women*

The biggest thing you might notice about interacting with other women is the lack of 'fraternizing'. Since working women have so much pressure on them inside the home, they usually do not have time to just hang out with colleagues. Their lunch conversations might revolve entirely around children, husbands, parents, and in-laws. It is not that you won't be able to make friends with other women at the office, it's just that it is usually difficult and more complex than it seems.

So should you shake a woman's hand? Like most things in India, it depends. The best thing you can do is don't be uninformed when interacting with India. Gaining some confidence in interacting with women and men will set you up for a great trip to India, and prevent some big slip-ups. Feel free to share more advice or stories below.

## Example 2

*Target Audience: COOs and Quality Managers at mid-sized manufacturing companies*

# Is your company ready for its own internal audits?

Internal audits are essential to an organization that values quality. Like a yearly physical, they help identify areas to improve before they become major issues. When you catch something internally before a client or a certifying agency finds it, you are a hero for your organization.

But it's often easy to fall into a trap when it comes deciding between using an independent auditor and training an internal resource to do your internal audit. Your initial reaction might be to think that 'bootstrapping' your audit with an internal resource is the cheaper route. However, it won't take you long to think about the cost of training and travel (upwards of \$2,500), time away from other work, extended time for completing the audit, and potential turnover in the position.

In fact, you've probably already realized that when compared to using an independent auditor, training an internal resource is a significant investment of time and money.

So how can you tell if that investment is worth it? Use these questions as a guide:

**Are you dedicated to a culture of quality?** If your entire senior management team talks consistently about quality and has already invested in other areas improvement, then you should get serious about establishing your own internal auditor.

**Are you looking to do some major growth?** Very large manufacturers have internal auditors on staff because they do constant audits. If your company is looking to expand soon to where you could keep an internal resource busy most of the year, getting someone trained soon will help as you grow.

**Do you already have someone who would be a great auditor?** You need someone who is both passionate about quality, and committed to staying with the organization. He/she should be able to work outside of office politics, but still have great relationships that contribute to open communication. This person must be senior enough to have a wide understanding of the entire organization, but also not already over-committed to other business processes. If you have someone like this, making the early investment is a great move.

Even if you decide to make the investment, an independent auditor can still add a lot of value. One of their greatest benefits is the ability to bring in cross-industry insights from other

companies that you may not have heard about. Also, a fresh set of professionally trained eyes will show you some things you may have missed.

There are a few situations where the investment into an internal resource is not worth it.

**Are you just doing an audit to win a contract or get a certification?** Brining in an independent auditor can save you a lot of money and time to be able to win important contracts and get certified. You don't want to put yourself in a situation where your client's auditor discovers things your internal resource missed.

**Is this your first internal audit?** If you are relatively unfamiliar with the world of quality, an independent auditor is going to set you on the right path and show you how to improve your processes in a very professional and much lower stress way as compared to an internal resource.

**Do you lack a clear internal candidate?** If you don't have the right person, or if that person leaves or grows tired of audits in the near future, you will soon face the same problem. Being a great auditor requires training, but it also requires a skillset of incredible comprehension and attention to detail. Without the right person for the job, making the investment doesn't make sense.

**Do relational politics make it difficult for someone on the inside to give an independent assessment?** If you are nervous that someone on the inside might be intimidated, or might have too close of relationships to be effective, save yourself the trouble and bring someone in from the outside who doesn't have existing relationships.

An internal audit is a major use of resources – time, money, and talent. You owe it to yourself to spend the time to decide whether you should use an independent auditor, or make the large investment into an internal resource.

## Example 3

*Target Audience: Executives and Volunteer Coordinators at mid to large sized non-profits*

# Getting Your Volunteers to Stick Around

Volunteers, the lifeblood of 85% of nonprofit organisations in the US, are becoming a rare species. In fact, *regular* volunteers, the most elusive of creatures, are so hard to discover these days that SoftwareAdvice [did a survey](#) to see what might get a good volunteer to keep coming back. The results give us a few practical reminders about how to [keep our volunteers engaged](#).

### **Be Flexible.**

27% of volunteers said they would return if offered flexible timings that fit into their regular schedules. Aside from dropping in when they have some free time, a significant number of them preferred choosing the roles they would volunteer in. [Considering every volunteer hour is worth \\$22](#), that all sounds rather dodgy, doesn't it? However, several organizations reported that after introducing volunteer scheduling software where volunteers could assign their own tasks, everyone was happier and more got done.

### **Let them know their work counts.**

24% of the sample group said they'd come back if they heard from someone for whom they'd made a difference. We all want to know that our hard work counts, especially when we're taking personal time off to try to make a difference. Aside from your volunteers hearing from beneficiaries, offering [a heartfelt thank-you](#) or other incentives encourages them to become repeat volunteers.

### **Add value.**

One often neglected motivator for volunteers is career incentives. Any work-related experience that might benefit their careers is an extremely desirable bonus for 23% of respondents, and it also raises your reputation as an organization that cares for its own. Offering roles that focus on specific skills, continuing education credits, or a reference letter are great opportunities for volunteers to show a [future employer](#) or [educational institution](#).

### **Commit to the cause.**

The most loyal volunteers care about the cause your organization supports. Focus on your cause more than your corporate image as an organization and you will inspire your volunteers to stick around longer. Demonstrate your commitment by sharing inspirational stories, and focusing on the good that was done in your community. Make sure the spotlight is not always on your organization.

## **Create a community.**

Another unspoken motivator for volunteers is to feel connected and a part of a larger whole. Many just enjoy the experience of meeting new people, making new friends and learning new things. 29% of respondents to the survey found casual volunteer meetups and events the most appealing. Foster and grow this sense of community, creating a dedicated and close-knit group of volunteers - the sort where [everyone knows everyone else's name](#). Throw parties to celebrate their achievements, hold training sessions and meetups, and [highlight their successes](#) both as individuals and as a group. That group is likely to stick around, and even grow.

Finding volunteers is one challenge. Getting them to continue coming back is another one. The results from this survey will help you know how you keep engaged with your volunteers and get them to stick around a little longer. Which one would mean the most to your volunteers?