

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



FRANCE

WORKING HOURS

- Monday to Friday from 8am or 9am to 12:00/12:30 and then from 14:00/14:30 to 18:00.

BUSINESS CLOTHING

- Fashion and appearance are much more important in France than in most other countries in the world. Even low-paid, entry-level executives buy the best clothes they can afford.
- Generally, dress tends to be on the formal side for both men and women, whether in business or social situations.
- As the French will perceive the way you dress as being a reflection of your social status and relative success, do your best to make clothing choices that are tasteful and stylish..

PUNCTUALITY

- While you should strive to be punctual, you will not be considered to be late, should you arrive ten minutes after the scheduled time.
- Punctuality is treated quite casually in France, although there are some regional differences, the further South you go the more casual the approach to time is.
- The French themselves have a very relaxed attitude when attending appointments themselves, so do not be surprised to find your French colleague arriving fairly late.
- The French consider this a prerogative, so do not expect any apologies- but as ever it will depend who you are dealing with.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Giving gifts among business associates is not common practice in France. To express appreciation to a French business contact, it may be better to host a special event or dinner than to give a business gift.

CONVERSATION

- Avoid asking your French counterpart about their political inclinations nor money earnings - it is considered rude. Do not discuss personal matters during business negotiations. It is common for French people to ask a lot of questions and to interrupt somebody before having finished their argument. It is a common habit which signifies interest in the speaker and in the discussion. Take it as a positive sign.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Studies by the Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suggest that France is below the OECD average when it comes to hours worked and consequently French employees have above average leisure time on an average day.



BUSINESS MEETINGS

- When meeting and discussing business with your French counterparts try to lower your voice and generally behave in a more formal way.
- Traditions, formality and attention to detail are highly valued and if in doubt take clues from your counterparts on how to behave. French is the only official language in France. However, there are also several regional languages spoken, mostly by elderly residents. English is widely taught in schools because of its importance in international trade as a “global language”. Consequently, in France most of your counterparts will be able to understand you if you speak English, especially if they are of the younger generation.
- Despite their knowledge of and competence in the English language, the French consider their use of French as a sign of respect for their culture.
- Therefore, to make your business negotiations easier you should at least try to use some French when dealing with French counterparts. It is helpful at your first meeting with a French-speaking individual, to apologise if you cannot speak French fluently.
- This creates respect for the French culture and reduces any

stigma about potential ignorance. There exists a strong, vertical hierarchy in French business culture. French bosses generally favour a dictatorial and authoritative leadership style. However, it is essential that you work successfully with all levels of the business organisation, despite the clear hierarchical structure. This said, only the most senior individuals can make the final decisions in business. The French have an inherent sense of privacy and there is a definite distinction between business and personal life. Respecting this privacy is particularly important when working in France. In accordance with French business culture, relationships must be formed first, before business can begin.

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- Approx. 11 days
- On average, people have 5 weeks of holidays (much more for public services).
- Finally, if you plan a business trip in May, be aware that May is full of « bridges » due to bank holidays, unless if you come for holidays.
- Same could be said for July and August, as best months to visit Paris if you enjoy empty streets.

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- Business correspondence in France is very impersonal in nature. Letters will start with a prefix alone (i.e., Monsieur) or with the prefix followed by a title (i.e., Monsieur le Ministre). Closing salutations are replaced by a lengthy paragraph with set wording.
- The French are a formal nation and tend to make extensive use of titles, especially in corporate life. Some individuals have family names which include a “de” or “d’” prefix, this is usually an indication of nobility. The same applies to academic titles and degrees, which are very important, and you are expected to use them in all conversations. The French language is highly regarded as a symbol of the culture and the use of it is an indication of respect for it. When developing a business relationship, it is important for the visitor to make an effort to speak French and to address their counterparts by title and in French.
- The use of last name terms and relevant titles must be made until you have been specifically invited to use first name terms. The use of first name terms is mainly reserved for close friends and family, but colleagues with the same level of responsibility generally use first names in private, but titles and last name terms in public. However, this practice is less frequent when there is an age gap or a considerable disparity in the status of counterparts and in these cases formal terms are used at all times.

BUSINESS MEALS

- Because of their love of food, French business people do like to concentrate on a discussion of the dishes during your meal.
- If you need to discuss business matters, wait until the desert is served or unless invited by your counterpart to do so.
- The earlier courses are usually used to discuss your food and wine preferences. Because of the long-term approach in business relationship building, meal times are used to develop a more personal relationship and discover shared interests in food and wine.
- Food is very important in France and is taken very seriously, thus long meals are customary, and offer great opportunities to conduct a more open and less formal business discussion. Be aware when ordering your meal that portion sizes tend to be smaller than in other European countries, so you would need to have several courses – a starter, main and a desert are common practice.
- Lunchtime is from 12:30 or 13:00 and can last until 15:00. Dinners are usually from 20:30 to 23:00

