

Business Etiquette Guide



- ♥ **Business Etiquette**
- ♥ **Meeting Business Partners for the First Time**
- ♥ **Business Relationships**
- ♥ **Business Negotiations**

Business Etiquette

Knowing a few rules of etiquette can greatly ease the process of making business contacts in Germany. When making the first contact via email, be sure to follow international standards for netiquette by structuring your message well and keeping it short. If you are calling your German business partner, please do him/her the favor of identifying your company and yourself by name when you first greet him/her.

Meeting Business Partners for the First Time

When meeting with business partners for the first time in person, make sure you are on time, dressed appropriately and armed with ample business cards. Your business partner will probably introduce him or herself as Mr. or Ms. XYZ (Herr or Frau XYZ), which implies that you should wait to address him or her on a first name basis until invited to do so. In general, the corporate dress code is formal and appropriate status symbols (watch, car, etc.) for your position are acceptable. Casual wear is acceptable on some occasions and will usually be announced in advance. As in most western cultures, be sure to use a firm, yet not painful, grip while shaking hands and maintain appropriate eye contact with the other parties when they are speaking to you. Be aware that it is impolite to put your hands in your pockets while someone is conversing with you, as well as to yawn or belch in public. Please note that Germans will both greet and say 'goodbye' to their business partners and friends with a handshake each time they meet.

Business Relationships

Many Germans strictly divide their work and private lives. For example, some people might hesitate to speak about their personal income, marital status, political and religious opinions or other matters they consider to be private at work. You may, however, be able to get a conversation going by appealing to your business partners' loyalty to his/her home region and its foods/beverages, way of speaking or sports teams. On the whole, however, Germans tend to be more interested in business-related issues, tasks and problems than on getting to know customers, colleagues and vendors. It may thus take time for German business partners to get to know each other on a personal level. On the other hand, as Germans tend to be rather reliable, a well-established business and personal relationship cannot be disrupted too easily. Business partners usually reward another year of good business relations with a Christmas or

New Year's card, newsletter or a small token of appreciation (a local wine, beer, sausage, or baked good, for example).

Business Negotiations

Germans are proud of "made in Germany" as a synonym for quality and reliability. In business meetings, Germans are rather formal, detail-oriented and direct. They tend to say exactly what they want and mean. They are decision making and problem solving oriented, although these processes can take quite some time to complete, especially considering the generally very highly hierarchical structures in German companies. Be aware that the negotiation process can sometimes be very lengthy, since Germans prefer to discuss many details in advance in order to prevent future misunderstandings. Please note that it is generally very impolite to make or accept telephone calls during a business meeting, conference or on any occasion where the call would serve as a distraction or imply disinterest to your business partners.

As Germans prefer to act on the basis of clearly communicated guidelines and fair rules, your German business partners will most likely view signed contracts as the non-negotiable end result of such discussions. Therefore, they will be quite disappointed and may even resort to legal action, if you surprise them with changes to business agreements after contracts have been signed. To sum it up, German business people value high quality, yet affordable, goods and services, which are provided (as agreed) on time and are accompanied by timely and transparent correspondence.

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