



HOW TO BUILD RELATIONS IN GERMANY

TOP TIPS



Association of
Translation Companies
DEFINING STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

1

MAKING FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST

FIRM HANDSHAKE (MEN & WOMEN)

A strong but not overly firm handshake is the standard. Ensure that you maintain eye contact and introduce yourself with a clear and formal tone.

RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE

Personal space is important in German culture. Avoid standing too close to others, especially during initial meetings.

BE PUNCTUAL

Germans highly value punctuality. Always arrive on time or early for meetings. Being late is seen as disrespectful.

FORMAL ADDRESSING

Always use the formal titles, such as Herr (Mr.) or Frau (Mrs.), followed by the last name. Use the "Sie" form (polite, formal) unless invited to use the more familiar "Du" form.

EXCHANGE BUSINESS CARDS

Present your business card with the right hand (in line with cultural norms) and ensure it includes your qualifications or professional titles.

2

BUSINESS SOCIALISING: DO'S AND DON'TS

HUMOUR

Germans typically appreciate humor, but it should be used with caution. Avoid jokes that are too personal, political, or controversial early on.

DRESS CODE

Conservative and formal attire is preferred for most business occasions. Flashy accessories or attire may be viewed as inappropriate. Neutral tones and professional clothing are standard.

ENTERTAINING

While dinners and social gatherings can be part of business, business meetings should not take place at home. Business dinners often happen at restaurants or exclusive venues.

DON'T OVERSHARE PERSONAL INFORMATION

Germans typically keep their private life separate from professional life, especially at the outset of a relationship.

3

GIFTING

GIFT GIVING OCCASIONS

Small gifts are typically given after a successful business deal, during Christmas, or to commemorate visits. It's a gesture of goodwill.

APPROPRIATENESS

Keep gifts professional and modest. Avoid overly personal items. Preferred gifts include high-quality local products, such as German wines, chocolates, or specialty foods.

AVOID BRIBERY

It's illegal and highly unethical. Germany has strict anti-corruption laws, and any appearance of bribery will harm business relations.

4

BUILDING TRUST

PUNCTUALITY IS KEY

Always be on time for meetings. Timeliness demonstrates respect and professionalism.

DELIVER ON PROMISES

Always follow through on commitments, as reliability and consistency are highly valued.

PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE

Dress well, remain formal, and maintain a polished appearance. Confidence is important, but don't appear arrogant.

VALUE RELIABILITY, HONESTY, AND TRANSPARENCY

Be straightforward and transparent in all dealings. Germans respect a direct, no-nonsense approach.

BE WELL-PREPARED

Always come prepared with facts, figures, and clear plans. Germans appreciate thoroughness and an organized approach.

5

ADAPTING TO GERMAN WORKING CULTURE

RESPECT HIERARCHY AND EXPERTISE

Hierarchy plays a role in the workplace, but expertise is just as important. While you should respect authority, opinions based on knowledge will always carry weight.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Germans place a strong emphasis on work-life balance. Don't expect after-hours communication or work unless absolutely necessary.

TEAMWORK

Germans value collaboration and efficient teamwork. Don't just rely on individual decisions; seek consensus where appropriate.

MEETINGS WITH STRUCTURE

Meetings tend to have a clear agenda, defined outcomes, and clear next steps. Make sure to prepare well and follow through on action items.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS & AGREEMENTS

Germans value clarity and transparency. Make sure goals, timelines, and expectations are clear from the beginning to avoid misunderstandings.

6

HOW TO RETAIN LOCAL STAFF/DISTRIBUTORS

STABILITY AND FAIR TREATMENT

Germans value stability and fairness in the workplace. Offer long-term growth opportunities and ensure fair treatment.

MOTIVATION

Recognize competence and create an environment that fosters independence. Encourage employees to take initiative but be clear about goals and expectations.

PRAISE AND RECOGNITION

Praise should be achievement-specific and direct. Be sincere and provide feedback that is both constructive and respectful.

CRITICISM

Provide direct, constructive feedback when necessary, focusing on the issue at hand rather than on the person. German culture appreciates honesty, but it should always be respectful.

ESSENTIAL GERMAN PHRASES

Hello, how are you?

Guten Tag, wie geht's?

Nice to meet you!

Freut mich, Sie kennenzulernen!

Please; thanks

Bitte; danke

How was your journey?

Wie war Ihre Reise?

Could you repeat please?

Wiederholen Sie, bitte!

Cheers!

Prost!

Let's get started!

Lassen Sie uns anfangen!

Closing an email

MfG (Mit freundlichen Grüßen)

Goodbye – see you soon.

Auf wiedersehen – bis bald!

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