

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



UNITED KINGDOM

WORKING HOURS

- 9:00 am. to 5:00 pm., Monday to Friday.

PUNCTUALITY

- In general, the British value time-keeping for business arrangements. If you set up a meeting for two o'clock, the chances are your counterparts will arrive on time or just before.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Giving gifts is not a usual part of British business etiquette, although reciprocation is good practice when gifts are received. Some organizations (especially government officials) are encouraged not to accept any form of gift and some are prevented from doing so on legal grounds.

BUSINESS MEALS

- It is becoming increasingly common for business referral networking to take place in the context of a working lunch or an evening meal. Through the use of social media networks such as LinkedIn and Eventbrite, it is possible to find numerous local business groups and networking opportunities.
- In the UK, meals with work colleagues are more often the subject of social or festive gatherings than formal opportunities to discuss business and may include spouses or partners, depending on the occasion. Therefore, it is acceptable to use any such events as an opportunity for informal discussions and the development of social bonds. It is important to take note of the exact time of the meal and understand the various terms that may be used to refer to any proposed meal:
- Lunch can be served anywhere from 11.30am to 2.30pm;
- Afternoon tea will frequently refer to a late afternoon meal, somewhere between 3pm and 6pm;
- Dinner predominantly describes the main evening meal, traditionally served before 8pm, although the exact time will vary for convenience and personal preference;
- Supper is often a light evening meal, served up until 11pm at night.

BUSINESS CLOTHING

- When it comes to business dress codes, classical conservative attire is the norm for both men and women in British culture and dark colours such as black, dark blue and charcoal grey are predominant.
- Although the dress codes have relaxed over the years and most companies adopt at least a dress down Friday.

BUREAUCRACY

- Complex bureaucracy



BUSINESS MEETING

- Organizations differ, but in the main there will be a secretary or Personal Assistant (PA) who controls the diary of the manager you are visiting.
- The best way to set up a meeting is to arrange it with this person, and then call the day before to confirm your attendance. You are advised to check in advance if any resources or equipment you require are available, to prevent delays or embarrassment at the meeting.
- Meetings can be confirmed via email and the majority of UK organisations use this method.
- The agenda and names of the attendees are often circulated in advance of the meeting. Whilst many managers do work longer than the official 9am to 5.30pm, it is rare for meetings to be held outside this time.
- Punctuality is expected and appreciated in the UK, but no one really minds if you arrive a few minutes late for a one-to-one meeting, provided there is a good reason e.g. traffic. Obviously, if more people are involved, there is a greater likelihood that someone will have another engagement to attend.
- In general, British people are more reserved than continental Europeans and you should refrain from physical contact apart from the initial handshake.
- Smiling, on the other hand, particularly at the initial stage of an encounter is considered an expression of positive intentions.
- It is also worth mentioning that it is not normal practice to shake hands with or greet everyone on entering a room full of people.
- When running a meeting, the most important factor to be aware of is the planning and preparation necessary to ensure the meeting achieves its objectives.
- Hence, the agenda for the meeting should stipulate clearly who is invited, the meeting location, date, time and what is expected to be discussed.
- Individual communications with attendees might be necessary to explain the expected format of the content. Increasingly, meetings are placing emphasis on shorter presentations and give more focus to discussion and question and answer type activities.
- Although the agenda is usually followed, people are not stopped if they digress and are allowed to explore related matters in detail. It is not uncommon that meetings finish with an agreement for another follow up meeting with decisions on the current meeting's main objectives not having been made.

CONVERSATION

- General conversation regarding persons family and lifestyle make good conversation. Main topics to avoid should be religion and politics.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- In the United Kingdom, almost 13% of employees work very long hours, in line with the OECD average.
- The more people work, the less time they have to spend on other activities, such as time with others, leisure activities, eating or sleeping.
- The amount and quality of leisure time is important for people's overall well-being, and can bring additional physical and mental health benefits.
- In the United Kingdom, full-time workers devote 62% of their day on average, or 14.9 hours, to personal care (eating, sleeping, etc.) and leisure (socialising with friends and family, hobbies, games, computer and television use, etc.) – close to the OECD average of 15 hours. (OECD Better life Index 2018).

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- Approx. 8 days

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- People in Britain usually address each other informally in day-to-day communications using their first names.
- This is the result of increasingly flat organizational structures and the encouragement of a friendly working environment which is intended to facilitate better team work.
- This also depends on the culture of the individual organization and may be dictated by situations, such as at extremely formal events or occasions where a certain naming etiquette must be observed.
- In addition to social titles (Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms), professional and academic titles (Prof. and Dr.) the UK makes use of honorary titles (Sir, Dame, etc.) and hereditary titles (Duke, Earl, Lady, etc.).
- When meeting your business partners for the first time it is more appropriate to use their surnames following the title for example: Mr (for men), Mrs (for women) and Miss or Ms (for unmarried women). If in doubt it is advisable to be more formal and do not use first name terms until you have been invited to do so.
- Usually, you will be invited to use someone's first name at the first meeting; but sometimes it may not happen at all.
- When referring to women and you are not aware of their marital status use "Ms". It is worth noting that titles should be used in conjunction with a person's surname.