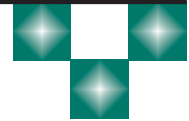




BY PAMELA EYRING



The Cultural Nuances of Crossing Borders in Western Europe

Western Europe may be on the small side geographically, but business traditions, customs and etiquette vary greatly from one country to another. In Italy and Spain, for example, business is conducted in a

very casual, laid-back manner. Not so in Germany and France, where rules and procedures are strictly followed.

Here, we take a look at the do's and don'ts of doing business in these four Western European countries, focusing on six key areas—business etiquette, meeting and greeting, business meetings, business dining, gift giving and relationship facilitation.

Italy

Business Etiquette

■ Italians do not live to work, but work to live; this mentality dictates business transactions. Italy differs immensely from the United States, where business and work tend to be more of a priority. This does not mean that Italians are not business savvy, however. Work is simply not a main concern. Relationships, primarily family, always take precedence over work.

■ Also a note about deadlines: Italians do not follow them! The pace of Italian culture is much, much slower than that of American culture. Everything is always “tomorrow.”

Meeting and Greeting

■ The best way to facilitate an introduction is to have a third-party representative. You will make a bigger

impact business-wise if you have a respected go-between. In business, it is about who you know more so than what you know.

■ Italians shake hands much like Americans—firm and with eye contact. After the initial greeting, the second greeting can be much different. Men and women, if comfortable with the relationship that has been established, will embrace and kiss one another on each cheek, starting with the left cheek and then the right.

■ Only use the greeting *ciao* with informal contacts. Instead, use *buon giorno* (good morning) or *buona sera* (good afternoon), which are much more formal and respected.



The Business Meeting

■ Along with the philosophy of “We will eventually get to business tomorrow,” Italians are very nonchalant and casual about their meetings. Expect a meeting with Italian hosts to be unstructured and informal. Structured presentations are rare and not received

well. Rather, present all the pertinent information and add some flair. Meetings are not set up to facilitate decisions; decisions are always made in private. The purpose of meeting is to test the support of the team and to evaluate the team's disposition.

Business Dining

■ Italians love their cuisine and love to showcase this aspect of their culture. Be prepared to spend an immense amount of time dining—as much as three hours or more. Lunch is the main meal of the day and includes several courses. In business situations, dining typically takes place in a restaurant setting.

■ Drinking without eating is very rare in Italy.

■ Never use a spoon to roll your pasta; this is poor dining etiquette. And do not cut salad with your knife; fold the leaves onto the fork instead.

■ Be sure to compliment your host; Italians pride themselves on hospitality.

■ If an invitation is extended to attend a personal party in an Italian's home, do not decline. An invitation like this is rare and would be considered rude if rejected.

■ Always let your host bring up the topic of business. You do not want to seem pushy or overbearing.

Gift Giving

■ Italians are very generous gift givers, and give and expect to receive high-quality items.

■ In a business situation, even if told that a gift is not necessary, be sure to

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pack one in your brief case in the event that a gift is presented to you. This ensures reciprocation and a show of appreciation.

■ Brand-name items are safe—nothing too big or overly expensive. Examples include: framed art, crafts or alcohol from your home country, and high-quality desk accessories.

Relationship Facilitation Tips

■ Relationships are everything to Italians, so be sure to focus on developing a relationship with your business contact before trying to initiate any kind of business.

■ Italians do not follow the traditional rules of business—contracts, deadlines or company agreements, for example. Most companies are family owned and run by personal alliances.

■ Italians keep their work and personal life separate; never inquire about your Italian business partner's personal affairs.

■ Acceptable topics of conversation include: Italian culture, architecture, food, wine, football (soccer) and thankfulness for your host's generosity.



Spain

Business Etiquette

■ The first and most important objective should be to establish a relationship with your Spanish business partner. This will get you further in business than any other strategy. Be prepared for a slow and tedious process, however. Spaniards do not make decisions quickly and will try to negotiate the best possible deal even after the deal has been settled. Spaniards also have a strong sense of community and will consult with others, including individuals outside the business environment,

to make decisions regarding their negotiations.



Meeting and Greeting

■ Spaniards shake hands much like Americans—firm and with eye contact.

■ Latin people as a whole are very “touchy feely.” So do not be taken off guard if you are embraced and kissed at an initial meeting. Let your Spanish host initiate the physical greeting; just follow suit.

■ Individuals' names will be a combination of the father's last name followed by the mother's last name. Be sure to know and memorize the names of the people you will be meeting on your business trip.

The Business Meeting

■ In Spain, business is conducted in groups or teams. Even the boss sees himself or herself as a team player.

■ Formal meetings are not overly popular. They are typically called if they are needed to save time or communicate instructions.

■ During the first meeting, your hosts will want to know much about your personal background.

■ Spaniards are very interested in advancing economically, but new ideas can be hard for them to accept. As a result, making a decision on an issue that is new and innovative can be a slow process.

Business Dining

■ Dining with your Spanish business

counterparts doesn't have anything to do with business. You are establishing a relationship; business should not be discussed. If you were to mention business in this setting, it would severely damage your chances of developing future business.

■ The only way business conversation should come up during a dining experience is if your host brings up the subject.

Gift Giving

■ Gift giving is not common at business meetings. The exchange of gifts at the conclusion of a successful negotiation is acceptable, however.

■ Small, high-quality gifts are appropriate and can include items such as: books, art and music.

■ If offered a gift, open it immediately in front of the giver.

Relationship Facilitation Tips

■ In a business-dining situation, drink and order only Spanish wines. This is a huge compliment.

■ Never make the American “ok” symbol with your fingers; it is considered vulgar in Spain.

■ In conversation, acceptable topics include: your home country, admiration of Spanish culture and architecture, food and wine, and family.

■ Greetings between Spaniards are much closer than that of Americans. Although it may seem uncomfortable to be so close to your new acquaintance, never back away. This shows great disrespect and is considered extremely rude.



France

Business Etiquette

■ France is the polar opposite of laid-back, casual Spain. France models most of its business practices with military

precision. They follow rules and procedures rigidly. Organizations are centered around a chief executive or the most powerful individual within the company, and there is no room for the boss to team up with middle management. The chain of command flows from the top down; this type of management is the norm for all French business.

Meeting and Greeting

- Shaking hands with everyone in a meeting is essential. It is considered rude if business is started and everyone has not finished shaking hands with all the individuals present. Do not shake hands with the same person twice in one day, however.
- The French shake hands quickly and lightly.
- Frenchmen are allowed to initiate a handshake to a woman.
- If a Frenchman kisses your hand, and you are a woman, accept this gesture graciously.
- When meeting French business contacts for the first time, do not begin speaking English. This is seen as extremely rude. Even if you do not speak French very well, do your best to greet them in French.



The Business Meeting

- The French have a very American mindset when it comes to business; they get down to business quickly and are well prepared.
- The purpose of most meetings is not only to assert authority as a boss but also

to clarify issues and offer suggestions—never to debate with the boss.

- Presentations are well prepared, extremely professional and presented formally.

Business Dining

- Business lunch is preferable to dinner, although business should not be conducted at such gatherings. Meeting for a meal is a way to establish a business relationship. French food is an art and a spiritual experience; if business must be discussed, wait until the dessert course is served.
- Business meals are always formal, with four or more courses. Expect to dine for at least three hours.
- Wine is an essential part of the meal, so do not refuse a glass. Just sip slowly.
- Do not ask for more wine; your host will serve you.
- You are expected to eat everything on your plate, but do not ask for seconds.
- Compliment the food!

Gift Giving

- An exchange of business gifts is acceptable, but not on the first meeting.
- The French pride themselves on style and quality. Accordingly, a business gift should be elegant and unique. An intellectual and aesthetically pleasing gift is especially appreciated.
- Enclose a personal note—never your business card.
- Good gift ideas include: art, books or office accessories.

Relationship Facilitation Tips

- Brush up on your French history, politics and culture.
- Business decisions are dictated by logic, not emotion.
- The French keep their business and personal life separate. Do not discuss personal affairs, such as your family, or ask about personal topics in a business

setting.

- Appropriate conversation topics include: French cuisine, art, music, philosophy and current events.



Germany

Business Etiquette

- Germans are much like the French when it comes to business. Operations are very formal and the head of the company is the key player in those operations. Germans seek rules and procedures in order to create comfort and avoid the unexpected.



Meeting and Greeting

- Meetings are planned and formal. The purpose of a meeting is to gain more insight into a potential business decision.
- When introducing yourself, use your last name only.
- The proper way to greet a German is by saying *guten tag*, which means “good day.”
- Avoid asking how someone is when you are first introduced; this is much too personal.

The Business Meeting

- A strict hierarchy will be present at a German meeting. A chief executive of a small group of executives will hold all the power in the company...as well as in your meeting.

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- Be prepared with a detailed agenda and follow it closely.
- Demonstrate your thoroughness with reports, briefings, numerous facts, figures, charts and tables.
- Bring an abundance of business cards with English on one side and German on the other. Remember to include your title. The higher your rank, the more respect you will receive.
- Punctuality is key; being late is intolerable.

Business Dining

- Business dining is not intended to discuss business. Only talk business if it is initiated by your German host.
- Remember that German meals are heavy and filling; pace yourself.

- It is acceptable to say no to seconds as long as it is done politely and graciously. It is not necessary to eat everything on your plate, but do not leave an enormous amount either. This will indicate to your hosts that they have done something wrong in choosing the menu or restaurant.

Gift Giving

- Exchanging small gifts (something that can fit in your briefcase) at a first meeting is not uncommon.
- Appropriate business gifts include: books, bourbon, recordings of classical music and American-made items.
- Gifts are expected for social events. The larger the gift, the more public the presentation should be.

Relationship Facilitation Tips

- Germans see it as their social duty to correct social faux pas, so do not be offended if they correct your behavior.
- Never boast about money, power or influence.
- Avoid the topic of World War II; this is an extremely sensitive subject.
- Germans take business very seriously; respect this mentality.
- Avoid hard-sell tactics and surprises. Appeal instead to logic and procedure.
- Never try to condense or summarize information in a presentation. This indicates to Germans that the information is unimportant.

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Pamela Eyring is Owner and Director of The Protocol School of Washington, the leader in etiquette and protocol services. Armed with more than two decades of operational protocol and educational development, Ms. Eyring brings in-depth knowledge and skill to the international protocol and etiquette industry. Formerly the Chief of Protocol at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio, she

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Ms. Eyring has presented seminars and briefings to corporate and government executives, Fortune 500 companies, academia and numerous government and industry organizations. She is a Washington Business Journal columnist with a monthly advice column titled Biz Etiquette. Ms. Eyring blends a professional and direct approach with her topics and presents them in an interactive and entertaining format. She has been interviewed by multiple radio and international television stations and featured in national publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Real Simple Magazine*, and the American Society of Training and Development's *T&D Magazine*.

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