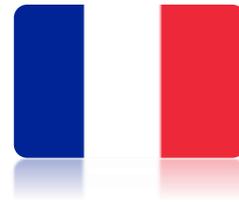


France Cultural Etiquette



Meeting and Greeting

- At a business or social meeting, shake hands with everyone present when arriving and leaving. A handshake may be quick with a light grip.
- Men may initiate handshakes with women.
- When family and close friends greet one another, they often kiss both cheeks.

Names and Titles

- Use last names and appropriate titles until specifically invited by your French host or colleagues to use their first names. First names are used only for close friends and family.
- Colleagues on the same level generally use first names in private but always last names in public.
- Address people as Monsieur, Madame or Mademoiselle without adding the surname.
- Madame is used for all adult women, married or single, over 18 years of age (except for waitresses, which are addressed as Mademoiselle.)
- Academic titles and degrees are very important. You are expected to know them and use them properly.

Body Language

- Do not sit with legs spread apart. Sit up straight with legs crossed at knee or knees together. Feet should never placed on tables or chairs.
- Toothpicks, nail clippers, and combs are not used in public.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets.
- Do not yawn or scratch in public. Sneeze or blow your nose as quietly as possible using a handkerchief or tissue. If possible, leave the room.
- Do not slap your open palm over a closed fist (this is considered a vulgar gesture).
- The "okay" sign, made with index finger and thumb, means "zero."
- The French use the "thumbs up" sign to say "okay."

Corporate Culture

- Professionalism is highly valued in business and is the key to acceptance of outsiders.
- France enjoys a skilled, well-educated labor force. Hard work is admired, but workaholicism is not.
- Be on time. The French appreciate punctuality.
- Give business cards to the receptionist or secretary upon arrival to an office and to each person you meet subsequently. Print cards in English or French. Include academic degree and/or title.
- Many French speak and understand English, but prefer not to use it. An interpreter will probably not be necessary, but check ahead of time. Use French only for greetings, toasts and occasional phrases unless your French is perfect.
- Government plays a major role in business. Find a local representative (banker, lawyer or agent) to help you through regulatory obstacles.
- Business people tend to be formal and conservative. Business relationships are proper, orderly and professional.
- Don't discuss personal life with business people. Personal lives are kept separate from business relationships.
- The French get down to business quickly, but make decisions slowly after much deliberation.
- Organizations are highly centralized with a powerful chief executive. Bosses are often dictatorial and authoritative
- French are leaders in the area of economic planning. Plans are far-reaching and detailed.
- Entering a room and seating is done by rank.
- Meetings follow an established format with a detailed agenda.
- The French dislike disagreeing and debating in a public forum, but enjoy a controlled debate, whereby an informed rebuttal is appreciated.
- The purpose of meetings is to brief/coordinate and clarify issues. State your intentions directly and openly.
- Presentations should be well prepared, comprehensive, clear, well-written, informative and presented in a formal, rational, professional manner -- appealing always to the intellect.
- The French dislike the hard sell approach.
- Things actually get done through a network of personal relationships and alliances.

- Avoid planning business meetings during August or two weeks before and after Christmas and Easter period
- Do not call a French businessperson at home unless it is an emergency.

Dining and Entertainment

- Do not ask for a martini or scotch before dinner -- they are viewed as palate numbing.
- Before dinner, pernod, kir, champagne, vermouth may be offered. Wine is always served with meals. After dinner, liqueurs are served.
- Business breakfasts are rare.
- Senior managers socialize only with those of equivalent status.
- Business entertainment is done mostly in restaurants.
- Lunch is still considered a private time. However, working lunches and breakfasts are becoming more common in France.
- The French do not like to discuss business during dinner. Dinner is more of a social occasion and a time to enjoy good food, wine and discussion.
- Spouses are not included in business lunches, but may be included in business dinners.
- A female guest of honor is seated to the right of the host. A male guest of honor is seated to the left of the hostess.
- Never start eating until your host and hostess have begun. Wait until toast has been proposed before you drink wine.
- Keep your hands on the table at all times during a meal — not in your lap. However, take care to keep your elbows off the table.
- Fold your salad onto your fork by using your knife. Do not cut your salad with a knife or fork.
- Never cut bread. Break bread with your fingers.
- There usually are no bread/butter plates. Put bread on the table next to your dinner plate above your fork.
- Cut cheese vertically. Do not cut off the point of cheese.
- Almost all food is cut with a fork and a knife.
- Never eat fruit whole. Fruit should be peeled and sliced before eating.
- When finished eating, place knife and fork side by side on the plate at the 5:25 position.
- Cross your knife and fork across your plate to signify that you would like more food.
- Do not smoke between courses.
- Leave wine glass almost full if you don't care for more.

- Taste everything offered.
- Leaving food on your plate is impolite.
- Do not ask for a tour of your host's home, it would be considered impolite.
- Send a thank-you note or telephone the next day to thank hostess.

Dress

- The French are the world leaders in fashion. Dress is conservative and understated. Casual attire is inappropriate in cities. Be clean and well-dressed at all times.
- For business, men should wear conservative suits and ties; women should wear conservative suits, pant suits and dresses.
- Suit coats stay on in offices and restaurants.

Gifts

- Small business gifts may be exchanged, but usually not at the first meeting.
- Never send a gift for a French colleague to his/her home.
- Give a good quality gift or none at all. Give: recorded music, art, books, office accessories.
- Do not give gifts with your company logo stamped on them (the French consider this garish).
- When invited to someone's home, always bring a small gift for the hostess. If possible, send flowers the morning of the party (popular in Paris). Otherwise, present a gift to the hostess upon arrival. A gift to the hostess will probably not be unwrapped immediately (unless no other guests are present or expected).
- Give candy, cookies, cakes and flowers. Do not give gifts of 6 or 12 (for lovers); gifts of odd numbers, especially 13; chrysanthemums or red roses; or wine unless it is exceptional quality.
- A gift should be of high quality and wrapped beautifully.

Helpful Hints

- Lower your voice a little and behave graciously and you will enjoy a warm response from the French.
- The French value their privacy. Don't ask personal questions related to occupation, salary, age, family or children unless you have a well-established friendship.
- Try to demonstrate some knowledge of history, politics and French culture.

- Compliments may be appreciated, but usually are received by denial instead of "thank you."
- Do not chew gum in public.
- The French do not tell or like to hear jokes. They prefer intelligent and satirical wit. Funny stories of real life situations are appreciated.

Epecially for Women

- An increasing number of French women hold management positions in retail, service, law, finance and human resources. Foreign women are generally accepted in business, though they may be flirted with on occasion.
- Women are better accepted in management positions in the major cities than the provinces.
- Business women may invite a Frenchman to lunch or dinner and will have no problem picking up the tab.

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