

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



UNITED STATES

WORKING HOURS

- Monday to Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm, with one hour for lunch.

PUNCTUALITY

- Punctuality is an essential part of US business etiquette and lateness is considered disrespectful and rude.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Presenting a gift is a nice gesture, but it is not expected.
- Business gifts are usually presented after the deal is closed. In most situations, gifts are usually unwrapped immediately and shown to all.
- The value of the gifts should be nominal (less than \$50) or run the risk that a company's policy may require the gift to be returned to comply with independence / conflicts of interest policies.

BUSINESS CLOTHING

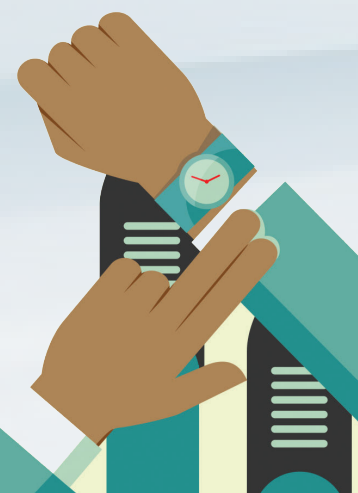
- Dress code depends on where in the USA you are doing business. The weather and local culture will determine what is appropriate or not.
- In general, people in the East dress more formally, while people in the West are known for being a bit more casual.
- It is best to always dress conservatively until it is clear what the accepted dress code is. Men should wear shirts with sport coats and shoes. Ties are generally worn for more formal meetings. Colours should be traditional such as black, blue, grey, etc. Women should wear modestly with not too much make-up or jewellery.
- Low-cut blouses, short skirts and tight clothing are not appropriate. High technology companies often wear casual clothes (denim pants) every day.

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- During the initial introduction you should address your American business colleagues with their respective titles and their last names.
- They will let you know immediately how they wish to be addressed. If you prefer to be addressed by your last name and/or title, do let your US business partners know immediately.
- They will not be offended, but respect your direct and honest approach.

CONVERSATION

- Typical topics in the US include work, sports, the weather, travel, food, how your stay has been, even family.
- Two rules for personal topics when meeting with American professionals are no religion and no politics. This avoids any uncomfortable situations during a discussion. Politics is acceptable if members of the discussion agree with a particular subject matter. Men and women are allowed to direct topics during a conversation.



BUSINESS MEETING

- Meetings start on time and often begin with a firm handshake.
- The handshake should be accompanied by direct eye contact, which signals interest, sincerity and confidence to your American business partner.
- Be prepared to participate in small talk at the beginning of the meeting.
- It serves as a means to ease tension and to create a comfortable atmosphere before “big business” starts. In addition, it can also be an important tool for networking or testing the ambience.
- Suitable topics include everything from job / work-related matters to sports (a clear favourite in the US), weather, travel, food etc.
- Controversial subjects such as religion or politics should be avoided just as personal matters.
- Business cards are infrequently distributed and are usually not exchanged unless you wish to contact the person at a later date.
- The exchange of business cards is done casually and does not require a set of rules. And no, it is certainly not intended as offense when the US business associate, who just received a business card from the Japanese delegate, stuffs this card into the back pocket of his pants without reading it.
- In negotiations Americans are deal-focused. They want to “get down to business” right away. Getting to know each other and building relationships can be done while the business discussions are under way.
- Americans regard negotiations as problem-solving situations based on mutual benefit and personal strengths, with a clear emphasis on financial position and business power.
- In discussions and negotiations American business partners value information that is straightforward and to the point.
- They expect the other delegates to think for themselves and to express their own ideas and opinions.
- American business language is full of idiomatic expressions, many taken from sports (e.g. touch base, ballpark figure, game plan, home run) or military (e.g. rally the troops).
- Most Americans may not even be aware that they are using idioms, but it can be quite a challenge for people who are not so familiar with American culture.
- Thus, if your US counterpart requests a “ballpark figure” and you are not sure what he is referring to, or he states that “sales went through the roof” and you are wondering “which roof?”, it is a good idea to get help from an interpreter.

BUSINESS MEALS

- Americans socialise and do business over breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- If business is the goal, then socializing is kept to a minimum at the start and end.
- Social meals are more about eating than chatting and taking hours over the food.
- If you invite someone to a restaurant, you should pay.
- A toast might take place at the start of a formal meal or for a special occasion / guest.
- Feel free to refuse specific foods or drinks without offering an explanation.
- Do not begin eating until the hostess starts or says to begin.
- Do not rest your elbows on the table.
- Alcoholic drinks are normally only consumed at dinner. One should wait for the host to initiate ordering alcohol.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- In the United States, some 11% of employees work very long hours, less than the OECD average of 13%.
- In the United States, full-time workers devote 60% of their day on average, or 14.4 hours, to personal care (eating, sleeping, etc.) and leisure (socializing with friends and family, hobbies, games, computer and television use, etc.) – less than the OECD average of 15 hours. OECD analysis suggests that the US could help working families to reduce poverty rates by strengthening services and benefits for children in their early years, including legislating for paid parental leave, and building on the successes of child education and care services, such as the
- Headstart programme and various state-level programmes (OECD Better life Index 2018).

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- Approx. 12 days

