

Friday, December 21, 2007

City Beat

Sleight of handshakes can be tricky business

Tony Shelton runs his business as a helping hand for executives in tough situations.

The president of a Houston consulting firm specializing in crisis communications now has devised a strategy to deal with one of the most potentially hazardous business rituals -- shaking hands.

Avoiding handshakes reduces the risk of catching a bug during flu season from November through March.

The trick, Shelton says, is to dodge the gesture gracefully without being perceived as some kind of germophobic Howard Hughes.

"You always have to use common sense here, and you need to decide if it's worth being exposed to a few germs if your career is at stake. You could always sanitize your hand later," says Shelton, president of Shelton & Caudle.

Shelton offers up a few excuses that might pass hands-off muster in a corporate setting:

- "I think I'm coming down with something."
- "Sorry, I just washed my hands and they're still wet."
- "I've adopted the Japanese custom of exchanging business cards instead of shaking hands."

Shelton also identifies four disastrous shakes capable of quashing a business deal:

- The Diamond Maker: Squeezing the hand in a vice grip.
- The Two-fisted Topper: One party puts a non-shaking hand on top of the shaking hands.
- The Dead Fish: A handshake with no grip.
- The Lost Twin: Someone so thrilled to see the other that he starts shaking hands and won't let go.

To escape The Lost Twin, Shelton advises applying The Dead Fish. - Greg Barr