

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS

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SWITZERLAND

WORKING HOURS

- Working hours (Arbeitsstunden, heures de travail) in Switzerland vary with the employer, position and the industry in which you're employed, the average being around 41 hours per week, and with work being from Monday to Friday.
- There is a maximum of 45 hours per week for workers employed in industrial enterprises, office staff, technical and other employees, as well as for sales staff of stores. For all other workers, the limit is fixed at 50 hours.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Gifts are exchanged after the successful conclusion of negotiations and not before. Never give an expensive gift, this can be seen as a bribe or flattery. Give a good bottle of wine, whisky or bourbon, books on your home region. If invited to your host's home, bring flowers or a good box of candy for the hostess and something small for children.

PUNCTUALITY

- Punctuality is necessary for all occasions, whether business or social. This is especially true in the German-speaking areas, where arriving even five minutes late for a business or social engagement can cause grave offence. Although French and Italian-speaking areas tend to be slightly more relaxed about time, punctuality is well appreciated.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- In Switzerland, the share of employees working very long hours is lower than the OECD average of 13%. Swiss childcare services are expensive and in short supply.
- To help working families, a temporary programme to increase the number of places in childcare has been extended from 2015 until 2019. A total of 43,000 new childcare places were created between 2003 and 2015. (OECD Better life Index 2018)

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- Use last names and the formal Sie/Vous/Lei until specifically invited by your colleagues or business partners to use their first names; especially when there is a great difference in rank or age, first names are not used. First names and the informal title du/tu/tu are generally reserved for very close friends and family.
- Please note that in the French-speaking region the use of the first name is often combined with the formal vous.
- Generally, the Swiss take a long time to establish personal relationships. Yet if you are willing to put in the time and effort, the bond you establish with them may prove to be very worthwhile. The Swiss are quiet and discreet, polite and very respectful.

BUSINESS CLOTHING

- It is in your best interest to be well-presented (read conservative) and to remain polite at all times.
- Do not wear jeans or casual attire on a first-time business meeting unless it is standard in the industry such as in IT or the arts. Dress well, but modestly; since the Swiss dislike ostentatious displays of wealth and appreciate clothing that is simple, clean, well pressed, and in good condition.
- Any jewellery [even a Swiss watch] should be elegant, but simple and understated.



BUSINESS MEALS

- Business entertainment is mostly done in restaurants. Lunch meetings are more common than breakfast.
- If invited to your host's home, do not ask for a tour. Try to finish everything on your plate; it is rude to leave leftovers. Use utensils at all times. Do not use your hands except for breaking bread. Cut potatoes, soft foods including dessert, salads with a fork and not a knife.
- Keep your hands on the table during the meal and not on your lap. Try to keep your elbows off the table.
- Try to leave a party no later than midnight.
- Business and private life are strictly separated. It is therefore not acceptable to call a Swiss businessperson at home, unless there is an emergency. Business entertainment is almost always done in a restaurant and spouses are generally included in business dinners. Business breakfasts are not very common.
- It is rare to receive an invitation to someone's private home. If this does happen, be aware that it is a great honour.

BUSINESS MEETINGS

- Switzerland is a little country and everyone knows each other and everything is known. Network is very important.
- The notion of community is very important too.
- At equal skills with another nationality, Swiss will always prefer to work with a Swiss.
- Meetings are generally impersonal, brisk, orderly, planned and task-oriented. It is important to prepare yourself in advance of a business meeting.
- The Swiss tend to get right down to business after a few minutes of general discussion. Be aware of the fact that non-verbal communication, such as body language, is very important and varies from region to region in Switzerland.
- Note that organisation, procedure and planning lie at the heart of Swiss business success. Clear systems are all-important. Meetings always have a detailed agenda that is followed to the letter. Discussions are open but not aimless. Everyone is expected to contribute with the goal of arriving at a consensus at high speed.

- Please note that punctuality for business and social meetings is taken seriously.
- Hand your business card to the receptionist upon arrival and give one to every person you are meeting with.
- Business cards should mention academic title and job title. However, your rank within the corporate hierarchy is even more important. When designing your card, you might consider having your professional title printed in a different font.
- It is advisable to have your business cards printed in both German and French. English business cards are accepted widely.

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- Approx. 20 days

CONVERSATION

Safe topics

- World politics and economics.
- Your travels in Switzerland.
- Positive aspects of Switzerland.
- Swiss cuisine.
- Sports, particularly winter sports.
- The Romansch culture.
- The founding of the Swiss Federation.
- Work; however, do not open a conversation with "What do you do?"

Topics to avoid

- Swiss neutrality.
- Switzerland's role in both world wars.
- The Swiss military.
- Voting rights for women in modern Switzerland.
- Monopolies of the industry.
- The wealth of the Swiss.
- Any personal questions.

