

# BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



## ITALY

### WORKING HOURS

- 9.00 am to 1.30 pm and from 2.30 pm to 6.00 pm, from Monday to Friday.

### PUNCTUALITY

- It's common practice to wait approximately 15 minutes before starting meetings.

### BUSINESS CLOTHING

- Dress and presentation play an important role in Italian culture. Fashionable style is considered a sign of wealthy social status and success. Milan is one of the World's four main centres of fashion and Italian design and craftsmanship is valued, respected and coveted the world over.

### BUSINESS MEALS

- Lunch is still the main meal of the day and it comprises several courses. However, lunch during the working day is very quick and informal. A break for lunch during a meeting might feature simple sandwiches or possibly a single dish in a restaurant (e.g., pasta, or salad, or pizza, etc.).
- Usually, lunch begins after 12.30 p.m. Dinner time is around 8.00 p.m. In southern regions, especially during the summer, dinner time is delayed until 9 p.m. and even 10 p.m.
- A moderate consumption of wine during the meal is considered a way to socialize. However, drinking too much or getting drunk is normally not accepted and is considered gauche.

### BUSINESS MEETINGS

- Written forms of communication are preferred for a first approach. In this case, either an e-mail is appropriate to present your idea and pave the way for a subsequent phone call or visit. Whenever possible, an introduction by someone who is already connected to the company would be useful. If you only have a general reference for the company you wish to approach, your phone call should be addressed to a secretary.
- They do care about their culture and traditions, and therefore tend to overlap the social and the business dimensions.
- When Italians meet, they love to be represented by a third person. However, they also like to work with people they know, so it is not uncommon to spend some time talking about personal issues and interests.
- As they are naturally cheerful and hospitable, it is a common situation, if a tried and trusted familiar relationship has been established, to hug each other and pat before the encounter. Shaking hands is always desirable, both on departure and on arrival. In general, greeting is very important for every business meeting.



## ADDRESSING A PERSON

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- A certain formality is still common and appreciated.
- The use of professional titles is required, especially in writing.
- Initially, you should address people by their title and last name (e.g. Dottor Rossi, please...) and wait to be explicitly invited to use other forms (first name or last name coupled with the Italian "tu"). Do not use "tu"
- If you are not invited or if the colleague has your same job position, sex, age and title.
- On the other hand, these of colloquial forms of address can be adopted quite rapidly, even during the first meeting, depending on the company culture and personal attitudes.
- Dottore and Dottoressa are generic (male and female) titles for people with a university degree.
- Specific titles are used for lawyers (Avvocato), engineers (Ingegnere) and architects (Architetto). In these cases, the same forms also apply to women.

## CONVERSATION

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- Common topics are work, family, food, holidays.
- There aren't uncomfortable topics for Italians.
- The matter also depends on the formality of the conversation.

## NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

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- Approx. 12-13 days

## GIFTS AND PRESENTS

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- In Italian business culture, giving gifts is not particularly common; only after a tried and trusted familiar relationship has been established, might it appear natural to give a small and not obviously expensive gift as a sign of friendship.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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- In Italy, almost 4% of employees work very long hours, less than the OECD average of 13%.
- The Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance provides a free care and entertainment service aimed at children of its employees from 4 to 12 years old. (OECD Better life Index 2018)

