



UNITED KINGDOM

Business Etiquette

Organisational Structure

Understanding British Business Culture

While UK businesses typically have relatively flat organisational structures, decision-making tends to occur at the top. Historically, there was a strict separation between different ranks, with management and lower-level staff often occupying different floors. Although this is less common today, senior managers still command a level of authority and respect.

Management Style

Key values for British workers include loyalty and integrity, along with a preference for directness and honesty from their managers. However, in group settings, understatement is often favored, especially when diplomacy is required. British business operations generally adhere to established rules, frameworks, and procedures, which can sometimes slow progress and decision-making.

Formality

The stereotype of the "stiff upper lip" may not be entirely accurate, but it is true that the British tend to be quite formal in business contexts. Behaviors such as backslapping or hugging are uncommon, as are overt emotional expressions. There is also a skepticism towards aggressive sales tactics, so it's advisable to cultivate rapport and relationships before pursuing deals.

Relationships

Many British professionals prefer to work with familiar organizations or individuals, which presents an opportunity for building strong networks. Networking is crucial for business success in the UK, and once a good relationship is established, dealings often become more informal and open while remaining professional.

Correspondence

Business letters in the UK are typically formal and adhere to specific conventions. Email etiquette is less defined, so it's wise to start with a formal tone. Depending on your familiarity with the recipient, you might use either their first name or their title and surname. Begin emails with "Dear," and conclude with a friendly yet professional signoff like "Kind regards." As email exchanges progress, you may reduce formality, especially if the other party does the same.

Dress Code

Meeting dress codes are often specified; when in doubt, opting for formal attire is safer. Men generally wear dark business suits with shirts and ties, although many companies now allow open collars. Women typically choose business suits and blouses or conservative dresses. Some organizations permit casual attire on Fridays, but this is not universal, so it's best to confirm beforehand.

Greetings

The traditional business greeting in the UK is a firm handshake, which is also customary upon departure. First names are usually used in most face-to-face interactions, with notable exceptions in medical and academic settings. Business cards are exchanged during meetings, but there is no formal protocol for this exchange.

Punctuality

Punctuality is highly valued. Always book meetings well in advance and confirm the date, time, and location via email. If you're running late, it's courteous to call and notify someone—even if it's just for a few minutes.

Meetings

Business meetings in the UK are typically structured with a defined agenda, though small talk before and after is customary. Negotiations tend to be quite open, but be attentive to unspoken cues as well as spoken words. The British often prefer outcomes

that benefit both parties. Ensure you present a well-reasoned argument supported by facts and figures, as the British appreciate being well-informed in decision-making.

Cultural Sensitivity

It's essential to acknowledge that the UK has a strong anti-discrimination culture supported by law. Discrimination based on age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or marital status is illegal. Keep this in mind during business meetings and small talk.

Business Language

Internationally, the British are often perceived as less skilled at learning languages. While this is a generalization, it is true that business in the UK is predominantly conducted in English. Most job candidates are expected to possess a high level of written and spoken English. Be aware that British and American English can differ in spelling and vocabulary, and the UK is known for its diverse range of regional accents!