

# Business etiquette

As we have already said, being aware of cultural diversity is a prerequisite of any good relationship, but simply being aware is not enough. For successful business relationships, it is important to know the basics of business culture, expressed in what is commonly referred to as 'business etiquette', that is the sum of all those behaviours and attitudes that are expected during interaction with somebody in a business context.



**Business etiquette** consists in rules and habits, but, most importantly, in creating an environment where others feel comfortable and secure and at their ease. It implies both thoughtful consideration of the feelings of others and the ability to minimise misunderstandings, which are very likely to occur, since etiquette differs from region to region and from country to country. In such a difficult and tiring context – it is hard to concentrate on the real business activity to be done while at the same time bearing in mind how to behave appropriately –, it could be a wise idea to focus on some key facts of business etiquette, and then be ready to get more detailed information about the culture you're going to have to deal with before the actual contact. This would help get off on the right foot and increase the chances of success. Any country, any region, has its own peculiarities, but these are the most common and useful areas and elements to know about:

- **Introductions**, including: handshakes, titles and how to address people, how to hand and receive business cards
- **Dress code**, whether formal or informal, casual, etc.
- **Time**: it is important to understand the concept of punctuality
- **Meetings**: it is important to know whether prior social contacts (more or less informal) are necessary before the actual meeting, and where it is appropriate to hold these meetings.
- **Behaviour during meetings**, that is habits related to: preliminary chit-chat, adherence to agenda, interruptions, style of communication (direct or indirect, humorous or serious, volume of voice, ...), language to use, decision making process, etc.
- **Dining**: it's important to know when to start eating, how to eat, how fast, whether to finish all the food or not, what to accept/order as a drink, etc.
- **Workdays**: days – including bank holidays and local festivities – when people usually do or do not work
- **Gift-giving**: it's important to know whether it is customary to give or accept gifts, and even what kinds of gift are allowed, in case
- **Body language**, including: bows, gestures, nods, eye contact, pats, personal space etc.





**1** BEFORE READING. Read these definitions and choose the one you think most appropriate to define what business etiquette is.

- a. A business etiquette is what you use to label your briefcase before a business trip.
- b. Using business etiquette means tagging the various business contacts you have in a different way.
- c. Business etiquette is the set of appropriate behaviour to adopt during a business transaction.
- d. Business etiquette refers to the values that everybody must observe during a meeting. They are the same all over the world.



**2** BEFORE READING. Try to list at least five aspects of behaviour that you deem important to keep under control before and during a multi-cultural business meeting.



**3** Read this text and answer the questions.

### International Business Etiquette – tips

Here are some key business etiquette tips that mean real success to business:

**‘Thank You’ Note:** If you want to differentiate yourself from others then never forget to write a ‘Thank You’ note to your job interviewer or your client. This will leave a good impression and also reflect well on your company.

**Know the Names:** Show others respect by knowing their names which will increase goodwill and communication. It is also worth management stepping back and acknowledging people individually for their good work as this will enhance their self esteem and increase motivation.

**Observe the ‘Elevator Rule’:** Be mindful of saying appropriate things at a job interview or client meeting. Do not start discussing business with a client or interviewer as soon as you step out of the lift. By not doing this, you avoid the risk of damaging your reputation.

**Focus on the Face, Not the Screen:** Never forget to switch off your phone and try not to use any other device just to prove you are a multitasking individual. In fact, in the world of business this is considered bad manners. Concentrate on the meeting and listen to what people are saying.

**Do not Judge:** Everyone is unique in their own way and uses a different approach to deal with situations. Therefore, if you disagree with another person’s approach, instead of criticising, try to understand it from their point of view. By doing so, you create a friendly environment. Always remember you get respect by giving respect.

**Character, Behaviour, Honesty:** Your character reflects your individuality and your behaviour exhibits your personality. Business etiquette encourages revealing your positive qualities. This helps your reputation. Always be honest and remember that it takes a long time to develop trust and a good reputation and only one small mistake to lose it.

**Sensitivity & Diplomacy:** A key pillar of business etiquette is sensitivity, meaning giving careful thought to every business aspect before making a judgement. This gives a strong foundation to your business. Also, thoughtless words and actions lead to a negative outcome.

Adapted from: <http://businessculture.org/business-culture/business-etiquette>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why is it a good idea to always send a ‘thank you’ note?</li> <li>2. What will help improve good communication relationships?</li> <li>3. What will make a worker’s motivation increase?</li> <li>4. Explain what is meant by the ‘elevator rule’.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Is it a good idea to prove that you are multitasking? Why?</li> <li>6. What should you do if you don’t agree with somebody? Why?</li> <li>7. What can you do to improve your reputation and give a good image of yourself?</li> <li>8. What is meant by ‘sensitivity and diplomacy’?</li> </ul> |
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**4** Surf the Internet and write down a short text of about 150 words to describe the differences in business etiquette in an area in two countries on two separate continents in the world.

