

Global Etiquette

European Business Meetings

By Maralyn D. Hill

Time matters for business meetings. It matter for social engagements as well, but we will cover one thing at a time. This month, we will focus on European countries. If I have missed a country, it is an oversight. Next month, we will feature another part of the world.

In many countries, not being prompt or on time is considered a huge insult. Yet, as many of you may have discovered, being late is culturally accepted in others. This is an important distinction and I'd encourage you to err on the side of being prompt. As you will be able to tell, I know more about some of these countries than others. When you are a guest in another country, or are doing business with someone from another country, it is best to know and understand the culture and not take someone being late as personal. Know and understand as much about time as you can.

Europe

Being punctual matters and is expected, especially in Northern European countries.

Albania

Punctuality is expected, and I'd suggest taking it seriously.

Austria

In Austria, every minute counts. Time is carefully scheduled and managed, as well as respected. Just as its trains arrive and leave on time, so do details of business. I'd suggest being

five to ten minutes early, as a few minutes late can offend. If you are going to be late at all, call.

Belgium

Being on time is extremely important, as the Belgians are good timekeepers. Punctuality is viewed as a virtue. Apologies for late arrivals will be accepted good naturedly, but I would not run the risk and certainly call.

Bulgaria

Make appointments well in advance and punctuality is quite important.

Croatia

The Croatian culture takes time seriously and considers punctuality good manners, especially with business meetings.

Cyprus

Cyprus is more complicated, as a formal request is required for a meeting, as well as a written confirmation on the part of both parties. You are expected to be punctual. Your Cypriot business counterpart may arrive late.

Czech Republic

Plan in advance, as you will find it difficult to set up on short notice. Czechs want to arrive prepared and have time to prepare so they have facts and figures at their disposal. I would not even suggest trying to arrange a business meeting on a Friday afternoon. Being late implies a lack of professionalism.

Denmark

Be punctual and prepared to argue your own point of view. It's expected. Meetings tend to stick to a strict agenda.

Estonia

Visitors are expected to be punctual, as Estonians are always on time. I'd suggest arriving five to ten minutes early, so you are in the right spot, fully prepared, etc. Estonians like to get straight to the point and business meetings generally stay on schedule. They equate time = money and do not like to waste it.

Finland

If you discover you will be more than five minutes late, it is best to call and advise, as Finns take punctuality quite seriously and expect the same from you.

France

Punctuality is considered a courtesy and expected. Prior appointments are vital even if social. Drop-ins are rude and unacceptable, but being up to ten minutes late for a business event will be tolerated. But strive to be on time. On the other hand, you may have to wait for your French colleague being late without apologies.

Germany

Appointments are expected and meetings and events run on time, so be on time. It will reflect poorly, if you are not punctual. German meetings are more formal. Use titles, unless invited to do otherwise.

Greece

Punctuality is not as important to Greeks. They are frequently late for appointments. Yet, they do expect others to be on time for business meetings. Sometimes, you don't have to schedule appointments ahead of time. Greeks enjoy the social aspect of business meetings as well as those with friends and families. While once I was making three different presentations, in three different regions of Greece, all with press coverage, etc., and most started between twenty to forty minutes later than scheduled. One goes with the flow and enjoys the people you meet while you are waiting. In every instance, the audience was so engaging the time flew by. Sometimes contacts made while waiting are as important as those made after presentation.

Hungary

Being fortunate to visit a few times, I found punctuality is extremely important when Hungarians meet foreigners. Try to arrive ten minutes early and allow extra time for traffic. Traffic is always a challenge in Budapest. If you are delayed five to ten minutes, it will not be crucial to the outcome of your business meeting. On the other hand, don't be consistently late.

Iceland

Times have changed. Now, Iceland is similar to other Nordic countries where punctuality is highly valued. If you are going to be delayed, let

the host know. It is a good idea to arrive ten minutes early so you are prepared to start on time.

If you traveled to Iceland twenty years ago and think it is the same, it isn't. Then, punctuality was not a must and "dropping in" prevailed with many business appointments. So be sure you are up to date.

Ireland

Be sure to make appointments in advance. There is somewhat of a difference between foreign and local associates. But unless you are local, be sure of on time arrival. It is considered inconsiderate, as well as impolite, to be late. If you are planning several appointments in a day, you need to allow plenty of time for traffic, especially in Dublin. If for some reason you are running late, you should phone and tell time of arrival. Ask if it is too late and they would rather reschedule, or if you can still come. Now as the foreigner, if you have arrived, you may wait up to fifteen minutes. The Irish are laid back with time, both business-wise and social. After fifteen minutes, feel free to call and check to be sure the meeting is still scheduled.

Israel

In general, the Israelis are casual about time, but they do expect you to be punctual and prior appointments are necessary.

Italy

In Italy, rules change, as punctuality is not a priority. The key is patience and to be prepared for delays and some waiting. I encourage you not to view this as a lack of respect, but rather one of multitasking. Be sure to build some flexibility into deadlines, as the firm you are dealing with may be doing several projects at once.

Latvia

Punctuality is appreciated by Latvians, as they are punctual themselves. Arriving early will provide you with a couple of more minutes to prepare, while you wait for the meeting to start on time.

Lithuania

Be sure to set up your meeting two to three weeks prior to the date. You will be expected to arrive on time and arriving five to ten minutes early is good. If you are going to be late, call. Lithuanians prefer to meet face-to-face. They want to ensure and build relationships and understanding.



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which is punctuality.

Spain

The Spanish view of time is much different than Western Europe, except for Italy coming close. Spaniards do not consider being late as impolite. Deadlines are frequently viewed as nice objectives when possible, but not really binding. Timing appointments can be a challenge.

Sweden

Punctuality is a must for both business and social appointments. The expression, "Never be late," would work well, as planning and schedules are an integral part of the Swedish life. If you are going to be late, phone. But you will have some points against you, as it is considered quite poor etiquette.

Switzerland

Everything runs on time in Switzerland. I've run through the train stations to make connections and Swiss Rail is amazing. You will find that appointments are essential, and punctuality is highly valued and expected.

Turkey

The Turkish are formal for business, even when purchasing a rug. You schedule your appointments in advance. A high value is placed on being punctual, and it is expected that international business people will honor this.

United Kingdom

Being on time is highly valued by the British for business meetings. If you arrive on time to the minute, those you are meeting with will either be walking in with you or have arrived a minute or two before you. Time is an economic commodity and Brits are known for not wanting to lose any. If you are a few minutes late, an apology will work. If you are going to be later or more delayed, call and advise when you can arrive and see if the meeting needs to be rescheduled. The odds are, they have another meeting scheduled after yours. So, you need to keep that in mind. They are more laid back on social gatherings, where people do arrive up to fifteen minutes late. But that depends, and it's best to check out details with someone in the know.

Note: Information for this article was compiled from my own experience, Do's and Taboos Around The World, associates, and double checked from approximately twenty different Internet sites.

Luxemburg

Like Belgium, Luxemburgers appreciate, as well as expect, punctuality, for both business and social events. Anything else is considered disrespectful and quite rude. If you are going to be late, be sure to call, apologize, and give them the choice of waiting or rescheduling. You can easily be branded as unreliable to do business with if you cannot respect time. Their meetings usually get straight to business, so as not to waste time.

Malta

It's a good idea to schedule your business meeting two to three weeks in advance and confirm by telephone. It is expected that you will be punctual, but not as rigid as in many places.

Montenegro

I'd suggest an appointment, but punctuality currently does not have much value.

Netherlands

The Dutch keep time well and view punctuality as a virtue in business. They are accepting of apologies for delays, if you have called ahead.

Norway

Professional Norwegians expect punctuality and it is highly valued. If you are going to be over five minutes late, be sure to call. Otherwise, it will not make a good impression. Best to arrive five or ten minutes early.

Poland

Poles are quite punctual, which I found to be true on a recent trip. You may discover that those in higher positions may arrive late to a meeting. It is only a means to show their status in the organization hierarchy. Poles have had to rebuild their country three times, since WWI, WWII, and the Russian occupation, and have shown the work ethic and stamina to do it. For those in higher positions to want some recognition, it is well deserved. Whereas it is best to be punctual, you could possibly be forgiven for ten to fifteen minutes, if you call.

Portugal

Prior appointments are necessary and I'd not suggest making them between noon and three, as everything closes. Punctuality is not viewed as important, however people from the North are more punctual than those from Southern Portugal. Believe it or not, it is considered polite to arrive five minutes late, but the host is normally on time. When someone is more than thirty minutes late, it is then considered rude. On arrival for a meeting, you may find your wait as long as twenty minutes. If it extends over thirty minutes, it is quite acceptable to show some concern. When setting up the meeting, if they suggest a late afternoon meeting, be sure to have them specify a thirty-minute time range.

Romania

Arrive a little early and allow for traffic delays or parking difficulties. Being punctual is viewed as a strength and you do not want to be late.

Skopje

(Macedonia - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

Times have changed. During the past few years, appointments have become necessary. It is best to be on time, but trains and buses are not necessarily on time, so allow extra.

Serbia

It will be expected that you will be punctual. That does not mean anyone else will be on time. But, you will lose respect, if you do not show respect.

Slovenia

I would strongly suggest arriving ten minutes early, to ensure you are not late. Slovenians are punctual and dislike waiting. A prospective business partner being late will be viewed as lacking respect and disinterest. Arriving late could well ensure that a business relationship will not be viewed with any serious consideration.

Slovakia

For a young country, they are very punctual. The business sector is punctual and do not like to be kept waiting for a meeting. Punctuality is expected. I witnessed this clockwork precision on a trip to Slovakia two years ago. They are growing and on their own schedule,