

To the manner born

■ In the US, don't try to bribe a policeman

■ Americans are friendly, but don't bond quickly

■ In the US, get used to women paying for their share of the bill

Excerpts from the *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* or *Lonely Planet*? No, a group of software engineers being 'groomed' to cope with the vicissitudes of work abroad. With the demand for Indian software professionals in the West on the rise, many IT firms in India are training their software engineers, to 'adjust' to foreign climes.

Padma Kiren Rao, Senior Manager, Human Resources with Cognizant Technology Solutions, which undertakes software projects for clients overseas, says, "Many of our employees work overseas, where they come across multi-cultural teams. In a such a situation, building relationships becomes the key to productivity. To be able to relate to people, one needs to understand them, their culture, what they like and dislike. For instance while here in India, it may be the done thing to invite co-workers home for dinner, in the West, it isn't so.

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MIND YOUR MANNERS: Minocher Patel conducts a workshop

Americans for instance are very particular about cleanliness and grooming. These programmes build a certain awareness and concern for different cultures and habits."

A software engineer who has undergone one such programme says, "In the West, Indians are considered to be technically very good, but they don't get the respect they deserve, because they lack communication skills." Another software engineer while admitting to

feeling daunted at the imminent prospect of the 'culture shock', says, "The same action in our culture could have one interpretation, and entirely different one in another culture. Programmes like this, prepare you mentally and help you recover from culture shock quicker."

Three years ago, Minocher Patel started Ecole Solitaire, a residential finishing school and today conducts 'Business Etiquette' and a host of other programmes to prepare software professionals for life

overseas. In these programmes Patel exhorts his audience, amongst other things, to respect different customs, not to have preconceived notions, not to label people and to manage their perceptions. During the course of three-day business etiquette programme, Patel sensitises his audience to many dimensions of work-

ing abroad, from positive thinking, interpersonal communication, active listening, telephone conferencing to table etiquette, the dynamics of buffets,

The global village phenomenon demands that you mind your manners even as you mind your business. As Indian IT professions go west, they are waking up to a culture where they have to mind their P's and Q's

On the treadmill

overview of international cuisine, personal grooming and hygiene and even a healthy dose of spiritual values.

So while it is important to know the difference between a 'sit-down' lunch and a 'dressed down Friday', or learn to recognise the salad spoon from the soup spoon, the key, according to Patel, boils down to being a 'good human being' - namely being sensitive to others.

In the words of a software engineer, "It is not about changing oneself but building confidence." Or in the words of another wise man, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

AHMED KARIM