

Unit 1: At Work

Hello and welcome to the first unit of the program. The topics presented in this program are an introduction to the diverse components of business practice in Canada. You may find that some areas are similar to how business is done in your own country, and some very different. Naturally, business practices can vary across the country, as Canada is very big and is culturally inclusive. Consider the information here as a guideline or starting point and modify it as needed.

You can view the list of available topics and select the video segments to watch that are most appropriate for you. There are 5 short video segments in this unit. The topics we will cover are:

Business Dress and Appearance

Appointments and Meetings

Peers and Subordinates

Superiors

Guests, Consultants, New Employees

Our first topic is Business Dress and Appearance

Dress, in the general sense, means the style of clothing you choose and wear.

You should always be aware of and concerned about your appearance. If you appear wrinkled, unshaven or generally untidy, people may believe that you don't care about the situation or the meeting enough to present yourself in the best possible way.

If you are not sure about the dress standards, dress a little more conservatively than you think might be the standard. If you think jeans may be OK for a social event but aren't sure, show up in ironed khakis and a nice golf shirt. If you think a situation may call for dress slacks, wear a dress shirt and tie. If you are preparing for a job interview, it is a good idea to drop by the company office before hand to find out what other employees are wearing to work.

A conservative, well-dressed appearance is important in Canadian business culture. Your clothing does not necessarily have to be brand new or at the height of fashion. If you wear quality clothing that is old, but presentable, your clothing is completely acceptable.

Although some companies and work situations allow or encourage casual dress, in many places, suits and ties are the dress code for men. Business suits, dresses, or dress slacks and a blouse are often the standard attire for women. For both men and women, it is a good guideline to wear perfume or other scents sparingly.

Appointments and Meetings

Making appointments

In Canada, punctuality is a priority. Canadians expect themselves and others to be on time for all business-related meetings. Moreover, you will be expected to arrive on time for a business appointment even if your Canadian counterpart fails to do the same. For most appointments, such as appointments with the doctor or dentist, you are expected to arrive a few minutes before the specified time. This allows the paperwork to be filled out prior to the scheduled appointment time.

Mornings tend to be the preferred time for appointments. Business hours are generally 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Longer hours, however, are common.

If you cannot prevent being late, even if it may be less than 5 minutes late, a telephone call stating your expected time of arrival is appreciated.

In general, it is acceptable to be 15 minutes late for an evening social engagement. Do not, however, be late by more than 30 minutes.

Meetings

If a subject is important enough to call a meeting, be considerate of the participants' time and ensure that it is well prepared. The objective of the meeting should be clearly defined and only those people who are specifically involved in achieving the objective need to be invited to participate. Generally, meetings should be as small as possible and task oriented.

In Canada, all meeting attendees are expected to participate by voicing their opinions. Polite dissension and discussion to achieve a consensus is encouraged. It is not enough to simply physically attend a meeting.

If you have set up a meeting, communicate beforehand-

- The objective
- The expected length of the meeting (Be sure to observe the ending time scrupulously, unless everyone agrees to continue.)
- Items expected to be discussed

Be sure to thank meeting members for their time and participation, and demonstrate (in the minutes or written record, at least) how their contributions helped meet the objective of the meeting. Participants are frequently left wondering if they've been heard or if their attendance and contributions were noticed. Distribute some written record (no matter how simple the meeting) to all attendees and absentees, with concise but complete descriptions of decisions made and including action items.

Peers and Subordinates

Peers are your equals at work. Subordinates are the people you supervise.

It is important to impress both the boss and your coworkers. 40% of new management hires fail in their first jobs. The key reason for their failure is their inability to build good relationships with peers and subordinates.

Social rank or class is an important guideline to social interaction in many cultures. It is the same in a corporate culture in North America. Most companies will have an organizational chart to help staff figure out who reports to whom and where they fit in the hierarchy. Of course, it is crucial to show respect to your superiors, but the best practice is to treat everyone with respect and courtesy. The current social and economic climate is one of rapid advancement through technology, which makes it very possible for a bothersome salesman to become an important client, or an administrative assistant to become a manager.

Mergers and acquisitions add to this "class mixing," causing a former competitor to become a coworker overnight.

This can make things awkward if you treat people differently depending on their "corporate standing." Having a consistent demeanor improves your credibility. Even the people at the top will begin to suspect your motives if you treat VIPs with impeccable courtesy and treat subordinates rudely.

Superiors

The only thing you owe your boss above and beyond what you owe peers and subordinates is more information. Unobtrusively be sure he or she knows what you're doing, is alerted as early as possible to issues that may arise, and is aware of outcomes and milestones.

Never surprise your boss.

You should be careful to speak well of him both inside and outside of the company. Corporate gossip can travel as fast as any other kind, and you do not want negative comments to your own image as a positive employee.

Your boss should never ask you to do a task that is personal to him or her or outside of company-related duties. In Canada, employees leave work at the agreed upon quitting time or when work is complete for the day. You do not have to wait until the boss leaves the office before you can leave.

Guests, Consultants, New Employees

At times, you may have a new employee, guest, or consultant working at your company for a day, week, or longer, so be sure that person has the resources and information he or she needs to do the job. Introduce the person to staff members and be sure to indicate which staff members may be problem solvers. For example, who to go to with network issues. This isn't just courtesy, it's good business, since time spent looking for things is embarrassing to the consultant and expensive for your company.

Give a consultant or guest the same type of workspace as an employee at your company in a similar role. A consultant who is there to do programming should have, if at all possible, the same size cube, type of computer equipment, etc. as an employee programmer would have in your company. This prevents your employees from feeling looked down-upon, and the consultant from feeling singled out or treated as second-rate.

A guest from a regulatory agency will tend to want to know what's "really" going on in the company. By treating him or her like everyone else, (instead of isolating them in a plush office in a far wing, for example) will raise less suspicion and enable them to get the information they need more efficiently.

Appoint an employee to be a 'buddy' to a guest or consultant to ensure that they are introduced around, "shown the ropes," and have someone to help resolve little logistical problems that may arise and cause non-productivity or embarrassment.

We have covered the first 5 topics to be presented in the series. You may review the material which you have found most useful at any time.