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2002

A HANDBOOK OF COMMON **JAPANESE** PHRASES

Compiled by
Sanseido

Translated and adapted by
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KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL
Tokyo • New York • London

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Based on *Common Japanese Phrases* and *Common Japanese Business Phrases*, previously published in Kodansha International's Power Japanese series.

Distributed in the United States by Kodansha America, Inc., 575 Lexington Avenue, New York N.Y. 10022, and in the United Kingdom and continental Europe by Kodansha Europe Ltd., 95 Aldwych, London WC2B 4JF. Published by Kodansha International Ltd., 17-14 Otowa 1-chome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112-8652, and Kodansha America, Inc.

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ISBN 4-7700-2798-2
First edition, 2002
02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Goshinsetsu ni arigatō gozaimashita. Okagesama de tasukarimashita. 151
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Mae kara mitai to omotte ita n' da. 155
Mae kara kikitai to omotte ita tokoro da yo. 155
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- Ikanaru tsugunai mo itasu tsumori de gozaimasu.* 156
Nanae no hiza o yae ni orimashite, owabi itashimasu. 157

I accept full responsibility for this 158

- Watashi no futoku no itasu tokoro de gozaimasu.* 158
Makoto ni ikan ni zanjimasu. 158
Watashi no fumei kara, kono yō na koto ni narimashite mōshiwake gozaimasen. 159
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P R E F A C E

In one version of an old story, a pilgrim arrives at a monastery high in the mountains and is granted permission to spend the night there. Over an austere meal with his hosts, the visitor discovers that, in order to preserve a meditative atmosphere and discourage idle chatter, the monks take a minimalist approach to communicating with one another, relying on numbers rather than words. A different number has been assigned to each message that might foreseeably need to be expressed—12 means “Good evening, Brother,” 27 means “Pass the brown rice,” 34 means “You’re dragging your sleeve in the yak butter,” and so forth—so that dinner conversation at the monastery consists of nothing more than the occasional quietly intoned numerical euphemism. The visitor marvels.

When the meal is over and the head monk has retired for the evening, one of the younger monks stands up at his place, glances around him, and recites a number different from those the newcomer has overheard so far. The response is a wave of quiet chuckles: This, the visitor is given to understand, was a joke. Another young monk rises and utters a new number, which is also greeted with subdued but appreciative laughter. A third young monk eagerly rises and recites yet another number, but this one elicits an embarrassed silence.

“What was wrong with that joke?” the visitor whispers to one of his hosts.

“It’s not the joke,” he’s informed. “It’s the way he told it.”

For a lot of people who aspire to communicate in Japanese (the ones who aren’t born to it), dinner with the monks is an apt metaphor for many of their real-life encounters with the language. Any student of Japanese who’s ever tried in vain to decipher an every-

day exchange between native speakers can probably identify with the clueless visitor in this droll old tale. Those who feel they’ve attained a certain level of competence in Japanese, only to find their efforts to communicate falling flat when it’s time to stand and deliver, can probably also sympathize with that hapless third monk. But what brings the aforesaid joke to mind in the first place is the tendency of Japanese speakers to rely on a communal stockpile of orthodox expressions—common phrases—that perform essentially the same function as those numbers the monks were quoting over dinner.

Early on in my own education in Japanese (a process that just might conclude in time for the colonization of Uranus), I witnessed something that alerted me to the prominent role reserved for orthodox phraseology. It was during my first few months in Tokyo, long before I could really speak the language, and the outfit I was working for was hosting a daytime gathering to celebrate the opening of a new branch. Other than me almost everyone in attendance was Japanese, except for a foursome of business school types from the United States who had apparently sneaked out of an office upstairs where they were working as interns for the summer. Before the drinks were served, we all had to stand around in a big circle and introduce ourselves—in Japanese, naturally. As it happened, the MBA boys from upstairs were up first, and I was more than curious to see what they’d say, especially since I didn’t yet know how to introduce myself in Japanese. The first American cruised through it; he had the routine down pretty well, I thought. I was amused, though, when the second one simply repeated the exact words spoken by the guy before him, changing only the name. When the other two Americans followed suit, rattling off the very same phrase their colleagues had used, I glanced around to see if any of the Japanese guests found this as fishy as I did. Far from it. In fact, to a man (this was an all-male gathering, which should surprise no one) they all introduced themselves using exactly the same phrase—so I did, too. By the time my

turn came around I had my introduction down cold—*Burenan desu. Dōzo yoroshiku onegai shimasu.*

Now, outside the realm of comedy, it's pretty hard to imagine two dozen English speakers introducing themselves, each in turn, with the very same words. That Japanese speakers do so as a matter of course not only points up the very different roles that words can serve in different cultures but also holds an immediate implication for anyone setting out to master Japanese: Remember that phrase!

Introductions, needless to say, are only the beginning. There's a whole storehouse of expressions that have become entrenched in the Japanese language through endless repetition and are now all but automatically employed in certain situations and exchanges. This book invites the English-language reader inside that storehouse to browse around and sample the stock.

The inventory of conventional Japanese expressions is so universally familiar to native speakers that these phrases often defy any ordinary analysis and evade the grasp of people not privy to the whole code or accustomed to the situations in which that code applies. Nowhere is this more true than in the Japanese working world, where real communication (as opposed to communication of the purely formal variety) tends to be framed in concise if not elliptical units and where the best kind of understanding is invariably an implicit one. In a working culture where standard phrases of conventional Japanese "business language," laden with implications quite beyond the reach of the uninitiated, are bandied about like badminton birdies, the uninitiated non-native will be left watching from the sidelines unless he or she can get some solid guidance on how and when some of the more important phrases are used. That's also what this book is for: To provide readers of English who work in the Japanese business world with a set of highly practical and socially appropriate standard Japanese expressions for use on the job or in related situations, as well as an account of the sorts of situations in which these expressions will be most useful.

To get an idea of how and why this particular selection of common phrases came to be presented—the list offered here is far from exhaustive—and to understand the specific perspective from which these recommendations on usage issue, it will help to know something of this book's origins.

In 1992 the publishing firm Sanseido put out a Japanese-language volume entitled *Kimari Monku no Jiten*, or "A Dictionary of Common Phrases." It wasn't really a dictionary, but a handbook of language etiquette. As such, it was apparently intended for the edification of younger Japanese readers (younger than the authors, that is) whose formal schooling might prepare them to build a better mouse pad but very likely did not, at least in the authors' estimation, equip them with the language sensibilities needed to negotiate routine social formalities—answering the phone, presenting someone with a gift, apologizing for an indiscretion—with the requisite level of politeness and decorum. To rectify these inadequacies and provide new generations of Japanese speakers with the means to conduct themselves in a duly genteel and socially accommodating manner, *Kimari Monku no Jiten* offered a catalogue of standard phrases recommended for use in particular situations, together with a detailed consideration of various situations calling for a degree of politesse that can be expected to arise in the ordinary life of an adult in Japanese society.

In surprising numbers, young people in Japan seem to embrace the notion that they need specific guidance from their elders on how to speak their own native language, in order to qualify as phraseologically upright, etiquette-savvy, grown-up members of society. That, at any rate, would be one way to interpret the wide readership enjoyed by language-improvement books such as Sanseido's *Kimari Monku no Jiten*. Some of this apparent concern for learning to mind one's language doubtless arises from the anxiety a lot of young people feel about entering the work force and the pressing need to possess all the right tools for success in business; one essential

tool, it turns out, is a facility for employing all the right “businesslike” expressions when on the job. To address this specific need, *Kimari Monku no Jiten* included an extensive list of phrases especially suitable for use by business people, reflecting above all the particular concerns and specialized environments of Japanese corporate culture.

The Sanseido book caught the eye of the editors of Kodansha International’s *Power Japanese* series, who realized that with certain modifications, a guide to Japanese language etiquette—even one originally written for native speakers—would have much to offer advanced students of the language and might hold appeal for other readers as well, including people not quite so far along in their study of Japanese. And so it came about that, in 1996, I was commissioned to transform the contents of Sanseido’s *Kimari Monku no Jiten* into something more comprehensible (or at least more presentable) to readers of English. The first fruits of this undertaking, comprising a scaled-down catalogue of Japanese phrases for use in everyday life, were published by Kodansha International in 1997 under the title *Common Japanese Phrases*. A second volume based on the same source, entitled *Common Japanese Business Phrases*, was published the following year.

This book, which combines the contents of the latter two volumes, was put together with two different groups of readers in mind. The first group consists of people who already have a pretty firm grasp of the mechanics of Japanese grammar and the basics of usage, who are familiar with the structural inflections associated with various levels of polite, honorific, and humble language, and who have acquired a more or less functional Japanese vocabulary. None of these points is explicitly addressed here; after all, this book’s source was written for native speakers of Japanese, whose mastery of the fundamentals was never in question. Readers who have this kind of basic grounding in the language—or who are way beyond the basics—will find whole great chunks of highly useful phraseology here to fill gaps in or lend authenticity to the command of Japanese

they already possess, as well as a wealth of insights and observations regarding the social and psychological contexts that help determine judgments about appropriate usage.

The other group whose interests this book will serve is made up of people who don’t know any Japanese to speak of and aren’t about to tackle the whole project now. These readers might be looking for some pithy phrases that will impress their friends in Japan or that they can toss off around the office or in the boardroom—to keep the opposition off balance or to keep their Japanese colleagues or friends wondering much they *really* understand. There’s plenty in these pages to suit those purposes, too, with the added benefit of explanations of the responses these phrases can ordinarily be expected to elicit.

As for the translation itself, I’ve tried to put everything into more or less natural-sounding American English, foregoing any literal decoding of the components of a phrase or sentence in favor of a faithful rendering of the sense or meaning of the whole. To some extent I’ve tried to approximate in English the degree of formality, politeness, or self-deprecation that’s explicit in the Japanese, but I’ll only have succeeded in those cases where the reader’s sense of these elusive qualities happens to coincide with my own. Japanese expressions that contain what are considered exclusively female or exclusively male speech forms are designated by the symbols ♀ and ♂, respectively. The conventions for transliterating Japanese are those observed in Kodansha International’s *Power Japanese* series.

The pages of this book are replete with suggestions, exhortations, and admonitions to employ this expression rather than that one in order to achieve a certain result in a given circumstance. Taken together, these prescriptions reflect a distinctive outlook on language and human interaction, not to mention the business world, that originates with the authors of the original work of which this is a translation, not with me. I’ve done what I could to inject a little levity here and there as a means of counterbalancing some of the more

strident pronouncements in the original text, but anybody who's looking for a surefire line to bring down the house in a dining room full of Zen monks is entirely on his or her own.

* * *

I'm grateful again to Michael Brase of Kodansha International for his all but supernatural forbearance and perspicacious counsel, and especially for preserving an enthusiasm during the long wait before the dawn. I'm also grateful to Shigeyoshi Suzuki for his comments and assistance. I offer my heartfelt thanks to my dear friend Iku Nonaka for her unflagging encouragement, my inexhaustible thanks again and always to the great Tom Gally, and my deepest thanks and love to Kaori Yashiro for precious aid and inspiration.

John Brennan
January 2002

PART

I

EVERYDAY PHRASES

CONGRATULATIONS

Best wishes on the beginning of a New Year

あけましておめでとうございます。

Akemashite omedetō gozaimasu.

Best wishes on the beginning of a New Year.

This is the standard expression for greeting people for the first time in the New Year, the celebration of which is the most significant and ceremonially observed holiday period in the Japanese calendar. A complete formal New Year's greeting begins with these words and continues with an expression of gratitude for the other person's kindness (or patronage) over the course of the previous year:

旧年中はお世話になりました。

Kyūnen-chū wa osewa ni narimashita.

I appreciate your kindness throughout the past year.

The speaker then expresses the hope that the New Year will see the continuation of good relations, communicating this desire in the form of a request:

本年も相変わりがせず、よろしくお願ひいたします。

Honnen mo aikawarimasezu, yoroshiku onegai itashimasu.

I humbly ask your continued favor in the coming year.

Even such a formal greeting, however, will have the hollow ring of a memorized formula if your delivery is rushed or if the words are tossed off in a monotone. It is essential to deliver your greeting at a measured pace, be attentive to the reply, and bow once respectfully upon concluding the greeting.

Among friends, from whom an extended and formal New Year's greeting would sound stilted and unnatural, a shorter and less formal alternative is preferred:

あけましておめでとう。今年もどうぞよろしく。

Akemashite omedetō. Kotoshi mo dōzo yoroshiku.

Happy New Year! Don't forget me this year!

While the general trend is toward less formality, this is an excellent opportunity to represent yourself as a solid, serious person to people in your neighborhood, for example, or to higher-ups at the office, by extending a scrupulously proper formal New Year's greeting, as described above. These few phrases, skillfully executed, could actually help to restore a less than impeccable public image, if need be. After all, New Year's time is the season for making fresh starts. The key to making a good impression is the delivery: enunciate each word clearly to the very end of the greeting, finishing with a crisp *onegai itashimasu*. The big finish is a sure crowd-pleaser.

Congratulations on this happy day

本日はおめでとうございます。

Honjitsu wa omedetō gozaimasu.

Congratulations on this happy day.

For a guest attending a celebration or special event—a wedding, a piano or dance recital, a party celebrating the publication of a book or commemorating the founding of a company—this standard congratulatory greeting is the very first thing to say to the hosts or to any of the participants in the event.

When you attend a celebration or similar event, your primary social duty is to express your heartfelt congratulations—*omedetō*—

to the appropriate people. By using this expression when greeting your hosts at the reception table or the entranceway, you clearly identify yourself as an invited guest. This paves the way for the reply, which is likely to be something on the order of:

ありがとうございます。恐れいますが、こちらにご記帳をお願いいたします。

Arigatō gozaimasu. Osoreirimasu ga, kochira ni gokichō o onegai itashimasu.

Thank you very much. May I trouble you to sign the guest book, please?

Depending on the occasion, guests at a celebration may greet one another with the standard congratulatory expression *omedetō gozaimasu*, communicating the same sort of mutual felicitation as when people wish one another a Happy New Year (see *Akemashite omedetō gozaimasu*). In such cases, *omedetō gozaimasu* can be an especially convenient way to greet people you don't know—a brief, friendly expression that you deliver with a smile, and one that does not automatically lead to the more complicated business of formal introductions.

In case you have been asked to make a toast or give a speech at such an event, you should preface your remarks with an earnest:

皆さま、おめでとうございます。

Mina-sama, omedetō gozaimasu.

Ladies and gentlemen, I offer my congratulations.

This has two distinct advantages: it properly communicates your good wishes to all those assembled, and it also serves notice that you are now going to speak and everyone should pipe down and listen up.

May even greater success lie ahead

ますますのご発展を祈っております。

Masumasu no gohatten o inotte orimasu.

May even greater success lie ahead.

This expression may be employed on celebratory occasions like the founding of a new business enterprise, the opening of a new establishment, or the winning of a prize or an election, and it can also apply to a commemorative event such as the tenth anniversary of a firm's founding. It serves as a standard ending for a message of congratulations, a sort of closing salute.

When extending congratulations for the success of a business, the word *hatten* (literally, “development,” but translated here as “success,” and in this usage preceded by the honorific prefix *go*) is frequently replaced with such words as *han'ei* (“prosperity”), or even *katsuyaku* (“activity”) or *seikō* (“success”)—all of which must be preceded by the honorific *go*. Thus, for such occasions any of the following variations are also appropriate:

ますますのご発展を祈っております。

Masumasu no gohan'ei o inotte orimasu.

May even greater prosperity lie ahead.

ますますのご活躍を祈っております。

Masumasu no gokatsuyaku o inotte orimasu.

May even more enterprising activity lie ahead.

ますますのご成功を祈っております。

Masumasu no goseikō o inotte orimasu.

May even greater success lie ahead.

To congratulate an individual on his or her personal accomplishments, you will never go wrong with the old standby:

ますますのご発展を祈っております。
Masumasu no gohatten o inotte orimasu.
 May even greater success lie ahead.

For a business-related occasion, it is essential to include in one's remarks some words of praise for the efforts of those involved. If you are offering congratulations on the progress or success of a particular company, for example, you applaud the hard work of the *shain*, or "all the employees" (everyone up to, but not including, the *shachō*, or "president"). For this purpose the following are useful:

並々ならぬご努力とご苦労の結果と……
Naminami naranu godoryoku to gokurō no kekka to ...
 As a result of your extraordinary efforts and hard work ...

山田さんの実行力には頭が下がります。
Yamada-san no jikkōryoku ni wa atama ga sagarimasu.
 I bow my head to your ability to get the job done, Mr. Yamada.

社員一丸となって、ここまで盛り立てて、……
Shain-ichigan to natte, koko made moritatete, ...
 All the employees, working together as one, having brought you this far, ...

A great deal of importance is attached to recognizing the diligence and the sacrifices of employees and to expressing a sense of empathy. If you convincingly demonstrate an understanding of the struggles and hard work that preceded the day's celebration, you are likely to win the hearts of the celebrants. In addition, it is important to communicate your own pleasure over the accomplishments of those being honored. This is perhaps best done in simple and direct language, as in:

自分のことのようにうれしく思っています。
Jibun no koto no yō ni ureshiku omotte imasu.
 I feel as happy as if I myself had achieved your great success.

In any case, whether at the end of your remarks or the beginning, you are expected to offer words of encouragement and to emphasize your expectations for the future.

Congratulations on the birth of your child

ご安産でおめでとうございます。
Goanzan de omedetō gozaimasu.
 Congratulations on the birth of your child.

This is the standard formal expression for congratulating the mother of a newborn baby or any of the immediate family. Such congratulations are traditionally regarded as falling within the domain of conversation among women—the mother of the child and her female well-wishers. In the past it was customary to wait until the mother had completely recovered from the delivery (up to a month or so after the actual birth) to call on her and offer congratulations, but these days felicitous sentiments are commonly expressed less formally, usually over the telephone. A typical example of informal congratulations from a woman might go:

おめでとう、よくがんばったわね。ゆっくり体を休めて、早く赤ちゃんの顔を見せてちょうだいね。㊦
Omedetō. Yoku gambatta wa ne. Yukkuri karada o yasumete, hayaku akachan no kao o misete chōdai ne.
 Congratulations! It must have been hard. Take good care of yourself now, and let us see the baby real soon!

When you see the new baby for the first time, you'll be expected to note a specific resemblance to one parent or the other, or perhaps to remark on some praiseworthy facial feature. In this situation, the following expressions may come in handy.

口もとがきりっとして、お利口そう。㊦

Kuchimoto ga kiritto shite, orikosō.

Looks like quite an intelligent baby, with that determined-looking mouth.

おかあさまに似て、やさしそうな顔立ちね。㊦

Okāsama ni nite, yasashisō na kaodachi ne.

She looks like her mother, with those gentle features.

おとうさまに似て、男らしい顔だちですね。㊦

Otōsama ni nite, otokorashii kaodachi desu ne.

He looks like his father, with those masculine features.

目鼻立ちがはっきりして、しっかりした赤ちゃんだこと。㊦

Mehanadachi ga hakkiri shite, shikkari shita akachan da koto.

Such a fine-featured little face. That's certainly a healthy-looking child.

お人形さんみたい。㊦

Oningyo-san mitai.

She (He) looks like a little doll.

While there are certain descriptive terms, like *marumaru to* (“chubby”) and *tama no yō* (“like a perfect little gem”), that are still apt to be applied to baby boys rather than baby girls, it is no longer generally considered appropriate, as it was in the past, to suggest that the birth of a male heir is a more auspicious event than that of a girl.

Thanks to everyone, mother and child are both fine

おかげさまで、母子ともに元気です。

Okagesama de, boshi tomo ni genki desu.

Thanks to everyone, mother and child are both fine.

This standard line is indispensable for fathers and others announcing the good news immediately after the birth of a child. The first thing that everyone wants to hear—be it the grandparents, siblings, other relatives, or friends—is that the delivery was successful, that the child is sound and healthy, and that there were no post-delivery complications; this simple sentence delivers the goods. The phrase *okagesama de* (an often-heard, nonspecific expression of appreciation here translated as “thanks to everyone”) communicates in a natural-sounding way a sense of gratitude—for the consideration the mother received from others during her pregnancy, for the kindness of fate, for the benevolence of the gods. This sentence provides a succinct, convenient response that any father can trot out whenever he is congratulated on the birth of a child, and it is also useful when replying to the various phone calls and cards from well-wishers that are likely to accompany the arrival of a new baby.

Beyond this standard formula for saying “All’s well, thank heavens,” it is also customary (and quite natural) to tell people whether it’s a boy or a girl, to report the date and time of the birth, and—depending on how interested your listener really is—perhaps to report the baby’s weight at birth. The idea is that these details, beyond their informational value, will more vividly communicate a sense of your own happiness.

It’s not considered necessary or even appropriate to make a point of announcing a new baby to the entire neighborhood and to all one’s friends and acquaintances, but it is important to convey the good news to people who were particularly helpful during

the mother's pregnancy and to those who showed concern for her welfare. For couples who were married in the traditional way, it is essential to inform the *nakōdo*—the older couple who played the role of matchmakers or sponsors during the courtship and at the wedding. The new parents, with infant in tow, often pay a formal visit to the *nakōdo* soon after the child is born, out of respect and to show off the fruits of their happy union.

CONDOLENCES

Please accept my condolences on this sad occasion

このたびはご愁傷さまでございます。

Kono tabi wa goshūshōsama de gozaimasu.

Please accept my condolences on this sad occasion.

Often heard at both wakes and funerals, this short expression is the one most commonly used for extending one's sympathy to the bereaved. Because it is so widely used, some people consider it trite, too formulaic, or simply inadequate to effectively communicate a sense of sincere condolence. Nevertheless, in certain situations—such as when signing in at the reception table at a wake—you may find these words extremely useful.

A word about delivery: while it is generally regarded as polite to speak such formal words distinctly and at a deliberate pace, mourners customarily begin this expression by clearly articulating the words *kono tabi* (translated here as “on this sad occasion”) and then deliver the rest of the sentence (*goshūshōsama de gozaimasu*, or “please accept my condolences”) in hushed, practically inaudible

tones deemed appropriate to the unspeakably painful event being observed.

Depending on the circumstances—when addressing a close relative of the deceased, for example—it may be appropriate to add a word or two, such as:

さぞお力落としのことと存じます。

Sazo ochikara-otoshi no koto to zonzimasu.

I'm sure this has been a terrible blow.

心からお悔やみ申しあげます。

Kokoro kara okuyami mōshiagemasu.

Allow me to offer my heartfelt sympathy.

These or similar words having been said, decorum dictates that you face the bereaved directly and execute a deep bow from the waist (about 60 degrees) with arms held straight at your sides and eyes forward—don't bend your neck! Next, raise your eyes slightly without lifting your head. Then lift your head (but don't stand up straight) to complete your first bow. Finally, bow deeply a second time.

At a funeral, you are likely to be invited to light an incense stick and place it in an urn in front of a photo of the deceased, which is displayed on an altar. You may be invited to do this with an expression such as:

ご霊前にお供えください。

Goreizen ni osonae kudasai.

Please offer a prayer for the soul of the deceased.

This brief ritual has its own explicit protocol. When your turn comes, take an incense stick and light it with one of the matches provided for the purpose, but don't blow the match out! Gently wave it back and forth until the flame goes out. Place the incense stick, lighted

end up, in the urn and bring your hands together in front of your face, head down, in an attitude of prayer. After a moment, bow deeply, then turn and leave the altar.

Before you leave either a wake or a funeral, a member of the bereaved family will probably make a point of thanking you for coming. You are likely to hear:

お忙しい中を、さっそくお悔やみいただきましてありがとうございます。
ごぞがいませす。

Oisogashii naka o, sassoku okuyami o itadakimashite arigatō gozaimasu.

Thank you for taking the time, on such short notice, to offer your condolences.

It was such shocking news that I rushed right over

あまり突然のことで、驚いてとんでまいりました。
Amari totsuzen no koto de, odorote tonde mairimashita.
It was such shocking news that I rushed right over.

In the unfortunate event that a relative or friend suddenly dies, this is a useful expression of sympathy. Whatever the cause—a traffic accident, a sudden illness, or a fatal condition not previously revealed—the sad news comes as a shock, and your words should show how hard it is to accept such a thing.

ついこの間お会いしたときは、あんなにお元気だったの
と思いますと、信じられない気持ちです。

Tsui kono aida oai shita toki wa, anna ni ogenki datta no ni to omoimasu to, shinjirarenai kimochi desu.

To think I saw her just the other day and she seemed perfectly fine. It's unbelievable.

このたびは思いもかけない災難で、ご心中をお察しいた
します。

Kono tabi wa omoi mo kakenai sainan de, goshinchū osasshi itashimasu.

This is such an unthinkable tragedy, I can imagine how you must feel.

さぞかしお嘆きのことでしょう。

Sazokashi onageki no koto deshō.

You must be heartbroken.

これからというところでしたのに、本当に残念です。

Kore kara to iu tokoro deshita no ni, hontō ni zannen desu.

It's truly a pity, he had such a bright future ahead of him.

If the death was due to some extraordinary cause, such as suicide, you must be circumspect in your choice of words so as not to exacerbate the grief of the bereaved survivors.

このたびは本当に思いがけないことで、さぞおつらいこと
でしょう。ご冥福をお祈りいたします。

*Kono tabi wa honto ni omoigakenai koto de, sazo otsurai koto deshō.
Gomeifuku o oinori itashimasu.*

This is such an unexpected tragedy, it must be terribly painful for you. I'll pray for her happiness in the next life.

At such times, inquiring into the circumstances of death is, of course, quite out of the question.

Sensitivity is also required when addressing parents who have lost a child. The right words are often difficult to find, but you might try these:

なんと申しあげてよいかわかりません。

Nan to mōshiagete yoi ka wakarimasen.

I simply don't know what to say.

お気持ちは痛いほどわかります。
Okimochi wa itai hodo wakarimasu.
I share your grief.

I know this is painful, but don't let it get the best of you

おつらいでしょうが、気をしっかりお持ちになってください。
Otsurai deshō ga, ki o shikkari omochi ni natte kudasai.
I know this is painful, but don't let it get the best of you.

Offering words of encouragement to those who are in mourning is a tricky matter. Carelessly spoken, otherwise appropriate words may come off as insincere or even smug, and even when they are tactfully delivered the gesture may seem pointless. Unless you are a close friend, it may be just as well to offer your condolences and leave it at that. For a longtime friend of the survivors or a member of the family circle, however, it's natural to make the attempt to keep people's spirits up.

お嘆きはごもつともですが、お体をいたわって、一日も早く元気な顔を見せてください。
Onageki wa gomottomo desu ga, okarada o itawatte, ichinichi mo hayaku genki na kao o misete kudasai.

I know you must be feeling terrible sorrow, but do take good care of yourself and try to get over it.

あなたがしっかりした方と結婚なさったからおかあさまもご安心なさったと思いますね。

Anata ga shikkari shita kata to kekkon nasatta kara okāsama mo go-anshin nasatta to omoimasu ne.

I know your mother rests in peace, knowing you married such a good man.

初孫の顔を見せてあげられて、それが何よりよかったですね。

Hatsumago no kao o misete agerarete, sore ga nani yori yokatta desu ne.

He lived to see his first grandchild, and I know that must have been a great consolation.

あまりお嘆きの深いのも、故人の障りになりましようから。
Amari onageki no fukai no mo, kojī no sawari ni narimashō kara.
He wouldn't be happy knowing you were suffering so much.

あとに残ったあなたがしっかり生きてゆかれるのが、何よりのご供養ですよ。

Ato ni nokotta anata ga shikkari ikite yukareru no ga, nani yori no gokuyō desu yo.

The greatest thing you can do in her memory is to go on living a good life.

The use of expressions like these at such a painful time must, of course, reflect the depth of one's friendship and empathy; if not, they may sound overly familiar or even intrusive.

MAKING A SPEECH

I'd like to offer a few words if I may

ひと言ご挨拶申しあげます。

Hitokoto goaisatsu mōshiagemasu.

I'd like to offer a few words if I may.

An experienced public speaker may regard such a standard opening line as painfully unimaginative, but for those unaccustomed to making speeches it's reassuring to have a familiar expression at hand to start off with, and this one will suit almost any formal occasion. A simple self-introduction should follow:

ただいまご紹介にあずかりましたジョン・ブラウンでございます。

Tadai ma goshōkai ni azukarimashita Jon Buraun de gozaimasu.
My name's John Brown, and I've been asked to say a few words.

Or simply:

ジョン・ブラウンでございます。

Jon Buraun de gozaimasu.

My name's John Brown.

Even though you may have just been introduced, it's a good idea to give your name once more, since it will help ensure that the audience remembers it (they are apt to need help remembering a non-Japanese name), and it will also give you a moment to remember what you are going to say next. For that matter, it will probably be to your advantage to have memorized a string of stock phrases, thus sparing yourself the awkward moment when you

search for the right word and find you don't know it.

When the occasion is a celebration, you can always lead off by congratulating the guest of honor:

田中さん、おめでとうございます。

Tanaka-san, omedetō gozaimasu.

Tanaka-san, please accept my congratulations.

The size of the audience will help determine which expressions are most suitable. While larger gatherings, since they tend to be more formal, call for the formal-sounding *hitokoto goaisatsu* opening with which we led off, it is permissible to greet a smaller crowd in much more familiar language:

今日はうれしいですね。

Kyō wa ureshii desu ne.

Well, this is certainly a happy day, isn't it?

Whatever the content of your speech or toast, nothing is more important than getting the names right. Many a Japanese wedding speech has been made and then instantly forgotten by all concerned, but the speaker they never forget is the one who, from start to finish, calls the groom or bride (or both!) by the wrong name. This actually happens, and more often than you might think.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us today

本日はご多忙中お集まりいただきまして、ありがとうございます。

Honjitsu wa gotabō-chū oatsumari itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us today.

This familiar greeting, spoken by the host or chairperson, is used to signal the opening of a formal meeting, conference, or lecture. It is rarely used, however, at more informal gatherings, such as internal business meetings or regularly scheduled meetings.

Among the harried denizens of today's hectic business world, one is forced to assume that no one has a lot of free time, or at least that no one would ever admit it. Even people who once were thought to have plenty of leisure time—housewives and retirees, for example—can often be seen hustling around at a strenuous pace, clutching their appointment books. In smaller communities and outlying areas, local governments have sponsored luncheon programs for presumably solitary elderly people, on the assumption that a great many older people suffer from loneliness and boredom. The programs have not, however, been very successful; it seems most older people are too busy to attend. But when people do show up for events of this sort, it is imperative to greet them by properly expressing appreciation for their presence. The following is an appropriate way:

万障おくりあわせの上、ご参集くださいます、ありがとうございます。

Banshō-okuriawase no ue, gosanshū kudasaimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

Thank you for taking the trouble to join us today, in spite of the inconvenience.

When the people being greeted have had to brave inclement weather or other specific hardships in order to be present, this must be duly noted in the greeting:

雨の中をお集りいただきまして、ありがとうございます。

Ame no naka o oatsumari itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

Thank you for taking the trouble to come, in spite of the rain.

While the often-heard *honjitsu wa gotabō-chū* greeting with which we began is certainly a reliable selection, it would suggest a remarkable lack of resourcefulness if every formal assembly were to begin with this very same line. In practice, the opening greeting is often tailored to the occasion:

年の瀬もおしつまって、世の中あわただしくなってきましたなか、お集まりいただき、ありがとうございます。

Toshi no se mo oshitsumatte, yo no naka awatadashiku natte kima-shita naka, oatsumari itadaki, arigatō gozaimasu.

With the year drawing to an end and the world having grown that much busier, we thank you for taking the trouble to be with us today.

折悪しくアメリカ大統領来日と重なりまして駅や道路の検問が煩わしかったかと思われませんが、お集りいただき、ありがとうございます。

Oriashiku Amerika daitōryō rai-nichi to kasanarimashite eki ya dōro no kenmon ga wazurawashikatta ka to omowaremasu ga, oatsumari itadaki, arigatō gozaimasu.

Since this event unfortunately coincides with the arrival of the U.S. President, I'm afraid many of you may have been inconvenienced by security checks at train stations or on the streets. Thank you for putting up with all the bother it has taken to be here.

You are more likely to win favor with an audience of schedule-jugglers if you specifically note the effort that was required to attend and express your gratitude.

How quickly time passes

月日のたつのは早いものでございます。
Tsukihi no tatsu no wa hayai mono de gozaimasu.
 How quickly time passes.

When people gather for a commemorative event—a memorial service for a departed friend, a golden wedding anniversary, or the anniversary of the founding of a company—it is natural for a speaker to preface his remarks by inviting those assembled to reflect on the passage of time. This short sentence fulfills that function.

Next come the specifics:

思いおこせば5年前……
Omoioikoseba gonen mae ...
 As you may recall, it was five years ago that ...

おかげさまで父の一周忌を迎えることができました。
Okagesama de chichi no isshūki o mukaeru koto ga dekimashita.
 Through the kindness of everyone (who helped us get through it), a full year has passed since my father died.

Tsukihi no tatsu no wa hayai mono de gozaimasu (our opening expression above) is also used when formally expressing thanks—in person or in writing—to someone who has helped a son or daughter get accepted at the right school or find a job. Along with parental affection and pride, these words evoke the particular poignancy of seeing one's children grow up.

The formal Buddhist memorial service for a deceased person is held on the anniversary of the date of death. Exactly which anniversaries are observed depends to some extent on the age of the deceased and other considerations, but memorial services are almost always held on the first and second anniversaries. Presumably, the purpose of such a gathering is to dissipate the lingering sorrow of the

survivors by recounting various memories of the deceased. At memorials held prior to the first anniversary—these customarily include a gathering on the forty-ninth day after death (called *shijūkunichi*) and another during *niibon*, or the next observance of the annual Festival of the Dead—it is not advisable to engage in reminiscences about the deceased unless prompted to do so by the survivors, as the bereaved may be as yet too mindful of their loss.

For lighter occasions, such as the anniversary of a firm's founding, a variety of useful expressions are available:

長いようで短い15年でした。
Nagai yō de mijikai jūgo-nen deshita.
 While it sounds like a long time, these fifteen years have passed quickly.

顧みますれば、今日にいたる10年間……
Kaerimimasureba, konnichi ni itaru jūnen-kan ...
 Looking back, ten years have already passed ...

継続は力なりと申しますが……
Keizoku wa chikara nari to mōshimasu ga ...
 To endure is to grow stronger, as they say, but ...

幾多の山坂をこえて……
Ikuta no yamasaka o koete ...
 Having overcome numerous challenges ...

苦しいときもございましたが……
Kurushii toki mo gozaimashita ga ...
 While it has been a struggle at times ...

Whatever the anniversary celebrates, whether the perseverance of an enterprise or the endurance of a family or household, the speaker should emphasize the sustaining efforts of all the individuals who made such an event possible.

GIFT-GIVING

This is a poor thing, but ...

つまらないものですが……

Tsumaranai mono desu ga ...

This is a poor thing, but ...

This odd-sounding locution is the conventionally approved way to signal that you are offering a gift. Often heard in Japan, where both gift-giving and linguistic self-deprecation are highly ritualized, expressions such as this can sometimes elicit a puzzled response from a non-native speaker. After all, you might reason, if they think it's a poor gift then why are they giving it to me? In fact, since in addition to "trifling" *tsumaranai* can also be translated as "boring" or "useless," a little knowledge can really leave you confused. Needless to say, the phrase does not mean that the speaker actually believes the gift to be boring or worthless (she might think so, but she probably wouldn't tell you). This is simply a verbal ritual of humility, presumably intended to steer the receiver of a gift away from any sense of obligation or intense gratitude.

Interestingly, even though no native speaker of Japanese could ever mistake the intent behind a phrase like this one, nowadays one often hears people dispensing with such ritualized utterances in favor of more transparent language. Younger people in particular, when giving someone a gift, might actually give it the old hard sell:

これ、とてもおいしいんですよ。

Kore, totemo oishii n' desu yo.

It's really delicious.

きっとお似合いだと思ひまして……

Kitto oniai da to omoimashite ...

I thought it would look good on you.

Another humble-sounding phrase for gift-givers is:

珍しくもございませんが……

Mezurashiku mo gozaimasen ga ...

This is nothing special, but ...

This is a handy expression when the offering is the sort of practical household item—soap, towels, fruit, coffee, beer, or the like—often given as a midsummer present (*ochūgen*) or year-end present (*oseibo*), in which case it is not only properly humble but accurate. This is not to say that such gifts aren't highly appreciated anyway, incidentally. This and the other phrases below are often followed by the word *dōzo* ("Please [accept it]"), spoken as the gift is proffered.

When the gift is something you made by hand, you are expected to humbly deprecate your own handiwork.

お恥ずかしいのですけれど……

Ohazukashii no desu keredo ...

I've done an embarrassingly poor job of it, but ...

うまくできなかったんですけど……

Umaku dekinakatta n' desu kedo ...

This didn't turn out very well, but ...

Some expressions both downplay the value of a gift and emphasize the spirit in which it is given.

心ばかりの品ですが……

Kokoro bakari no shina desu ga ...

This is just a small token of my appreciation.

A phrase like this communicates something more than mere formal courtesy, and is useful when the gift itself is meant to express more than just good manners.

It may not be to your liking, but ...

お口に合いますかどうか……

Okuchi ni aimasu ka dō ka ...

It may not be to your liking, but ...

This standard phrase can be used whenever you present a gift of food, as often happens when paying a visit to someone's home. It can also be used by a host or hostess when serving food to a guest, and by a housewife bringing a few helpings of a home-cooked specialty over to the neighbors.

Everyone has his own tastes when it comes to food, of course. The mere fact that something was expensive or comes highly recommended is no guarantee that any given person will like it. Therefore, notwithstanding that you yourself believe the item to be a scrumptious morsel, you should make allowances for a different reaction when you offer it to another.

お口に合いますかどうか、おひとつどうぞ。

Okuchi ni aimasu ka dō ka, ohitotsu dōzo.

This may not suit your taste, but please try one.

These days one does sometimes hear less cautious language:

わが家では大変好評ですので……

Wagaya de wa taihen kōhyō desu no de ...

This is quite popular at our house, so ...

先日食べてとてもおいしかったので……

Senjitsu tabete totemo oishikatta no de ...

I had this the other day and it was really good, so ...

私のおはこ料理なんです。

Watashi no ohako-ryōri nan desu.

This is my specialty.

This type of approach, though, is best reserved for close friends and relatives.

When you offer food to guests at your home or invite them to start eating, you are expected, as a matter of course, to belittle the merits of the food being served:

何もございませんが、どうぞ召し上がってください。

Nani mo gozaimasen ga, dōzo meshiagatte kudasai.

It's nothing much, but please go ahead and have some.

あいにく召しあがっていただけるようなものがなくて、……

Ainiku meshiagatte itadakeru yō na mono ga nakute, ...

Unfortunately we have nothing worth serving to a guest ...

A well-mannered guest will say, just prior to tucking into the victuals:

いただきます。

Itadakimasu.

or perhaps

頂戴いたします。

Chōdai itashimasu.

Both are expressions of gratitude for what is about to be received.

At the end of the meal, a polite guest compliments the hosts.

たいへんごちそうさまでした。おいしゅうございました。

Taihen gochisōsama deshita. Oishū gozaimashita.

Thank you for the great meal. That was superb.

The host or hostess just as politely demurs, again dismissing the quality of the food offered.

お粗末さまでした。

Osomatsusama deshita.

It was a meager offering.

Occasionally, the standard *okuchi ni aimasu ka dō ka* may seem a bit too commonplace to express the feeling behind the thing being offered. If so, you might offer a reason for offering this particular thing.

暑いときは冷たいものがよいかと思ひまして……

Atsui toki wa tsumetai mono ga yoi ka to omoimashite ...

I thought something cool might be nice in this heat ...

Hearing this, the listener will perhaps be more likely to appreciate your consideration.

This is a token of my good wishes

お祝いの気持ちでございます。

Oiwai no kimochi de gozaimasu.

This is a token of my good wishes.

This is what you say when you present a gift to mark a special occasion. The custom of a previous era dictated that gifts given in celebration of a particular event be handed to the person being honored on the morning of an auspicious day (as determined by the traditional lunar calendar). These days, few people observe such restrictions, but certain other points of protocol do remain in effect.

When you give a present that has been gift-wrapped, it may well not be opened on the spot but instead be put aside to be opened later. If so, it's a good idea to say what's inside and why you chose it, thus providing the recipient with an opportunity to say something gracious like this:

ちょうど欲しかったものです。

Chōdo hoshikatta mono desu.

It's exactly what I wanted.

This is also a way of enabling the recipient to thank you specifically for your particular gift.

When you are presenting someone with a gift of cash—no checks please!—here is a useful expression that seldom fails to draw a smile:

軽いものにかえさせていただきました。

Karui mono ni kaesasete itadakimashita.

Here's a little something that's not too heavy.

When the occasion for celebration is entry into or graduation from school, gifts often go to the parents, who will accept them on their child's behalf (you might give the child a card as well, if you're looking to win hearts), but this is only advisable for younger children. The situation may vary depending on your relationship with the principals, but in general children of middle school age or older are better off collecting their own presents—they certainly think so—and you will be fondly regarded for respecting their autonomy.

As a rule, it is best to be prompt with celebratory gifts for all occasions other than the birth of a child. Just what to give, of course, depends on the occasion. Certain celebrations are traditionally associated with specific gifts: a vase or a potted plant for a housewarming, baby clothes for a new baby, a decorative figurine for the opening

of a store or the launching of a business. Not surprisingly, this usually produces an oversupply of the traditional selections, so it's just as well to find out, if you can, what the intended recipient really wants.

This is nothing special, but it happens to be a specialty of the area I come from

珍しくもございませんが、私どもの国の特産物でして……
Mezurashiku mo gozaimasen ga, watakushi-domo no kuni no tokusan-butsu deshite ...

This is nothing special, but it happens to be a specialty of the area I come from.

When you present people with a local specialty from back home, whether it's a formal midsummer or year-end gift, a present for someone you're visiting, or simply something to share with the neighbors, this phrase will come in handy. Thanks to Japan's booming home-delivery services, regional delicacies from all over the country can be now be enjoyed at home wherever you live, making such items—imports included—popular as gifts.

For the recipient, the main point isn't so much that your gift is difficult to obtain but that it came from the same place you come from, a point that is likely to enhance the flavor of even the most commonplace cuisine:

ほう、あの人の故郷のワインか。
Hō, ano hito no furusato no wain ka.
 Hmm, so this is the wine he drinks back home.

You yourself may duly comment on the difference:

外国のワインなど珍しくもございませんが、故郷のワインを飲みますと、私などはひと味がうように思ひまして…
 …

Gaikoku no wain nado mezurashiku mo gozaimasen ga, furusato no wain o nomimasu to, watashi nado wa hitoaji chigau yō ni omoimashite ...

Imported wine is nothing special nowadays, but to me the wine from home somehow tastes just a little bit better.

There is every chance your companion will agree with you (at least publicly).

A brand-name gift is considered a safe bet by a lot of people, since both the giver and the receiver can presumably be assured of its quality and the value of the gift is beyond dispute—everyone knows how much it cost. Still, as a present, a little something special from back home probably says more than any brand-name item ever could. At the same time, such a gift is likely to invite all kinds of questions about your origins, leading to discussions that may well strengthen the bonds between you and the beneficiary of your generosity.

This is very kind of you. I'm honored

これはご丁寧に、恐れいたします。
Kore wa goteinei ni, osoreirimasu.
 This is very kind of you. I'm honored.

When you receive a gift, you must be mindful of the proper form for showing gratitude—a casual word or two of thanks won't do. It's common, for example, to indicate that you are simply overwhelmed, even to the point of apologizing (for the trouble the giver has gone through to select it) and hinting that you really couldn't possibly accept it.

こんなことをしていただくと申し訳なくて……
Konna koto o shite itadaku to mōshiwake nakute ...
 Oh, this is so very kind of you, but I'm afraid, really ...

祝ってくださるお気持ちだけで十分ですのにこんなもの
 で頂戴して……
*Iwatte kudasaru okimochi dake de jūbun desu no ni konna mono
 made chōdai shite ...*

Your good wishes alone are precious enough, but to receive
 such a lovely gift as well ...

The gift-giver, playing his part in this ritual, will deprecate his gift
 as a way of urging you to accept it.

いいえ、大したものでもありませんから……
Iie, taishita mono de mo arimasen kara ...
 Oh, hardly. It's really nothing to make a fuss over.

At this point it would be possible to end the drama by simply say-
 ing you'll park your good manners and take the loot.

それでは遠慮なく頂戴します。
Sore de wa enryo naku chōdai shimasu.
 In that case, I'll dispense with the formalities and accept it.

You will communicate more of a sense of gratitude, however, if
 you emphasize your pleasure rather than your capitulation.

それでは喜んで頂戴します。
Sore de wa yorokonde chōdai shimasu.
 In that case, I happily accept your gift.

Finally, you are actually ready to say thanks, and you should do so
 in way that lets the gift-giver know you fully appreciate the feeling
 behind the gift.

お心のこもったお品をありがとうございます。
Okokoro no komotta oshina o arigatō gozaimasu.
 Thank you for such a thoughtful gift.

Traditionally, gift-giving and gift-receiving have been linked in
 a quid pro quo arrangement that is still widely observed, to the
 extent that even now people often automatically associate the act
 of accepting a gift with the obligation to give one in return. Owing
 to this aspect of the transaction, there are actually plenty of people
 who would just as soon not receive gifts at all. There are also occa-
 sions when you are not expected to (and should not) give a return
 gift: when you are given a present to take home from a reception
 or banquet; when you receive a farewell gift, a get-well present, a
 graduation present, or the like from someone older or in a senior
 position; or when you receive a midsummer gift, a year-end gift, or
 a present given in thanks for a favor you did from someone younger
 or in a lower position.

Some people feel obligated to give gifts in return for get-well
 gifts or presents given to them to celebrate a family occasion. In
 the former case, since the fact of one's recovery is presumably being
 celebrated by all one's friends, it's not necessarily good form to
 give presents only to people from whom you received them, and in
 the latter case return presents are simply unnecessary.

You're always so very thoughtful. I do appreciate it

いつもお心にかけていただいて、ありがとうございます。

Itsumo okokoro ni kakete itadaite, arigatō gozaimasu.

You're always so very thoughtful. I do appreciate it.

If you regularly receive presents—midsummer gifts or year-end gifts, for instance—from a particular person, it is essential to emphasize that person's continual generosity, and this is one way to do so. An expression of gratitude may often take the form of an apology (usually *sumimasen* "I'm sorry"; literally, "There's no end to it"), presumably for putting the gift-giver to so much trouble:

いつもいつも、すみません。

Itsumo itsumo, sumimasen.

You're always so generous. I can't thank you enough.

To someone who makes a point of giving you a different gift every time (not everyone does), you might say:

いつもお珍しいものを、ありがとうございます。

Itsumo omezurashii mono o, arigatō gozaimasu.

Your gifts are always so special. Thank you.

結構なものを頂戴いたしまして、ありがとうございます。

Kekkō na mono o chōdai itashimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

Thank you for such a lovely present.

In thanking someone who is in the habit of giving you practical gifts—these customarily include staples like *miso* (fermented soybean paste) and *nori* (dried seaweed), as well as cooking oil—you can emphasize how useful they are:

いつも重宝させていただいております。

Itsumo chōhō sasete itadaite orimasu.

They always come in so handy.

To thank a regular visitor to your home who always brings along a gift, you may, as above, express your gratitude in words of apology:

いつも気を遣っていただいてすみません。

Itsumo ki o tsukatte itadaite sumimasen.

You always go to such trouble. I really appreciate it.

In this situation, presuming your guest is someone with whom you are fairly close, you can open the gift on the spot (after making a brief show of polite refusal). If the gift is food (and it very likely will be), you might serve some of it immediately, sharing it with your guest. Similarly, when you are visiting someone else and have brought along a gift of food or drink, you might present it with an expression such as:

いっしょにいただくと思って……

Issho ni itadakō to omotte ...

I thought we might all enjoy this together.

This makes it all the easier for your host to graciously accept your gift, perhaps with an expression such as:

では喜んで。

Dewa yorokonde.

Well then, I accept with pleasure.

While the customs of previous eras were quite explicit about the proper way to accept a formal gift—a present was supposed to be received on a tray, which had to be placed at the head of the table, the seat of honor, while an elaborate show of gratitude took place—rigid adherence to protocol is no longer the norm. Nevertheless, it

is still considered polite to accept a gift by receiving it with both hands, arms slightly extended, and then raise it toward one's head in a ritual gesture of gratitude.

I'm afraid I hardly deserve such kindness

過分なお志を頂戴いたしまして……

Kabun na okokorozashi o chōdai itashimashite ...

I'm afraid I hardly deserve such kindness.

When calling on someone who is recovering from an illness or an injury or when visiting the family of someone who has died, it is customary in Japan to present a gift, usually a gift of money. This expression is one standard form of expressing gratitude for such a gift—but *don't* use it right away!

When you receive a birthday present or the like from a good friend, there's nothing wrong with opening it on the spot and showing your pleasure. But when you are presented with an envelope containing cash by someone attending the funeral of a member of your family or by someone visiting you in the hospital, it would be highly irregular to open it then and there. At such times, you may graciously accept the offering by saying:

ご丁寧なお志をいただきまして、ありがとうございます。

Goteinei na okokorozashi o itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

It's gracious of you. Thank you for your kindness.

To someone who visits you at your sickbed, you might be more emphatic:

お顔を拝見しただけで元気ができるような気がいたします。

その上こんなものまで頂いて……

Okao o haiken shita dake de genki ga deru yō na ki ga itashimasu.

Sono ue, konna mono made itadaite ...

Your company alone is enough to make me feel better. To receive a gift on top of that, why ...

When the occasion is a funeral or memorial service, less is more:

ご丁寧なお供えをいただきまして、ありがとうございます。

Goteichō na osonae o itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

It's gracious of you. Thank you for this offering.

or perhaps:

ありがとうございます。さっそく供えさせていただきます。

Arigatō gozaimasu. Sassoku sonaesasete itadakimasu.

Thank you. I'll present your offering right away.

Only after several days have passed—when you next see the gift-giver or when (as custom also requires) you communicate your gratitude in writing—should you make use of the formal expression of thanks with which we began. You might begin by saying:

先日は丁寧なご弔問をいただきまして、ありがとうございます。

Senjitsu wa teinei na gochōmon o itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

It was kind of you to come and offer your sympathy the other day.

Thank you.

or possibly:

先日は丁寧なお見舞いをいただきまして、ありがとうございます。

Senjitsu wa teinei na omimai o itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.

It was kind of you to come and visit me (when I was bedridden) the other day. Thank you.

Now you're ready to make your full-blown formal statement of gratitude:

過分なお志を頂戴いたしまして、恐縮いたしております。
Kabun na okokorozashi o chōdai itashimashite, kyōshuku itashite orimasu.

I'm afraid I hardly deserve such kindness, but I deeply appreciate it.

When the occasion for generosity was the death of someone close to you, you might also add something like:

亡くなりました父も、さぞ喜んでいることと思います。
Nakunarimashita chichi mo, sazo yorokonde iru koto to omoimasu.

I'm sure my late father would also be very pleased.

ADDRESSING SOMEONE

Going out?

お出かけですか。
Odekake desu ka.
 Going out?

Here is a perfectly polite way to hail a neighbor or an acquaintance who, judging by her appearance or hurried pace, is obviously going out. This expression is not the same as a proper greeting, which would require more elaborate language, but it implies a courteous respect for the fact that the other person is in a hurry. Although

grammatically a question, this is really an observation. It should not be confused with a direct question, such as:

どちらにお出かけですか。
Dochira ni odekake desu ka.
 Where are you going?

To abruptly pose such a question would definitely be overstepping the established (if tacit) conversational boundaries.

Since *Odekake desu ka* is not really a question, the person thus greeted is by no means obliged nor necessarily expected to state his destination. Instead, he can answer vaguely, as people commonly do:

ええ、ちょっとそこまで。
Ee, chotto soko made.
 Yes, I'm just stepping out for a minute.

Should you encounter someone who won't settle for this vague reply and who seems intent on getting you to state your itinerary, feel free to cut the conversation short without mincing words. Politeness does not require you to suffer prying questions, and it is considered distinctly impolite to detain someone who has places to go with a lot of idle chatter. Common courtesy (and common sense) dictates that the other person keep the conversation brief, ending it after a moment or two with a polite send off:

では、お気をつけて。
Dewa, oki o tsukete.
 Well, take care.

or

いってらっしゃい。
Itte 'rasshai.
 Goodbye for now.

The phrase *Odekake desu ka* has another, common but somewhat different usage. You may hear someone who comes to your door or calls up on the telephone say:

スミスさんはお出かけですか
Sumisu-san wa odekake desu ka.
 Has Mr. Smith gone out?

With these words the visitor or caller is simply requesting, in a politely oblique manner, to speak with the person named—the implied assumption is not that the person named has gone out but that he is present. When employed this way, the sentence *Murata-san wa odekake desu ka* is virtually synonymous with the more direct (and slightly more common) but still very polite form:

村田さんはいらっしゃいますか。
Murata-san wa irasshaimasu ka.
 Is Mr. Murata in?

How are you?

ごきげんいかが。
Gokigen ikaga.
 How are you?

As you might expect, the polite thing to do when you see someone you know is to inquire about his health and frame of mind, and this common expression performs that function quite succinctly. The term *kigen* (here preceded by the honorific prefix *go*) is conveniently broad in meaning, taking in the other person's situation, well-being, or mood. This expression is considered slightly more refined than some of the more commonly heard alternatives, including:

お変わりありませんか。
Okawari arimasen ka.
 How have you been?
 (Literally, "Have there been any changes?")

お元気ですか。
Ogenki desu ka.
 How's everything?

In addition, *gokigen ikaga* is among the preferred forms for politely asking someone who has been ill or injured about his condition when you visit him.

Standard replies to these greetings include:

おかげさまで、とても元気にしています。
Okagesama de, totemo genki ni shite imasu.
 I'm happy to say I'm just fine.

and the shortened form:

おかげさまで。
Okagesama de.
 Very well, thank you.

Courtesy dictates that your reply be followed by a return form of the same query:

おかげさまで、とても元気にしています。そちらは。
Okagesama de, totemo genki ni shite imasu. Sochira wa.
 I'm happy to say I'm just fine. How about you?

おかげさまで。あなたのほうは。
Okagesama de. Anata no hō wa.
 Very well, thank you. And you?

An expression similar in form to but different in meaning from *gokigen ikaga* is:

ごきげんよう。

Gokigen yō.

Take care, now.

which is a kind of all-purpose salutation used as both a greeting and as an expression of farewell. It is derived from *gokigen yoku* (literally, “your good health”), which could be construed as either a congratulatory or a hopeful message with which to greet or see someone off. Both *gokigen ikaga* and *gokigen yō* could conceivably be used in similar situations, so keep in mind that *gokigen ikaga* is a question requiring an answer, while *gokigen yō* is merely another way to say hello or goodbye.

In addition to asking people how they are, it is also extremely common to remark on the season or the weather when you run into someone you know. Here you have your choice of a whole litany of innocuous observations:

寒くなりましたね。

Samuku narimashita ne.

It's gotten cold, hasn't it?

涼しくまりましたね。

Suzushiku narimashita ne.

It's gotten cool, hasn't it?

暑くなりましたね。

Atsuku narimashita ne.

It's gotten hot, hasn't it?

しのぎやすくなりましたね。

Shinogiyasuku narimashita ne.

It's gotten nicer, hasn't it?

あいにくのお天気ですね。

Ainiku no otenki desu ne.

Awful weather, isn't it?

Chance meetings between acquaintances, of course, don't call for much more pithy meteorological commentary than this—the more insipid the remark, the easier it is to agree with, so you can both get on about your business.

Have you got a moment?

ちょっといいですか。

Chotto ii desu ka.

Have you got a moment?

With this expression you can get someone's attention or consent to enter into a conversation, usually so that you can ask a question or make a request. This is an abbreviated form of what was once—and still is, in some cases—a more elaborate display of verbal courtesy. For example:

ちょっとお時間をいただきたいのですが。

Chotto ojikan o itadakitai no desu ga.

I'd wonder if I could have a moment of your time.

今、ご都合はいかがですか。

Ima, gotsugō wa ikaga desu ka.

Would this be a convenient time to have a word with you?

These longer, more formal expressions, however, would sound overly delicate if used among peers or people who know one another well. In such company, the informal shorter form cited above—or the

even shorter form *chotto ii*—sounds more appropriate and is thus much more commonly used, for example, by office colleagues talking to each other or summoning a peer over the phone.

Since this is an informal expression, you would not use it when addressing a superior at work or anyone other than a colleague or friend. Instead, to make the sort of crisply polite impression considered ideal in more formal transactions, you would say:

失礼します。 <i>Shitsurei shimasu.</i> Excuse me.	or	失礼ですが…… <i>Shitsurei desu ga ...</i> Excuse me, but ...
恐れいます。 <i>Osoreirimasu.</i> I beg your pardon.	or	恐れいますが…… <i>Osoreirimasu ga ...</i> I beg your pardon, but ...

If you're addressing someone you've never met in order to ask a question, you can add an extra courteous touch by declaring your intentions.

少々お尋ねいたします。
Shōshō otazune itashimasu.
I'd like to ask a question if I may.

Having received your answer or taken in whatever reply your interlocutor makes, you should properly excuse yourself for the presumption:

お引き止めして申し訳ありませんでした。
Ohikitorome shite mōshiwake arimasen deshita.
I apologize for detaining you.

Perhaps the most commonly heard forms used to get someone's attention are:

すみません。 <i>Sumimasen.</i> Pardon me.	or	すみませんが…… <i>Sumimasen ga ...</i> Pardon me, but ...
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These everyday expressions are most useful for situations in which neither formality nor familiarity is the reigning principle—when you ask a railway employee about the correct fare, place an order with a waitress, or ask a police officer for directions, for example. In such cases, an expression like *osoreirimasu* would sound unnaturally formal, while *chotto ii desu ka* would sound overly familiar.

Is it all right if I take this seat?

こちらの席、よろしいでしょうか。
Kochira no seki, yoroshii deshō ka.
Is it all right if I take this seat?

When you're looking for a place to sit in a dining hall, at a drinking place, or anywhere else where strangers share (and sometimes compete for) seating or table space, you'll make a better impression on other people if you politely confirm the availability of a seat rather than preemptorily claiming it for your own. This expression is the ticket. Speaking of tickets, you're also likely to find it useful in movie theaters and on trains and buses, where these magic words are usually sufficient to get an otherwise available seat cleared of any luggage parked on it.

A possible alternative is:

こちら、空いていますか。
Kochira, aite imasu ka.
Is this seat empty?

Although this more direct approach is by no means impolite, it does lack the delicacy of the expression cited above. After all, when you ask “Is this seat empty?” you’re really saying, “This seat is empty, isn’t it?” and implying that you don’t need anyone’s blessing or permission to take it. In the same way, when you want people to make room for you, you could simply ask directly:

ちょっとつめてくれませんか。

Chotto tsumete kuremasen ka.

Could you make a little room, please?

But it would be much more courteous to frame your request in words that don’t sound quite so demanding, such as the expression we began with:

こちらの席、よろしいですか。

Kochira no seki, yoroshii desu ka.

Is it all right if I take this seat?

Or you could be more elaborate:

恐れ入りますが、少々おつめ合わせいただけないでしょうか。

Osoreirimasu ga, shōshō otsumeawase itadakenai deshō ka.

Pardon me, but I wonder if you wouldn’t be kind enough to make a little room.

Speaking of making room, it often happens that people entering a party or a banquet hall linger in clusters near the entranceway, causing congestion and blocking the way for subsequent arrivals. At such times you are likely to hear someone in charge say something like:

ご順に中ほどまでおつめ合わせください。

Gojun ni naka-hodo made otsumeawase kudasai.

Would everyone kindly make way and move along inside?

There is a special form of this same basic request reserved for occasions when people are sitting (or kneeling) on tatami:

お膝おくりをお願いいたします。

Ohiza-okuri o onegai itashimasu.

Would everyone move closer together and make room, please?

Given the relative infrequency of events held on tatami floors these days, this expression is seldom heard anymore.

I’ve let too much time pass since I saw you last

ご無沙汰いたしました。

Gobusata itashimashita.

I’ve let too much time pass since I saw you last.

This is the polite way to greet someone you haven’t seen in a long time, whether you happen to be visiting the person at home or meeting her elsewhere. The literal meaning of the message is that you haven’t been passing along news and information the way you should, but in conventional usage it has the effect of an implicit apology for not staying in closer touch with someone you consider to be a benefactor.

Another expression that appears quite similar in form actually has a very different usage.

どうもご挨拶が遅れまして……

Dōmo goaisatsu ga okuremashite …

I really should have been in touch sooner.

This phrase is employed when a tentative business transaction has heretofore been sketched out by telephone or fax, and the party initiating the deal has appeared to make his proposal in person. By using this expression, he conveys the sense that, by all that is proper, this formality should have been observed much sooner.

By way of comparison, consider two very common expressions that are used in the same sorts of situations as *gobusata itashimashita*:

しばらくでした。
Shibaraku deshita.
It's been a while.

お久しぶりです。
Ohisashiburi desu.
It's been a long time, hasn't it?

Unlike the first two expressions introduced above, neither phrase carries any sense of apology. These are much more casual forms that—not unlike “Long time, no see”—are perfectly appropriate for greeting people you know well but probably too casual for mere acquaintances and definitely too offhand for your elders or superiors at work.

When you meet an acquaintance you haven't seen for some time, it's naturally considered courteous to talk about how things have been. Several standard lines are available for this purpose:

お変わりありませんか。
Okawari arimasen ka.
How have you been?
(literally, “Have there been any changes?”)

ちっともお変わりになりませんね。
Chitto mo okawari ni narimasen ne.
You haven't changed a bit.

お変わりなくてけっこうですね。
Okawari nakute kekkō desu ne.
You're looking well, as ever.

お元気そうでなによりです。
Ogenkisō de nani yori desu.
You look well, and that's the important thing.

The latter three expressions are, of course, logical choices when the other person actually does look well, but even if that is not the case, these words may still be appropriate. It may be, for example, that the other person has been ill or has suffered some misfortune, which you have heard about from other sources, and you may wish to cheer him up by using expressions such as these.

VISITING

I hope you get well soon

一日も早いご回復を祈っております。
Ichinichi mo hayai gokaifuku o inotte orimasu.
I hope you get well soon.

There are a variety of concerns that must be attended to when you pay a visit to someone who is bedridden, the first of which is whether or not you should be visiting in the first place. Many people have no desire to entertain visitors when they're not at their best, or simply don't want anyone to see them in an incapacitated state, so you cannot assume it's all right to go visit as soon as you hear that someone is sick or in the hospital. This also holds true

for people who are hospitalized after being injured. The best policy, whenever possible, is to find out about the person's condition from someone who knows and to pay a visit—once you know visitors are welcome—during the patient's convalescence.

It may be that hospitalization is required to treat an illness or condition of a private nature, such as hemorrhoids or a gynecological condition, that the person in question would rather not disclose. In such a case, any inquiries on your part are likely to be met with vague reassurances that it's nothing serious, and the most courteous course you can follow is to drop the subject.

These caveats notwithstanding, for someone in the midst of a long and tedious recovery, or someone, especially an older person, getting over a relatively minor illness, a visit from a friend or an acquaintance can be the best medicine there is. Rather than fretting over what kind of get-well gift to send, the kindest thing may be simply to put in a personal appearance now and then. Since your host is unwell, of course, you must take care not to wear him out, so it's best to keep your visits brief. You should also be mindful of the other person's concern for her appearance—it may be embarrassing to entertain visitors while dressed in pajamas or while wearing no makeup.

The sentence with which this section began is an appropriate expression of farewell with which to end a visit to a sick friend. Some alternatives are:

お大事になさってください。

Odaiji ni nasatte kudasai.

Please take good care of yourself.

どうかあせらずに養生なさってください。

Dōka aserazu ni yōjō nasatte kudasai.

Just take it easy and let yourself get better.

天の与えた休養だと思って、このさい英気を養ってください。

Ten no ataeta kyūyō da to omotte, kono sai eiki o yashinatte kudasai.
Consider it a heaven-sent rest and use the opportunity to build up your strength.

These days a lot of people, especially people in the business world, seem to be learning the limits of their endurance only by suffering some sort of physical collapse. In addition to your wishes for a speedy recovery, you might want to add a note of caution when visiting a fallen corporate warrior:

会社も困ってるでしょうが、我が身が大事ですよ。

Kaisha mo komatte 'ru deshō ga, wagami ga daiji desu yo.

The office will have to struggle along without you for a while, but you really ought to be thinking about your health.

I feel much better now that I see you looking so well

お元気そうなので安心いたしました。

Ogenkisō na no de anshin itashimashita.

I feel much better now that I see you looking so well.

Here is a standard line employed by visitors to cheer up an acquaintance who has been hospitalized due to an illness or injury. Once you've greeted the patient, it's quite natural to inquire about her condition (it's also perfectly polite, provided you don't pry). You might try one of the following:

どうなさいました。

Dō nasaimashita ka.

How did all this come about?

いかがですか。

Ikaga desu ka.

How are you doing?

After hearing the reply, you might trot out the standard cheer-up line introduced above, or you might use slightly different words:

心配していましたが、お顔の色がいいので安心しました。
Shinpai shite imashita ga, okao no iro ga ii no de anshin shima-shita.

I was worried about you, but now that I see you looking so healthy I feel better.

Whichever way you say it, the point is to strike a note of cheerful reassurance, but a measure of caution is advisable as well. Depending on the person and the situation, intentionally uplifting remarks of this sort may not be particularly welcome (they may sound trite or insincere). If this should appear to be the case—if your bedridden friend seems hard put to respond—the best thing is probably to move briskly on to another topic.

In some cases it may seem absurd or even cruel to compliment someone on how good she looks when the opposite is all too obvious. On these occasions you might take a different tack:

明るくてきれいなおへやですね。

Akarukute kirei na oheya desu ne.

This is a nice cheerful room, isn't it?

窓から外の景色がよく見えて、晴れ晴れしますね。

Mado kara soto no keshiki ga yoku miete, harebare shimasu ne.

You have such a nice view from the window, it's quite refreshing.

You should try to be sensitive to the mood of the person you're visiting. It's relatively easy for someone enduring a protracted convalescence to get depressed, and at times it might be appropriate

to sound a note of slight reprimand in order to steer someone away from self-pity.

もうしばらくの辛抱ですから、無理をしないでがんばってください。

Mō shibaraku no shinbō desu kara, muri o shinai de ganbatte kudasai.
You're just going to have to be patient a little while longer, so try to accept that and don't overdo things.

病気に負けてへこたれてはいけませんよ。

Byōki ni makete hekotarete wa ikemasen yo.

You can't get depressed and let this thing get the best of you.

思うようにならないでしょうが、わがままを言わないで、しっかり療養してください。

Omou yō ni naranai deshō ga, wagamama o iwanai de, shikkari ryōyō shite kudasai.

Things may not be going the way you'd like them to, but you just have to do what you're told and let yourself heal.

Whether or not you would actually say such things, of course, depends entirely on your relationship with the person and on the person's character.

An illness or injury often affects not only the individual but the family as well, and it may be well to offer your encouragement to them when you have the chance. If you are a friend of the family, you might offer your services in support:

私にできることならいたしますから……

Watashi ni dekiru koto nara itashimasu kara ...

If there's anything I can do to help ...

Even if there's nothing particular to be done, such words of encouragement are usually highly appreciated.

This was certainly an unexpected misfortune

とんだ災難でしたね。

Tonda sainan deshita ne.

This was certainly an unexpected misfortune.

The formal custom of calling on people to provide support in times of trouble extends beyond illness and injury; one also visits friends and acquaintances whose lives have been disrupted by fires, floods, or earthquakes. This sentence is a useful expression of concern for occasions when disaster—large or small—has struck. Others include:

びっくりして、とんできましたよ。

Bikkuri shite, tonde kimashita yo.

I was so shocked that I rushed right over.

突然で大変でしたね。でも大事にいらなくて何よりでした。

Totsuzen de taihen deshita ne. Demo daiji ni itaranakute nani yori deshita.

This was so sudden, it must have been quite a shock. Thank heaven no one was seriously hurt.

事故と伺ったときは私も血が下がるような気がしましたが、命に別状なくて本当に不幸中の幸いでした。

Jiko to ukagatta toki wa watashi mo chi ga sagaru yō na ki ga shimashita ga, inochi ni betsujō nakute hontō ni fukō-chū no saiwai deshita.

When I heard about the accident, it bowled me over. Bad as it is, though, it's a blessing that everyone survived.

It's courteous to offer assistance, especially when the damage is limited to material loss:

ご不自由でしょう。お手伝いできることがあったら、何でもおっしゃってください。

Gofujiyū deshō. Otetsudai dekiru koto ga attara, nan de mo osshatte kudasai.

You must be having a tough time of it. If there's anything I can do to help, just say so.

ご家族みなご無事で何よりでした。ご無事ならば、なくしたものはまたなんとでもなりますよ。私もできるかぎりお役に立つようにしますから。

Gokazoku mina gobuji de nani yori deshita. Gobuji naraba, nakushita mono wa mata nan to de mo narimasu yo. Watashi mo dekiru kagiri oyaku ni tatsu yō ni shimasu kara.

Thank heaven everyone in the family is all right. That's the important thing—you can always replace whatever you lost. You can count on me to do anything I possibly can.

お力になれることがあったら、何でも遠慮なくおっしゃってください。

Ochikara ni nareru koto ga attara, nan de mo enryo naku osshatte kudasai.

If there's anything I can do to help out, no matter what, just let me know.

Given the nature of a disastrous event like a fire or an earthquake, one cannot expect those coping with the aftermath to waste time waiting on visitors. If you intend to lend a hand, make sure you arrive adequately prepared to do so. If it looks as though you'd only be in the way, though, it's best to hand over whatever gift you have brought and take your leave without further ado. As to a gift, cash is always welcome at such times, but you might also consider practical items, such as bottled mineral water, canned food, or a portable gas burner. The gifts that will be most appreciated are those that are most urgently needed.

We're really lost without you

あなたがいなくて本当に困っています。

Anata ga inakute hontō ni komatte imasu.

We're really lost without you.

When you visit someone who has been ill, especially a colleague, words of encouragement are a standard part of the protocol. This expression conveys particular appreciation for the value of the other person's efforts on the job, to reinforce what may be a flagging sense of self-worth.

If the person you're visiting is in a supervisory position and gets the impression that everything back at the office is humming right along without him or that his absence has gone unnoticed, he is likely to feel that his role is superfluous—an anxiety lurking in the minds of many people in the business world nowadays. Such worries are hardly conducive to recuperation; to dispel them you might say something like:

課長がいないと、職場がなんだかピリッとしませんよ。

Kachō ga inai to, shokuba ga nandaka piritto shinai n' desu yo.

With you (the section chief) away, the office seems to have lost some of the old drive.

主任が入院中だというと、お得意さんが、じゃ退院してから出直すかって言われるんですよ。

Shunin ga nyūin-chū da to iu to, otokui-san ga, ja taiin shite kara denaosu ka tte iwareru n' desu yo.

Regular clients don't want to talk to anyone but you—when they hear the chief is in the hospital, they say they'll call again when you're back.

なんとかこなしてはいるんですが、鶴のひと声があるのとないのとじゃ大違いなんですよ。

Nantoka konashite wa iru n' desu ga, tsuru no hitokoe ga aru no to nai no to ja ōchigai nan desu yo.

We're managing to get by, I guess, but it's nothing like when you're around to lay down the law.

If you're visiting someone who works under you, you might cheer him up by conveying the idea that everyone at work is looking forward to his recovery:

みんなで手分けして仕事はさばっているんだが、やっぱり君独自のノウハウというのがあってね。㊂

Minna de tewake shite shigoto wa sabaite iru n' da ga, yappari kimi dokuji no nouhau to iu no ga atte ne.

Everybody's pitching in to get the job done, but nobody really has your special touch.

In the event that recovery is expected to be a lengthy process, the prudent course is to avoid saying anything to make the patient impatient—overeager, that is, to get well and back to work. Instead, focus on the long term, as in this extended sample:

この際じっくりといいアイデアを練ってくれたまえ。こんな機会はめったとないから、禍転じて福となす、という気分で、仕事とまったく関係のない本を読んだり、病院内を観察するのも、案外次の仕事につながるかもしれないよ。㊂

Kono sai jikkuri to ii aidia o nette kureta mae. Konna kikai wa metta to nai kara, wazawai tenjite fuku to nasu, to iu kibun de, shigoto to mattaku kankei no nai hon o yondari, byōin-nai o kansatsu suru no mo, angai tsugi no shigoto ni tsunagaru ka mo shirenai yo.

Use the time to let some good ideas develop. You don't get many chances like this, so think of it as a way to get some benefit out of a bad break. Read a few books that have nothing to do with work, take a look around the hospital. You never know—it could help you on the job later on.

When it's time to leave, it's a good idea to leave on a cheerful note, such as the promise of another visit:

またお見舞いに寄らせてもらいます。
Mata omimai ni yorasete moraimasu.
 I'll come to see you again soon.

You were very kind to come and see me. Thank you

ご丁寧なお見舞いをいただき、ありがとうございました。
Goteichō na omimai o itadaki, arigatō gozaimashita.
 You were very kind to come and see me. Thank you.

The customs involved in thanking someone for visiting you in the hospital have various stages, the first of which is simply expressing your gratitude in suitable words at the time of the visit:

さっそくのお見舞い、ありがとうございます。
Sassoku no omimai, arigatō gozaimasu.
 Thank you for coming to see me so soon.

あなたの顔を見ただけでうれしくて、元気がわいてくるよ
 うです。
Anata no kao o mita dake de ureshikute, genki ga waite kuru yō desu.
 I'm really happy to see you. I feel better already.

お顔を見せてくださるだけでうれしいのに、お心遣いいた
 だいて、ありがとうございます。
Okao o misete kudasaru dake de ureshii no ni, okokoro-zukai itadaite,
arigatō gozaimasu.
 I'm so glad you've come to see me, and thank you for the gift.

If you received a get-well present from someone while in the hospital, it's customary to thank them again once you've returned home.

入院中は何かとお心遣いありがとうございました。おかげ
 さまで予定より早く退院することができました。あと少
 し、自宅で体力をつけるようがんばります。

Nyūin-chū wa nani ka to okokoro-zukai arigatō gozaimashita.
Okagesama de yotei yori hayaku taiin suru koto ga dekimashita.
Ato sukoshi, jitaku de tairyoku o tsukeru yō ganbarimasu.

Thank you for the gift you brought me while I was in the hospital. I'm happy to say that I've gotten well enough to leave the hospital sooner than expected, and now it's just a matter of recuperating at home for a little while.

Then, when you've finally returned to ordinary life, you should once again thank those who facilitated your recovery. You might say:

休んでいるあいだはお世話になりました。
Yasunde iru aida wa osewa ni narimashita.
 Thank you for all you did while I was indisposed.

But you needn't make it quite so brief; this is one time when people tend to pour it on. For example:

みなさんにご迷惑をおかけしました。そのうえお忙しいの
 にお見舞いに来てくださってありがとうございます。元
 気になれたのも皆さんのおかげです。いい経験をした
 と思って、これからの仕事に励んで、ご恩返しをするつ
 もりです。

Mina-san ni gomeiwaku o okake shimashita. Sono ue oisogashii no
ni omimai ni kite kudasatte arigatō gozaimasu. Genki ni nareta
no mo mina-san no okage desu. Ii keiken o shita to omotte, kore
kara no shigoto ni hagende, go-ongaeshi o suru tsumori desu.

I regret having put you all to so much trouble. I'm grateful to you for taking time out of your busy schedules to visit me—

your kindness was the key to my recovery. I will look upon this as a positive experience and apply my very best efforts to my work, in the hope that I can someday repay all you have done for me.

日頃忘れていた健康のありがたさを身にしみて知ったというのが収穫でした。それにつけても療養中のあたたかいお見舞いには勇気づけられ、つくづく友人のありがたさを再発見しました。

Higoro wasurete ita kenkō no arigatasa o mi ni shimite shitta to iu no ga shūkaku deshita. Sore ni tsukete mo ryōyō-chū no atatakai omimai ni wa yūki-zukerare, tsukuzuku yūjin no arigatasa o sai-hakken shimashita.

The realization that good health is a great blessing—something I had lost sight of—has now become acutely clear. Moreover, as one who drew strength from your kind visits during my convalescence, I have realized anew what a great blessing it is to have good friends.

It is customary, once you have returned to ordinary life or have recovered sufficiently, to celebrate the return of good health by sending return gifts to those whose good wishes (and get-well presents of cash) have sustained you. There is no need to spend lavishly on these presents, however, especially in light of the expense of hospitalization and convalescence. Something simple will suffice, and it's also nice to send a note announcing that you're back in action.

How good of you to come!

ようこそおいでくださいました。

Yōkoso oide kudasaimashita.

How good of you to come!

Here are some gracious words with which to welcome a visitor to your home. The first part of the word *yōkoso* is, in fact, derived from *yoku*, which literally means “well,” and you could say that this expression performs the same literal functions that the term “welcome” does in English. It is somewhat more emphatic, perhaps, than the more familiar expression

いらっしゃいませ。

Irasshaimase.

Welcome!

which is used in a wider variety of contexts—to welcome customers to a store or restaurant, for example—and not merely to greet visitors to one's home.

Alternatives to *yōkoso oide kudasaimashita* include:

お待ちしております。

Omachi shite orimashita.

I've been looking forward to seeing you.

これはお珍しい。

Kore wa omezurashii.

Isn't this a nice surprise!

The first of these applies to situations in which the visitor was expected, while the second can be used when someone drops by without giving advance notice, particularly when the surprise visitor is someone who is usually too busy to come around. Unannounced visits are, of course, something out of the ordinary for most people and can be disruptive for those being visited. For this reason, the caller may well offer a brief excuse for any inconvenience:

ご近所まで参りましたもので……。

Gokinjo made mairimasita mono de ...

I just happened to be in the neighborhood, so ...

Once you have initially welcomed someone who has come for a visit, your next job is to invite him into your home, usually by saying something like:

どうぞお上がりください。
Dōzo oagari kudasai.
Please come in.

Having led your guest into the room where you'll be entertaining him, you should encourage him to take a seat.

どうぞお楽になさってください。
Dōzo oraku ni nasatte kudasai.
Please make yourself comfortable.

When you serve the tea or coffee or snacks, you should do so with a suitably humble-sounding invitation to partake:

何もございませんが、どうぞごゆっくり。
Nani mo gozaimasen ga, dōzo goyukkuri.
It isn't much, but please help yourself.

The guest, for his part, deferentially resists such favored treatment, saying:

どうぞお構いなく。
Dōzo okamai naku.
Please don't go to any trouble over me.

or

どうぞお気遣いなく。
Dōzo okizukai naku.
Please don't worry about me.

If the guest has brought along a gift for the host, he might present it at this point, or if it's a gift of food or drink, even earlier. In this connection, it should be noted that the odd-sounding phrase

つまらない物ですが。
Tsumaranai mono desu ga.
I'm afraid this isn't much of a gift.

seems to have gradually lost currency among visitors, perhaps due to the decidedly negative implications of the word *tsumaranai* (literally, "poor" or "trifling"). Instead, many people now prefer such expressions as:

心ばかりのものですが。
Kokoro bakari no mono desu ga.
This is just something to show my appreciation.

LEAVING

Oh, look at the time!

おや、もうこんな時間。
Oya, mō konna jikan.
Oh, look at the time!

When you visit the home of a friend, it is generally left up to you as the guest to bring the visit to an end. One time-honored pretext for doing so is to remark on the lateness of the hour, for which purpose this expression works wonderfully. When you feel the time has come to be leaving, wait until the conversation begins to flag

or some other convenient opening appears, then consult your watch or a clock and utter the magic words as you rise to go. According to the rules of politeness, this is the signal for your host to insist that it's too soon to depart, saying something like:

まだよろしいじゃありませんか。

Mada yoroshii ja arimasen ka.

You don't have to leave already, do you?

You shouldn't take this literally—your host is merely performing a role as required by courtesy. Besides, it's considered very bad manners to overstay your welcome, so feel free to firmly resist the (ostensible) invitation to linger:

いえいえ、すっかり長居してしまいました。

Ie ie, sukkari naga-i shite shimaimashita.

No, I've already imposed on your hospitality far too long.

Presuming there are no further politely forceful attempts to detain you (if there are—be strong!), you can prepare to take your leave, but first offer some appreciative comment, like:

今日はとても楽しかったです。

Kyō wa totemo tanoshikatta desu.

I had a wonderful time today.

Should you find yourself tiring of the old checking-your-watch routine, another other useful expression for signaling your imminent departure is:

そろそろおいとまを……

Sorosoro oitoma o ...

Well, I'd best be getting along.

There are more elaborately polite expressions that make use of the term *itoma* ("leave-taking," here preceded by the honorific prefix *o*), some of which have been immortalized in *rakugo* routines and the like; you could really make an impression on your hosts if you were to say, for example:

あまり長居をいたしましてはかえってご迷惑でございますから、これでおいとまを。

Amari naga-i o itashimashite wa kaette gomewaku de gozaimasu kara, kore de oitoma o.

I would be imposing on you if I were to dawdle any longer, so I'd better be going.

If you have been treated to a meal by your host and then decide that you have stayed just about as long as courtesy requires, you can make your departure in style with this somewhat antiquated bit of verbosity:

いただき立ちで申し訳ございませんが、そろそろおいとまを。

Itadaki-dachi de mōshiwake gozaimasen ga, sorosoro oitoma o.

I apologize for having to eat and run, but I'm afraid I have to be going.

As you say this, keep in mind that rude though it is to eat and run, it's still worse to abuse your hosts' hospitality by overstaying your welcome.

I wish I'd had more to offer by way of hospitality

何のおもてなしもできませんで……

Nan no omotenashi mo dekimasen de ...

I wish I'd had more to offer by way of hospitality.

This is perhaps the expression most widely used by people seeing off someone who has been visiting them at home. The term *mote-nashi* (here employed with the honorific prefix *o* and translated as “hospitality”) literally means “treatment” in a very general sense, but it is usually understood to refer to the digestible components of hospitality: food and drink. In other words, the host is apologizing for only providing tea instead of a full meal, or for only providing a meal instead of a grand banquet; the implication is that whatever was offered wasn’t good enough for you. This show of humility is, of course, a ritual dictated by courtesy—actually, you may have been treated like visiting royalty.

Alternatives to the above expression include:

何のおかまいもできませんで……

Nan no okamai mo dekimasen de ...

I’m afraid I’ve been a poor host.

なんのお愛想もございませんで……

Nan no oaiso mo gozaimasen de ...

I’m sorry I couldn’t be more hospitable.

The departing guest, meanwhile, does his own apologizing:

今日のかえってご迷惑をおかけしまして……

Kyō wa kaette gomewaku o okake shimashite ...

I’m sorry for imposing on you today.

Here, then, is a paradigm of politeness, Japanese style: each of the principal parties to a perfectly harmless social transaction finds something to apologize for, permitting a balanced mutual show of humility.

There are various polite ways for a host to invite a departing guest to come again:

ぜひまたお立ち寄りください。

Zehi mata otachiyori kudasai.

By all means, stop over again sometime.

近いうちにまた遊びにきてください。

Chikai uchi ni mata asobi ni kite kudasai.

Come and see us again soon, okay?

今度いらっしゃるときは、もっとごゆっくりしていただきますい。

Kondo irassharu toki wa, motto goyukkuri shite itte kudasai.

The next time you come we’ll have a good long visit, all right?

これからも時々お顔を見せてください。

Kore kara mo tokidoki okao o misete kudasai.

Drop by when you have a chance—don’t be a stranger.

これを機会にちよくちよくお出かけください。

Kore o kikai ni chokuchoku odekake kudasai.

Any time you feel like getting out, just come right on over.

According to custom, the host accompanies his guest to the front gate (more often the front door nowadays), where he bids his guest farewell:

ごきげんよう。

Gokigen yō.

Take care, now.

The guest might reply on his way out (making one last show of apology, since this phrase literally means “I beg your pardon”):

ごめんください。

Gomen kudasai.

Thank you and goodbye.

MAKING REQUESTS

I hope that you will favor me with your guidance and advice

ご指導ご鞭撻を賜りますよう、お願いいたします。

Goshidō gobentatsu o tamawarimasu yō, onegai itashimasu.

I hope that you will favor me with your guidance and advice.

This formal request is most often employed, as a salutation of sorts, in connection with either marriage plans or the quest for employment. It has the ring of old-fashioned abject humility—to request *bentatsu* (here preceded by the honorific *go*) is to literally ask for a whipping—and so is reserved for occasions that require explicit self-deprecation.

There are other, slightly less submissive-sounding ways to say basically the same thing:

一所懸命やっていくつもりでございますので、今後ともどうぞよろしくご指導くださいますようお願い申し上げます。

Issho-kenmei yatte iku tsumori de gozaimasu no de, kongo tomo dōzo yoroshiku goshidō kudasaimasu yō onegaimōshiagemasu.

I ask your guidance in the days to come. I intend to do my very best.

ベストを尽くしてがんばるつもりであります。

Besuto o tsukushite ganbaru tsumori de orimasu.

I'll make every effort to do my very best.

なにぶんにも未熟者でございますから、どうぞこのうえともご忠告ご指導くださいますよう、お願い申し上げます。

Nanibun ni mo mijuku-mono de gozaimasu kara, dōzo kono ue tomo gochūkoku goshidō kudasaimasu yō, onegai mōshiagemasu.

Since I'm still somewhat inexperienced, I ask that you favor me with your advice and guidance.

ふつつか者ですが、今後ともよろしくご指導ください。

Futsutsuka-mono desu ga, kongo tomo yoroshiku goshidō kudasai.

Unschooling as I am in the ways of the world, I ask that you guide me in the days ahead.

The parents of the bride or the groom are also sometimes called upon to request the favor of others on behalf of their children. For example:

これからも末永くお見守りいただき、厳しいご叱正、ご指導を賜りますよう、心からお願い申し上げます。

Kore kara mo suenagaku omimamori itadaki, kibishii goshissei, goshidō o tamawarimasu yō, kokoro kara onegaimōshiagemasu.

We ask that that they may always enjoy your protection, and that you favor them with strict guidance and sound advice.

or perhaps:

まだまだ足取りのおぼつかない未熟者ですので、折にふれて皆さまのお力添えをいただきたくお願い申し上げます。

Mada mada ashidori no obotsukanai mijuku-mono desu no de, ori ni furete mina-sama no ochikarazoe o itadakitaku onegaimōshiagemasu.

As they are just starting out and don't know much of life, we ask you all to grant them the favor of your support from time to time.

At a formal wedding reception, it's customary for the father of the groom (occasionally the father of the bride) to bring the festivi-

ties to a close by saying a few words, often conveying this same sort of message. It's considered good form for the bride and groom to say a word or two also, giving them a chance to speak for themselves and perhaps elicit a sense of support among the guests. At such times, although the entire (and often astronomical) expense of the wedding is invariably borne by the parents, no mention is made of this nor is gratitude explicitly expressed.

Make it so / Say hello, etc.

よろしく。

Yoroshiku.

Make it so / Say hello, etc.

The multiplicity and variety of functions that this word serves make it not only one of the most useful terms in the language but also one of the most ubiquitous (not to mention practically impossible to translate bereft of context). When used to seal an agreement or formalize a request, it represents an abbreviation of the more formal expression

どうぞよろしくお願いします。

Dōzo yoroshiku onegai shimasu.

I ask that you please make it so.

For most informal transactions and situations, *yoroshiku* alone will suffice.

Let us consider some of the uses to which this term is commonly put. Suppose you wanted to ask someone you know to give your regards to a third person whom you both know. The standard informal expression to use is:

中田さんによろしく。

Nakada-san ni yoroshiku.

Say hello to Mr. Nakada for me.

Or let's say you've been introduced for the first time to someone of roughly your own age and status. To formalize the introduction you would probably say:

どうぞよろしく。

Dōzo yoroshiku.

Pleased to meet you.

In neither case does the use of *yoroshiku* necessarily imply a strict commitment to any specific arrangement. Rather, the term as used here is merely a standard form of greeting.* It is also sometimes used to end conversations, including telephone calls, especially when business has been discussed (the word *hitotsu*, literally, "one," lends a lighter, more familiar tone to a request for favor):

ひとつよろしく。㊂

Hitotsu yoroshiku.

Do whatever needs doing, okay?

It should be noted, though, that this is merely a businesslike way to say goodbye and doesn't actually commit anyone to anything in particular. The point is, although it is a term usually associated with requests, the informal use of *yoroshiku* often has nothing at all to do with making a request.

Yoroshiku acquires much more gravity when you address someone who is considered your elder or a superior at work. If you present a request in such circumstances, you risk your reputation as someone who knows the rules unless you scrupulously punctuate your request with a carefully delivered

よろしくお願ひします。
Yoroshiku onegai shimasu.
 I ask that you make it so.

On occasion you might be asked to take responsibility for some job by a superior at work, who explains what needs to be done and then says:

あとはよろしくやってくれ。㊶
Ato wa yoroshiku yatte kure.
 As for the rest of it, do what you think is best.

In this context *yoroshiku* means something like “appropriately” or “to a sufficient extent,” indicating the sort of conveniently vague standard that bosses often demand and seldom seem to elucidate.

*Interestingly enough, *dōzo yoroshiku* as a first-time greeting appears in inverted form as term of farewell in business-related telephone calls: *yoroshiku dōzo*.

I have a big favor to ask you

折り入ってお願いがございます。
Ori-itte onegai ga gozaimasu.
 I have a big favor to ask you.

The first part of this expression, *ori-itte* (literally, “earnestly”), is the part that packs the punch—this word alone will tip off the listener that you want her to listen closely because you’ve got some truly pressing business on your mind. For this very reason, you should observe a measure of discretion before using this expression, lest you suffer the same fate that befell the boy who cried wolf.

This is a sentence to be reserved for occasions of serious need and is not to be trotted out whenever an itch wants scratching. When you begin with these words, you can expect the person you’re addressing to straighten up and pay serious attention.

A similarly ominous-sounding expression, and one useful for similar occasions, is:

ほかにお願ひできる方もございませんので……
Hoka ni onegai dekiru kata mo gozaimasen no de …
 You’re the only person I can ask this of.

The suggestion here is not, of course, that you have already run through a list of potential candidates before getting to this person, but that this person alone, owing to her power or ability, is in a position to be able to help you with a very serious need, and therefore should give sympathetic consideration to the request that you so urgently wish to make.

If you do find yourself in a situation in which you desperately require assistance, it’s probably a good idea to present your case to someone other than those you tend to hit up for ordinary favors. Notwithstanding the fact that both of these expressions will have great impact on the proper person, it’s not advisable to try springing either of them on someone you still owe a favor to from the week before, or someone whose generosity (or patience) you have already tested; your plaintive words are likely to be greeted with rolling eyes and muted sighs rather than the sympathetic attention you were hoping for. In the main, people tend to reserve these expressions for those they consider their standby saviours in times when all else fails—special relatives, former teachers, mentors, or certain bosses—and only then to ask for help with matters of a personal nature.

CONSENTING TO A REQUEST

I'm happy to be of service

喜んでつとめさせていただきます。
Yorokonde tsutomesasete itadakimasu.
 I'm happy to be of service.

This is a standard expression of consent to a formal request, particularly useful when the request comes from someone to whom you are indebted and therefore can't refuse—a sponsor or patron, or the person who acted as go-between or master of ceremonies at your wedding, for example. Possible alternatives include:

私のような者でお役に立てるなら……
Watashi no yō na mono de oyaku ni tateru nara ...
 If you think I could be of any assistance to you, of course.

及ばずながら、尽力させていただきます。
Oyobazunagara, jinryoku sasete itadakimasu.
 I'll do my best, however humble my efforts may be.

いや光栄です。私でよければ、喜んでおひきうけしましょう。
Iya kōei desu. Watashi de yokereba, yorokonde ohikiuke shimashō.
 I'm honored. It would be a pleasure, if you really think I'm the man for the job.

ほかならぬあなたのお頼みですから。
Hoka-naranu anata no otanomi desu kara.
 It might be different if it were someone else asking, but for you—of course.

こんなことでご恩返しができるなら喜んで。
Konna koto de go-ongaeshi dekiru nara yorokonde.
 It would be a pleasure to have the chance to repay your kindness.

お安いご用ですよ。
Oyasui goyō desu yo.
 That's hardly asking much of me (in return for the service you've done me).

Since you are in fact agreeing, and with (ostensible) enthusiasm, to the request, and thereby rendering satisfaction, it may not seem important to be too concerned about just what words you use. Nevertheless, you shouldn't give the impression that you are agreeing in haste or without giving due consideration to what is expected of you. Depending on just what the favor involves, the person asking may have thought a great deal about who to ask before settling on you—so you are expected to take such a request seriously. Giving your consent too breezily or rushing too eagerly into a commitment in the manner of Tora-san from the movies, for example, may actually undermine the other person's confidence in you, leaving him to wonder if the job will really get done. Better to reassure the other person by conveying a realistic sense of your limitations and soberly declaring your intention to honor the request to the best of your abilities:

どこまでご希望にそえるかわかりませんが、できるかぎりつとめさせていただきます。

Doko made gokibō ni soeru ka wakarimasen ga, dekiru kagiri tsutomesasete itadakimasu.

I'm not sure I can live up to your expectations, but I'll give it my very best effort.

Should an occasion arise when you simply cannot comply with a formal request from someone to whom you owe a favor, you have

a way out. There is an all-purpose formal expression of refusal—to be used sparingly, if at all—that will close the matter for good:

そういったご依頼は一切お受けしないことにしておりますので、悪しからずご了承ください。

Sō itta goirai wa issai ouke shinai koto ni shite orimasu no de, ashikarazu goryōshō kudasai.

It's my standard policy not to accept this type of request. I hope you'll understand without taking offense.

Needless to say, once you've rejected a request from someone in this manner, you are not eligible to comply with a similar request from someone else.

Only because it's you who's asking

ほかならぬあなたの頼みですもの。㊦

Hoka-naranu anata no tanomi desu mono.

Only because it's you who's asking.

If someone makes a request and you decide to accept it, you have your pick of a number of common expressions to communicate your consent. For example, if you wish to acquiesce humbly to the other person's wishes, you can choose from the following:

私であれば、喜んで。

Watashi de yokereba, yorokonde.

Certainly, if you're sure I'm the right person.

私にできることなら、喜んで。

Watashi ni dekiru koto nara, yorokonde.

Sure, if you think I'd be equal to the task.

お役に立つかどうかわかりませんが……

Oyaku ni tatsu ka dō ka wakarimasen ga ...

All right, although I'm not sure how much good I can do.

While these are all familiar and polite expressions, none of them sounds too old-fashioned or too formal for use in casual speech. On the other hand, if you want to emphasize that it would be no trouble at all to grant the request, you might use one of these:

お安いご用ですよ。

Oyasui goyō desu yo.

No problem at all.

ご安心ください。

Go-anshin kudasai.

Don't trouble yourself—I'll take care of it.

そんなことなら、いつでもおっしゃってくださればいいのに。

Sonna koto nara, itsu de mo osshatte kudasareba ii no ni.

That's all? Of course, any time you like.

If the other person was worried that he might be imposing on you, this type of reply has the advantage of putting his worries to rest. There's another expression that promotes this sense of reassurance more vividly:

大船に乗ったつもりで万事私におまかせください。

Ōbune ni notta tsumori de banji watashi ni omakase kudasai.

Just hop on board my ship and leave everything to me.

There may be occasions when you are either reluctant or ill-equipped to take on whatever favor is being asked of you, although you feel you must. Then again, there may be certain people for whom you would be willing to do just about anything. In both

such cases, the sentence at the beginning of this section will come in handy.

ほかならぬあなたの頼みですもの。㊦
Hoka-naranu anata no tanomi desu mono.
 Only because it's you who is asking.

By saying this you are implicitly agreeing to do what is asked of you, but exactly what you mean depends on which kind of situation you find yourself in. On the one hand, the person making the request may be someone who, for reasons of honor or obligation, you simply cannot refuse; in that case, you mean that you'll do what is asked because you are obliged to—you would not do it otherwise. In this situation, you are subtly putting a negative spin on your reply. On the other hand, the person asking the favor may be someone for whom you'd gladly brave both fires and floods; in that case you mean that it's not the favor that counts, but the person who is asking. Here the message has a strongly positive cast.

REFUSING A REQUEST

I regret that I can't be of any help

お力になれなくて残念です。
Ochikara ni narenakute zannen desu.
 I regret that I can't be of any help.

When you are presented with a request from someone to whom you're not particularly close, you can use this expression to politely decline, if you wish. A similar alternative expression is:

お役に立てなくて残念です。
Oyaku ni tatenakute zannen desu.
 I'm afraid that I won't be able to be of any assistance.

If someone asks you to take charge of a neighborhood project or to accept some other position of responsibility, you may well feel you're not qualified for the job. In such cases as this, a popular strategy is to plead a lack of ability:

私には荷が重すぎて……。
Watashi ni wa ni ga omosugite ...
 I don't have what it takes.

力不足で、とてもご要望にお応えできそうにもありません。
Chikara-busoku de, totemo goyōbō ni okotae deki sō ni mo arimasen.
 I just don't have the ability—I couldn't do a satisfactory job of it.

A similar gambit is to point out the trouble that would likely result from rashly accepting responsibilities that one is ill-equipped to perform:

せっかくお声をかけていただきましたが、なにぶん仕事が忙しく、お引き受けしてもかえって皆さんにご迷惑をおかけするだけですので……
Sekkaku okoe o kakete itadakimashita ga, nanibun shigoto ga isogashiku, ohikiuke shite mo kaette mina-san ni gomeiwaku o okake suru dake desu no de ...

I appreciate your asking me, but I'm already so busy with work that if I were to accept I'm afraid I'd only end up causing everyone a lot of trouble.

Some situations call for more a forceful way to turn down a request. Let's say that you have shown an interest in or even tentatively agreed to a request, only to find that the favor asked has suddenly grown bigger or more complicated than anything that was

originally discussed. Your response is to emphatically opt out, but rather than imply that anyone was trying to take advantage of you, you might simply say:

この話はなかったことにしてください。
Kono hanashi wa nakatta koto ni shite kudasai.
 Let's just forget that this subject ever came up.

This expression conveys a strong and unmistakable rejection of the proposal. Since the situation is not what you were led to believe and no further discussion will make it so, you can use these words to put an end to the subject. A slightly different but related expression is:

おろしてもらいます。
Oroshite moraimasu.
 Deal me out.

When you have previously agreed to a request but later wish to withdraw your consent, you can use this expression, though it won't in any way shield you from hard feelings on the other side.

PERSUADING

There's no time like the present

善は急げ
Zen wa isoge.
 There's no time like the present.

This is an abbreviation of an old proverb:

善は急げ、悪は延べよ。
Zen wa isoge, aku wa nobeyo.
 Hasten the good deeds, postpone the bad.

In contemporary usage, the second half of the proverb tends to be omitted, but the first part (here translated outside the context of the whole proverb as "There's no time like the present") is often cited in the effort to persuade someone to take what will clearly be a beneficial action. If you have a friend who is considering such a course of action but wavering, you might say something like:

善は急げというじゃないか。㊶
Zen wa isoge to iu ja nai ka.
 As the saying goes, there's no time like the present.

With these words you can help incite your friend—for her own good and in a manner not at all coercive or preachy (well, maybe a tad preachy)—to forge ahead without delay.

Suppose you are in a position of authority and someone working under you comes up with a plan for tackling some task or another. If you approve of the plan and decide to adopt it, you could simply say, "Okay, put this plan into action immediately." But if you seize the opportunity to quote the saying cited above—fleshing it out with a few details, of course—you can avoid sounding too bossy and instead strike a pleasing note of praise and encouragement.

In a similar way, these three little words can provide you with a convenient and succinct means of lighting a fire under a friend who's dithering or taking an overly leisurely approach to things. As the examples above suggest, this expression works best when spoken by someone in a position of authority or by a friend or peer—probably not the sort of quip to try out on the boss.

Another phrase often used in conjunction with this expression is:

思い立ったら吉日。
Omoitattara kichijitsu.
 Strike while the iron is hot.

The meaning (literally, “The day you make up your mind to do something is the best day to do it”) is basically the same as that of the phrase *zen wa isoge*, and the function—to promote action or discourage procrastination—is also the same.

Have you thought it over?

考えていただけましたか。
Kangaete itadakemashita ka.
 Have you thought it over?

Occasionally you may ask a favor or make a request of someone and find that you can't get an answer on the spot—the other person is unable or unwilling to say yes or no right away and wants time to think it over. Under normal circumstances, you simply have to be patient. After a suitable interval (just how long depends on what you're asking), you can feel free to broach the subject again, saying:

例の件、考えていただけましたか。
Rei no ken, kangaete itadakemashita ka.
 About that thing we talked about, have you thought it over?

You could also say something like:

例の件、どうなりましたか。
Rei no ken, dō narimashita ka.
 About that thing we talked about, what did you decide?

Unless the person you're dealing with is someone to whom you're very close, this is a decidedly familiar way of putting the question, though, and not likely to be well received. It may seem like a fine distinction, but when you're addressing someone other than a close friend or a subordinate at work, it is within the realm of moderation and politeness to ask if the person has thought it over (as in the two expressions above), and outside that realm to ask for a decision.

On the other hand, if it is a very close friend or someone working under you, you probably don't have to observe such niceties. You can simply say:

例の件、いいでしょう？
Rei no ken, ii deshō?
 About that other thing, it's okay, right?

In this case, you're even allowed to resort to steamrolling if you still can't get a straight answer:

まだ考えているの？ 絶対迷惑はかけないからウンと言
 ってよ。
Mada kangaete iru no? Zettai meiwaku wa kakenai kara un to itte
yo.
 You're still thinking it over? Come on, there's absolutely nothing to worry about. Just say yes.

Among close friends, as long as the person asked didn't categorically reject the request outright, all manner of nagging, wheedling, and begging is generally considered permissible in the effort to win consent to a request. With surprising frequency, the situation actually ends up in a sort of role-reversal, with the person who asked the favor berating his would-be benefactor for indecisiveness and saying things like:

いつまで待たせれば気がすむのよ。㊦

Itsu made matasereba ki ga sumu no yo.

How long do I have to wait before you make up your mind?

Often enough, the other person capitulates just to get back on his friend's good side. Not always, though, and then the person asking has no choice but to abandon the cause, but not before one last parting shot that both signals the end of the struggle and conveys his exasperation:

もうあなたになんか頼まないわ。㊦

Mō anata ni nanka tanomanai wa.

That's the last time I ever ask you for anything.

Has your situation improved at all lately?

その後、ご都合はいかがですか。

Sono go, gotsugō wa ikaga desu ka.

Has your situation improved at all lately?

You're bound to feel reluctant to remind or persuade people to repay money that you lent them. Even so, there's no point in fuming and fretting as you wait and wait for money that doesn't appear to be on its way back to you. Sometimes people simply (even if conveniently) forget, and if that's the case the surest way to ensure you'll see your money again is by providing a polite reminder. Perhaps the safest and least objectionable expressions for the purpose would be something like:

以前ご用立てしたお金のことですが、その後、ご都合はいかがですか。

Izen goyōdate shita okane no koto desu ga, sono go, gotsugō wa ikaga desu ka.

or

以前お貸ししたお金のことですが、その後、ご都合はいかがですか。

Izen okashi shita okane no koto desu ga, sono go, gotsugō wa ikaga desu ka.

About that money I lent you, has your situation improved at all recently?

With these words, you are clearly giving the other person the benefit of the doubt—maybe it did just slip his mind—and are merely calling his attention to the subject in a neutral way. The term *tsugō* (translated in this expression as “your situation” and employed here with the honorific prefix *go*) is a deliberately ambiguous choice of words, but in this context it clearly refers to the other person's management of his finances; *tsugō* is often used when the subject of money comes up to refer obliquely to someone's financial affairs (although it is also widely used to refer to “convenience” or “inconvenience” in a general sense). Someone might say, for example, talking about herself:

今は都合が悪くて……

Ima wa tsugō ga warukute ...

I'm a little short at the moment.

In another context, you might hear someone, perhaps a banker, say:

いろいろご都合もおありかと存じますが……

Iroiro gotsugō mo oari ka to zonjimasu ga ...

We all have our own particular financial worries, I suppose.

If you are really serious about getting your money back without further delay, there is one fairly reliable way to obtain repayment of a loan without giving offense to the borrower. If you explain that you urgently need the money yourself, the other person can hardly refuse.

突然こんなことを申しあげるのは心苦しいのですが、先日お貸ししたお金、私のほうでも急に必要になりました
.....

Totsuzen konna koto o mōshiageru no wa kokorogurushii no desu ga, senjitsu okashi shita okane, watashi no hō de mo kyū ni hitsuyō ni narimashite ...

I'm really sorry to have to tell you this so suddenly, but something has come up and I really need that money I lent you the other day ...

Needless to say, both the borrowing and lending of money can lead to tangled webs.

STATING AN OBJECTION

Something's not quite right

何か違うんじゃない。

Nani ka chigau 'n ja nai.

Something's not quite right.

This is the sort of thing you might say to express doubt or dissatisfaction, to indicate that the situation has gotten mixed up or gone wrong somehow and all is not as it should be. The main part of the sentence, *nani ka chigau* (translated here as “something's not right”) is conveniently vague; this expression is especially useful when it's hard to pinpoint exactly what the problem is. It is often used in preference to more definitive statements such as:

それは間違っている。

Sore wa machigatte iru.

That's wrong.

The preference for vagueness, which applies to many other types of expressions as well, seems to be based on a common aversion to the risk involved in making stronger statements—especially contrary ones. If you use the expression *sore wa machigatte iru*, for example, you run the risk of directly offending someone, and at the least you're likely to be put on the spot and have to justify your objections in detail, when someone else replies:

それではお前はどうか考えるんだ。㊶

Sore de wa omae wa dō kangaeru n' da.

Okay, then suppose you explain to us how you see the situation.

It is to avoid this very situation that people tend to stick to cracks like *nani ka chigau n' ja nai*, which sound more impressionistic and don't convey any strong message for which they might be held responsible.

Suppose you encounter a couple out shopping, the woman trying to put together an outfit while the man looks on and tries to act helpful. You might hear the following exchange:

この色とこの色を組み合わせるのはどう？

Kono iro to kono iro o kumiawaseru no wa dō?

What do you think, does this color go with this other color?

うーん、何か違うな。㊶

Uun, nani ka chigau na.

Hmm, something's not quite right about it.

The man, who isn't very taken with the combination of colors, avoids the possibility of hurting the woman's feelings (she might

like the combination) while implicitly suggesting that she keep looking.

Another example: a photographer is trying valiantly to get a model to pose in a manner suitable for the picture he needs. He tells her what he wants and she tries one pose after another, but none of them is quite on the mark. Tacitly, what the photographer wants to say is, “You really don’t have any idea what I’m looking for here, do you?” Ever the diplomatic professional, though, he actually says:

どうも違うな。

Dōmo chigau na.

I don’t know, something’s not right.

These days one often hears a different expression used, particularly by young women, to express essentially the same meaning as those above:

ちょっと変。

Chotto hen.

Kind of weird.

This expression conveys a strong sense that the objection is more subjective than objective and thus not necessarily explainable in logical terms.

Stop trying to stand in the way

足を引っ張るのはやめてください。

Ashi o hipparu no wa yamete kudasai.

Stop trying to stand in the way.

Sometimes an objection can take the form of a scolding, in which case this expression might come in handy. The phrase *ashi o hipparu*

(literally, “to trip up,” here translated as “stand in the way”) refers to such ill-considered behavior as deliberately trying to hinder someone’s progress or undermine someone’s success. It is often heard in contexts like the following:

人が一所懸命努力しているのに、足を引っ張るようなことはやめてください。

Hito ga issho-kenmei doryoku shite iru no ni, ashi o hipparu yō na koto wa yamete kudasai.

I’m doing the very best I can—stop trying to stand in my way.

This expression is generally used to deliver a forceful rebuke to someone whose actions are motivated by malice or envy, and it often implies that the speaker has reached the limits of endurance and will tolerate no more such behavior. To drive home this point, the speaker often follows up with phrases like:

もうこりごりです。

Mō korigori desu.

I’ve had enough!

いいかげんにしてください。

Ii kagen ni shite kudasai.

You’ve taken this far enough!

Such language represents the utmost degree of protest or criticism; these words should be used with extreme discretion.

Consider the example of a local governmental council that convenes to discuss a certain proposal. On one side of the issue is the majority, which favors the proposal, and on the other side is a hostile minority. The minority stoops to underhanded tactics, outright fabrication, and overall demagoguery in an attempt to bring down the majority’s leaders and reverse the vote—until someone representing the majority is sufficiently outraged to take the members

of the minority to task. This is a case in which the use of the harsh language cited above would probably be considered justifiable.

In addition to *ashi o hipparu*, there are several other related idioms in which *ashi* (“leg” or “foot”) figures prominently. One such phrase is:

揚げ足を取る

ageashi o toru

literally, “grab a raised leg”

which refers to trapping someone in a slip of the tongue, pretending to mistake someone’s meaning, or just being sarcastic and generally picking on people. Another interesting specimen is:

足をすくう

ashi o sukuu

literally, “to trip”

which means to catch someone off guard or take advantage of inattentiveness.

It may seem impolite for me to say this

ぶしつけを承知で申し上げます。

Bushitsuke o shōchi de mōshiagemasu.

It may seem impolite for me to say this.

While it’s usually a good idea to couch your objections in mild language, you may occasionally find yourself in circumstances where there’s no point in mincing words. By prefacing your remarks with this expression, you serve notice that you’re going to dispense with delicacy for a change and frankly speak your mind. Although the

term *bushitsuke* literally means “rudeness,” this expression doesn’t, of course, communicate an intention to be rude (nor will it excuse a subsequent display of bad manners) but only an intention to speak openly and unambiguously. Another expression that can be used the same way is:

この際、忌憚なく申しあげます。

Kono sai, kitan naku mōshiagemasu.

I’m going to be candid with you.

Both sentences lend themselves to use in more formal exchanges—conversations with people whom you either don’t know well or who are in positions of authority. Less ceremony is required to prepare a close friend for a frank opinion; to a friend you can simply say:

この際、はっきり言うけど……

Kono sai, hakkiri iu kedo ...

If you want to know the truth ...

Another standard expression that is similar in meaning to those cited above but different in usage is:

遠慮なく言わせていただいたほうが、おたがいのためと
思ひまして……

Enryo naku iwasete itadaita hō ga, otagai no tame to omoimashite ...

It will be better for both of us if I speak frankly.

The difference is that this is not something you can say to an elder or to anyone in a position of authority over you. No matter what unreasonable or absurd position such a person takes, the use of phrase *otagai no tame* (here translated “for both of us”) implies that you know what’s best—an impermissible act of presumption

when dealing with authority figures. This sentence, then, is to be reserved for use with peers or people over whom you have authority.

Whomever you're addressing, merely warning people you're going to be candid does not grant you a license to rant and rave. As in virtually every other conversational context, you are expected to behave with composure and restraint, and particularly so when you publicly disagree with someone. Intemperate remarks can lead straight to a quarrel, and that really would be rude.

It probably just slipped your mind, but ...

ついうっかりなさったんだと思いますが……

Tsui ukkari nasatta n' da to omoimasu ga ...

It probably just slipped your mind, but ...

In cities like Tokyo, residents are supposed to take their garbage out only on certain days of the week, when municipal garbage trucks come around to collect the trash at designated neighborhood pick-up sites. But suppose the fellow who lives across the way from you is putting his garbage out on the street whenever he pleases, and this has become a nuisance. In this instance you might approach him at a convenient moment and say:

お忙しくてついうっかりなさったんだと思いますが、ゴミの収集日は火曜日ですよ。

Oisogashikute tsui ukkari nasatta n' da to omoimasu ga, gomi no shūshū-bi wa kayōbi desu yo.

I'm sure you're busy and it probably just slipped your mind, but the pick-up day for trash is Tuesday.

By reminding him of the correct procedure in this polite way, you can avoid the risk of causing needless offense. The expression *tsui*

ukkari nasatta n' da to omoimasu conveys the message that you are not accusing the other person of doing anything wrong, but simply pointing out something that may have been forgotten or misunderstood. The phrase clearly communicates a sense of open-minded consideration for the other person's point of view—after all, anyone can make a mistake—and thus can be highly useful for fostering harmonious relations in a variety of situations. In order for the expression to have the intended effect, however, it must not be taken for sarcasm, so make sure to (at least) sound sincere.

Let's say you want a neighbor to pay for certain damages for which he bears indirect responsibility. You might present your case this way:

野球に夢中になって、ついうっかり方向がずれたんだと思いますが、おたくのお坊ちゃんがうちの窓ガラスにボールをぶつけてしまったらしく……

Yakyū ni muchū ni natte, tsui ukkari hōkō ga zureta n' da to omoimasu ga, otaku no obotchan ga uchi no mado-garasu ni bōru o butsukete shimatta rashiku ...

I'm sure he was caught up in the game and just happened to throw the ball in the wrong direction, but it seems your son broke one of our windows with a baseball ...

Or perhaps it's you who need straightening out: you have been practicing the piano at night after work, and someone in your apartment building has lodged a complaint. The landlord subsequently pays you a visit, saying:

ついうっかりなさったんだと思いますが、このアパートでは夜 9 時すぎのピアノはご遠慮していただくことになっておまして……

Tsui ukkari nasatta n' da to omoimasu ga, kono apāto de wa yoru kuji-sugi no piano wa goenryo shite itadaku koto ni natte orimashite ...

I'm sure you just didn't realize it, but we have a rule in the building against playing the piano after nine at night.

Here's one more example to show how potential disputes can be avoided through the diplomatic application of the indirect approach. Let's say the people who have moved into the apartment next door keep the volume on their television turned up so high that it's driving you crazy. Rather than complain to the landlord or, worse, march over there and demand that they turn it down, you might call on them the next day and say:

このアパート、壁が薄いのでうちのテレビの音がお邪魔になっているんじゃないかと、前々から気にしておりましたのよ。㊦

Kono apāto, kabe ga usui no de uchi no terebi no oto ga ojame ni natte iru n' ja nai ka to, maemae kara ki ni shite orimashita no yo.

The walls in this building are so thin, I've been wondering for the longest time whether the sound from my television is bothering you.

No discerning person will mistake the real implication of your words, nor will anyone fail to appreciate your consideration for their feelings.

MAKING EXCUSES AND DENYING RUMORS

For fear of intruding I'm afraid I've fallen out of touch

遠慮が無沙汰になってしまいました。

Enryo ga busata ni natte shimaimashita.

For fear of intruding I'm afraid I've fallen out of touch.

Now and then you may run into someone—a former colleague, say, or an old classmate—with whom you once had a long-standing tance that has since lapsed. At such times, this polite expression will provide a smooth opening to what could otherwise be an awkward reunion. This sort of greeting will also serve you well if you have occasion to get in touch with a current acquaintance whom you haven't seen in a long while.

The meaning of the first part of this expression, translated here as “for fear of intruding,” emerges from the key term *enryo*, the implications of which may be clearer from the following, more elaborate example:

あまりひんばんにお訪ねしてはご迷惑かと思い、遠慮しておりました。

Amari hinpan ni otazune shite wa gomeiwaku ka to omoi, enryo shite orimashita.

I was afraid I'd make a nuisance of myself by calling on you too often, so I was keeping my distance (out of respect for your privacy).

The use of *enryo* thus implies that it was neither negligence nor any disinclination on your part that caused you to fall out of touch

(*gobusata*) but only a sense of propriety and respect, lending this handy expression the tone of an explanation (though not necessarily a truthful one) rather than an apology.

In general, such explanations or excuses tend to adhere to a basic pattern: you testify to your original intention to do whatever it was and then point out how fate or circumstances intervened to prevent you from following through. In delivering such an account, you are likely to find one or more of the following expressions useful.

kokoro narazu mo (“in spite of my best intentions”), as in:

心ならずも渋滞に巻き込まれ、到着が三十分も遅れてしまいました。

Kokoro narazu mo jūtai ni makikomare, tōchaku ga san-jūppun mo okurete shimaimashita.

In spite of my best intentions I got stuck in traffic and ended up arriving half an hour late.

yamunaku (“be forced”), as in:

病院で検査いたしましたところ安静にせよとのことで、やむなく出発を見合わせました。

Byōin de kensa itashimashita tokoro ansei ni seyo to no koto de, yamunaku shuppatsu o miawasemashita.

I had just had a checkup and they warned me to take it easy, so I was forced to postpone my departure.

It's not always advisable to lead off with an excuse, however. Suppose you have the bad luck to arrive late for a date—a severely regarded transgression. Your would-be companion is likely to be in a foul enough mood already, and for you to rattle off even a plausible excuse when you finally show up may well have the effect of trying to put out a fire with gasoline. Rather than trying straight-

away to justify your lapse in punctuality, it would be much better to lead off with an apology:

ごめんなさい。でも、せめて事情だけでも聞いてくれない? ㊦

Gomen nasai. Demo, semete jijō dake de mo kiite kurenai?

I'm sorry. But would you at least let me explain what happened?

Apologies having been made, even if not gleefully accepted, your best chance of salvaging the evening is probably to proceed very slowly—timidly—into an account of how, in spite of your best intentions, you were forced to be late.

I did no such thing

身に覚えのないことだ。

Mi ni oboe no nai koto da.

I did no such thing.

While it's bad enough to find oneself the object of groundless criticism or gossip, there is a danger in letting loose talk run its course, since rumors often give way to more serious misunderstandings and may even damage one's overall credibility. It is therefore considered advisable to publicly refute unfounded criticism—to explicitly defend one's integrity and silence the wagging tongues. This phrase is used to refute accusations or blame for a misdeed that the speaker is quite certain—based on a clear recollection of the situation—he did not commit. Consider this short dialogue, for example:

彼女を泣かせたのは君じゃないのか。㊧

Kanojo o nakaseta no wa kimi ja nai no ka?

It was you who drove her to tears, wasn't it?

何を言う。身に覚えのないことだ。㊦

Nani o iu. Mi ni oboe no nai koto da.

What are you talking about? I did no such thing.

The implication is that the person accused has not only done nothing wrong but is moreover taken aback at being held to blame. A similar expression is:

根も葉もないことだ。

Ne mo ha mo nai koto da.

There's no truth to that whatsoever.

Here, the emphasis is on the fact that the charge has no basis (the literal meaning is "That has neither roots nor leaves"); this expression is frequently employed to squelch ugly rumors.

Merely denying a charge does not necessarily disarm it or eliminate accumulated mistrust, however. This is perhaps most obviously true of politicians, whose frequent denials of equally frequent charges of corruption tend to be dismissed as self-serving fictions. Someone whose integrity is in doubt from the outset has little hope of refuting an accusation by simply insisting on his honesty—such protestations of virtue and innocence are apt to be ignored. The phrase used to describe such a case is:

身から出た錆

Mi kara deta sabi

As they sow, so shall they reap.

(literally, "It's rust from your own body.")

Sometimes the problem is not so much what's being said but rather who is saying it. Here is a strong comeback that will shoot down any loose-lipped busybody making intemperate accusations or insinuations:

あなたにそんなことを言われる筋合いはない。

Anata ni sonna koto o iwareru sujiai wa nai.

You have no business talking to me that way.

With this retort, you imply that whether or not the allegation is true is a separate matter and not one that you intend to discuss. The clear message is that the other party has his nose in your business and had better get it out fast. *Anata* ("you"), rather than the person's name, is purposely employed here as a kind of putdown; under normal circumstances, the speaker would use the other person's name or title. There is, incidentally, always some danger that the use of *anata* will come off sounding rude, for which reason it is studiously avoided by people addressing higher-ups and elders.

CRITICIZING

I'm speechless!

あいた口がふさがらない。

Aita kuchi ga fusagaranaï.

I'm speechless!

Here, oddly enough, is a familiar way to express what is ostensibly inexpressible—astonishment that surpasses words. Generally used to indicate one's utter stupefaction in reaction to some unthinkable act of stupidity by another person, this expression can be backed up by the following one, which means precisely the same thing:

あきれてものが言えない。

Akirete mono ga ienai.

I'm dumbfounded.

Only certain situations lend themselves to the use of such expressions, of course. To wit:

金魚が寒そうだから水槽にお湯を入れただと? まったくあきれてものが言えない。㊂

Kin'gyo ga samusō da kara suisō ni oyu o ireta da to? Mattaku akirete mono ga ienai.

You poured hot water in the fish tank because you thought the fish looked cold? I'm absolutely dumbfounded.

When someone does something so stupid that it departs entirely from the realm of common sense, it's not unreasonable to raise doubts about what goes on inside his head, for which purpose another familiar expression works very well:

いったい何を考えているのか……

Ittai nani o kangaete iru no ka ...

What in the world can you be thinking of?

For adults dealing with children who blithely persist in foolish behavior despite having been explicitly and emphatically instructed otherwise time and time again, the ultimate recourse is often a declaration of surrender:

もう勝手にしなさい。私は知りませんからね。㊂

Mō katte ni shinasai. Watashi wa shirimasen kara ne.

Okay, do as you like. I'm not going to be responsible.

This sort of disavowal is often referred to by the term

匙を投げる

saji o nageru

to abandon hope

A literal translation of this familiar phrase might be "to throw down the spoon," which is aptly reminiscent of "to throw in the towel." Supposedly, the expression originally referred to the frustrated act of a physician confronting an incurable condition: in despair at his inability to save the patient, the doctor would seize his spoon for mixing up tonics and elixirs (he was also the pharmacist, apparently) and fling it. In fact, the phrase is often used in a medical context:

もうあの人には医者が匙を投げた。

Mō ano hito ni wa isha ga saji o nageta.

The doctors have given up on her.

When, after repeated demonstrations of buffoonery, someone is written off as an imbecile, an expression frequently employed is:

バカにつける薬はない。

Baka ni tsukeru kusuri wa nai.

There's no cure for a fool.

This one, however, is not recommended for parents dealing with errant children. Better to remain speechless.

It shows a lack of breeding

お里が知れますよ。

Osato ga shiremasu yo.

It shows a lack of breeding.

When someone's behavior is considered scandalous or disgraceful—a serious breach of etiquette, a stunning display of ignorance, or any words or actions regarded as shamefully inappropriate—there is a tendency, apparent from the currency of this and other similar expressions, to ascribe the misbehavior to a faulty upbringing.

年頃の娘が酔っぱらって上司にからんだり、服を脱いだり、まったくお里が知れるよ。㊦

Toshigoro no musume ga yopparatte jōshi ni karandari, fuku o nuidari, mattaku osato ga shireru yo.

For a young woman to get drunk and hang all over her boss, shucking off her clothes—well, it sure shows lack of breeding.

そんなはしたない言葉を使うなんて、お里が知れますよ。
Sonna hashitanai kotoba o tsukau nante, osato ga shiremasu yo.
You're just showing off your lack of breeding, using vulgar language like that.

Here the term *sato* (here used with the honorific prefix *o*) which literally means “the home in which one was raised,” connotes one's upbringing or lineage. Another phrase with essentially the same meaning is:

育ちがわかる。

Sodachi ga wakaru.

It shows a poor upbringing.

Both these expressions convey a caustic, if tacit, criticism of the way the person was raised by her parents and of the social education she received at their hands. A similar expression that more explicitly refers to parental failings is:

親の顔が見たい。

Oya no kao ga mitai.

I can just imagine his parents.

While the latter two expressions—*sodachi ga wakaru* and *oya no kao ga mitai*—are used in reference to either women or men, the phrase *osato ga shiremasu yo* is used all but exclusively in reference to a woman.

Whichever expression is employed, someone thus criticized probably won't submit lightly to having her parents disparaged or her upbringing called into question. Indeed, such remarks are likely to strike more deeply and painfully than if she herself were being directly censured. This may reflect the influence of what many consider to be a primary tenet of Japanese society, as expressed by the saying

子の不始末は親の恥。

Ko no fushimatsu wa oya no haji.

The sins of the children bring shame on the parents.

Quite often, parents reinforce this attitude when scolding their children, particularly in their frequent invocations of the term *seken*, which can be variously translated as “other people,” “society,” “what people think,” or even “gossip.”

そんなことをすれば世間がなんと言うだろう。

Sonna koto o sureba seken ga nan to iu darō.

What do you suppose people will think if you go and do a thing like that?

おまえは、親を世間の笑いものにしたいのか。㊦

Omae wa, oya o seken no waraimono ni shitai no ka.

What do you want to do, humiliate your parents in front of the whole world?

The related compound *seken-tei* (“decency” or “public appearances”) is also used in this context.

すこしは世間体を考えたらどうなんだ。㊂

Sukoshi wa seken-tei o kangaetara dō nan da.

You might give a little thought to what people will think.

The attitudes reflected by the expressions considered in this section suggest that Japan is a tough place for offspring—at home their parents warn them to maintain appearances because the world is watching, and out in the world they're reprimanded for bringing shame on their parents.

He knows all the answers

ああ言えばこう言う。

Aa ieba kō iu.

He knows all the answers.

You're confronted with the need to reprimand somebody, but you no sooner broach the subject than he tells you that's not how it is at all, the situation is entirely different. You find he has a ready-made excuse for whatever complaint you might have. Such people can be maddening, and this expression applies to them.

ああ言えばこう言う。まったく口だけは達者なやつだ。

Aa ieba kō iu. Mattaku kuchi dake wa tassha na yatsu da.

That guy has an answer for everything. He's long on talk and that's about all.

An expression quite similar to this one in both usage and meaning is:

右と言えば左。

Migi to ieba hidari.

You say right and he says left.

Both of these phrases are used to describe a glib, evasive person, as opposed to someone who simply makes a point of contradicting others at every turn. The latter sort is often referred to as *amanojaku*, an epithet that implies a perversely contrary nature and that originally denoted demons who assail the gates of heaven.

A person who is very good at talking his way around problems but not much good at anything else—*kuchi dake wa tassha*—can also be called

口舌の徒

kōzetsu no to

a smooth talker

While this term (which literally means “an apostle of mouth and tongue”) has a somewhat old-fashioned ring to it, it carries precisely the same criticism of the evasive verbalist as *migi to ieba hidari* and *aa ieba kō iu*.

Other disparaging expressions commonly applied to contrary or niggling types include:

口が減らないやつ

kuchi ga heranai yatsu

a guy who always has to have the last word

(literally, “someone with a mouth that won't wear out”)

口から先に生まれてきたようなやつ

kuchi kara saki ni umarete kita yō na yatsu

a born yapper

(literally, “someone born mouth first”)

While these are similar criticisms, the first is more clearly an indictment of someone who won't admit defeat or who insists on splitting hairs, while the second implies that, whatever his other failings, the person simply talks too much.

However one looks at it, there's nothing more vexing when trying to state your position than to be talked down or contradicted out of hand. It's all the more infuriating to encounter such willful opposition from a child or an underling, and at such times a good slap in the face might seem the most salient response. Naturally, any such impulse must be vanquished. As an adult, you must rely on the force of verbal, rather than physical, persuasion; if your first attempt meets with obstinate resistance, try another approach.

PRAISING

I didn't recognize you

おみそれしました。

Omisore shimashita.

I didn't recognize you.

Originally, the message behind these words was the literal one—the phrase was employed as a sort of apologetic greeting by someone who had failed to recognize an acquaintance. Over time, people began using this expression as a form of polite hyperbole, to imply that the other person had undergone some transformation—due to a change in appearance, perhaps, or a display of unknown abilities—so wonderful as to render her unrecognizable. In this way, the phrase evolved into an expression of praise. If someone you know—someone whose everyday appearance you are accustomed to—turns up one day dressed to the nines, this phrase will be perfectly apt. To express the same sentiment, you could also say one of the following:

見違えた。

Michigaeta.

I thought you were someone else.

誰かと思った。

Dare ka to omotta.

Is that really you?

Whichever phrase you use, the effect is to exaggerate your reaction—in an implicitly complimentary way—to your friend's unfamiliar appearance.

Aside from the frequency with which they are employed to comment on someone's appearance, expressions such as *omisore shimashita* can also indicate how deeply impressed the speaker is with another person's skill or ability. Consider the example of one golfer complimenting another on his game; his companion having demonstrated abilities that far exceeded expectations, the speaker expresses his respect and admiration:

田中さんのゴルフの腕は大したものですな。いや、おみそれしました。㊦

Tanaka-san no gorufu no ude wa taishita mono desu na. Iya, omisore shimashita.

You really have a wonderful talent for golf, Mr. Tanaka. I mean, I could hardly believe that was you.

A degree of caution should accompany the use of the phrases considered in this section. Although, as noted above, these are generally intended as words of praise in the form of hyperbole, they can have the ring of condescension, and may even be construed to suggest that the speaker has suddenly discovered redeeming qualities in someone who was previously held in low regard. The point is to celebrate the fact that the other person looks good or has done well—not to emphasize how amazing it is.

A useful alternative expression of praise, and one that is free from the potentially double-edged implications of those already mentioned, is:

さすがですね。
Sasuga desu ne.

which could be translated “Just as you’d expect” or “As usual” or “Isn’t that just like you.” In this case, the speaker clearly indicates that good things were expected from the other person all along.

He’s truly a man of honest character

竹を割ったようなお人柄ですね。
Take o watta yō na ohitogara desu ne.
He’s truly a man of honest character.

Here is an expression of praise—this one customarily applied all but exclusively to males—that plays off that old cultural standby, the noble bamboo tree. The phrase implies that having a righteously honest disposition is like a length of bamboo that has split cleanly in two, something that bamboo does easily when cut from the top down. Literally rendered, *take o watta* means “split the bamboo.” The man about whom these words are said is presumed to be that rare creature, an honest man, who has a completely forthright nature free from any hint of malice or perversity, as in this tribute, delivered by an older woman:

佐藤さんの息子さんは竹を割ったようなお人柄で、ほんとうに気持ちのいい好青年だわ。㊦
Satō-san no musuko-san wa take o watta yō na ohitogara de, hontō ni kimochi no ii kō-seinen da wa.

Mr. Sato’s son has such an honest character, he’s really a fine young man.

Among the other stock phrases commonly used to express the speaker’s positive appraisal of someone’s character or qualities are 一本気な (*ippongi na*), as in 一本気な若者 (*ippongi na wakamono*), “a determined young man,” or 筋のある (*suji no aru*), as in 筋のある若者 (*suji no aru wakamono*) “a young man with spunk.”

The first of these, *ippongi na*, is most often used in a positive sense to salute someone’s single-mindedness; keep in mind, however, that the same phrase is occasionally used in a pejorative sense to criticize someone for having a one-track mind. The second phrase, *suji no aru*, is similar to the first—it’s used to express admiration for someone who is resolute or who doesn’t easily admit defeat. This expression should not be confused with the phrase *suji ga ii*, which, in addition to “good character,” can also mean that the person has a natural aptitude (for something specific) or that he acts in a particularly logical or well-thought-out manner.

We began this section with an expression of praise for honesty. Although there seems little risk of these words being overused, the world being what it is, it may help to have a couple of alternatives at the ready. One commonly heard phrase is:

裏表のない人
uraomote no nai hito
a straight shooter

The term *uraomote* can be literally translated as “front and back” or “two faces,” so *uraomote no nai hito* can be read as “a person without two faces,” or someone whose character is free from duplicity. As a tribute to honesty, it can conceivably carry the faint overtones of a backhanded compliment, since this phrase is no more than the inverse of the caustic epithet

裏表のある人

uraomote no aru hito

a two-faced phony; a hypocrite

A similar expressional—also potentially double-edged—phrase is

かげひなたのない人

kagehinata no nai hito

someone who's on the level

This too is simply the contrary of a harshly critical expression:

かげひなたのある人

kagehinata no aru hito

a double-dealer

As noted above, the phrases *take o watta yō na* and *ippongi na* tend to be applied only to men, and moreover to relatively younger men; this is less true of the phrases *uraomote no aru (nai)*, *suji no aru*, and *suji ga ii*.

REACTING TO PRAISE

You're just being polite

お上手ね。㊦

Ojōzu ne.

You're just being polite.

Virtually every student of Japanese encounters the term *jōzu* (used

above, as is generally the case, with the honorific prefix *o*) quite early on. Usually, it's used as a compliment or an expression of approval and refers to something done skillfully or to a skillful person. Thus, the immortal line also encountered early on by virtually anyone who can mangle a word or two of Japanese:

日本語がお上手ですね。

Nihongo ga ojōzu desu ne.

Your Japanese is quite good.

Obviously, the usage of *ojōzu* in this sense is not governed by strict standards of sincerity or accuracy. The synonymous term *umai* is employed in just the same manner, and with just as little compunction.

Compare this essentially standard usage of *ojōzu* with its usage in the following exchange, between a native speaker and a student of Japanese:

あなたの日本語はぼくたちよりうまいな。㊦

Anata no nihongo wa bokutachi yori umai na.

You speak Japanese better than we do.

まあ、お上手ね。㊦

Maa, ojōzu ne.

You're just being polite.

Here, *ojōzu* refers ironically to the first speaker's tactful words. The effect is of an oblique but effectively modest dismissal of base flattery. A slightly less respectful-sounding expression that is otherwise similar both in meaning and usage is:

口がうまい。

Kuchi ga umai.

You smooth talker (that's nonsense).

There are several other standard expressions that play on the term *jōzu*. Two of them,

お上手を言う
ojōzu o iu

to flatter; to lay it on thick

上手を使う
jōzu o tsukau

are similar to those discussed above—they connote the action of using words to curry favor with, fawn upon, or even grovel before someone. For example, the following response to unwarranted words of praise:

またそんな、お上手ばかりおっしゃって。㊦
Mata sonna, ojōzu bakari osshatte.
This again. Stop trying to butter me up.

Sometimes the adverse reaction is elicited not merely by false praise but by the presumption of some ulterior motivation on the part of the other party. The term *ojōzu-gokashi* connotes self-interested behavior masquerading as kindness. This sort of conniving pretense—also called *otame-gokashi*—is typified by honey-tongued efforts to persuade someone to take an action that will ostensibly be to his advantage but in reality will benefit the persuader. Such efforts may be dismissed thus:

やめて、お上手ごかしはたくさんよ。㊦
Yamete, ojōzu-gokashi wa takusan yo.
Enough! You're just trying to use me to feather your own nest.

I owe this entirely to Mr. Fukuda

ひとえに福田部長のおかげです。

Hitoe ni Fukuda-buchō no okage desu.
I owe this entirely to Mr. Fukuda (the section chief).

In the event you receive a promotion to a higher position or your work is singled out for special recognition, you'll be expected to respond by displaying appreciation and, above all, humility. This expression exemplifies the ideal of self-deprecation that is considered essential to social intercourse in Japan, particularly in the workplace. According to this principle, when things go well you decline to take any of the credit for yourself (at least publicly) and emphasize instead the contributions of others. You might deflect credit for a promotion toward a superior, for example:

このたび部長職を拝命いたしましたのも、ひとえに専務のお力添えのおかげです。
Kono tabi buchō-shoku o haimei itashimashita no mo, hitoe ni senmu no ochikarazoe no okage desu.
My promotion to section chief is entirely due to your own efforts (as director).

In such a case, it is incumbent on the boss—who must observe the same principle of overt modesty—to graciously deflect the praise right back to you.

いやいや、君の実力が認められたのさ。㊦
Iya iya, kimi no jitsuryoku ga mitomerareta no sa.
Nothing of the kind. It's your own abilities that have been recognized.

It may happen that you receive special recognition for your work as the head of a group or team, in which case you are obliged not only to fend off praise but also to thank the members of the group:

今度の昇進は私一人の手柄じゃない。君たちの惜しみな

い協力のおかげだ。ありがとう。㊶

Kondo no shōshin wa watashi hitori no tegara ja nai. Kimi-tachi no oshiminai kyōryoku no okage da. Arigatō.

This promotion really isn't due to any special merit on my part. I owe it, rather, to the unselfish efforts of all of you. Thank you.

As for the members of the group themselves, they might variously reply:

おめでとうございます。これから責任重大ですね。バリバリやってください。

Omedetō gozaimasu. Kore kara sekinin-jūdai desu ne. Baribari yatte kudasai.

Congratulations. You'll be carrying a lot of responsibility from now on. Give it all you've got.

さすがですね。実力が認められて、私たちも嬉しいです。
Sasuga desu ne. Jitsuryoku ga mitomerarete, watashi-tachi mo ure-shii desu.

One might have expected it. We're glad to see you get the recognition you deserve.

オレたちもがんばらなくっちゃね。㊶

Ore-tachi mo ganbaranakutcha ne.

I guess we're gonna have to work hard and try to keep up with you.

Even in private conversations, you may wish to play up the unlikelihood of your good fortune, emphasizing that you never expected to be singled out:

内心、驚いているんだ。㊶

Naishin, odorote iru n' da.

To tell you the truth, it came as a complete surprise.

これも時の運ってやつかな。㊶

Kore mo toki no un tte yatsu ka na.

This is just another case of dumb luck, I guess.

自信なんてなかったわ、本当よ。㊶

Jishin nante nakatta wa, hontō yo.

I never expected this, honestly.

EXPRESSING THANKS

You've been a great help. It was very kind of you

ご親切に、助かりました。

Goshinsetsu ni, tasukarimashita.

You've been a great help. It was very kind of you.

If, as most speakers would probably agree, the most frequently used expression of gratitude in contemporary Japanese is *arigatō gozaimasu* ("Thank you"), then these are perhaps the next most commonly heard words of thanks. (Actually, as in the example below, the two expressions are frequently used in combination.) More so than *arigatō gozaimasu*, however, this phrase conveys a feeling of indebtedness. When another person has done you a favor at your own request or has simply provided a helping hand out of the goodness of her heart, this is the phrase to use. Equally useful are such variants as:

ご親切にありがとうございました。おかげさまで助かりました。

Goshinsetsu ni arigatō gozaimashita. Okagesama de tasukarimashita.

Thank you very much for your kindness. All's well now, thanks to you.

It should be stressed that these words convey a sense of gratitude more emphatic than you'd ordinarily show, say, to the waitress who brings you your coffee. Rather, this is the sort of thing you might say to a stranger who takes the trouble to give you explicit directions when you're lost, or who hurries after you to return the wallet you dropped unknowingly, or who volunteers to help you carry something heavy, or who rescues you from a drunken boor on the train. Naturally, the kindness of others is never so keenly appreciated as when it is needed most, and at such times it is important to make an appropriately elaborate—and sincere—demonstration of thanks.

Occasions may arise when some kind soul helps you out of a really tight spot and words simply aren't sufficient to communicate the depth of your gratitude. Imagine that a complete stranger has found your missing handbag and brought it to your home, with all the contents intact. In such a case, words of thanks delivered on the spot just aren't enough, so you might ask how to reach the person at his home:

どうか、お名前とご住所をお聞かせください。
Dōka, onamae to gojūsho o okikase kudasai.

Would you be so kind as to give me your name and your address?

You can then make a proper show of thanks by calling on your benefactor the very next day, usually bearing a small (and often edible) token of your gratitude.

The same course of action would be called for if, for example, you lost your wallet and a passerby lent you the train fare home. In this case, the kindly stranger might well decline the customary elaborate show of gratitude, saying something like:

いや、名乗るほどの者ではありません。

Iya, nanoru hodo no mono de wa arimasen.

Look, it's no big thing (not important enough to take credit for).

At this point, the only gracious thing to do is to accept the favor gratefully and, with a solemn bow, sincerely state your thanks:

ご親切は忘れません。

Goshinsetsu wa wasuremasen.

I won't forget your kindness.

When the person lending you a hand or doing you a favor is an acquaintance, rather than a stranger or passerby, it's considered appropriate to express your thanks with the words:

いつもお世話になります。

Itsumo osewa ni narimasu.

I'm forever in your debt.

This expression is, however, perilously similar to the ubiquitous phrase *Itsumo osewa ni natte orimasu*, the formulaic phrase with which neighbors politely thank one another for being neighbors or business people greet their patrons and suppliers over the telephone, so a good deal of care should be taken to make it sound truly grateful rather than perfunctory.

I've been wanting one for a long time

前からほしいと思っていたの。㊦

Mae kara hoshii to omotte ita no.

I've been wanting one for a long time.

When a friend presents you with a gift, it is only natural to express your gratitude, and you can easily respond with a simple and heartfelt

どうもありがとう。

Dōmo arigatō.

Thanks very much.

Should you leave it at that, however, you will have inadvertently conveyed a distinct lack of courtesy.

It is considered far more gracious to call particular attention to the present itself, emphasizing its value to you and thus presumably returning a degree of pleasure to the gift-giver. For this purpose the first phrase introduced above will serve you well. If someone gives you a Gucci scarf, for example, you might say:

まあ、グッチのスカーフ。これ、前からほしいと思っていたの。どうもありがとう。㊦

Maa, guchi no sukāfu. Kore, mae kara hoshii to omotte ita no. Dōmo arigatō.

Ooh, a Gucci scarf! I've been wanting one of these for a long time. Thanks a lot.

Since *mae kara hoshii to omotte ita* is a ready-made expression right out of the standard repertoire, it goes without saying that the actual truth value of these words in any given situation is far less important than the good manners (and good intentions) they represent. Even if you wouldn't know a Gucci scarf from a dishrag, by claiming to have yearned for one you are effectively showing appreciation to the gift-giver by subtly complimenting her on her good judgment and sense of taste—and that is the important thing. You can accomplish the same thing by saying:

私が欲しがってること、よくわかったわね。㊦

Watashi ga hoshigatte 'ru koto, yoku wakatta wa ne.

You knew just what I wanted, didn't you.

Compared to *mae kara hoshii to omotte ita*, this expression may have a more transparently ingratiating ring to it, but the other person will probably ignore the obviousness of the strategy and receive your words in the spirit intended.

There are any number of alternative expressions representing variations on this recommended approach to public demonstrations of gratitude. What follows is a mere sampling.

To thank someone who takes you to a restaurant you've never been to:

前から食べたいと思っていたの。㊦

Mae kara tabetai to omotte ita no.

I've been wanting to try this place for a long time.

To thank someone who takes you to a movie or play:

前から見たいと思っていたんだ。㊦

Mae kara mitai to omotte ita n' da.

I've been wanting to see this for a long time.

To thank someone who takes you to a concert:

前から聴きたいと思っていたところだよ。㊦

Mae kara kikitai to omotte ita tokoro da yo.

I've been wanting to go for a long time.

To thank someone who takes you somewhere you've never been:

前から行ってみたいと思っていたの。

Mae kara itte mitai to omotte ita no.

I've been wanting to come here for a long time.

Thus, what may be thought of as the *mae kara* strategy—which usually involves stretching the truth a little in order to show appreciation—is a multipurpose bit of phraseology that comes in handy on any number of occasions and helps establish your reputation as someone who knows how to express gratitude properly.

APOLOGIZING

I'm prepared to do whatever is required to make amends

いかなる償いもいたすつもりでございます。

Ikanaru tsugunai mo itasu tsumori de gozaimasu.

I'm prepared to do whatever is required to make amends.

This short sentence represents an extreme declaration of formal apology. The Japanese language is said by some to reflect a culture of apology, in the sense that the social act most fundamentally enshrined in the language seems to be the apology. Even the most ordinary transaction—asking for information or making a minor request—usually incorporates such standard phrases as *sumimasen* (“I’m sorry”) or *osoreirimasu* (“I beg your pardon”), expressions that, at least on a literal level, convey apology. You might say that the impact of such apologetic expressions has become diluted through overuse. As a result, when the primary purpose actually is to formally and earnestly apologize for something one has done, the language employed tends to be extreme. What’s more, people may literally get down on their knees or even prostrate themselves to demonstrate the sincerity of their words.

If you really want to reach back and humble yourself the way they do in samurai movies, you might try this (though you’ll probably have to explain it after having used it):

七重の膝を八重に折りまして、お詫びいたします。

Nanae no hiza o yae ni orimashite, owabi itashimasu.

I beg your forgiveness on bended knee.

A literal translation of this standard expression will provide an idea of the extreme attitude it expresses. *Nanae no hiza o yae ni orimashite* means forcing one’s knees (which bend only in two) to bend seven ways (*nanae*) and then once more (*yae*, “eightfold”)—as if this were physiologically possible—from which decidedly uncomfortable position one offers one’s apology (*owabi itashimasu*).

Japanese society has long honored a sort of tacit understanding whereby a transgressor can effectively expiate his offense by making a sincere and sufficiently humble apology. In addition, a direct apology is considered the most reliable way to assuage the anger of the offended party. While both these functions have helped established the spoken apology as an essential social lubricant, it no longer necessarily holds the power it once did. These days, even the most sincere apology may be answered by a demand for complete financial compensation.

In the unfortunate event that you have caused an injury through your own negligence or carelessly started a fire that spread and damaged other people’s property, no apology will be sufficient to undo the harm. Nevertheless, by conscientiously making the most humble kind of apology, you can at least demonstrate your sincere regret, and that is perhaps the first point to address. Should you commit the sort of offense that affects another person’s reputation—calling off the wedding after the invitations have been sent out, for instance—be prepared to grovel your way through an apology that will surely be a once-in-a-lifetime lesson in public humility.

I accept full responsibility for this

私の不徳のいたすところでございます。
Watashi no futoku no itasu tokoro de gozaimasu.
 I accept full responsibility for this.

Occasionally, you may be required to apologize for something you didn't even do—for misconduct or carelessness by a subordinate or a family member, for instance. This is a standard form of apology for those occasions. Certain related expressions have lately fallen into disrepute as a result of being associated with shady politicians, who tend to rely on them in their efforts to double-talk their way past scandalous revelations. One of these is:

まことに遺憾に存じます。
Makoto ni ikan ni zonzimasu.
 I consider this truly regrettable.

It should be pointed out, however, that there is no dishonesty inherent in the words themselves. Rather, what tarnishes their impact is the sanctimonious pose of feigned ignorance and the pretense, implicit in the use of these words, that someone else is responsible for the politician's own actions.

Suppose you recommended someone for a job, and she was hired but ended up making a mess of things. Or perhaps you played match-maker for two people who subsequently got engaged, only to have one of them back out at the last minute. In such cases you really aren't to blame for the unfortunate outcome, but your fingerprints are on it. Your failing was that you didn't see trouble coming, so you might as well apologize for that:

私の不明から、このようなことになりまして申し訳ございません。

Watashi no fumei kara, kono yō na koto ni narimashite mōshiwake gozaimasen.

I'm deeply sorry that things have come to this pass, all due to a lack of foresight on my part.

Needless to say, you meant well, and when the best of intentions produce unhappiness, who's to blame? Surely there's no need to blame anyone, but the problem is that hard feelings often remain. Expressions like this are probably the most effective way to deal with them.

If it's a case of misconduct or carelessness by someone you're expected to be responsible for, here are two possible approaches:

不行き届きで申し訳ございません。
Fu-yukitodoki de mōshiwake gozaimasen.
 I apologize for this negligence.

至りませんで、とんだ粗相をいたしまして申し訳ございません。
Itarimasen de, tonda sosō o itashimashite mōshiwake gozaimasen.
 Carelessness caused this awful mess. I apologize.

When delivering an apology such as this, you'll be more likely to achieve the intended effect if you lower the tone of your voice a degree or two and make a point of clearly enunciating all the way to the end of the sentence. In such cases, it's not advisable to start chanting *sumimasen*, as that may very well only exacerbate the situation, laying you open to the rebuke

すみませんですむと思うか。
Sumimasen de sumu to omou ka.

You think just saying you're sorry is going to make things right?

I'm sorry about all the fuss

お騒がせいたしました。

Osawagase itashimashita.

I'm sorry about all the fuss.

As you might expect in a language that offers so many occasions for apology, there are many different ways to apologize. Just which way is appropriate in a given situation depends on a number of factors, the first of which is the identity of the person you're apologizing to. For example, take the familiar form

ごめんなさい。

Gomen nasai.

Sorry.

This is a perfectly appropriate way to apologize to someone in your family, a close friend, or a child. It would be a serious breach of etiquette and imply a lack of common sense, however, to use this form with one of your elders or a superior at work. In that case you would probably best be advised to say:

申し訳ありませんでした。

Mōshiwake arimasen deshita.

Please accept my apologies.

If you make a mistake at work or somehow cause trouble for someone who is not part of your immediate circle, this type of apology will probably be appropriate. Later, once the dust has settled and the mistake has been rectified or the trouble resolved, you'll probably have an opportunity to say you're sorry once again—to perform a sort of follow-up apology. For that purpose, the form at the beginning of this section, *osawagase itashimashita*, is an excellent choice.

Let's compare *osawagase itashimashita* with a similar form that is often used in the same way:

ご迷惑をおかけしました。

Gomeiwaku o okake shimashita.

I apologize for causing you so much trouble.

Either form could be used for a follow-up apology. Generally speaking, though, *osawagase itashimashita* tends to be used when there really wasn't too much harm done or serious trouble caused in the first place. *Gomeiwaku o okake shimashita*, on the other hand, is more often used when the original matter was serious enough to possibly have a more lasting impact—when the water might not have all flowed under the bridge yet. Thus, you might consider three grades of apologies for circumstances like these: the first and most weighty is *mōshiwake arimasen deshita*; the second, not quite so grave, is *gomeiwaku o okake shimashita*; and the third and least somber is *osawagase itashimashita*. It's probably safe to use the latter expression if the person you're apologizing to seems glad to put the incident behind her. If you're lucky, your apology may even draw a smile.

How thoughtless of me

私としたことが.....

Watashi to shita koto ga ...

How thoughtless of me. For shame!

This phrase, an expression of mild self-criticism, is the kind of thing that might escape your lips if you were entertaining a visitor and suddenly realized you had forgotten to offer him a seat. This lightly apologetic expression is an abbreviated form of the longer phrase:

私としたことが、はしたない。
Watashi to shita koto ga, hashitanai.
 How thoughtless of me!

In contemporary usage, the second part of this sentence, *hashitanai* (“shameful” or “disgraceful”) tends to be omitted. The effect is to suggest that you have unintentionally committed a slight breach of courtesy, which you will now promptly rectify.

Often enough, the key phrase *watashi to shita koto ga* is followed by another expression that completes the sentence and drives the point home, as in the following examples:

私としたことが、気がつきませんで……
Watashi to shita koto ga, ki ga tsukimassen de ...
 How thoughtless of me not to notice.

私としたことが、ご無礼いたしました。
Watashi to shita koto ga, goburei itashimashita.
 How thoughtless of me, how rude!

私としたことが、とんだ粗相をいたしました。
Watashi to shita koto ga, tonda sosō o itashimashita.
 How thoughtless of me to commit such a stupid oversight.

In each of these examples, the phrase that follows *watashi to shita koto ga* can itself be used as a form of apology, by itself or in a different combination. In fact, some people feel that an expression such as the last one, *tonda sosō o itashimashita*, actually sounds more properly submissive when not preceded by *watashi to shita koto ga*, in such sentences as:

まことに不調法でとんだ粗相をいたしました。
Makoto ni buchōhō de tonda sosō o itashimashita.
 That was truly a rude and unforgivable oversight.

People who prefer to rely on slightly more formal expressions of apology such as this may feel that *watashi to shita koto ga*—the suggestion that one should (and generally does) know better than to do something impolite—sounds too much like an excuse rather than a sincere apology. On the other hand, there are those who find the use of this expression, and the spontaneous self-critique it implies, to be courteous and sometimes even charming.

I'm sorry you had to witness such a disgraceful display

お見苦しいところをお目にかけて……
Omigurushii tokoro o ome ni kakemashite ...
 I'm sorry you had to witness such a disgraceful display.

Ordinarily, protocol requires that visitors be entertained under controlled conditions; this means, among other things, that guests usually see only what they're supposed to see. Occasionally, however, the host slips up or something goes wrong, and the visitor gets an eyeful (or an earful) of something not intended for public display. This expression comes in handy at such times.

The first word of this expression, *migurushii* (appearing above with the honorific prefix *o*), means “unsightly” or “disgraceful.” Suppose someone has come to visit and you're going to serve tea. The cupboard where the cups and saucers are kept is a disorderly mess, however, and in trying to get what you need you inadvertently trigger a clattering cascade of poorly stacked crockery. Or perhaps you have a photo you'd like to show your guest and you end up spending 20 minutes dredging up what seems like half your possessions out of closets and drawers trying to find it. In either situation you have exposed your guest to an unsightly spectacle, for which an apology is in order.

According to custom, the things that should not be exposed to view outside one's immediate circle—and there are surprisingly many such things—are covered by the term 内情 *naijō* (literally, “internal affairs”). These include such private realms as the contents of cupboards, drawers, and closets. Because they are private—and intimately associated with oneself—they are presumed to be *migurushii* from an outsider's point of view. Then again, displays of clumsiness (such as knocking over dishes) and time-wasting disorganization (such as the mess in the closet) may also be seen as disgraceful breaches of the *naijō* domain simply because that's not the way you're expected to act when you have company; apparently, that's the way you act when no one's around.

There are other ways in which private matters can encroach on the polite public domain in which guests are supposed to be received, leaving you in a position to apologize. It is unmistakably *migurushii*, for example, for a husband and wife or two colleagues to quarrel in front of a visitor. In such cases, a more proper apology might be:

お聞き苦しいところをお聞かせしてしまいました。

Okikigurushii tokoro o okikase shite shimaimashita.

I'm sorry you had to hear such a disgraceful commotion.

PART

II

BUSINESS PHRASES

BUSINESS CALLS: OPENING STRATEGIES

My name's Brown. How do you do?

初めましてブラウンと申します。
Hajimemashite Buraun to mōshimasu.
My name's Brown. How do you do?

The importance of making a good first impression is a well-established principle of business not only in Japan but throughout the world. Singularly emphatic importance, however, is attached to this point in the Japanese business world, where form is supremely important (and function often runs a distant second), so particularly close attention should be paid to proper introductions. Whenever you meet someone for the first time in your role as a working person, it's only proper and polite to introduce yourself. When you do so, you'll want to strike the right note of seriousness, formality, and confidence, for which purpose the standard phrase at the beginning of this section—properly delivered—will serve you well.

Note that only the surname is given. What's more, in this case a surname consisting of a single syllable in its original form weighs in at a hefty four syllables when rendered into Japanese: "BU-RA-U-N." To properly introduce yourself, you have to make sure that your name registers with the other party, which requires that you pronounce it the way it's rendered in the Japanese sound system (if you don't know, consult someone who does). This can be tricky, and it may take a good deal of practice before your own name rolls off your tongue the way it should in Japanese.

Should you ever feel like straying slightly from the well-beaten path, here's a less often heard, slightly longer variation to hold in reserve:

初めてお目にかかります。ブラウンと申します。
Hajimete ome ni kakarimasu. Buraun to mōshimasu.
How do you do? My name's Brown.

Strictly in terms of meaning, the expression *Hajimete ome ni kakarimasu* (literally, "I present myself before your eyes for the first time") carries the same message as "I don't believe we've met." In terms of usage, however, it's probably more useful to regard this as another way to say "How do you do?"

In business circles, individual identity is often less important than the matter of whom you represent, so it may be preferable to begin your introduction with that information:

初めましてヤマト商事のブラウンでございます。
Hajimemashite Yamato Shōji no Buraun de gozaimasu.
My name's Brown, with Yamato Trading. How do you do?

While the name of the individual appears first in the translation above (because that's the preferred order in English), in Japanese the name of the firm precedes that of the person introducing himself. Some might consider this difference to be emblematic of an essential contrast between the English-speaking and Japanese-speaking corporate cultures.

I'm sorry to bother you at a busy time

お忙しいところを恐れいたします。
Oisogashii tokoro o osoreirimasu.
I'm sorry to bother you at a busy time.

One cherished assumption that features prominently in Japan's corporate culture, as well as in popular mythology, is the notion that

Japanese business people always have far more work to do than time to do it in—that to be up to their ears in it every waking moment is their natural state. A self-serving image, perhaps, but one that is duly enshrined in office language and etiquette. Accordingly, unless you acknowledge at the outset that your visit, your call, your meeting, or even your phone message is keeping the other person from something far more important, you'll be starting out on the wrong foot. You can pay the necessary dues with the single phrase given above. Or you might try:

お忙しいところをお邪魔いたしましたして……

Oisogashii tokoro o ojama itashimashite ...

Forgive me for intruding on your busy schedule.

For an especially formal business call, you might try more formal language:

わざわざお時間を割いていただきまして恐縮に存じます。

Wazawaza ojikan o saite itadakimashite kyōshuku ni zanjimasu.

I'm very grateful to you for allowing me to impose on your time.

Seeing as how you're expected to apologize even for a scheduled business call, it's hardly a good idea to drop in on people without an appointment. As a rule, don't make unscheduled calls if you can avoid it. Should it somehow come about that you urgently need to see someone and don't have an appointment, you'll need to convince the other person that you'll keep it short. After apologizing for your intrusion, bid the absolute minimum:

15分で結構ですから……

Jūgo-fun de kekkō desu kara ...

If I could have just fifteen minutes of your time ...

Presuming this approach works, it's up to you to make sure you've

spoken your piece by the time your fifteen minutes are up. The ability to do so is the mark of a pro, so you actually have an opportunity to transform what could have been an awkward disruption into a display of concision and efficiency. You can also help make a name for yourself as someone who knows and respects the value of time, which can only be to your advantage in the future.

In the business world, of course, keeping busy is everything; after all, what does "business" mean if not staying busy? When people are hard at work, money is being made and, presumably, profits are accumulating. In this sense, by indicating you know someone is very busy, you're subtly sending a very positive signal—the suggestion that this person is engaged in a vital, prosperous enterprise. There's a simple phrase that, while usually used in an offhand or even a euphemistic manner, succinctly conveys this compliment. Suppose that after arriving at a client's office for a scheduled meeting, you've been kept waiting. Finally your man turns up and apologizes:

大変お待たせしました。

Taihen omatase shimashita.

I'm really sorry to have kept you waiting.

Now, you could simply trot out a standard (and sadly unimaginative) retort:

どういたしまして。

Dō itashimashite.

Not at all.

Or you could seize the opportunity to toss off this timely line:

忙しそうで、なによりです。

Isogashisō de, nani yori desu.

You certainly seem to be busy—and that's what it's all about.

To get down to the business at hand

さっそくですが……

Sassoku desu ga ...

To get down to the business at hand ...

When you call on a client or when someone calls on you, the conversation will invariably open with an exchange of greetings and politely innocuous inquiries about everyone's health, possibly augmented by commentary on the weather or the state of the economy. But sooner or later (and don't be deceived by all this leisurely politeness—sooner is usually better), someone has to broach the subject of business. The phrase above serves as an unmistakable signal that the preliminaries have been dispensed with and it's time to get down to business, as in:

さっそくですが、本日伺いましたのは……

Sassoku desu ga, honjitsu ukagaimashita no wa ...

To get down to the business at hand, the reason I'm here today is ...

With this utterance, the social formalities and polite chatter cease. It's on to business, and once the talk has taken this inevitable turn, pity the fool who wastes precious time trying to lighten the atmosphere with frivolous remarks. This is all the more true, of course, when the conversation is interrupting a particularly busy day, and in such a case it may be best to cut straightaway to the gist of the matter, using one of these phrases:

手短かに申し上げます。

Temijika ni mōshiagemasu.

Let me sum up the situation for you.

かいつまんで申しますと……

Kaitsumande mōshimasu to ...

To make a long story short ...

When the topic at hand involves something that has already yielded a clear outcome, very often the best strategy is to open with that:

まず結論から申しますと……

Mazu ketsuron kara mōshimasu to ...

First let me give you the upshot.

Another useful opening strategy is to enumerate the items that need to be addressed:

二点ほどお伝えすることがございます。

Niten hodo otsutae suru koto ga gozaimasu.

There are just two things I'd like to go over with you.

By taking this approach you can reassure the other person that you won't be bending his ear for the rest of the afternoon, and at the same time you can effectively draw his attention to the specific points you're enumerating.

Now and then you might be compelled to broach a subject that you know the other person really doesn't want to address—and will try hard to avoid. If you simply launch into one of these conversational sore spots without warming up the audience a bit, you're all too likely to elicit an adverse response. The wisest policy is to ease into the subject gently by signaling that it's coming up:

そろそろ、例の件をお話ししたいと存じますが……

Sorosoro, rei no ken o ohanashi shitai to zonzimasu ga ...

Now then, I wonder if we could move on and maybe discuss that other matter.

BUSINESS CALLS: CLOSING STRATEGIES

I'd like to look into this and come back and try again

研究して出直してまいります。

Kenkyū shite denaoshite mairimasu.

I'd like to look into this and come back and try again.

A true professional doesn't abandon hope simply because her sales pitch was rejected or his presentation failed to persuade the audience. On the contrary, the real pro is distinguished by determination, persistence, and the ability to look beyond temporary setbacks toward the ultimate goal. Suppose you're trying to get someone to do business with you and find you've run up against a wall. You've reached the point where a lesser person would cut his losses and accept defeat with a meek apology:

お邪魔しました。

Ojama shimashita.

Sorry to have wasted your time.

Not for you a simpering surrender, however. For now, you'll fall back and regroup, but not before letting the other party know that you, like another old soldier who lost the battle only to win the war, shall return:

研究して出直してまいります。

Kenkyū shite denaoshite mairimasu.

I'd like to look into this and come back and try again.

With these words, you gracefully concede the present round and

declare your intention to render satisfaction next time. Here's a slightly longer and more gracious way to accomplish the same thing:

貴重なご意見をありがとうございました。さっそく研究いたしまして、あらためて出直してまいります。

Kichō na go-iken o arigatō gozaimashita. Sassoku kenkyū itashimashite, aratamete denaoshite mairimasu.

Thank you for sharing your ideas—they're extremely helpful.

We'll give this immediate and careful consideration, and I'll be back with a new proposal.

Here's another way to put the best possible face on a failed first attempt, this time somewhat less directly:

本日は大変勉強になりました。これをご縁に一層努力いたしますので、今後ともよろしくご指導ください。

Honjitsu wa taihen benkyō ni narimashita. Kore o goen ni issō do-ryoku itashimasu no de, kongo tomo yoroshiku goshidō kudasai.

Today's discussion has been extremely instructive. This is going to make me work even harder (to get your business), and I'd be very grateful to receive more of this kind of guidance in the future.

Having asserted your never-say-die attitude, you might, depending on the circumstances, try to pin down a date and time for your next sally. If the other side is agreeable, you're likely to hear something on the order of:

では来週にでもご連絡ください。

Dewa raishū ni demo gorenraku kudasai.

Okay then, contact us next week or so.

Nice going, you're still in the ballgame. But the other party could refuse to be pinned down, offering only a vague assurance that they'll be in touch:

いずれこちらからお電話します。
Izure kochira kara odenwa shimasu.
 Either way, we'll give you a call.

Oh, well. Don't cancel all your appointments waiting for that call.

Remember, it takes time to put together a business arrangement. You shouldn't take yourself out of the game just because nobody has swung at your first couple of pitches. If you have the fire and tenacity to keep coming back at them, those qualities will ultimately tell the tale. That's when you may will hear these words, which will show you've carried the day:

いや、あなたの熱意には負けました。
Iya, anata no netsui ni wa makemashita.
 Okay, okay, you've won me over.

BUSINESS CALLS: RECEIVING VISITORS

Hello. Mr. Watanabe, of course

いらっしゃいませ、渡辺様でございますね。
Irasshaimase, Watanabe-sama de gozaimasu ne.
 Hello. Mr. Watanabe, of course

Like it or not, a visitor's first impression of the organization you work for is apt to be determined by the reception he gets from the person who greets him upon his arrival. A polite, cheerful word of welcome—*irasshaimase*—will strike a perfectly cordial note with virtually any

visitor and will help convey the impression that he's dealing with a first-rate outfit.

Generally, someone who has arrived to pay a business call will announce herself by stating the name of the firm she represents and her own name (in that order!) and then ask to see the person with whom she has an appointment. Now and then, though, you may encounter a visitor who forgoes the formality of introducing himself at the outset, offering only the name of the person he's come to call on:

田中さんをお願いします。
Tanaka-san o onegai shimasu.
 I'm here to see Mr. Tanaka.

Office etiquette requires that you ascertain the visitor's name before you announce him; "Mr. Tanaka, somebody's here to see you" would sound distinctly rude in translation (it would hardly pass for courtesy in English). Therefore, you politely inquire:

失礼ですが、どちら様でいらっしゃいますか。
Shitsurei desu ga, dochira-sama de irasshaimasu ka.
 I'm sorry, may I have your name, please?

This particular bit of business boilerplate, which can also be used on the telephone to ascertain the identity of a caller, is so well established in the language that it is very often reduced to an abbreviation: the speaker utters only the introductory phrase and leaves the question itself unspoken.

失礼ですが……
Shitsurei desu ga ...
 I'm sorry ...

Having elicited the visitor's name, you need to make sure you've

heard it correctly before announcing him. Mispronouncing the name of a guest is a hideous lapse of etiquette, and you should take a moment to confirm the correct pronunciation by repeating it:

渡辺様でございますね。かしこまりました。

Watanabe-sama de gozaimasu ne. Kashikomarimashita.

Mr. Watanabe, of course.

The latter part of this two-sentence formula, the verb *kashikomarimashita* (which, like all Japanese verbs, can constitute a sentence by itself) ought to be memorized right now if you don't know it already. This is the standard way to reply in the affirmative to a guest or visitor. An alternative is the compound verb *shōchi itashimashita*—commit that one to memory right away, too. Either of these expressions, depending on the context, could be variously translated as “Yes, sir,” “Certainly, madam,” “Of course,” “I understand,” “Very well,” or “I’ll do that.” To express any of these meanings in conversation with a colleague or peer, you would probably say *wakarimashita*, but not when dealing with a VIP (and visitors are VIPs, at least until they’ve left).

In cases where the visitor has been expected, a slight variation on the above will serve:

渡辺様でございますね。お待ちいたしておりました。

Watanabe-sama de gozaimasu ne. Omachi itashite orimashita.

Mr. Watanabe, of course. We’ve been expecting you.

The addition of the latter sentence—*Omachi itashite orimashita* (“We’ve been expecting you”)—will pleasantly reinforce the impression that your outfit really stays on top of individual comings and goings.

Pardon me for asking

失礼ですが……

Shitsurei desu ga ...

Pardon me for asking ...

Anyone accorded the status of a guest—including a visitor to your office—is entitled to special treatment in the Japanese business world. This, no doubt, has much to do with preserving a fundamental distinction between those on the inside (of a business, in this case) and those on the outside, a dichotomy that distinguishes many other facets of Japanese society as well. In recognition of their special status, visitors are to be addressed exclusively in highly polite language, replete with honorific phraseology. Among other things, this means that when you ask a visitor a question, no matter how reasonable or innocent, you must preface your question with an apologetic warning of a potential impertinence, as in the following examples:

失礼ですが、どちら様でいらっしゃいますか。

Shitsurei desu ga, dochira-sama de irasshairimasu ka.

Pardon me for asking, but may I have your name, please?

失礼ですが、どのようなご用件でしょうか。

Shitsurei desu ga, dono yō na goyōken deshō ka.

Pardon me, but may I ask what this is regarding?

失礼ですが、私どもの誰をお訪ねですか。

Shitsurei desu ga, watakushi-domo no dare o otazune desu ka.

I’m sorry, with whom did you wish to speak?

失礼ですが、お約束でございますか。

Shitsurei desu ga, oyakusoku de gozaimasu ka.

I beg your pardon, but do you have an appointment?

Phrasing your questions thus, you can emit a gracious and accommodating glow. The extra touches make all the difference—don't try to simplify things by taking a just-the-facts approach. Leave off the polite disclaimer (*Shitsurei desu ga ...* can be literally translated "This is rude, but ...") and the other bits of polite window dressing, and these same mundane queries sound far less hospitable:

お名前は？
Onamae wa?
Your name?

ご用件は？
Goyōken wa?
What's this about?

うちの誰ですか。
Uchi no dare desu ka.
Who do you want to see?

約束ですか。
Yakusoku desu ka.
Got an appointment?

Obviously, this is the approach to avoid, unless for some reason you want to sound like the churlish turnkey in a prison movie.

Now and then, a visitor may drop in and ask to see someone who's out of the office or in a meeting at the time. Having informed the visitor of the situation and inquired into the nature of the matter at hand (in the manner demonstrated above), you might, depending on your instructions or on the prevailing policy, follow up with:

おさしつかえなければ、代わりの者が承りますが……
Osashitsukae nakereba, kawari no mono ga uketamawarimasu ga ...

If it's not inconvenient, I can inform someone else on the staff that you're here.

You can leave it up to the visitor to decide whether to wait until the person in question is available, talk to someone else instead, or call again another time.

If, on the other hand, policy dictates that anybody without an appointment (including the odd salesperson trying to lodge a foot in the door) be turned away, you need go no further than asking whether your visitor has an appointment. The same polite query introduced above (and the English version as well) has a very different and decidedly chillier ring to it in this context.

失礼ですが、お約束でございますか。
Shitsurei desu ga, oyakusoku de gozaimasu ka.
I beg your pardon, but do you have an appointment?

The follow-up to this is automatic: No appointment, no entry.

Sorry to put you to the trouble of coming

お呼びたていたしまして……
Oyobitate itashimashite ...
Sorry to put you to the trouble of coming.

When you know in advance that someone is coming to see you at the office, it's poor form to keep your visitor waiting after she's arrived—particularly if you're the one who requested the meeting. Still, sometimes it's simply unavoidable, in which case the standard arrangement is for the receptionist (or whoever performs that role) to lead the way to a waiting room or an unoccupied chair, urge the visitor to have a seat, and politely excuse herself, saying something like:

斎藤はただいま参りますので、少々お待ちください。
Saitō wa tadaima mairimasu no de, shōshō omachi kudasai.
 If you'd be kind enough to wait just a few moments, Mr. Saito
 is on his way.

The ensuing brief wait is usually interrupted by the arrival of coffee or tea. Finally, the visitor's host appears, offering a courteous apology:

お待たせいたしました。本日は突然お呼びたていたしました
 て恐縮です。
*Omatase itashimashita. Honjitsu wa totsuzen oyobitate itashimashite
 kyōshuku desu.*
 I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Sorry to put you to the trouble
 of coming on such short notice today.

Here are some other phrases you might use when greeting a guest, depending on your relationship with the visitor:

お待ちしておりました。どうぞこちらへ。
Omachi shite orimashita. Dōzo kochira e.
 We've been expecting you. This way, please.

お久しぶりです。その後いかがですか。
Ohisashiburi desu. Sono go ikaga desu ka.
 It's been a long time. How have you been (since we last met)?

先日はいろいろとお世話になりました……
Senjitsu wa iroiro to osewa ni narimashite ...
 Thank you for all your help the other day.

The key phrase *oyobitate itashimashite* ("Sorry to put you to the trouble of coming") conveys consideration for the fact that the speaker has caused his guest some inconvenience and also appreciation for the visitor's forbearance. Granted, the visitor may in fact

not have suffered any real inconvenience, and free enterprise itself would soon grind to a halt if people started letting a little inconvenience stand in the way of business. Nevertheless, even if you're about to lodge a complaint or make a demand, politeness requires that you explicitly express your appreciation to any visitor who appears at your request. Here are a couple of alternative phrases, both distinctly formal sounding, that convey essentially the same message:

わざわざご足労願ひまして、申し訳ございません。
Wazawaza gosokurō negaimashite, mōshiwake gozaimasen.
 I apologize for putting you to all the trouble of coming here.

遠方よりお越しいただきまして、ありがとうございます。
Enpō yori okoshi itadakimashite, arigatō gozaimasu.
 Thank you for taking the trouble to come all the way over here.

Once these formalities have been dispensed with, the question of sharing a meal might come up, depending on the hour and the nature of the visit:

お食事はもうお済みですか。
Oshokuji wa mō osumi desu ka.
 Have you had lunch (or dinner) yet?

In conventional usage, this is not an informational query but an invitation to dine. Etiquette requires that the visitor accept such an invitation, so the only appropriate response is to answer in the negative (with a courteous disregard for the facts, if necessary) and show a willingness to comply. The host, given the power he wields in these situations, may very well have already made the necessary arrangements for a meal. Thus, a warning to the business caller with a timid palate: if you are squeamish at the prospect of dining on the uncooked flesh of anonymous sea creatures and other exotic fare, schedule your visits well before or after the mealtime hours.

ON THE TELEPHONE

We appreciate all that you've done for us

いつもお世話になっております。

Itsumo osewa ni natte orimasu.

We appreciate all that you've done for us.

One of the relatively few Japanese phrases widely recognized outside Japan is *moshi-moshi*, which, among its other functions, is frequently used as a sort of greeting when one answers the telephone. A mere *moshi-moshi* will not suffice, however, when you answer the office phone. Let's say it's ten in the morning and the phone rings at the trading firm Asahi Shōji. You answer:

おはようございます。アサヒ商事です。

Ohayō gozaimasu. Asahi Shōji desu.

Good morning, Asahi Shōji.

or

はい、アサヒ商事でございます。

Hai, Asahi Shōji de gozaimasu.

Hello, Asahi Shōji.

It's essential to promptly state the name of the firm. Of the two alternatives shown above, the first is often preferred, since the initial greeting *ohayō gozaimasu* is thought to strike the sort of cheerful, resonant note that reflects a positive and businesslike atmosphere (not in the afternoon, though). Some firms have rules stating that callers must be greeted with an apology if the phone has rung more than, say, five times:

お待たせいたしました。アサヒ商事でございます。

Omatase itashimashita. Asahi Shōji de gozaimasu.

Asahi Shōji. I'm sorry to keep you waiting.

Generally, the caller's first duty is to identify herself, and that is your cue to say:

いつもお世話になっております。

Itsumo osewa ni natte orimasu.

We appreciate all that you've done for us.

A variation frequently used by speakers of the Kansai dialect prevalent in western Honshu is:

毎度お世話になっております。

Maido osewa ni natte orimasu.

We appreciate all that you've done for us.

To the analytical mind, it may seem inordinately gushy, even by Japanese standards, to use the words *itsumo* (literally, "always") and *maido* ("every time") with every Tom, Dick, and Hiroshi who happens to call. After all, the caller could be anyone, including a corporate extortionist or the disgruntled husband of the boss's mistress. Still, it doesn't pay to be too literal-minded about these things, and none but the most utterly cantankerous caller is likely to object to gratuitous words of appreciation.

Now and then you may encounter a caller who fails to disclose his name at the start of the conversation. In that case, you have to inquire:

失礼ですが、お名前を……

Shitsurei desu ga, onamae o ...

I'm sorry. May I have your name, please?

or

失礼ですが、どちら様でしょうか。

Shitsurei desu ga, dochira-sama deshō ka.

I'm sorry. May I ask who's calling?

As noted elsewhere (see the section entitled "Pardon me for asking") the message to be conveyed is so utterly predictable from the context that the expressions above are very frequently reduced to an abbreviation: the speaker utters only the introductory phrase and leaves the question itself unspoken.

失礼ですが……

Shitsurei desu ga ...

I'm sorry ...

In some cases, such as when the caller has seized control of the conversation and is off and running before you get the chance to ask who's on the other end, it can be more politic (and more fun) to take a euphemistic approach, one that has a fairly exact counterpart in English:

恐れいます。お名前が聞きとれませんでしたので、もう一度お願いいたします。

Osoreirimasu. Onamae ga kikitoremasen deshita no de, mō ichido onegai itashimasu.

I'm terribly sorry. I'm afraid I didn't quite catch your name. Could you say it again, please?

This not only requires the caller to identify himself, but also subtly reminds him that he should have done so at the outset.

Let me turn you over to the person in charge of that

担当の者と替わります。

Tantō no mono to kawarimasu.

Let me turn you over to the person in charge of that.

After you've mastered the job of answering the office phone in the appropriate businesslike manner (see the previous section), you still have to make sure the call gets through to the proper person. When the caller requests to speak with a specific individual, confirmation is all that's required:

営業二課の森田でございますね。少々お待ちください。

Eigyō ni-ka no Morita de gozaimasu ne. Shōshō omachi kudasai.

Ms. Morita in Business Section Number Two? One moment, please.

or

かしこまりました。営業二課の森田におつなぎいたします。少々お待ちください。

Kashikomarimashita. Eigyō ni-ka no Morita ni otsunagi itashimasu. Shōshō omachi kudasai.

Certainly. I'll connect you with Ms. Morita in Business Section Number Two. One moment, please.

In the event the caller doesn't ask to speak to a specific individual—perhaps she's calling to get information about products or services, for instance—it's up to you to direct the call to the relevant person or department:

ただいま担当の者と替わりますので、少々お待ちください。

Tadaima tantō no mono to kawarimasu no de, shōshō omachi kudasai.

Let me turn you over to the person in charge of that. One moment, please.

or

係の者におつなぎいたしますので、しばらくお待ちください。
Kakari no mono ni otsunagi itashimasu no de, shibaraku omachi kudasai.

Just a moment, please. I'll connect you to the person in charge of that.

You are, of course, expected to follow through on the promise conveyed by these words, by making sure the call is directed to whoever is best qualified to answer the caller's questions or otherwise deal with the matter at hand; anything less is passing the buck. You won't endear yourself to anyone by giving people the runaround, no matter how politely or fluently, so it's best to briefly explain what the caller wants and make sure you've found the right person to handle it before transferring the call.

In the event someone calls to lodge a complaint, the first thing to do is to determine whether or not you'll be able to resolve the problem on your own. Sometimes a caller with a complaint simply wants to blow off some steam; with a little patience and tact (and a ready stock of apologetic phrases), you can probably handle that kind of call by yourself. Some complaints, however, call for a response from higher up the line, in which case you *can* pass the buck:

では、責任者に替わりますので、少々お待ちください。

Dewa, sekinin-sha ni kawarimasu no de, shōshō omachi kudasai.

In that case, let me turn you over to my supervisor. Just a moment, please.

I'm afraid we seem to have a bad connection

お電話が遠いようですが……

Odenwa ga tōi yō desu ga ...

I'm afraid we seem to have a bad connection.

Over the past several years, the Japanese business world has become thoroughly infested with mobile telephones. Regardless of whether or not these devices actually increase anyone's efficiency, the frequency with which they are brandished in public suggests that Japan's corporate culture has foregone reticence and polite circumspection in favor of a raucous nonchalance. Like it or not, portable phones are apparently here to stay, so you might as well acquire a few phrases that will help you deal with mobile callers.

The increasing reliance on mobile phones has plenty of built-in drawbacks, one of which stems from the notoriously capricious quality of the connections the phones provide. Signals can break up or fade in and out and background noises often interfere, frustrating all attempts at communication. But even when you're taking a call from someone on a mobile phone and can't make out a word being said, it wouldn't do (and would probably be pointless) to keep asking the caller to repeat everything over and over. At the same time, don't yield to the temptation to simply *pretend* to understand what the caller is saying: merely piping in now and then with a dutiful-sounding *hai* when you actually haven't a clue what the conversation is about would be inviting disaster. Instead, try this:

お電話が遠いようですので、恐れいりますが、もう少し大きな声でお話しいただけませんか。

Odenwa ga tōi yō desu no de, osoreirimasu ga, mō sukoshi ōki na koe de ohanashi itadakemassen ka.

We seem to have a bad connection. I'm sorry, but could you please speak a little louder?

The direct approach is clearly in the best interests of all concerned. In the event that real communication is still impaired, you could try asking the caller to speak more slowly:

恐れいりますが、もう少しゆっくりとお話しいただけませんか。

Osoreirimasu ga, mō sukoshi yukkuri to ohanashi itadakemasen ka.
I'm sorry, but could you please speak a little more slowly?

If it's obvious that no amount of speaking up or slowing down will make the caller intelligible under the present circumstances, state the case in plain terms, lay out the options, and end the conversation.

申し訳ございません。お電話がまだ遠いようですが……
間違いがありますと大変ですので、後ほどおかけ直し
いただけますか。それとも、こちらからおかけいたしま
しょうか。

*Mōshiwake gozaimasen. Odenwa ga mada tōi yō desu ga ... Machi-
gai ga arimasu to taihen desu no de, nochihodo okakenaoshi
itadakemasu ka. Sore tomo, kochira kara okake itashimashō ka.*

I'm terribly sorry. We still seem to have a bad connection. I'm afraid we may get our signals crossed, so either let me call you back or please call me back.

The ubiquity of mobile phones and their well-known quirks have inevitably encouraged the more devious-minded to invent imaginary phone troubles as a pretext for dodging conversations they'd rather not have. Anyone so inclined, however, should be forewarned: unless you are a highly skillful liar, some false note in your voice will probably give away the ruse. You might succeed in avoiding the caller, but you could also be forfeiting his trust in the future.

She's away from her desk at the moment

ただいま席をはずしております。

Tadaiima seki o hazushite orimasu.

She's away from her desk at the moment.

Let's say you answer the phone and the caller asks to speak with Ms. Mori, one of your colleagues:

森さんをお願いいたします。

Mori-san o onegai itashimasu.

I'd like to speak to Ms. Mori, please.

Ms. Mori, however, is nowhere in sight, although she apparently hasn't gone out because her sweater is still draped over the back of her chair. You can say:

ただいま席をはずしております。

Tadaiima seki o hazushite orimasu.

She's away from her desk at the moment.

The implication is that, although momentarily unavailable, she's around somewhere and therefore can be reached or will be able to return the call fairly soon. This is *not* the phrase to use when taking a call for a colleague who's away from the office—if the caller tries again ten minutes later and is then informed that the person he's looking for is out for the afternoon, he's liable to think he was deliberately misled the first time. Therefore, when someone is out of the office, say so, and tell the caller what time she'll be back, if you can:

ただいま外出しておりますが、4時には戻ってまいります。

*Tadaiima gaishutsu shite orimasu ga, yoji ni wa modotte mairi-
masu.*

She's out of the office at the moment. She'll be back at four o'clock.

Then ask to take a message:

戻りましたら、折り返しお電話さしあげましょうか。

Modorimashitara, orikaeshi odenwa sashiagemashō ka.
Shall I have her call you when she gets back?

or

おさしつかえなければ、ご伝言承ります。
Osashitsukae nakereba, godengon uketamawarimasu.
I'll be happy to take a message, if you like.

The use of the phrase *osashitsukae nakereba* (literally, "provided it wouldn't cause you any inconvenience") in the second example above emphasizes that there is no obligation to leave a message—it's entirely up to the caller. Incidentally, it's not a good idea to inquire into the reason for the call. Even if you're only asking out of a desire to be helpful, the question is apt to strike the caller as presumptuous.

Certain telephone situations call for particular delicacy and tact. Suppose, for instance, someone calls the office around ten o'clock in the morning and asks to speak to a colleague of yours named Sato who's ordinarily expected to be in by nine-thirty. If you say he's not in yet, the caller might conclude that Sato's habitually tardy and undependable, so instead you should say:

佐藤は本日、立ち寄りがありまして11時ごろに参ります。
Satō wa honjitsu, tachiyori ga arimashite jūichi-ji goro ni mairimasu.
Mr. Sato had to make a stop on the way in today. He'll be here around eleven.

Similarly, if Mr. Tamura, the boss, has taken the day off to play golf with a client, you needn't burden anyone calling with the details. Just say:

田村は本日、出張で留守にしておりますが、明日は出社いたします。

Tamura wa honjitsu, shutchō de rusu ni shite orimasu ga, myōnichi wa shussha itashimasu.

Mr. Tamura is away on business today, but he'll be back tomorrow.

Note the absence of the honorific *-san* in the last two examples. Business etiquette requires that, when talking to someone outside the business, you refer to people who work for the same firm you do—even the boss—by name only.

I'm sorry for calling out of the blue like this

お電話で失礼とは存じますが……

Odenwa de shitsurei to wa zanjimasu ga ...

I'm sorry for calling out of the blue like this.

Someday you'll probably have to request a service from someone you've never dealt with before. In principle, making such a request requires a face-to-face meeting; even in these phone-crazed times, the Japanese business world still attaches mystical importance to the need for an in-the-flesh encounter to seal the start of any business project or relationship. Nevertheless, it's often more practical to make the initial overture over the telephone. Therefore, as a way of acknowledging the notion that people are supposed to meet before they discuss business—and scolding yourself for not being there in person—you have to be apologetic about it when you want to sound out someone over the phone prior to making a formal business request. There's a ready-made phrase for this purpose:

お電話で失礼とは存じますが……

Odenwa de shitsurei to wa zanjimasu ga ...

It's really not proper for me to be doing this over the phone, but ...

Having made the obligatory bow to convention, you can proceed to sketch out your tentative proposal. Here are a couple of alternative phrases that will enable you to broach the subject at hand somewhat more directly:

突然のお願いで恐縮ですが……

Totsuzen no onegai de kyōshuku desu ga ...

I apologize for springing this on you so unceremoniously,
but ...

折り入ってお願いがございまして……

Ori-itte onegai ga gozaimashite ...

There's something I'd really like to ask of you.

Once you've actually met the other person (and you certainly must, if you're going to be doing business together), subsequent conversations will flow more naturally and it will be easier to make further requests, eliminating the need for this sort of language. To pique the other person's interest in getting together to talk, it seldom hurts to appeal to self-interest:

詳細はお目にかかった折にお話しいたしますが、けっして
ご損になるお話ではございません。

*Shōsai wa ome ni kakatta ori ni ohanashi itashimasu ga, kesshite
goston ni naru ohanashi de wa gozaimasen.*

I'll be glad to give you all the details when we meet. You certainly won't be sorry when you've heard what I have to say.

A somewhat different but equally standard usage of the first phrase of this section applies to telephone exchanges in which the caller is introducing himself. Let's say you've just taken over a new sales position and are calling customers to let them know the torch has been passed to you. You might start out this way:

お電話で失礼とは存じますが、このたび御社の担当となり
ましたブラウンと申します。

*Odenwa de shitsurei to wa zonzimasu ga, kono tabi onsha no tantō
to narimashita Buraun to mōshimasu.*

It's really not proper for me to be doing this over the phone, but

let me introduce myself. My name's Brown. I'll be in charge
of your account from now on.

This, of course, represents only a cursory introduction. You still have to call on each customer and formally introduce yourself in person, at the earliest possible opportunity.

I'm sorry to be calling so late

夜分遅く恐れいたします。

Yabun osoku osoreirimasu.

I'm sorry to be calling so late.

Nobody likes getting a call from the office after hours when they're trying to relax. Considering the amount of time people spend working, it goes without saying that, if at all possible, their nightly respite ought not to be disturbed. Sometimes it can't be helped, though. Emergencies arise and may occasionally require you to get hold of a colleague or a superior who's already left for the day. In such a case, the standard greeting is, naturally, apologetic:

夜分遅く恐れいたします。

Yabun osoku osoreirimasu.

I'm sorry to be calling so late.

or

夜分に恐れいたします。

Yabun ni osoreirimasu.

I'm sorry to be calling so late.

The first word of each phrase above, *yabun*, literally means "evening" or "nighttime," so this wouldn't be the greeting to use on a Saturday afternoon. Generally speaking, *yabun* covers the period from about

eight in the evening until morning. At other times, you can use a different greeting, such as:

おくつろぎのところが恐れいます。

Okutsurogi no tokoro o osoreimasu.

I'm sorry to be intruding on your private time.

Let's put the proper greeting into the context of the phone conversation you are reluctantly going to initiate. Suppose you find yourself forced to call your boss (Mr. Yano, the *kachō*, or head of your section) at home. You dial the number and his wife or daughter answers, and you say:

夜分遅く恐れいますが、矢野課長はご在宅でしょうか。
私、部下のブラウンと申します。

*Yabun osoku osoreimasu ga, Yano-kachō wa gozaitaku deshō ka.
Watakushi, buka no Buraun to mōshimasu.*

I'm sorry to be calling so late. Is Mr. Yano available? This is Mr. Brown, one of his employees.

Presuming the boss is indeed at home, his wife can identify the caller to him by name and put him on. Now you greet him:

こんな時間にお呼び立ていたしまして申し訳ございません。
実は……

*Konna jikan ni oyobitate itashimashite mōshiwake gozaimasen.
Jitsu wa ...*

I'm terribly sorry to be calling you at this hour. The situation is this ...

After providing a concise summary of the situation and receiving your instructions, don't neglect to apologize again as you sign off:

夜分お騒がせいたしました。

Yabun osawagase itashimashita.

I'm sorry to have interrupted your evening.

EXPLANATIONS, APOLOGIES, EXCUSES

Due to unavoidable circumstances

よんどころない事情で……

Yondokoro-nai jijō de ...

Due to unavoidable circumstances ...

Naturally, it's best to establish and scrupulously maintain a reputation as someone who knows how to keep a promise. Still, now and then you'll probably be forced to cancel an appointment for reasons that are beyond your control and that wouldn't bear explaining. The phrase *yondokoro-nai jijō* ("unavoidable circumstances") offers uniform coverage for this sort of situation, as in:

申し訳ありません。よんどころない事情で、明日伺えなくなりました。

Mōshiwake arimasen. Yondokoro-nai jijō de, myōnichi ukagaenaku narimashita.

I'm very sorry, but due to unavoidable circumstances I'm afraid I won't be able to make it tomorrow.

In principle, this sort of reference to *yondokoro-nai jijō* is supposed to elicit the other party's implicit understanding. After all, unavoidable circumstances can interfere with anyone's plans. Sooner or later, everyone has to fall back on this excuse, so it has a sort of universal

validity, like a free pass—which will be summarily revoked if you start using it too often.

An alternative to the *yondokoro-nai jijō* approach is to attribute the situation to unspecified difficulties:

申し訳ありません。ちょっと問題が生じまして明日伺えなくなりました。

Mōshiwake arimasen. Chotto mondai ga shōjimashite myōnichi ukagaenaku narimashita.

I'm very sorry, but a small problem has come up and I'm afraid won't be able to make it tomorrow.

This is not always the wisest approach to take because the mention of *mondai* (“problem”; the same goes for *toraburu*, “trouble”) is likely to pique the other party's curiosity. You may be stuck if you're asked what sort of trouble it is, and the other party may well feel entitled to ask, since you brought the subject up.

Just as “unavoidable circumstances” constitute a permissible reason for canceling or postponing an appointment, “a previous engagement” is almost always an acceptable reason for turning down an invitation. When you're invited by a colleague or a superior to go out for drinks after work and don't want to go, for instance, you needn't hurt anyone's feeling by being evasive or unduly blunt. Just say:

あいにく先約がございまして……

Ainiku senyaku ga gozaimashite ...

I'm afraid I have a previous engagement.

The standing “previous engagement” is a familiar dodge, of course, being universally available, but for all anyone knows you might actually have one. While the other person is essentially compelled to accept your excuse, it's polite to acknowledge the courtesy of the invitation. One effective way to do so is to request a rain check:

次の機会にはよろしくお願いたします。

Tsugi no kikai ni wa yoroshiku onegai itashimasu.

Let's do it another time.

I'm afraid I have to ask your indulgence

お聞き苦しい点もあるかと存じますが……

Okikigurushii ten mo aru ka to zanjimasu ga ...

I'm afraid I'll have to ask your indulgence ...

It's considered good form to strike a note of humility when you first address a meeting or a gathering of some sort. Call it a variation on the “aw shucks, folks” approach: you play up your own inadequacy as a preventive measure to keep listeners from expecting too much. The tone is apologetic:

風邪をひいておりまして、お聞き苦しい点もあるかと存じますが、ご容赦ください。

Kaze o hiite orimashite, okikigurushii ten mo aru ka to zanjimasu ga, goyōsha kudasai.

I've got a bit of a cold, and I'm afraid I'll have to ask your indulgence. I hope you'll pardon me.

or

わたくしは技術系の人間で、このような場でお話しするのは初めてでございます。お聞き苦しい点もあるかと存じますが……

Watakushi wa gijutsu-kei no ningen de, kono yō na ba de ohanashi suru no wa hajimete de gozaimasu. Okikigurushii ten mo aru ka to zanjimasu ga ...

I've always worked on the technical end of things, and this is the first time I've ever spoken at a gathering like this. I'm afraid I'll have to ask your indulgence.

The implication is that the speaker might be forgiven if the speech is less than riveting. These words are merely a polite formality, of course, and the speaker who utters them may go on to deliver an address that is the very model of wit and eloquence.

The following is an assortment of other standard lines to have on hand when you're addressing a meeting.

When handing out copies to provide listeners with relevant information:

ご判断の材料になればと存じまして……

Gohandan no zairyō ni nareba to zonjimashite ...

I thought perhaps this data might be worth considering.

When you're about to launch into a technical explanation:

専門用語で恐縮ですが……

Senmon-yōgo de kyōshuku desu ga ...

I'm afraid you'll have to bear with some technical terminology.

When you intend to present verbally only an outline of the matter at hand (having provided the listeners with a more detailed explanation on paper):

詳細はお手元のレポートをご覧ください。

Shōsai wa otemoto no repōto o goran kudasai.

Please refer to the report in front of you for the details.

When you want to call the listeners' attention to a particular point in order to prevent any misunderstanding:

それからついでに申しますと……

Sore kara tsuide ni mōshimasu to ...

While I'm at it, let me just say ...

When you're wrapping up your remarks:

以上、説明の至らない点多々あったかと存じますが、ご清聴ありがとうございました。

Ijō, setsumei no itaranai ten mo tata atta ka to zonjimasu ga, goseichō arigatō gozaimashita.

That's about it. I'm afraid there may be many relevant points that I've neglected to address, but I thank you for your kind attention.

We did absolutely everything we could, but

できるだけことはしたんですが……

Dekiru dake no koto wa shita n' desu ga ...

We did absolutely everything we could, but ...

Sometimes, in spite of your very best efforts, you just can't deliver the goods. You do have to deliver the bad news, though, and let the customer or the boss know that the situation has not yielded the hoped-for results. Don't fail to note that you gave it your best shot, using either the phrase above or the following one:

八方手を尽くしましたが……

Happō te o tsukushimashita ga ...

We exhausted every possibility, but ...

The standard explanations (or excuses) for failure to meet expectations tend to cite severe time pressures or material obstacles, such as budgetary constraints, as in the following examples:

できるだけことはしたんですが、なにぶんコストの問題がありまして……

Dekiru dake no koto wa shita n' desu ga, nanibun kosuto no mondai ga arimashite ...

We did absolutely everything we could, but after all, we kept running into cost problems.

八方手を尽くしましたが、なにぶん急なことだったもの
すから。

Happō te o tsukushimashita ga, nanibun kyū na koto datta mono desu kara.

We exhausted every possibility, but after all, it was a rush job.

In business, of course, results are everything. In the absence of results, excuses are as common as weeds, and there's no guarantee that yours will get a sympathetic hearing. If you are unfairly taken to task, you're entitled to defend yourself, but don't harp on the fact that you did your best—you've said so already, and you don't want to overemphasize that your best wasn't good enough. Instead, wait for an appropriate opening and say:

せめて事情だけでも聞いてください。

Semete jijō dake de mo kiite kudasai.

At least let me explain the circumstances.

Then calmly review the process that led to the disappointing outcome, relate the current situation, and indicate what can be done to improve things, in that order. Keep in mind that the ability to confront setbacks without losing one's head is the mark of a professional.

I'm afraid you've put your finger on it

痛いところを衝かれました。

Itai tokoro o tsukaremashita.

I'm afraid you've put your finger on it.

It's time again to make your periodic report to the customer regarding the project you're working on for her. After you've provided a brief outline of the situation, you give her a chance to comment or ask questions, and she proceeds to zero directly in on the weakest part of your program—the part you glossed over, hoping it would pass unnoticed. Ouch! Now you can say:

痛いところを衝かれました。

Itai tokoro o tsukaremashita.

I'm afraid you've put your finger on it.

You could also say:

まさにそこが問題点でありまして……

Masa ni soko ga mondai-ten de arimashite ...

That's just where the problem lies.

Or you could try to leaven the atmosphere with a little base flattery:

さすがは高山さん、鋭いご指摘です。

Sasuga wa Takayama-san, surudoï goshiteki desu.

It takes a keen eye like yours, Ms. Takayama, to see the situation so clearly.

When you're already aware of flaws or other points in your presentation that are likely to be addressed, it makes sense to be sure you're ready to answer for them. Nevertheless, it doesn't pay to be glib—you might inadvertently convey a tell-me-something-I-don't-already-know sort of impudence, which would only work against you. Make sure you clearly acknowledge the other party's wisdom in being meticulous about the details—don't let them leave thinking you might have let things slide if the problem hadn't been pointed out. Take charge:

痛いところを衝かれました。まさにそこがこの企画の問題点でありまして、これについては次のように私どもは考えております。

Itai tokoro o tsukaremashita. Masa ni soko ga kono kikaku no mondai-ten de arimashite, kore ni tsuite wa tsugi no yō ni watakushi-domo wa kangaete orimasu.

I'm afraid you've put your finger on it. That's just where the problem lies, and here's what we're thinking of doing about it.

This way, the client is credited with pointing out the problem, so it's out in the open, and now you're taking steps to deal with it. Everyone's happy, more or less.

REQUESTS

Could you spare me a little of your time?

ちょっとお時間をいただけますか。

Chotto ojikan o itadakemasu ka.

Could you spare me a little of your time?

When the time comes to relay information to or consult with one of the higher-ups at the office, you can't just thrust yourself into the other person's path as if you were asking directions from a passerby on the street. You have to obliquely inquire whether the circumstances would permit you a hearing:

ちょっとお時間をいただけますか。

Chotto ojikan o itadakemasu ka.

Could you spare me a little of your time?

The basic query *ojikan o itadakemasu ka* ("May I have some of your time?") constitutes an invaluable piece of business phraseology and can be adapted to serve a variety of functions and occasions. Here are two examples.

When you want to request a meeting with someone outside the firm:

ぜひお目にかかってお話ししたいのですが、お時間をいただけますか。

Zehi ome ni kakatte ohanashi shitai no desu ga, ojikan o itadakemasu ka.

I'd really like to get together and talk things over with you. Could you spare me a little of your time?

When concluding a visit to someone at another firm:

貴重なお時間をいただきましてありがとうございました。

Kichō na ojikan o itadakimashite arigatō gozaimashita.

Thank you very much for letting me have some of your precious time.

The same words, *ojikan o itadakemasu ka*, can also be used to convey an entirely different meaning. In this case the request is for *more* time, as in:

この件は即答いたしかねますので、お時間をいただけますか。

Kono ken wa sokutō itashikanemasu no de, ojikan o itadakemasu ka.

That's something that really can't be settled right on the spot.

Could you give me a little time to look into it?

The longer it takes to respond, of course, the longer the matter is left dangling, and the more likely you are to get a call from the other party pressing you for an answer. You, in turn, could try hauling out that key phrase once again:

もう少しお時間をいただけますか。

Mō sukoshi ojikan o itadakemasu ka.

Could I have a little more time?

Now, however, these words may carry the sound of someone dragging his feet.

I'm sorry to put you to the trouble

お手数をおかけします。

Otesū o okake shimasu.

I'm sorry to put you to the trouble.

Over the course of an ordinary working day, it's likely you will need to request a service or helping hand from one of your colleagues any number of times—this, among other reasons, is why people work together in offices. At these times it's essential to present your request in an appropriately polite manner. People can get very touchy about unscheduled requests, even simple ones delivered in the line of duty, unless the proper overtures are made. For the sake of continuing good relations, due consideration must be given to the other person's point of view. Then again, there's no call to grovel on the office floor every time you need a fax sent or a file delivered, either. Simply recite these magic words:

お手数をおかけします。

Otesū o okake shimasu.

I'm sorry to put you to the trouble.

This simple phrase can work wonders. You would do well to memorize it now and use it often—when approaching one of the higher-ups for advice on dealing with a problem, for example, or when on

the phone asking someone in another department to look something up for you.

A similar expression, and one you'll probably hear all the time around the office, is *osoreirimasu*, which could be variously translated as “pardon me for asking” or “if you please,” or sometimes as “thank you.” This phrase, like *otesū o okake shimasu*, often functions as a courteous formality attached to a question or request, as in:

恐れいりますが、その戸を締めてもらえますか。

Osoreirimasu ga, sono to o shimete moraemasu ka.

Would you mind closing that door, please?

The difference between these two expressions is worth noting. The latter, *osoreirimasu*, has a more perfunctory ring to it; it tends to come across as an obligatory formality. Moreover, *osoreirimasu*, as a statement of the speaker's feelings, represents an approach to the situation emphasizing one's own point of view. As noted above, it's essential to convey a concern for the other person's point of view, in light of the effort she's being asked to exert, and that is exactly the function that *otesū o okake shimasu* performs. Given this basic distinction between these two phrases, it's important to use the right one at the right time. Let's say you're winding up a visit to another firm and one of the employees there has put together some materials for you to take along when you leave. In this case, you may not have had to make any request, but you can leave a good impression by showing courteous appreciation for the service you've received:

お手数をおかけしました。

Otesū o okake shimashita.

I'm sorry to have put you to the trouble.

Whatever it takes

そこをなんとか……

Soko o nantoka ...

Whatever it takes ...

In the event you find yourself prevailing on a reluctant colleague to do a crucial and difficult favor, or in a situation where a customer or a supplier is balking at an important request, you may have to resort to abject begging. You might as well do it right:

そこをなんとか……けっして軽く考えているわけではございませんので。

Soko o nantoka ... Kesshite karuku kangaete iru wake de wa gozaimasen no de ...

Whatever it takes, please. Believe me, this is no laughing matter.

or

そうおっしゃらず、そこをなんとか……

Sō ossharazu, soko o nantoka ...

Please don't say that. Look, whatever you can do ...

No matter how many times you're refused, keep coming back, and pour on the pathos. You want to convey the impression that you're tottering at the edge of a mighty precipice (think of Mount Fuji) and the other person is your last and only hope of survival. Focus on the objective, have no shame, and you can win: for a good many people, a truly pathetic appeal for help is hard to refuse.

This strategy can be combined with other elements to yield a number of possible approaches:

The promise-of-reciprocation approach:

埋め合わせは必ずいたします。ですから今回だけは、ひとつ……

Umeawase wa kanarazu itashimasu. Desu kara konkai dake wa, hitotsu ...

I promise I'll return the favor. So just this once, please, whatever it takes ...

The soon-to-be-homeless approach:

ご承諾いただけませんと、わたくし、社に帰れませんので……

Goshōdaku itadakemasen to, watakushi, sha ni kaeremasen no de ...

If I can't get your okay on this, I won't be able to show my face at the office anymore.

The have-pity-on-the-little-guy approach, especially useful for someone from a small firm addressing someone (here a Mr. Kato) from a big corporation:

加藤さんのお力でなんとかしていただけると、今日まで信じてまいりました。加藤さんならきっとご理解いただけると……

Katō-san no ochikara de nantoka shite itadakeru to, konnichi made shinjite mairimashita. Katō-san nara kitto gorikai itadakeru to ...

Up to now I've believed that somehow you'd come through for us, Mr. Kato. I was sure that you were the one who would understand ...

Obviously, the idea is to emphasize and appeal to the other person's good side, implying that it would be unworthy of him—downright sinful—to turn you down.

Whenever it's convenient for you

ご都合にあわせます。

Gotsugō ni awasemasu.

Whenever it's convenient for you.

It's an established principle of business etiquette—when requesting a meeting or fixing the date for a meeting you've requested—that the other person's schedule takes precedence over other considerations. At such times, one of these phrases may come in handy:

ご都合のよい日をご指定ください。

Gotsugō no yoi hi o goshitei kudasai.

Just name a day that would be convenient for you.

わたくしどもは、中村様のご都合にあわせます。

Watakushi-domo wa, Nakamura-sama no gotsugō ni awasemasu.

We can accommodate your schedule, Mr. Nakamura.

お手すきのお時間がございましたら……

Otesuki no ojikan ga gozaimashitara ...

If there should be some particularly convenient time for you ...

Another approach is to politely propose a date yourself:

もし、おさしつかえなければ、4月21日ではいかがでしょうか。

Moshi, osashitsukae nakereba, shigatsu nijūichi-nichi de wa ikaga deshō ka.

If it wouldn't be too inconvenient, how would April 21 be?

The elaborately polite examples above convey a self-effacing attitude. The following one has a slightly more casual ring:

ご都合がよろしければ、4月21日、あるいは4月23日ではいかがでしょうか。

Gotsugō ga yoroshikereba, shigatsu nijūichi-nichi, aruiwa shigatsu nijūsan-nichi de wa ikaga deshō ka.

If you could fit it in, would either the 21st or the 23rd of April be all right?

On occasion, the task of arranging a meeting with someone might entail prevailing on a third party to introduce you or help smooth the way. If you actually need someone to act as an intermediary, the phrase to use is:

よろしくお取りなしてください。

Yoroshiku otorinashi kudasai.

Please intercede for me.

If you simply want to meet someone, presuming you know the third party well enough to ask the favor, you could say:

よろしくお引き合わせください。

Yoroshiku ohikiawase kudasai.

Please introduce me.

The expression *ohikiawase* ("introduce or bring together") is not to be confused with *ohikimawashi*, which probably sounds similar. The latter is used to make a different sort of request:

よろしくお引き回しをお願いします。

Yoroshiku ohikimawashi o onegai shimasu.

I hope you don't mind if I look to you for guidance.

This is the kind of thing a new employee might say to a more experienced colleague or upon being introduced to the person in charge of the account at a client firm.

Sorry to spring this on you, but

突然で悪いんだけど……
Totsuzen de warui n' da kedo ...
 Sorry to spring this on you, but ...

The privileges of seniority are reflected in the types of expressions favored by bosses and older employees when they address their subordinates and younger colleagues. When making a request, the higher-ups tend to dispense with elaborate phraseology and rituals of formal courtesy, simply because they're allowed to, unlike the rest of us. For instance, as noted elsewhere, the phrase *osoreirimasu ga* is a standard polite preface for impromptu requests made by ordinary mortals, but you won't hear that one from the boss. You're far more likely to hear one of these phrases:

突然で悪いんだけど……
Totsuzen de warui n' da kedo ...
 Sorry to spring this on you, but ...

忙しいところを悪いんだけど……
Isogashii tokoro o warui n' da kedo ...
 Sorry to interrupt you, but ...

突然で申し訳ないが……
Totsuzen de mōshiwake nai ga ...
 Sorry to be asking on such short notice, but ...

Any of these would generally be followed by a routine request, as in:

突然で悪いんだけど、この数字をちょっとチェックしてくれる？
Totsuzen de warui n' da kedo, kono sūji o chotto chekku shite kureru?
 Sorry to spring this on you, but could you check these figures for me?

忙しいところを悪いんだけど、ちょっとこれをコピーしてくれない？

Isogashii tokoro o warui n' da kedo, chotto kore o kopi shite kurenai?

Sorry to interrupt you, but could you make me a copy of this?

突然で申し訳ないが、今日は1時間ほど残業してほしいんだ。

Totsuzen de mōshiwake nai ga, kyō wa ichiji-kan hodo zangyō shite hoshii n' da.

Sorry to be asking on such short notice, but I need you to put in an hour or so of overtime today.

This is not to suggest that people with seniority are entirely exempt from the rules of etiquette. The introductory phrases above do convey a sense of courtesy, though not the self-humbling version of courtesy one usually encounters. Seniority be damned, it would be considered rude of any boss to make a sudden request without such a preface attached. Gone are the days when an office staff would put up some gruff old codger hollering *Oi, ocha* ("Hey, tea here!") at the female employees. Some senior types actually make an effort to sound sympathetic when asking their subordinates to do things for them:

面倒なことを頼むが、ひとつやってくれないか。
Mendō na koto o tanomu ga, hitotsu yatte kurenai ka.
 I know it's a pain, but would you take care of it for me?

君でないとわからないことだから。
Kimi de nai to wakaranai koto da kara.
 See, you're the only one who can handle this.

After having given the order and the employee has acknowledged it, he might say:

ご苦労だね。

Gokurō da ne.

It's a tough job (and I appreciate your doing it).

Sometimes a boss or a senior colleague will couch a request in euphemistic phraseology. A prominent example is the expression *tsuide no toki* ("when you have time"), as in:

ついでのと看でいいんだが、これを頼む。

Tsuide no toki de ii n' da ga, kore o tanomu.

When you have time, take care of this for me.

It wouldn't be a good idea to take these words literally. However courteous they sound, the conventional implication is that the speaker wants you to drop whatever you're doing and carry out the request.

CONSENTING TO A REQUEST

However poor my efforts may be

及ばずながら……

Oyobazunagara ...

However poor my efforts may be ...

People are subjected to all sorts of requests and demands in the business world, some bigger than others. When you have been asked to take on some particularly important task or a major job, you may need to express your willingness to do so in a formal and self-

deprecating manner. The same applies if you're given an important new assignment or a promotion. On all these occasions, modesty first:

及ばずながら、ご期待にそえますよう尽力いたします。

Oyobazunagara, gokitai ni soemasu yō jinryoku itashimasu.

However poor my efforts may be, I'll try to live up to your expectations.

or

微力ながらお役に立ちたいと存じます。

Biryoku nagara oyaku ni tachitai to zonjimasu.

Meager as my talents may be, I'll be glad to help out.

If you really want to get humble about it, you could trot out one of these:

至らない点もあるかと存じますが、全力を尽くす所存です。

Itaranai ten mo aru ka to zonjimasu ga, zenryoku o tsukusu shozon desu.

I'm afraid I may not be equal to the job in some respects, but I intend to give my all.

or

行き届かぬところもあるかと思いますが、私のようなものでよろしければお力に……

Yukitodokanu tokoro mo aru ka to omoimasu ga, watashi no yō na mono de yoroshikereba ochikara ni ...

If you're sure that, with all my shortcomings, I'm the person for the job, then I'll do my best.

Hokey as they may sound, the examples above are for use in formal situations. Nobody talks that way under normal circumstances. To convey your enthusiastic consent in a more casual situation, you could use any of the following:

私であれば、喜んで……

Watashi de yokereba, yorokonde ...

If I'm really the one you want, I'll be glad to.

お安いご用ですよ。

Oyasui goyō desu yo.

No trouble at all.

そういうことでしたら、ぜひお任せください。

Sō iu koto deshitaru, zehi omakase kudasai.

If that's all it is, by all means, leave it to me.

いつでもおっしゃってください。

Itsudemo osshatte kudasai.

Certainly, anytime at all.

REFUSING A REQUEST

Bear with me this time

勘弁してください。

Kanben shite kudasai.

Bear with me this time.

Imagine you're faced with a regular customer who's pressing you to quote him a lower price, despite the fact that you've already met him more than halfway. You've conceded most of your profit margin and yet the customer adamantly and unreasonably continues to insist that you go lower still. He won't give up, but you can't possibly give another inch, and there's nothing to be done about

it. That's the moment to heave a desperate, audible sigh and plead for mercy:

勘弁してください。

Kanben shite kudasai.

Bear with me this time.

Nobody likes to take no for an answer, and it's especially hard to refuse a regular client, even when the request is clearly unreasonable. Poorly handled, a refusal can easily cause resentment and much worse—it might end up costing you the account. Therefore, no matter how painful it is to contain your indignation, it's imperative that you refrain from even a hint of criticism of, or displeasure at, the customer's bare-knuckled tactics. To the absolute bitter end, play it humbly:

私どもといたしましては、これが精一杯のところでございます。

Watakushi-domo to itashimashite wa, kore ga sei-ippai no tokoro de gozaimashite ...

From our point of view, this is really as far we can possibly go.

掛け値なしでこれだけでございます。

Kake-ne nashi de kore dake de gozaimasu.

It's no more than an honest price, nothing added.

どうか事情をお察してください。

Dōka jijō o osasshi kudasai.

Please, try and understand our situation.

If, despite your most stoic forbearance and gentle words, you're still unable to come to reasonable terms with this most persistent customer, there's one more trick left in the bag—play for time:

では一両日お時間をいただけないでしょうか。
Dewa ichiryōjitsu ojikan o itadakenai deshō ka.
 Well then, could you possibly give me a day or two?

Your request implies that you'll try to find a way to give him what he wants, but you can actually use the time to consult your superiors and try to find some other way out. Besides, if you give the other guy a little time to cool off, he might realize he's been out of line and come around to your way of thinking.

It's a matter of company policy

社の方針ですので……
Sha no hōshin desu no de ...
 It's a matter of company policy.

It's not particularly difficult to turn down a request when you're on equal footing with the other party or dealing from a position of relative strength. You certainly wouldn't want to sound high and mighty about it, of course, but if you choose the right expression you can effectively get the message across, either directly or indirectly, without giving undue offense. Suppose, for instance, someone is trying to put the squeeze on you for special treatment or an unreasonable discount. You can decline without ruffling anyone's feathers by saying:

社の方針ですので、どうかご容赦ください。
Sha no hōshin desu no de, dōka goyōsha kudasai.
 I'm afraid we simply can't—it's a matter of company policy.

Let's say you're being hounded by one of those high-pressure sales people—don't mince words:

あいにくですが、今回は見送らせていただきます。
Ainiku desu ga, konkai wa miokurasete itadakimasu.
 Sorry, but I'll pass this time.

or

せっかくですが、今回は見送らせていただきます。
Sekkaku desu ga, konkai wa miokurasete itadakimasu.
 Sorry you've gone to all the trouble, but we'll pass this time.

If you'd rather offer an excuse than just say no, try this one:

すでにほかの業者さんと約束しておりまして……
Sude ni hoka no gyōsha-san to yakusoku shite orimashite ...
 I'm afraid we've already made arrangements with another dealer.

Or you can simply toss out this all-purpose wet blanket:

ちょっとむずかしいですね。
Chotto muzukashii desu ne.
 That would be difficult.

If it seems more appropriate to take an indirect approach, you can clearly communicate your refusal without ever having to state it in so many words. Conventional usage favors this indirect strategy—drop a few hints and let the person getting the bad news fill in the rest. There are plenty of expressions available that are well suited to it. Here's a small sampling:

けっこうなお話とは思いますが……
Kekkō na ohanashi to wa omoimasu ga ...
 What you've told me is all very interesting, but ...

お役に立ちたいのはやまやまですが……
Oyaku ni tachitai no wa yamayama desu ga ...
 I certainly wish I could help you, but ...

いろいろお骨折りいただきましたが……

Iroiro ohone-ori itadakimashita ga ...

It's been kind of you to go to all this trouble, but ...

当方には身にあまるお申し出でございますが……

Tōhō ni wa mi ni amaru omōshide de gozaimasu ga ...

Your offer is more than generous, but ...

ご事情はお察ししますが……

Gojijō wa osasshi shimasu ga ...

I understand your situation, but ...

Is that an order?

それは業務命令ですか。

Sore wa gyōmu-meirei desu ka.

Is that an order?

If a person seeks employment in the business world and accepts the status of employee, it goes without saying that she's expected take direction from and execute the commands of her superiors in the workplace. But what about those times when a boss wants something done that just isn't part of the job? How do you say no?

Consider this scenario: the head of the section you work in is someone who takes particular delight in going out with the gang for drinks after work, while you yourself aren't nearly as keen on that sort of thing, having long since endured enough karaoke for one lifetime. One day the boss announces:

金曜日に課の親睦会をやりたいたから、みんな出席してくれ。

Kin'yōbi ni ka no shinboku-kai o yaritai kara, minna shusseki shite kure.

I'd like to have a little section get-together on Friday, and I want you all to come.

It so happens you have something else planned for Friday night. If you have to go out drinking with the people in your section, you'll have to cancel your other plans. That would be more than even you could bear, so you fire back with:

課長、それは業務命令ですか。

Kachō, sore wa gyōmu-meirei desu ka.

Is that an order, boss?

There, now you've shown him, now he knows who's the boss on Friday night. He certainly can't order you to give up your precious free time, so there's nothing he can say. On the other hand, no matter how good a time you have on Friday night, Monday morning will come around eventually, and you know who'll be the boss then. Maybe you spoke out a bit too quickly—maybe you should have thought this through more carefully.

As a peremptory comeback to a boss who acts as if the employees exist to serve his every whim, *sore wa gyōmu-meirei desu ka* could be an effective shot across the bow, but it's also the kind of hardball remark that tends to engender ill will. If you're prepared to live with the consequences, fine; if not, you'd better take a different tack.

Let's go back to the original scenario. This time, after the boss announces his plans to monopolize everyone's Friday night, you make your apologies and fish up a polite (possibly fictional) excuse, such as:

あいにく金曜日は先約がございます。

Ainiku kin'yōbi wa sen'yaku ga gozaimasu.

I'm afraid I have a previous commitment on Friday.

このところ体調をくずしております。
Kono tokoro taichō o kuzushite orimasu.
 I have to take it easy for health reasons.

日本語の教室があり、今週は私がスピーチをすることにな
 っております。
Nihongo no kyōshitsu ga ari, konshū wa watashi ga supichi o suru
koto ni natte orimasu.
 I've got Japanese class and I have to make a speech this week.

Nobody's going to dispute the validity of your excuse, provided you don't make it too imaginative. This way, you can keep your plans and still maintain cordial relations at the office. Just make sure that you don't run into the gang while you're out painting the town on your own Friday night.

WITHHOLDING COMMENT

On my own authority

私の一存では……
Watakushi no ichizon de wa ...
 On my own authority ...

A knack for quick thinking is always an asset, but when a client asks you a question and you don't know the answer, it wouldn't be smart to just improvise. In the same way, it wouldn't be wise if, in the midst of an important negotiation, you took it upon yourself to single-handedly make decisions you had no authority to make.

As an employee, you represent the firm, and in your business dealings with people outside the firm your words are generally taken to represent the official company position—there's no going back later to explain that you were only speaking for yourself. That's why, when presented with a question you can't answer or a decision that exceeds your authority, the best policy for the time being is to refrain from taking a position, saying:

私の一存ではお答えいたしかねますので、少しお時間を
 いただけますか。

Watakushi no ichizon de wa okotae itashikanemasu no de, sukoshi
ojikan o itadakemasu ka.

I'm afraid I really can't answer that on my own authority. Can you give me a little time?

This is far preferable to pretending to be able to answer the question and making some equivocal statement to disguise the fact that you're in over your head, which can lead to endless disputes later on over what you did or didn't say.

A couple of alternative expressions that perform the same function are:

あいにくその件は、私にはわかりかねます。
Ainiku sono ken wa, watakushi ni wa wakarikanemasu.
 I'm afraid that's something that I myself don't know enough about.

申し訳ありません。担当の者でないとお答えできません。
Mōshiwake arimasen. Tantō no mono de nai to okotae dekimasen.
 I'm very sorry, but that's a question only the person in charge can answer.

Of course, if you left it at that you'd sound indifferent and distinctly unhelpful, so it's best to follow up with something that shows you intend to render satisfaction, such as:

ただ今、係の者に問い合わせさせていただきます。
Tadaiima, kakari no mono ni toiwasete mairimasu.
 Let me go and ask the person in charge.

or

上の者と相談いたしまして、あらためてご返事いたします。
Ue no mono to sōdan itashimashite, aratamete gohenji itashimasu.
 I'll be glad to give you an answer once I've had a chance to consult with my superiors.

I'll take it into consideration

検討いたします。
Kentō itashimasu.
 I'll take it into consideration.

You can't always be expected to know what to do when someone makes you a business proposal or presents you with a suggestion or piece of advice. You may want to think it over; very often that's the wisest course. The expression to use is:

検討いたします。
Kentō itashimasu.
 I'll take it into consideration.

There are a couple of variations on this basic phrase that shouldn't be confused with one another. The first variation is fairly straightforward, conveying the idea that the speaker intends to closely examine the pros and cons of the matter without delay:

さっそく検討いたします。
Sassoku kentō itashimasu.
 I'll take it into immediate consideration.

The second, grammatically tortuous variation (which nevertheless conveys the same literal meaning as the basic phrase *kentō itashimasu*) tends to be employed as a euphemism for polite refusal.

検討させていただきます。
Kentō sasete itadakimasu.
 I'll take it into consideration.

With these words, the speaker is often implying that he probably won't be giving the matter much further consideration. It may well be that he's already dismissed what he's just been told, having heard the other person out just for the sake of politeness or curiosity; knowing that it would be rude to flatly reject the idea on the spot, he's simply holding his tongue. This is the way business people often deal with unwelcome requests, and it's also a well-known strategy for responding to well-intentioned advice that, under the circumstances, can't be followed.

Whichever version of the phrase you use, the effect is to leave the listener in the dark for the time being. If it's a request that's been presented, these words don't clearly let the other person know whether to hold out hope or give up and look elsewhere. For that reason, politeness requires you to convey your answer in unequivocal terms at the very next opportunity that presents itself, either in person or over the phone. Start out this way:

ご依頼の件は検討いたしましたか……
Goirai no ken wa kentō itashimashita ga ...
 I've considered your request carefully ...

or

ご助言の件は検討いたしましたか……
Gojogen no ken wa kentō itashimashita ga ...
 I've considered your advice carefully ...

or

ご提案の件は検討いたしましたか……

Goteian no ken wa kentō itashimashita ga ...
I've considered your proposal carefully ...

If the answer is no, say so without further delay, and don't forget to add a courteous apology:

ご依頼の件は検討いたしました。今回は見送らせていただきます。まことに残念ですが、ご容赦くださいますようお願いいたします。

Goirai no ken wa kentō itashimashita ga, konkai wa miokurasete itadakimasu. Makoto ni zannen desu ga, goyōsha kudasaimasu yō onegai itashimasu.

I've considered your request carefully, but I'm afraid I'll have to pass this time. I'm sorry to disappoint you, and I hope you understand.

You'll be expected to provide a reason for your refusal, so be prepared to explain.

Let's just wait and see what happens

少し様子を見てみましょう。
Sukoshi yōsu o mite mimashō.
Let's just wait and see what happens.

For some people, at least, the notion of a business executive is associated with decisiveness. Be that as it may, the Japanese business world is home to plenty of so-called executives whose employees have to pressure them into making decisions. Often enough, the response to such pressure may take the form of one of these phrases:

少し様子を見てみましょう。
Sukoshi yōsu o mite mimashō.
Let's just wait and see what happens.

ちょっとペンディングにしておこう。
Chotto pendingu ni shite okō.
Let's leave the matter pending for a while.

事態の推移を今しばらく見守って……
Jitai no suii o ima shibaraku mimamotte ...
Let's wait and see how the situation develops.

The latter expression is most famously associated with do-nothing politicians, but it's definitely heard in business circles as well. The attitude it reflects is thought by some to represent the wisdom of the seasoned veteran, who treads slowly and lightly where fools rush in. After all, the thinking goes, the vagaries of business—fluctuating interest rates and exchange rates, wily maneuvers by one's rivals—are impossible to foresee; the future, good or bad, is impenetrable to even the sharpest eye. Therefore, they say, in a situation where you can't decide which course to follow the safest thing is to stay where you are. Based on this type of reasoning, it's not necessarily true that those who keep falling back on the *sukoshi yōsu o mite miyō* approach are lazy, indecisive, or dull-witted; in their own world, they're the enlightened ones.

EXPRESSING DISAGREEMENT

With all due respect

お言葉ではございますが……

Okotoba de wa gozaimasu ga ...

With all due respect ...

Harmony is bliss, but there are times when a person just can't agree with what's been said and feels compelled to voice an opposing view. As a preface to the statement of a contrary position, depending on the situation, this phrase might serve:

お言葉ではございますが……

Okotoba de wa gozaimasu ga ...

With all due respect ...

This is not an expression to toss around indiscriminately, however. For some people, it has a harsh ring; it's probably not the words themselves—the language is both formal and, well, respectful—but the fact that they signal opposition. It would seem the Japanese business world in general is painfully unaccustomed to people disagreeing with each other out loud, however respectfully. The use of this phrase can convey the impression that no effort is being made to soften the shock of contradiction and may even suggest that the speaker is willing to risk a falling out. Obviously, this is not one to use on cherished customers and other regular associates. It's probably best reserved for use in in-house discussions and brainstorming sessions, occasions when it's acceptable to let fly with all sorts of opinions and ideas.

There may come a day when you want to try out a phrase like this

on your boss when taking issue with some dubious instructions on a particular business matter. Do so with utmost care. You're playing with fire to begin with, so don't make matters worse by interrupting him in mid-sentence with a fiery *okotoba de wa gozaimasu ga*—that would almost certainly push him over the edge. Instead, let him exhaust his argument thoroughly, and when you're sure he's finished (or at least ready to take a breather), start out with one of these:

差し出がましいようですが……

Sashide-gamashii yō desu ga ...

I know this might sound a bit forward of me, but ...

お言葉を返すようで心苦しいのですが……

Okotoba o kaesu yō de kokorogurushii no desu ga ...

I would hate to sound presumptuous for saying this, but ...

けっしてお言葉を返すわけではありませんが……

Kesshite okotoba o kaesu wake de wa arimasen ga ...

I certainly don't intend any disrespect by this, but ...

With one of these phrases, you're still in the safety zone. Probably the only time when you could get away with saying *okotoba de wa gozaimasu ga* to your boss would be when defending yourself against an unfair accusation or a harsh criticism that's based on a misunderstanding of the facts. Otherwise, steer clear.

I certainly appreciate what you're saying

おっしゃることはよくわかります。

Ossharu koto wa yoku wakarimasu.

I certainly appreciate what you're saying.

Even if a client or customer has taken an utterly unreasonable position, you have to state your opposition in a way that minimizes the possibility of exacerbating the situation. One way of doing this is to start out by clearly acknowledging the other person's point of view:

おっしゃることはよくわかります。

Ossharu koto wa yoku wakarimasu.

I certainly appreciate what you're saying.

お気持ちはよくわかります。

Okimochi wa yoku wakarimasu.

I definitely understand how you feel.

たしかにその通りだと存じます。

Tashika ni sono tōri da to zonjimasu.

Without a doubt, it's just as you've said.

なるほどお客様のおっしゃることはごもっともです。

Naruhodo okyaku-sama no ossharu koto wa gomottomo desu.

The situation is indeed just exactly as you've described it.

Whether or not you actually consider the other party's viewpoint valid is an entirely different matter, of course, and one best kept private. The idea is to open with an ingratiating stroke aimed at putting the listener in a mood to entertain a different point of view. Pulling off a graceful transition into the latter is the second part of this one-two approach:

おっしゃることはよくわかります。ただ私どもといたしましては……

Ossharu koto wa yoku wakarimasu. Tada, watakushi-domo to itashimashite wa ...

I certainly appreciate what you're saying. It's just that, speaking from our point of view ...

お気持ちはよくわかります。たしかにそういう見方もございますが……

Okimochi wa yoku wakarimasu. Tashika ni sō iu mikata mo gozaimasu ga ...

I definitely understand how you feel. That's certainly one valid way to look at the situation, but ...

たしかにその通りだと存じます。ただ、こういう見方もあるのではないのでしょうか。

Tashika ni sono tōri da to zonjimasu. Tada, kō iu mikata mo aru no de wa nai deshō ka.

Without a doubt, it's just as you've said. Only, I wonder whether it might not also be possible to look at it this way: ...

なるほどお客様のおっしゃることはごもっともです。しかし、このようにさせていただけばもっとご満足いただけるのではないのでしょうか。

Naruhodo okyaku-sama no ossharu koto wa gomottomo desu. Shikashi, kono yō ni sasete itadakeba motto gomanzoku itadakeru no de wa nai deshō ka.

The situation is indeed just exactly as you've described it. And yet, it seems to me perhaps you might be even happier in the end if we were to handle it this way: ...

If there's a hint of flattery in your approach, all the better to prepare the way for your own position, the essence of which is to make what's already good even better. The thing to remember is, you can avoid giving needless offense by withholding your own views until you've first paid the obligatory tribute to the other person's ideas. Then, when you finally get around to your opinion, you can more or less casually mention your doubts or dissent. Here's one more example:

お話を伺って大変勉強になりました。基本的には賛成ですが、二三、感じたことをお話ししてよろしいでしょうか。

Ohanashi o ukagatte taihen benkyō ni narimashita. Kihon-teki ni wa sansei desu ga, ni-san, kanjita koto o ohanashi shite yoroshii deshō ka.

What you've said is very enlightening. Basically, I agree with you, but there are just a couple of things I'd like to talk over, if I might.

I wonder if I might ask a question?

ひとつ質問してもよろしいですか。

Hitotsu shitsumon shite mo yoroshii desu ka.

I wonder if I might ask a question?

Due to a pervasive aversion to spontaneity that characterizes most official venues of communication in the Japanese business world, in-house meetings can resemble liturgical pageants in their solemn predictability. Let's suppose, however, that you work for a firm where some meetings include actual give-and-take. Let's say you're at such a meeting and you happen to disagree with a point just made by someone else in attendance. Before you state your own view (the correct view, needless to say), the rules say you must first seek and be granted permission to speak. One of these phrases will serve:

ひとつ質問してもよろしいですか。

Hitotsu shitsumon shite mo yoroshii desu ka.

I wonder if I might ask a question?

ちょっとよろしいですか。

Chotto yoroshii desu ka.

Excuse me, may I say something?

二三、確認させていただきたいのですが……

Ni-san, kakunin sasete itadakitai no desu ga ...

There are a couple of things perhaps you could clear up for me.

Beyond enabling you to take the floor, an expression such as one of these performs two functions: it directs the focus of the discussion toward the points you're going to challenge and also signals that you're about to take issue with something that's already been said. You can continue by directing attention back to the remarks you disagree with, and then—only then—weigh in on the other side. Suppose, for instance, you're going to challenge some dubious statement made by a colleague named Murata. You could say:

ただいま村田さんは_____とおっしゃいましたが、私は反対の立場です。

Tadaima Murata-san wa _____ to osshaimashita ga, watashi wa hantai no tachiba desu.

Just now Mr. Murata said _____, but I take the opposite view.

or

ただいま村田さんにご指摘なさいましたが、私は反対の立場です。

Tadaima Murata-san wa _____ to goshiteki nasaimashita ga, watashi wa hantai no tachiba desu.

We've just heard Mr. Murata make the point that _____, but I take the opposite view.

or

ただいまの村田さんのご意見には、問題点がひとつあります。

Tadaima no Murata-san no goiken ni wa, mondai-ten ga hitotsu arimasu.

There's one problem with the position just stated by Mr. Murata.

In those cases when the in-house meeting is not an occasion for elaborate rituals of politeness, you needn't be equivocal about contradicting someone, though you must always be at least as circum-

spect as you would in English. Be clear when stating your own position and explain your reasons in the simplest and most direct terms possible. Above all, make sure you have a firm and accurate grasp of the views you're speaking up against, to avoid the embarrassment of working yourself into a lather over something you only half-understood.

GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

There's one little thing that bothers me

ちょっと気になったんだが……

Chotto ki ni natta n' da ga ...

There's one little thing that bothers me, though.

Advice and instructions from a boss to an employee tend to be conveyed in language far less formal than that used when a message is going in the opposite direction. A section head looking over a report submitted by one of the people under him might use one of these phrases:

ちょっと気になったんだが……

Chotto ki ni natta n' da ga ...

There's one little thing that bothers me, though.

欲を言えば……

Yoku o ieba ...

What I would really to see is ...

These expressions serve as gentle lead-ins to a request for further exertions. The speaker is implying that, while not quite up to standard yet, the employee's work merits approval in some respects, or at least this is an acknowledgment of the efforts made so far. It would do little for the employee's morale, after all, to summarily dismiss the fruits of her hard work as unacceptable. A lighter touch can take some of the sting out of having her efforts found wanting, as in:

ちょっと気になったんだが、この経費はもう少し削る必要があるそうだね。

Chotto ki ni natta n' da ga, kono keihi wa mō sukoshi kezuru hitsuyō ga arisō da ne.

There's one little thing that bothers me, though. These expenses need to be reduced just a bit more.

いいね、よくやってくれた。ただ欲を言えば、ここのところはこうしたほうが……

Ii ne, yoku yatte kureta. Tada yoku o ieba, koko no tokoro wa kō shita hō ga ...

Ah, very good, you've done a nice job. But what would really make this great is to take this part here ...

The second example above demonstrates the two-step method: first show some appreciation for the employee's efforts thus far, then indicate the areas that remain in need of attention. Given this kind of gentle handling, the employee can be expected to accept the boss's new instructions without any hard feelings.

On occasion, however, the kid glove treatment may not be warranted. It's an unlucky employee who submits a report for review and hears this:

もっといいやり方はないものかな。

Motto ii yarikata wa nai mono ka na.

There must be a better way of doing this.

These words indicate that the work is seriously deficient—bad enough for the boss to skip the customary words of encouragement and reach for the sledge hammer. In this case the employee's whole approach may have to be revised. Still, even that probably wouldn't be as bad as being shouldered aside while the boss steps in and takes over the job himself, saying something like:

よし、あとはおれがやる。
Yoshi, ato wa ore ga yaru.
 Okay, I'll take over from here.

Make sure to check it

ちゃんとチェックしといて。
Chanto chekku shitoite.
 Make sure to check it.

There are all sorts of everyday Japanese expressions that incorporate words and fragmented bits of words that were once English, and the business world in particular is rife with this sort of hybrid phraseology. If the existence of such expressions represents a bridge between the two languages, it must be a suspension bridge: once across, the grammatical roles, distinctive pronunciation, and varieties of meaning that give a word its identity in English all tend to be suspended. Whatever's left is reinterpreted under the dominion of Japanese-language patterns and conventions and generally emerges all but unrecognizable to English speakers who knew that word back home before it left Kansas.

Nevertheless, there are a few English-derived terms that retain at least some of the flavor of their origins. Consider some of the various uses of the familiar phrase *chekku suru*, from the English verb "check":

この契約書をチェックするようにたのまれた。
Kono keiyaku-sho o chekku suru yō ni tanomareta.
 I've been asked to check over this contract.

日の丸社の動きをチェックしてくれ。
Hinomaru-sha no ugoki o chekku shite kure.
 Check and see what Hinomaru (a rival firm) is up to, will you?

スケジュールをチェックしといて。
Sukejūru o chekku shitoite.
 Check your schedule, would you?

In the first example, *chekku suru* means something like "look over (something) to make sure it's okay." In the second, it means "investigate or look into." In the third example, the meaning is "consult," and here both the Japanese sentence and the translation are identically ambiguous: depending on the context, the message conveyed could be either "consult your schedule to confirm a standing appointment" or "consult your schedule to see if a given period of time is open." Here's one more example demonstrating the broad range of usage that applies to *chekku suru*:

おれ、秘書の川村さんをチェックしてるんだ。
Ore, hisho no Kawamura-san o chekku shite 'ru n' da.
 I've been checking out that secretary, Ms. Kawamura.

Japanese business talk is full of phrases featuring "English" borrowings, due in part to the pseudo-cosmopolitan cachet attached to such terminology in some circles. What follows is only a meager sampling:

コールバックしてくれる？
Kōru-bakku shite kureru?
 Would you call me back?

アポを取っというて。

Apo o tottoite.

Set up an appointment.

リアクションを見といてくれ。

Riakushon o mitoite kure.

Keep an eye out and watch their reaction.

エクスキューズを考えというて。

Ekusukyūzu o kangaetoite.

Think up an excuse.

オフレコにしというて。

Ofu-reko ni shitoite.

Let's keep this off the record (confidential).

Put your heart into it

気を入れてやってくれ。

Ki o irete yatte kure.

Put your heart into it.

The section chief has just unveiled an important new project and now, to give it a proper launching, he wants to whip up the troops into a frenzy of exertion. His impassioned appeal for best efforts all around finds expression in one of the following phrases:

ここはひとつ、気を入れてやってくれ。

Koko wa hitotsu, ki o irete yatte kure.

All right now, let's see you really put your heart into it.

ここはひとつ、本腰を入れてやってくれ。

Koko wa hitotsu, hongoshi o irete yatte kure.

All right now, I want you to really give it all you've got.

Next, one of the employees who's caught the spirit (or who wants to curry favor with the boss) takes up the cry:

よし、みんな気合を入れていこうぜ。

Yoshi, minna kiai o irete ikō ze.

All right, guys, let's fire up!

or

そうだ、気を引き締めていこう。

Sō da, ki o hikishimete ikō.

Yeah, let's get tough!

Soon the whole section is ablaze with fiery zeal, every last woman and man pledged to make the new project a brilliant success—another triumph for enlightened phraseology.

The basic phrase *ki o ireru* (“to put one's heart into it” or “do something in earnest”) is also frequently employed to exhort an employee who's judged to be neglecting his work or not taking it seriously enough. The boss might say:

どうしたんだ。もっと気を入れてやらないとだめじゃないか。
Dō shita n' da. Motto ki o irete yaranai to dame ja nai ka.

What's the matter with you? You'd better get serious about what you're doing.

At the heart of all the key phrases in this section is *ki* (“spirit”). While *ki o ireru* and *ki o hikishimeru* (“to get tough or brace oneself for action”) represent positive things you can do with your *ki*, there are negative things as well. Here are three:

気をちらす

ki o chirasu

to be distracted or unable to concentrate

氣をとられる

ki o torareru

to lose one's focus or be distracted

気を抜く

ki o nuku

to lose one's drive or zest

The latter phrase might be used by the boss, once again chewing someone out for making a careless mistake:

気を抜いているから、こういう単純なミスをするんだ。しっかりしろ。

Ki o nuite iru kara, kō iu tanjun na misu o suru n' da. Shikkari shiro.
You're losing your edge—that's why you let an easy one like this get by you. Snap out of it!

REPRIMANDS

You, of all people

ブラウン君ともあろうものが……

Buraun-kun to mo arō mono ga ...

You, of all people, Brown.

Now and then, even the most conscientious of us is apt to slip up. When your turn comes around it may come as a shock, since your overall track record is doubtless exemplary. In any case it probably won't escape the notice of your boss, who will certainly bring the matter to your attention:

ブラウン君ともあろうものが、こんなミスをするとは信じられん。いったいどうしたんだ。

Buraun-kun to mo arō mono ga, konna misu o suru to wa shinjiraren. Ittai dō shita n' da.

I can hardly believe that you, of all people, Brown, dropped the ball like this. What in god's name is going on?

Lucky for you you're not the section chief. When he comes in for a scolding from his superior, the weight of his responsibilities will probably be used to grind his face in it, as in:

君、課長ともあろうものがそんな弱気なことでどうする。いやしくも管理者なら……

Kimi, kachō to mo arō mono ga sonna yowaki na koto de dō suru. Iyashiku mo kanri-sha nara ...

You, the section head, of all people, how can you be such a lightweight? If you were any kind of a manager at all ...

Both of the examples above convey two messages at once: the boss is both delivering a reprimand for blundering or carelessness and at the same time expressing disappointment that the employee has failed to measure up to expectations. The latter message may be intended as a backhanded form of positive motivation, implying that the employee is being held to a higher standard due to her superior abilities or the importance of her position. On the other hand, these words could also have a nasty, sarcastic edge, suggesting that this one screw-up has confirmed long-held doubts and proven that the employee's abilities had obviously been overrated. In this sense, a simple reprimand like this can have far more impact than half an hour of ranting and raving—particularly when the target is someone with otherwise strong credentials and, up to now, a presumably bright future.

The tactic of emphasizing the unexpectedness of seeing a job botched underlies the frequent usage of these expressions as well:

君らしくもない。
Kimi-rashiku mo nai.
 This just isn't like you.

まさか君が、こんなミスをしでかすとは夢にも思わなかったよ。

Masaka kimi ga, konna misu o shidekasu to wa yume ni mo omowanakatta yo.

It never occurred to me that you would have messed things up like this, not even in my wildest dreams.

A judicious boss might also sound a note of consolation by appealing directly to the employee's pride:

君の実力はこの程度じゃないはず。
Kimi no jitsuryoku wa kono teido ja nai hazu.
 I ought to be able to expect more from someone of your abilities.

If you keep this up

こんなことがつづくようなら……
Konna koto ga tsuzuku yō nara ...
 If you keep this up ...

There's a whole armory of sharp-edged phrases—some lethal, some not—available to a boss taking an employee to task for bungling his duties. One of the more menacing of these is frequently wielded thus:

こんなことがつづくようなら、私にも考えがある。
Konna koto ga tsuzuku yō nara, watashi ni mo kangae ga aru.
 If you keep this up, I'll be forced to do something about it.

If you hear these words, alarm bells should ring within. Your livelihood could be in jeopardy; if not, perhaps a demotion is being contemplated, possibly a downgrade to some meaningless and woebegone sinecure—the dreaded desk by the window. At the very least, the prospect of a resoundingly negative personnel evaluation may be in the offing.

If whatever mistake you've made provokes this kind of rebuke, it must have been a serious transgression. A trivial slip-up would ordinarily meet with a more tolerant response, such as:

今回は初めてだから仕方がないが……
Konkai wa hajimete da kara shikata ga nai ga ...
 Well, you're new at this, and that can't be helped.

Serious blunders fall into another category, however, and are dealt with far more severely. Watch out if you hear something like this:

君はいつもこんないいかげんなことをやっているのか。
Kimi wa itsumo konna iikagen na koto o yatte iru no ka.
 Is this your normal way of doing things—screwing up like this?

This type of comment (it's not really a question) strongly suggests that the speaker has lost faith in you. Even worse would be to hear something like this:

ほかの人にもそんな態度をとっているのか。
Hoka no hito ni mo sonna taido o totte iru no ka.
 Is this the way you act around everyone?

Now you've got the boss feeling sorry for himself—he only tolerates you because he's such a patient and understanding guy (right!), and look how you've repaid his kindness. You'd better try and win back his trust while you still can, because from here it's not too far downhill to the direst expressions of outright dismissal:

やる気がないんだったら辞めてもらってもいいんだぞ。
Yaru ki ga nai n' dattara yamete moratte mo ii n' da zo.
 If you don't feel like doing your job, you can always quit, you know.

首を洗って待ってるんだな。
Kubi o aratte matte 'ru n' da na.
 Prepare for the worst. You'll be hearing about this.

もう会社に来るな。
Mō kaisha ni kuru na.
 Don't bother coming into work anymore.

Saying you're sorry won't cut it

すみませんですむと思うか。
Sumimasen de sumu to omou ka.
 Saying you're sorry won't cut it.

Beating up on the hired help may be thought by some to be just one more part of the job of being a boss, but it takes a certain level of discernment to be effective at it. A supervisor can't afford to coddle an employee he happens to be fond of or is grooming for an important post in the future, or she'll never learn how demanding the job really is. At the same time, if he's overly critical the employee is apt to lose confidence or grow resentful at the harsh medicine she's being made to take for her own good. The question of just how heavy or light a touch to use when bringing someone into line is a perplexing one for which there are no ready-made answers.

Two frequently heard and thoroughly typical expressions of reprimand are:

すみませんですむと思うか。
Sumimasen de sumu to omou ka.
 Saying you're sorry won't cut it.

and

いったい何を考えているんだ。
Ittai nani o kangaete iru n' da.
 What the hell's the matter with you?

The first of these emphasizes the seriousness of a mistake that affects business—unlike a social or personal lapse, it can't be erased with a mere apology. The second example, for which a more literal translation might be “What in the world are you thinking of?” isn't really a question but a blunt admonition to shake off all distractions and earnestly concentrate on the task at hand. This is the kind of phrase that's often delivered in the heat of the moment, when people tend to fall back on clichés.

When the reading of the riot act is directed at a veteran employee, it might include one of the following:

何年この仕事をやってるんだ。
Nannen kono shigoto o yatte 'ru n' da.
 How many years have you been here (at this job)?

いつまでも新人のつもりでいるんじゃない。
Itsu made mo shinjin no tsumori de iru n' ja nai.
 You can't keep making these rookie mistakes forever.

The first example is a purely rhetorical question. It implies that, given the extent of his experience, the employee ought to know better, and this is expected to get him to show greater discretion in the future. While it may sound demeaning, the second expression is supposed to accomplish the same thing.

APOLOGIES

There's no excuse for what I've done

返す言葉もございません。

Kaesu kotoba mo gozaimasen.

There's no excuse for what I've done.

When a client confronts you with a serious mistake you've made or presents a justifiable grievance or criticism, the only thing for it is to acknowledge that you were wrong, wholeheartedly and without qualification. There are any number of ways to do this, such as:

返す言葉もございません。

Kaesu kotoba mo gozaimasen.

There's no excuse for what I've done.

一言もありません。

Ichigon mo arimasen.

There's absolutely nothing I can say (in my own defense).

お説の通りです。

Osetsu no tōri desu.

You're entirely correct.

いちいちごもつともです。

Ichi-ichi gomottomo desu.

Every single thing you've said is perfectly true.

おっしゃる通りでございます。

Ossharu tōri de gozaimasu.

I'm afraid it's exactly as you've said.

Forget about trying to explain, abandon all those pathetic excuses, and just beg forgiveness:

面目ありません。

Menboku arimasen.

I'm ashamed of myself.

面目次第もございません。

Menboku-shidai mo gozaimasen.

I'm truly ashamed.

This is not a moment for levity, but if you know the other person well enough, you can perhaps afford to use a less lugubrious expression than those above. For instance:

穴があったら入りたい気持ちです。

Ana ga attara hairitai kimochi desu.

If I had a hole I'd crawl into it.

The standard pattern in these cases is: humbly accept the blame, express your most sincere regrets and have your apologies accepted, and then solemnly vow that the mistake will never be repeated. The following would be one way to handle the lot:

このたびの不始末につきましては、返す言葉もございませんが、以後二度とこのようなことのないよう注意いたします。どうかご容赦ください。

Kono tabi no fu-shimatsu ni tsukimashite wa, kaesu kotoba mo gozaimasen ga, igo nido to kono yō na koto no nai yō chūi itashimasu. Dōka goyōsha kudasai.

There's no excuse for the carelessness that's been shown, but we'll certainly take steps to ensure that this sort of thing never happens again. Please forgive us.

This approach would be used when dealing with a lapse that's con-

sidered to be the fault of the company as a whole. If the blame clearly lies with one unfortunate individual, it calls for a more personal statement, such as:

私の不注意(私の不勉強)で大変ご迷惑をおかけしました。
以後気をつけますので、どうかお許してください。

Watakushi no fu-chūi (Watakushi no fu-benkyō) de taihen gomei-waku o okake shimashita. Igo ki o tsukemasu no de, dōka oyurushi kudasai.

I'm afraid I've created serious trouble for you as a result of my carelessness (inattention). I hope you can forgive me. I'll be more careful in the future.

Our mistake

私どもの手違いで……
Watakushi-domo no techigai de ...
Our mistake ...

Mistakes don't just happen—people make them. If the customer got the wrong goods or was quoted the wrong price, or if the shipment didn't arrive on the date it was supposed to, it's because somebody wasn't doing his job properly. That requires an apology, which might go like this:

私どもの手違いで、大変ご迷惑をおかけしました。
Watakushi-domo no techigai de, taihen gomeiwaku o okake shimashita.

It was an error on our part, and we regret causing you this inconvenience.

私どもの手違いで、とんだ粗相をいたしました。

Watakushi-domo no techigai de, tonda sosō o itashimashita.
This was inexcusable carelessness, and it was our mistake.

私どもの手違いで、お客様がご注文なされた品の入荷が一日遅れてしまいました。ご迷惑をおかけしまして申し訳ございません。

Watakushi-domo no techigai de, okyaku-sama ga gochūmon nasatta shina no nyūka ga ichinichi okurete shimaimashita. Gomei-waku o okake shimashite mōshiwake gozaimasen.

Mistakes made by this office caused a one-day delay in the arrival of your order. I apologize for this unfortunate disruption.

The key phrase *watakushi-domo no techigai* ("our mistake") amounts to an acceptance of responsibility for what's gone wrong. In its place, a similar phrase can be used instead:

手違いがございまして……
Techigai ga gozaimashite ...
There's been an error.

Here the assumption of responsibility is conspicuously absent, as in "mistakes were made." It may be that it's unclear which side actually made the mistake, but even so, when an apology leads off with this phrase, the effect tends to be that of a statement made for form's sake rather than a statement of sincere regret.

Sometimes the blame can be attributed to a particular individual, such as the person in charge of the account. In that case, this phrase will come in handy:

係の者の手違いで……
Kakari no mono no techigai de ...
Due to an error by the person in charge ...

All too often it's left up to someone other than the guilty party to make the proper apologies. If you get stuck with this sorry duty, you may point out that you yourself are not responsible for the mistake, but the important thing is to convey the regrets of the firm itself, which must assume ultimate responsibility. For example:

係の者の手違いで、ご指摘のように請求金額に間違いがございました。さっそく訂正しましてお送りいたします。ご迷惑をおかけしました。

Kakari no mono no techigai de, goshiteki no yō ni seikyū-kingaku ni machigai ga gozaimashita. Sassoku teisei shimashite ookuri itashimasu. Gomeiwaku o okake shimashita.

Due to an error by the person in charge, the amount you were billed was incorrect, as you indicated. I'll prepare a correct invoice and send it to you right away. I apologize for the inconvenience this has caused you.

In apologizing for a mistake made by someone working under you, one of these lines might also serve:

ご注意いただかなければ気がつかないところでした。さっそく係に申して改めさせます。

Gochūi itadakanakereba ki ga tsukanai tokoro deshita. Sassoku kakari ni mōshite aratamesasemasu.

If you hadn't pointed it out we would never have known. I'll tell the person who's handling this immediately and have him straighten it out right away.

不行き届きで申し訳ございません。以後このようなことがないよう、嚴重に申し伝えます。

Fu-yukitodoki de mōshiwake gozaimasen. Igo kono yō na koto ga nai yō, genjū ni mōshitsutaemasu.

I apologize for this carelessness. I'll set my people straight and make sure this never happens again.

I'll go back to square one

一から出直します。

Ichi kara denaoshimasu.

I'll go back to square one.

It takes guts to admit that your whole approach needs a complete overhaul. Then again, it's far better to admit it yourself than have someone else point it out. Sometimes the best way to get back on track after a foul-up is to return to the basic principles and think things through once more. Demonstrating a renewed determination to do well is also an effective way to show contrition for a lapse. These phrases are used for that purpose:

一から出直します。

Ichi kara denaoshimasu.

I'll go back to square one.

一からやり直します。

Ichi kara yarinaoshimasu.

I'll start over from scratch.

Once a person gets used to a job, he almost inevitably starts to lose the intensity and heightened sense of purpose that he felt as a newcomer. An experienced hand can become overly confident of his own abilities as, perhaps unconsciously, he learns to choose the easy way whenever possible and avoid anything that promises to be difficult. This is a trap that many people fall into, and there are any number of reasons to break out of it—above all, the discovery that it's led you to make a serious mistake. If that happens you may have to plead your case before the boss, and you'll have to show that you're prepared to revamp your whole program. This way, for example:

もう一度チャンスをください。一からやり直します。

Mō ichido chansu o kudasai. Ichi kara yarinaoshimasu.

Please let me have another chance. I'll start over from scratch.

It might be too late, of course. The head office may already be sending in your replacement and issuing orders for your exile to the boondocks. Even if that's the case, you may be able redeem yourself somewhat in the eyes of your boss and colleagues by humbly and stoically embracing your fate with words such as these:

わかりました。一から出直します。

Wakarimashita. Ichi kara denaoshimasu.

I understand. I'm going back to square one.

or

わかりました。雑巾がけからやり直します。

Wakarimashita. Zōkin-gake kara yarinaoshimasu.

I understand. I'll start over from the very bottom.

CONFIRMATION

As you know

ご承知のように……

Goshōchi no yō ni ...

As you know ...

When you address a meeting, it's a good idea to review the facts and circumstances in the background before launching into your own views on the matter at hand. You can start out by reviewing the points on which everyone is expected to be united, and you

can employ one of these introductory phrases to make it clear that's what you're doing:

ご承知のように……

Goshōchi no yō ni ...

As you know ...

ご案内のように……

Goannai no yō ni ...

As you are no doubt aware ...

ご存じの通り……

Gozonji no tōri ...

As you are aware ...

Unless you lead off with an expression of this sort, your listeners probably won't know if what you're saying is supposed to be common knowledge or your own individual interpretation of things. Using one of these phrases not only enables you to clearly stake out the common ground at the outset but will also lend a sense of organization to your remarks. Virtually any topic can be introduced this way:

ご承知のように、今期の営業実績は……

Goshōchi no yō ni, konki no eigyō jisseki wa ...

As you know, our sales for this quarter are ...

ご案内のように、このたびの役員改選は……

Goannai no yō ni, kono tabi no yakuin kaisen wa ...

As you are no doubt aware, the recent board of directors' election was ...

ご存じの通り、このプロジェクトの基本的なコンセプトは……

Gozonji no tōri, kono purojekuto no kihon-teki na konseputo wa ...

As you are aware, the basic concept for this project is ...

It is also possible to put this sort of expression to more devious uses. For instance, you can practice a subtle form of one-upmanship by implying that something unknown to your listeners is common knowledge to everyone else. You could say:

ご承知のように、最近の家電製品にはファジー理論が応用されています。

Goshōchi no yō ni, saikin no kaden-seihin ni wa faji-riron ga ōyō sarete orimasu.

As you know, these days household appliances are incorporating the use of fuzzy logic.

or

ご存じの通り、3月に公定歩合が引き下げられました。

Gozonji no tōri, sangatsu ni kōtei-buai ga hikisageraremashita.

As you are aware, the bank rate was lowered in March.

Even though you're certain at least some of your listeners know nothing about your topic (they're the ones who are now squirming), you can be fairly sure none of them will pipe up and expose his ignorance.

Just to make sure I've got this right

念のためにお尋ねしますが……

Nen no tame ni otazune shimasu ga ...

Just to make sure I've got this right ...

There's never any harm in making sure. When you receive important information or instructions, it makes good sense to go over the essential points twice, even if you're pretty sure you got it right the first time. There's a ready-made phrase for this purpose:

念のためにお尋ねしますが……

Nen no tame ni otazune shimasu ga ...

Just to make sure I've got this right ...

It's particularly important to get repeat confirmation on easy-to-confuse items such as names, telephone numbers, dates and times, and figures and amounts—in fact, it's a cardinal rule of business. Here's how it's done:

念のためにお尋ねしますが、新宿支店ではなく新橋支店ですね。

Nen no tame ni otazune shimasu ga, Shinjuku shiten de wa naku Shinbashi shiten desu ne.

Just to make sure I've got this right, it's the Shinbashi branch and not the Shinjuku branch, right?

or

念のためにお尋ねしますが、田中さんに電話すればよろしいですね。

Nen no tame ni otazune shimasu ga, Tanaka-san ni denwa sureba yoroshii n' desu ne.

Just to make sure I've got it straight, it's Ms. Tanaka I'm supposed to call, right?

This is also a useful tactic to employ when you're told something that doesn't seem quite right. Maybe the other person misspoke or maybe you didn't hear what you thought you heard; in any case, you can put your doubts to rest by requesting confirmation. For instance:

念のためにお尋ねしますが、電話には私どもの前川がでたんですね。

Nen no tame ni otazune shimasu ga, denwa ni wa watakushi-domo no Maekawa ga deta n' desu ne?

Just to make sure I've understood, it was Mr. Maekawa from our staff who spoke to you on the phone, is that correct?

念のためにお尋ねしますが、お買いもとめになったのは3月23日ですね。

Nen no tame ni otazune shimasu ga, okaimotome ni natta no wa sangatsu nijūsan-nichi desu ne.

Just to make certain, the date of purchase was March 23, is that correct?

When you're speaking to a valued customer, even if what she's told you is utterly implausible (Mr. Maekawa retired two years ago and the store was closed for a national holiday on March 23), you can't afford to alienate her by directly contradicting her version of events. By leading her through the doubtful details a second time, you can give her a chance to correct her own mistakes without having to offend her by pointing them out. Still, if she sticks to her dubious story, you may have to gently point out the inconsistencies. You can use one of these phrases to broach the issue:

私の思い違いかもしれません……。……

Watakushi no omoichigai ka mo shiremasen ga ...

It may be that I'm mistaken, but ...

ちょっと気になる点があるのですが……。……

Chotto ki ni naru ten ga aru no desu ga ...

There's one point that seems a bit curious ...

SALES TALK

Did you like it?

ご満足いただけましたか。

Gomanzoku itadakemashita ka.

Did you like it?

A customer comes into the store and looks around. The clerk greets her with a polite but friendly:

いらっしゃいませ。

Irasshaimase.

Welcome.

The customer finds an item she likes—one of several blouses presented for her consideration by the clerk, who now urges her to try it on:

どうぞ、お試してください。

Dōzo, otameshi kudasai.

Please, go ahead and try it on.

The customer goes into the dressing room and tries on the blouse. Afterwards, when she comes back out looking pleased, the clerk immediately asks:

ご満足いただけましたか。お客様にぴったりですよ。

Gomanzoku itadakemashita ka. Okyaku-sama ni pittari desu yo.

Did you like it? It fits you perfectly.

or maybe

いかがですか、お気に召しましたか。

Ikaga desu ka. Oki ni meshimashita ka.

How was it? Did you like it?

With these words, the clerk is creating an opening for some sociable chitchat. Naturally, she'll offer whatever advice or assistance she can with an eye to making a sale, but equally important is set-

ting a friendly tone. All too many shops are staffed with clerks who apparently think nothing more is required of them than dead silence, occasionally punctuated by a brusque:

お決まりでしょうか。
Okimari deshō ka.
 All set?

If the customer appears to be having a hard time making up her mind, this clerk won't simply hover in the background trying to suppress her impatience. She'll say something like:

こういうタイプがご希望ですか。よろしかったらいくつもお揃えしてみます。
Kō iu taipu ga gokibō desu ka. Yoroshikattara ikutsu ka osoroe shite mimasu.

Is this the type you're interested in? If you'd like, I can set out several for you to look over.

or

最近はこのタイプがよく出ています。
Saikin wa kono taipu ga yoku dete imasu.
 This type is selling quite well these days.

or

お客様のような方ですと、このタイプがよくお似合いですね。
Okyaku-sama no yō na kata desu to, kono taipu ga yoku oniai desu ne.

You're the sort of person this type really looks nice on.

This clerk knows that while the quality of the product may be the customer's paramount concern, the attitude she conveys at the store has an extremely powerful influence on the decision to buy or not to buy. It's no coincidence that clerks who can communicate effectively with their customers also tend to be the ones posting the highest sales totals.

We'll give you a good price

勉強させていただきます。
Benkyō sasete itadakimasu.
 We'll give you a good price.

If you've studied Japanese at all, you've undoubtedly come across the expression *benkyō suru* ("to study.") In the language of sales, however, this familiar phrase takes on another meaning entirely, as does its more polite and businesslike alternative form:

勉強させていただきます。
Benkyō sasete itadakimasu.
 We'll give you a good price.

Another way to express the same meaning would be:

お安くしておきますよ。
Oyasuku shite okimasu yo.
 We can let you have it cheap.

Apparently, however, the latter expression and others like it are disdained by those who sell and shop for higher-end merchandise. Like its English counterpart, the term *yasui* ("cheap")—along with the derivative forms *yasuku* and *oyasuku*—is considered either too prosaic or too earthy for the quality stuff, so the former expression is often preferred by hoity-toity clerks and clientele. No such scruples are to be found among the vendors of the traditional open marketplace, though: stroll through almost any one of them (or though the produce section in the basement of almost any department store) and you'll encounter a remarkably boisterous version of commerce that thrives on the chant:

安いよ! 安いよ!

Yasui yo! Yasui yo!
Cheap! Get it cheap!

Back at the big-ticket emporiums, they go in for a more genteel approach. A well-dressed fellow might quietly materialize at your side as you browse through the stock and remark in a discreetly modulated tone:

ただいまお買い得になっております。サービス期間中ですので……

Tadaiima okaidoku ni natte orimasu. Sābisu kikan-chū desu no de...

It's really quite a bargain at the moment. We're in the middle of a sale, you see.

or

ご奉仕価格になっております。

Gohōshi kakaku ni natte orimasu.

That's a reduced price.

or

ご予算的にはこちらのほうがお得になっております。

Goyosan-teki ni wa kochira no hō ga otoku ni natte orimasu.

This one has the merit of being less demanding on one's budget.

The classic sales pitch at a typical high-priced store or boutique might sound like this:

品質の点ではまずご心配はありませんし、このお値段でしたらお買い物です。

Hinshitsu no ten de wa mazu goshinpai wa arimasen shi, kono onedan deshitaru okaimono desu.

You can be assured of the item's quality, and at this price it's really a good buy.

The strategy behind the phraseology is transparent: the clerk flatters you by suggesting your first concern is quality, rather than price,

but he doesn't neglect to mention that the price is right, too, just in case you happen to care.

OFFICE VERNACULAR

Good morning

おはようございます。

Ohayō gozaimasu.

Good morning.

For people working in a typical office in Japan, and most particularly the younger employees, exaggerated displays of robust energy tend to be regarded in a very positive light. Some of these employees seem to assume that overt demonstrations of zeal are expected of them: you see plenty of office workers who have apparently taken a vow never to walk through the office—they run. One standard (and less exhausting) channel for the expression of a spunky attitude is the morning greeting:

おはようございます。

Ohayō gozaimasu.

Good morning.

With these words, often delivered at a surprisingly zesty volume, an employee greets everyone else at the office—the people he knows, including his superiors, as well as those he doesn't know—upon the first encounter of the morning. This is also the preferred way to greet people on the phone in the morning. An employee answering the phone at the trading firm Asahi Shōji would say:

おはようございます。アサヒ商事です。
Ohayō gozaimasu. Asahi Shōji desu.
 Good morning, Asahi Shōji.

What makes *ohayō gozaimasu* a particularly favored greeting around the office is the second half of the phrase. The word *gozaimasu* (a humble variant of “to be”) bespeaks modesty, respect, and a certain level of formality, and therefore carries just the right resonance for the businesslike environment of the workplace. By comparison, the standard greeting for post-morning encounters, *konnichi wa* (“hello”), and the evening greeting, *konban wa* (“good evening”), don’t really cut it, especially when you’re greeting the higher-ups; those phrases just don’t have the sober, respectful ring of *ohayō gozaimasu*. So, how do you greet people when it gets to be lunch time or later—or don’t you?

One school of thought recommends this approach to greeting a superior during the post-noon hours: bow your head while carefully intoning *konnichi wa* or *konban wa*. The overt gesture of respect and the less-than-formal greeting can combine, so the thinking goes, to convey a pleasing sense of polite familiarity.

Incidentally, in some circles *ohayō gozaimasu* (and the abbreviated version, *ohayō*) serves as the standard greeting for any time of day. This is an established custom in the cocktail trade and among entertainers and people in the arts, but many others have picked it up as well. For some students, the use of *ohayō* as an afternoon or evening greeting is reserved for close comrades—everyone else merely gets the time of day.

Good work

お疲れさまでした。

Otsukare-sama deshita.
 Good work.

This phrase, one of the most commonly heard in the Japanese business world, conveys appreciative recognition of another person’s labors. It could be used, for example, to greet a colleague returning to the office from an excursion to a client’s factory in an outlying area; a more elaborate translation might be “Your hard work is appreciated.” The figurative intention is to assuage the other person’s fatigue and commend his exertions on the firm’s behalf. A similar expression is:

ご苦労さまでした。
Gokurō-sama deshita.
 Well done.

This one, however, is generally reserved for use by higher-ups addressing the people who serve under them and by older employees addressing their juniors. Strictly speaking, it would be a breach of etiquette for a younger employee or an underling to say *gokurō-sama deshita* to a senior colleague or boss—the one to use is *otsukare-sama deshita*. In less formal circumstances, the final word is often dropped from these expressions, yielding the abbreviated forms.

お疲れさま。
Otsukare-sama.
 Good work.

and

ご苦労さま。
Gokurō-sama.
 Well done.

The phrase *otsukare-sama deshita* is often employed as a form of farewell to a colleague or boss at the end of the work day. The fol-

lowing exchange between fellow employees features an everyday example of this sort of usage:

Sato-san: お先に失礼いたします。
Osaki ni shitsurei itashimasu.
Pardon me, but I'm off.

Kimura-san: お疲れさまでした。
Otsukare-sama deshita.
Good work today.

This sort of comradely send-off can help alleviate the stiffness that dominates the atmosphere in some offices.

Grammatically speaking, *otsukare-sama deshita* is a past-tense phrase. The present-tense form, *otsukare-sama desu*, is also used, but under different conditions—when the work in question is ongoing. Let's say a colleague, Mr. Horiguchi, is phoning in from outside the office (he's about to call on the printing firm Dai-ichi Insatsu) to pick up his messages:

堀口です。いま第一印刷に向かっていますが、何か連絡は入っていますか。

Horiguchi desu. Ima Dai-ichi Insatsu ni mukatte imasu ga, nani ka renraku wa haitte imasu ka.

This is Mr. Horiguchi. I'm on my way over to Dai-ichi Insatsu. Are there any messages for me?

You reply:

お疲れさまです。少々お待ちください。
Otsukare-sama desu. Shōshō omachi kudasai.
Good work. Just a moment, please. I'll check.

It's not quite what it should be

いまいちです。
Ima-ichi desu.
It's not quite what it should be.

If something doesn't quite meet your expectations, is just a bit lacking in some important quality, or simply doesn't work out in an entirely satisfactory manner, you can pronounce it *ima-ichi* ("not quite what it should be"). To get a sense of the way this expression is used around the office, consider this exchange between two colleagues:

新製品の売れ行きはどうかね。
Shinsei-hin no ureyuki wa dō ka ne.
How's the new product selling?

発売2週間目としては、いまいちですね。
Hatsubai nishūkan-me toshite wa, ima-ichi desu ne.
Not quite the way it should be, considering it's been on the market for two weeks.

The term *ima-ichi* is a relative recent ersatz compound consisting of two components: *ima* ("now") and *ichi* ("one"); *ima-hitotsu*, another jury-rigged compound—*ima* + *hitotsu* ("one thing")—means the same thing and is used essentially the same way. Since *ima-ichi* conveys, in a literal sense, the meaning that one thing is lacking at present, it is considered by some speakers to be applicable only to that which is regarded as a near miss, so analogous compounds—*ima-ni*: *ima* + *ni* ("two"); *ima-san*: *ima* + *san* ("three")—have been coined to indicate something farther off the mark. The higher the number at the end, the greater the sense of dissatisfaction or disappointment conveyed. Consider another brief exchange between colleagues:

ダイマル社のCM、評判はどうだろう。

Daimaru-sha no shiemu, hyōban wa dō darō.

What kind of reaction did that Daimaru TV commercial get?

うーん、今二、いや今三かな。

Uun, ima-ni, iya ima-san ka na.

Well, not that great—not great at all, actually.

Another shorthand expression you're likely to hear around the office is *soku* ("right away"). This is probably not a standard item in the vocabulary of a lot of native speakers of Japanese, who might be apt to use longer-established expressions such as *sokkoku* ("immediately") or *tadachi ni* ("right away"). Still, *soku* is an attention-getting term when used in the context of work, as in this exchange between an employee and her section chief:

課長、新製品のプランがまとまりました。

Kachō, shinsei-hin no puran ga matomarimashita.

Chief, we've finished putting together the plans for the new product.

よし、即ミーティングだ。

Yoshi, soku mitingu da.

Okay, let's have a meeting right away.

Here's the boss, getting worked up about the fact that defective products are being sold and demonstrating another, somewhat different usage of *soku*:

なに、新製品に欠陥があった？ ばかな、欠陥即発売停止じゃないか。

Nani, shinsei-hin ni kekkā ga atta? Baka na, kekkā soku hatsu-bai-teishi ja nai ka.

What, they found a defect in the new product! Of all the stupid ... A defect means you halt all sales immediately.

In the phrase *kekkā soku hatsu-bai-teishi* ("a defect means halting sales immediately"), the interposition of *soku* between *kekkā* ("defect") and *hatsu-bai-teishi* ("sales halt") conveys the sense of an automatic or immediate progression from the former to the latter: if the first thing happens then the second should immediately follow. We can presume everyone is supposed to know this, and that's why the irate boss recites the formula in this shorthand form.

This is just between us

ここだけの話ですが……

Koko dake no hanashi desu ga ...

This is just between us ...

Throughout the world, business people tend to treat information carefully, but it would be hard to imagine a business world more enamored of secrets than that of Japan. Still, wherever a lot of secrets are kept, almost as many are more than likely disclosed. In any case, when someone has confidential information to divulge, there are plenty of ready-made phrases to suit the occasion, such as:

ここだけの話ですが……

Koko dake no hanashi desu ga ...

This is just between us ...

Anytime someone starts off with a line like that, he can be confident he has won the attention of his audience. In business, after all, it's a point of pride to be able to anticipate events, to know what's going to happen before it happens (or at least before the competition finds out). So if what's about to be said has the forbidden-fruit appeal of confidential information, you can bet people will be listening. Here are some other phrases that can precede the spilling of the beans:

オフレコですが……

Ofu-reko desu ga ...

This can't be repeated, but ... (literally, This is off the record, but ...)

このことはまだ私と小野さんだけしか知らないことですが……

Kono koto wa mada watashi to Ono-san dake shika shiranai koto desu ga ...

This is something that only Mr. Ono and I know about right now ...

どうかご内聞に願いますよ。

Dōka gonaibun ni negaimasu yo.

I'll have to ask you to keep this strictly confidential.

Of course, there's no guarantee that the information that follows will be anything of great importance, or even that it will be true. It tends not to matter—people pay attention anyway. But the one who lets the cat out of the bag had better not assume that his listeners will respect the confidence any more than he did. A secret disclosed is a secret no more, and the information can become common property in an amazingly short amount of time.

The attraction that confidential information holds, along with the tendency for “secrets” that have been divulged to rapidly become public knowledge, is well-known and is often shrewdly exploited for business purposes. Leaks can be planted to attract or divert attention, misinformation can be spread to throw rivals off the track, and confusion can be sown in the enemy camp, all under the guise of sharing otherwise private information. You might hear an exchange like this:

ここで話しているものかどうか……

Koko de hanashite ii mono ka dō ka ...

I'm not sure whether I should be saying this ...

誰にも話しませんから、聞かせてください。

Dare ni mo hanashimasen kara, kikasete kudasai.

I won't breath a word to anyone, so you can tell me.

Be careful. All may not be what it seems, and if you pass this secret along to others, you could be playing directly into the other guy's hands.

Thank you / I'm sorry / Pardon me

恐縮です。

Kyōshuku desu.

Thank you. / I'm sorry. / Pardon me.

One of the characteristic determiners of Japanese language usage is the speaker's gender. Some patterns and expressions are all but exclusively reserved for use by female speakers, others are for male speakers, and the rest—this is by far the biggest category—are for both. Another major influence on usage is the human predilection for ambiguity, which leads to the generation of multiple conventional interpretations of a single expression. Now then, here's a convenient phrase that exemplifies both of these aspects of usage:

恐縮です。

Kyōshuku desu.

Thank you. / I'm sorry. / Pardon me.

Often heard around the office, *kyōshuku desu* is regarded by many people, though not all, as a distinctly male-sounding phrase. In meaning, it's similar to this one:

恐れいます。

Osoreimasu.

Excuse me. / I'm sorry.

The latter phrase, however, is not considered gender-specific and is probably just as commonly spoken by women as by men. Moreover, it doesn't cover quite the range of meanings and situations that *kyōshuku desu* does. A male employee can get a lot of mileage out of this one phrase, saying:

(when treated to dinner by the boss)

恐縮です。

Kyōshuku desu.

Thank you.

(after being reprimanded by a superior)

恐縮です。

Kyōshuku desu.

I'm sorry.

(when hauling a lot of luggage and making his way through a crowd)

恐縮ですが……

Kyōshuku desu ga ...

Pardon me ...

Versatile though it is, however, *kyōshuku desu* is in eminent danger of falling into disrepute due to overuse, and anyone who relies on this expression too much is likely to end up the butt of office jokes. A similar fate awaits those who overuse this familiar expression:

すみません。

Sumimasen.

Thank you. / I'm sorry. / Excuse me.

While this one can also be applied to a variety of situations, many people consider it distinctly inadequate as an expression of sincere gratitude or apology. For those purposes, these phrases are widely preferred:

ありがとうございます。

Arigatō gozaimasu.

Thank you very much.

申し訳ありません。

Mōshiwake arimasen.

I'm very sorry.

While it may seem the height of convenience to employ the same phrase for a whole variety of purposes, it's by no means necessarily advisable, lest you develop a reputation as someone of highly limited capabilities.