

For the newcomer - work your way into the 'clique'

MBOMBELA - In the big cities, underdressing is usually construed as unprofessional at best, and rude at worst.

Yet, here in the *platteland*, some of the most successful movers and shakers do not rely on suits and ties. It is your conduct, not your attire, which will persuade local business people in most sectors to trust you, and therefore do business with you.

Linda Grimbeek, chief operating officer of Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism (KLCBT), has been working with businesses of all sizes in diverse sectors for years. According to her, the Lowveld plays by its own rules.

"Very often people step into a giant hole when they try to do business in the Lowveld because of the unique culture. Unfortunately in the Lowveld, things are different.

"Sadly this alienates you from getting potential clients and even suppliers in the Lowveld. Many have tried, but you cannot bend the locals to your will, even if you are an MBA graduate."

Do not make calls to people you do not know on a Monday morning or a Friday afternoon, she warns. "On a Monday morning, some people are returning from weekends, or have to open their businesses and get things running. Most business owners are also the managers and the marketing managers, so they need to get things going before they can concentrate on your cold call. If you irritate them at these times, you will be flatly rejected.

"They will only take an appointment if they know you. Yes, we like to do business with people we know and that's that."

So how can new businesses break into

this famous Lowveld "clique"? Grimbeek advises they attend every networking function or opportunity they can.

"Join the KLCBT and join our events. Once they got to know you face-to-face, you are welcome to call them for an appointment."

She adds that you should try dressing like a local. "We can afford fancy clothes - just look at how we turn out at fancy functions. We dress casually because the climate and local culture allow it.

"Local people will quickly cite you as an outsider if you arrive in a suit. Embrace the

fact that you do not need a jacket and a tie in the Lowveld and enjoy your time doing business here. Tone it down and make some friends - and then do a lot of business.

"This is the culture. Our slower-paced lifestyle and easier dress code are part of what is attractive about the Lowveld. If you are prepared to embrace this and work around it, you will be welcomed with open arms."

Grimbeek adds that established locals should take note of how outsiders perceive them. "Maybe we should realise that we need

to, perhaps, become a little more formal or serious about business. Perhaps we take a little bit more 'me time' than is generally acceptable, and perhaps we are really so shy to take calls from strangers that we miss out on great opportunities and innovative new products."

• The KLCBT wants to hear from you. If you have any complaints or ideas and need advice, contact Grimbeek on linda@klcvt.co.za or phone 013-755-1988.



Linda Grimbeek.