

Want that deal, Mr CEO? Brush up your manners

By Sujata Dutta Sachdeva/TNN

New Delhi: What's grace, attitude and etiquette got to do with boardrooms? A lot, say experts. Cracking boardroom deals is not about technical skills alone: more and more CEOs are realising it today. Whether it's business on the phone, e-mail, or a luncheon meeting, the image one projects is becoming more important for clinching deals.

According to a research by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Stanford Research Institute, technical skills and knowledge account for just 15 per cent of the reason why one gets a job; 85 per cent is based on "soft skills". A lesson Indian CEOs are taking seriously: finishing schools are fast becoming important in their scheme of things. And etiquette consultants are the big thing now.

That's why business schools like IIM and XLRI are incorporating these courses in their curriculum. From telephone etiquette to how to interact with a women CEO in the US, which drink to order at a business meeting and the art of saying thank you after receiving an award, these courses teach everything. Often, they are customised according to requirement. "Many CEOs also

send their wives or come together for these classes," says Pria Warrick, who runs a finishing school in Delhi.

Minochar says even CEOs need to be taught

what to wear and how to make social conversation. Even top executives can break into a sweat thinking about meeting and making conversation with new acquaintances. In fact, a recent study by the Shyness Research Institute says 88 per cent of people feel shy at some point, and

**SUNDAY
SPECIAL**

SUNDAY

TIME

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"Corporate finesse is a niche market," says image consultant Sabira Merchant. She regularly holds classes for top honchos of MNC and Indian corporates. "The trend is catching on, especially with Indian companies being listed at NASDAQ and going in for foreign joint ventures."

Minocher Patel, best known for setting up India's first residential finishing school in Pune and whose clients include TCS, Singapore Airlines and Wipro, points out: "Corporate India is realising that the likeability factor is important to build relationships and get new businesses. What was considered a soft skill earlier, has now become a hard skill."

nothing is more frightening to them than chatting with a stranger. That's where these schools step in.

"From what clothes to wear and who pays the bill after a business lunch, we teach them everything," says Minochar.

Of course, confidentiality is important. "Most of my clients like to come for exclusive classes either early morning or late evening," says Warrick, whose clients include IAS officers, diplomats and top CEOs. And it all comes at a price: A three-day workshop costs Rs 50,000-1 lakh. Of course, CEOs are not complaining, if it means getting business worth a few crores.