

donimageinstitute.com), says, "The customised coaching will include an 'Indian dress day' and a colour analysis specific to Asian skin tones." The Indian dress day, informs Arwen, will cover dress codes for the Indian entrepreneur starting and marketing a business, students at their first job, even suggest how to dress for special events like media appearances.

Corporate codes like these have kept Minocher Patel occupied ever since he set up Ecole Solitaire, a residential finishing school in Pune, in 1998. But back then, people would respond with an artless "What's that?" when the term 'etiquette training' came up. "Now, we don't even have to market ourselves," Patel says. Everyone worth his white collar, from CEOs to the newbie trainee, is up for a lesson or two in image styling, he says. Naturally, methods and goals of training differ. "For a trainee, we start from scratch—choosing the right clothes, grooming, presentation and conversation skills, body language and the dos and don'ts of corporate protocol. A senior person, on the other hand, already has the exposure. All he needs is to polish it up a bit: he might have a rough tongue, for instance, so you'll work on communication."

**C**OMMUNICATION, in fact, is the Achilles' heel for most job hopefuls, says Vatsala Bhat, dean of Mysore's Raman International Institute of Information Technology (RiiiT), a full-fledged residential IT finishing school. "We use audio-visual aids, role plays, quizzes, to draw out students, especially those from rural Karnataka." The occasional Barack Obama video helps too. After all, it's the little things that matter.

"Corporate etiquette is super-specialised now," declares Kauser Khan, founder of the Bangalore-based Protocol. "Etiquette today doesn't stop at crockery, cutlery and five-course meals. You must know how to be a host, a guest, what small talk to make at a formal dinner...for example, a decision is



**Don't feel shy** Minocher Patel shows newbies how to mingle with the ladies

taken only at the end of the meal, over coffee. If you're a guest, you should never offer to pay. Your guest should be seated to your right and not opposite you, which is confrontational." 'EQ', she says, has taken a giant leap from Emotional Quotient to Etiquette Quotient.

It's no surprise that Kauser's 'Competent Corporate Woman' module is a runaway hit. "Our cultural and social conditioning is such that women in India carry their social image into their professional image. But the corporate environment isn't man vs woman. One should know what non-verbal signals one is sending out—in the UK, for instance, holding eye contact for more than a minute sends wrong messages."

Decoding signals, in fact, is vital in international interactions. Cultural sensitisation, it seems, is a must for those

travelling abroad or dealing with foreigners. Minocher Patel elaborates, "An American might encourage an informal atmosphere at a meeting and crack a few jokes. But you won't find a German doing this, though in the after hours, he will open up!" Ruchi recalls her tips for a businessman headed for Tokyo, "In Japan, it's considered disrespectful to slip someone's business card into your back pocket or scribble on it, because in their culture, it's equivalent to writing on the face." Kauser adds another pointer, "In China, it's offensive to scratch your nose." Power networking on the virtual plane has its own set of rules too. Ruchi's rule of thumb is to avoid tweeting or posting remarks on religion, caste and politics.

Of course, all this acquired business sense doesn't come cheap. A day-long session for entry-level IT employees could cost ₹15,000-20,000, going up to the mid-level ₹20,000-25,000; while 20 hours of power talk over 10 days could set you back by ₹5,000 in a group, and ₹10,000 in a one-to-one session. It's evidently a small price to pay for those scaling professional peaks. For filling those shiny corporate shoes the best you can makes all the difference. ■

**'EQ', she explains, has taken a giant leap from the Emotional Quotient of yesterday to today's Etiquette Quotient.**