

A general rule is to take the lead from the Arab, discussing what he brings up in social conversations.

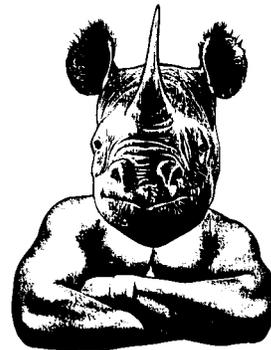
For him, what are general questions about age, family and his female relatives may be seen as very intimate questions. Basically, it would not be wise to ask about his family or himself in front of other people or loud enough for them to hear you.

For example: Just before a weekly meeting of a field operation an American was chatting with the other members at the meeting. When almost everyone had arrived, the American turned to the last arrival and asked, "How's the wife, Omar?"

Omar flushed a deep red and mumbled something incomprehensible (a strong clue your foot is in the wrong place). But the American smiled and nodded as if he understood the mumble and turned away.

The Arab staff members knew Omar's wife had been in the hospital for six weeks. But the American's question in a public meeting was considered embarrassingly crude. The subject of any women connected to an Arab is very intricate and closely tied to his personal dignity and his ego--his public "appearances."

In this case the American meant well. But because of local ways of life he had asked what was a private question in public, in a loud voice, and in a closed room where a business meeting was underway and not everyone there was a close friend of Omar's.



The delicate question was tied to honor and to the shame of Omar. In a sense, also, to all the Arab males present--yet it was asked casually, as if it were not important and not personal.

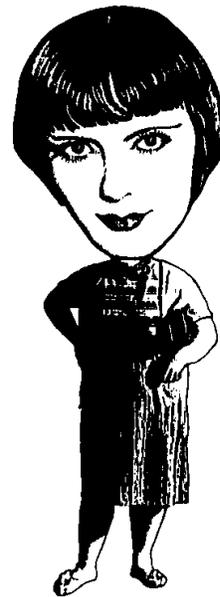
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The normal way locally would have been to ask the question in a low voice, standing a foot from his employee or sitting close to him, and holding or patting the employee's shoulder or arm while asking and listening. This would be read as sincere concern, the behavior expected of a supervisor in the Arab world.

One must be particularly careful in conversation with Saudis. In view of previous discussions of propriety and privacy in Saudi culture, the military linguist should never discuss sex in mixed company nor ask about the family affairs of a Saudi associate. Regarding the work environment, he should refrain from commenting on certain aspects of Saudi behavior--lack of punctuality, inability to implement a plan or complete a job on schedule, consistent absence from place of work. Such behavior is fully consistent with native tendencies toward determinism and subjectivism; any questioning of it amounts to an affront.

Regarding politics and religion, the visitor should not discuss Arab defeats in prior wars with Israel. Such recollection offends Arab pride. Do not engage a Saudi in any political argument, especially in public. Never make any unfavorable comments to Saudis about their country's royal family or internal affairs.



One may pose questions regarding the practices and beliefs of Islam. However, one should never criticize the religion, belittle the Prophet Muhammad, or attempt to proselytize. However, do not refer to a Saudi as a

"Mohammedan." Use the term "Muslim." Also, do not use nicknames, slang, or insulting words, even jokingly.

f. Difficult Questions to

Answer Since the Saudis themselves are disinclined to discuss personal (or private) matters, they do not ask many embarrassing or difficult questions. Even so, the linguist should expect to field a few. For those which involve U.S. security interests, he can be politely evasive without risking loss of rapport. Those involving foreign policy, and particularly U.S. support for Israel, cannot be so easily dismissed.



The visitor is very likely to hear the following question in some form or other. Why does the United States continue to support Israel when that country constantly obstructs Middle East peace, etc., etc.? An acceptable answer would be that U.S. foreign policy toward any country is influenced by numerous factors, to include the impact of domestic interest groups. You yourself did not personally participate in the formulation of US policy.

Aside from politics, Saudis might ask about religious preference--especially if the linguist is an accomplished Arabist. The question would be posed in the following sequence. You know Arabic well. You can read the Qur'an. You understand our culture.

Why don't you convert to Islam? The linguist may not want to answer such a question, but he is likely to face persistence. He must be careful, for any blunt response would probably ignite an argument as to which faith guarantees salvation. Such discussions usually destroy rapport. It would be best to reply that you need more time to study the religion of Islam before considering conversion.



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The American may also have to deal with questions which involve the self-interest of his associates. Some Saudi officers might ask him to intercede for them at MODA (Ministry of Defense and Aviation), their objective being promotion or preferential assignment. Such requests would likely come from officers who are not well connected. If they indeed lack patronage at defense headquarters, there is little the attaché can do for them. Even so, they have expectations, and rapport is at stake if the visitor ignores successive entreaties.

This dilemma can possibly be resolved on the basis of esteem. The linguist may truly admire the talents and qualities of his associate. In this case, he can at least favorably mention that officer--albeit, in a casual way, during visits to MODA. Otherwise, he can merely mention that a certain officer keeps asking about promotion, re-assignment, whatever, without actually endorsing that request. (The attaché must avoid suspicion of meddling). In either case, the attaché can inform his associate that he did mention his name at MODA, and such a response should be satisfactory.



"Use all of your brain."

Review Quiz: Concept of Time/Conversation Guidelines

Fill in the blanks Fill in the blanks with the most correct word immediately following each section. Not all words listed will be used.

Acting in a fast, speedy, impatient manner is often misinterpreted as an (1) _____ in Arab circles.

Looking at your (2) _____ during social discussion is considered rude.

Planning for future events may be difficult in Arab circles. Continual (3) _____ is essential. A (4) _____ attitude toward time is a common Arab perspective.

Small talk, with Arab hosts, should never include inquiries about (5) _____ relatives.

Placing the right hand over the heart indicates (6) _____ and warmth of feeling.

When speaking, the Arab custom is to be much (7) _____ than what most Americans are used to.

Many Middle East peoples may use (8) _____ ways of communication. An Arab uses (9) _____ and (10) _____ "from the cradle." Americans should be aware of (11) _____ of thought expressed.

Careful (12) _____ is important.

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tact	diplomacy	relaxed	listening
closer	nuances	coordination	female
insult	watch	indirect	sincerity
happiness	sadness	grief	pain

Take the lead from your Arab host when discussing seemingly (13) _____ topics. Tactful intelligence personnel will refrain from commenting on traditional Saudi Arabian lack of (14) _____, ability to implement a (15) _____ or consistent (16) _____ from a place of work. Discussion of prior wars with (17) _____ can offend Arab pride.

It is wise never to make (18) _____ comments about Saudi internal affairs. (19) _____ the Prophet Muhammad or has no place. Refer to a Saudi Arabian as being a (20) _____ rather than Mohammedan or Moslem.

belittling	plan	Criticizing	Muslim
sensitive	absence	punctuality	promptness
Israel			

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"Go to class every day; pay attention in class; apply yourself...Attendance, Attention and Application."
Dean Benjamin De La Selva on rules for DLIFLC success.