

Colombia Cultural Etiquette



Meeting and Greeting

- Shake hands with everyone when entering or leaving a room.

Body Language

- Smiling is very important.
- Never put your feet on furniture in a hotel, office or home.
- Yawning is impolite and viewed as a sign of hunger or sleepiness. Always cover your mouth when yawning.
- It is considered demeaning to beckon someone with your index finger. Instead, beckon with your palm down, waving your fingers or your whole hand.

Corporate Culture

- Colombians are normally punctual in business, although they may be up to a half-hour late. The best policy for foreign businesspeople is to be punctual, but prepared to wait. Don't get angry if a 12:00 p.m. appointment doesn't begin until 12:30 p.m. Excuse yourself if you are late.
- "In an hour or two" may mean tomorrow or next week. "Tomorrow" seldom means tomorrow and may mean next week. Don't get offended if someone says they will phone you tomorrow and then calls a week later.
- Colombians want to know you personally before they do business with you. You must develop a relationship with your counterparts before they will consider you trustworthy.
- Always allow your Colombian counterparts to bring up the subject of business. Be aware that this may take awhile. Meetings may be slow, with quiet, deliberate discussions.
- Follow up a meeting by sending a letter summarizing the main points and what was agreed upon.
- It may take several trips to complete a business transaction. Colombians prefer to do business in person -- one can only get "so far" by phone and fax.
- Maintain eye contact during conversations, or you may leave a bad impression.
- Contracts may be long and detailed. Put the key aspects of agreed-upon points in writing.

- Third-party contacts are vital to business success. You should hire a local distributor, representative, salesperson and/or lawyer.

Dining and Entertainment

- Time and punctuality are not stressed. Colombians will typically arrive up to thirty minutes late for social engagements. A 10:00 p.m. party will often begin a half-hour to one hour late.
- Working breakfasts are common, and business lunches and dinners are popular. Plan on spending at least two or three hours at either.

Dress

- Colombians pay a lot of attention to appearance and clothing. Dress conservatively and be well groomed.
- Shoes are the first thing people notice. Colombians do not wear tennis shoes unless they are playing tennis, jogging, etc.
- For business, men should wear dark suits, white shirts and ties in the cities. In warmer areas, dress is less formal. Women should wear dresses and suits. Wear comfortable cotton in warmer areas.

Gifts

- Gifts made in America are well-received.
- Give personal gifts, like clothing and perfume, only when you know people well.
- Bring your hostess fruit, flowers or chocolates. Send flowers ahead of time, if possible. Roses are a favorite.
- Give your colleagues fine scotch and wines, engraved pens, calculators and gifts from your home region.

Helpful Hints

- Don't offer your opinions about local politics or religion.
- Be prudent when you talk about drugs. Colombia is working with the United States' government in the war against drugs, but U.S. foreign policy is not viewed positively by many Colombians.
- If you are invited to a bullfight, do not decline. Tickets for good seats are very expensive.

- Do not be offended if you are called a “gringo.” Colombians use this term to refer to people from the United States, and it is not meant to be insulting.
- Colombians consider Panama to have been stolen from them by *norteamericanos* eager to build the Panama Canal. Try to stay away from this touchy subject.

Especially for Women

- A woman in the workforce is treated as any man, notwithstanding special courtesy and manners.
- United States businesswomen are received well in Colombia and will be treated in a businesslike manner, although perhaps with some curiosity. North American women should not have trouble doing business in Colombia.
- Men may flirt or make comments; simply ignore them. Women should be careful not to do anything that might be considered flirtatious, which may be misinterpreted.

Resource: http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_co.htm