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INFORMATION FOR THE CITIZEN DIPLOMAT

What's in a . . . Title?

By Pamela Eyring

It is difficult enough to remember names, but today's world requires much more of the citizen diplomat. Whether you are introducing colleagues at home or guests from other cultures, their names must often be preceded by the proper title or honorific.

Perhaps one of the more confusing titles is that of *Honorable*. This courtesy title is appropriate for elected and appointed officials, judges, diplomats, and some state and local government officials. It can be used in an address or invitation or in a spoken introduction or conversation. It is always used with a person's full name and never in conjunction with a military rank or scholastic degree. Introducing an important naval officer as The Honorable Admiral John Stevenson could be your ticket to the brig . . . at least in the Admiral's mind.

Oddly enough, the courtesy title of *Honorable* is



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not considered to be an honorific. Honorifics are prefixes used as a sign of respect in the spoken and written form. Prefixes such as *Captain*, *Doctor*, *Professor*, or *Monsignor* denote the bearer's office, rank or profession. So, Captain Bligh, for many reasons, was never referred to as *Honorable*. More everyday honorifics include those that denote gender, such as *Mister*, or that specify gender and

marital status, such as *Ms.* and *Mrs.*

Though Americans don't often use the courtesy title of *His/Her Excellency*, this is a common form of address when referring to a foreign president, cabinet minister, ambassador or other current or retired high-ranking official. *His/Her Excellency* is also used when addressing Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops here and abroad.

The Real Fun Begins

While courtesy titles and honorifics can be a bit confusing, the real challenge is using the proper titles and rules of precedence in introductions. Let's start at the top! In very high positions such as President of the United States, the individual's name is not used in an introduction or in response to the introduction.

continued on back

Precedence is the preferential order, rank, or importance given to individuals in ceremonies and social formalities. Precedence determines who is introduced first among several individuals and who is introduced to whom.

In some cultures, a person's title is actually more important than a person's name.

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Say, "Mr. President, may I present Ms. Anna Williams?"

Precedence determines who is introduced to whom. Neither gender nor age are considerations in formal introductions. The name of the person of higher precedence is always spoken first. Persons of greater authority receive or have presented to them persons of lower authority. For example, "Chairman McMillan, may I present our new board member, Tom Smith."

The formula is similar for elected and appointed officials. Officials receive or have non-officials introduced to them. For example, "Senator Hughes, may I present Michael McNabb, prin-

cipal of Philadelphia South Elementary School."

When you are introducing people who do not hold high rank or official positions, you may use the symmetric form of names. Don't say, "Pastor Jones, may I present Bob Smith." The correct form is, "Pastor Jones, may I present Dr. Smith." Or, "Richard, may I present Martin." This rule does not apply when one of the people introduced is very well-known. For example, "Ms. Couric, may I present Ms. Elaine Harris."

Sometimes, the higher to lower authority rule is turned upside down. A prime example of this shake-up is when you are introducing your colleagues and business associates to your company's client. Then the formula

calls for the client to receive the business associate. For example, "Matt Hopkins, I would like to introduce Ben Grossman, the president of our company. Mr. Hopkins is our client from South Carolina."

Whenever or wherever you are formally introduced to someone for the first time, **do not assume that you are on a first-name basis.** This is especially true when you meet someone from another culture who may not be comfortable with American informality. Wait to be invited to use a new friend or business associate's first name. It is the civilized thing to do!

This article is part of a continuing series by Pamela Eyring.



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