

Unit 3: Social Occasions

Unit 3 deals with social occasions. As a company employee, consultant or business associate you will be invited to and expected to attend some social events throughout the year. However, in Canada, family responsibilities have a high priority. Canadians spend most evenings and weekends with their families and friends and not with business associates or clients. Nightly extended drinking sessions with co-workers are not the norm. Generally, you are not expected to attend a corporate event if it conflicts with your personal schedule.

You need to achieve a balance between behavior you feel comfortable with and that which is comfortable for your business contacts.

The topics this segment will cover are:

Public Behavior

Gift Giving

Social Settings

Table Manners

Toasting

Tipping

Networking

Let's begin with Public Behaviour. This content is available for download.

In business situations, a handshake is used upon greetings or introductions. Men usually wait for women to offer their hand before shaking. You should grip the other person's hand firmly and briefly. A weak handshake can give the impression of not being interested in the other person or being weak physically or in business.

An open, cordial manner is usually necessary when dealing with Canadian businesspeople.

Direct--but not too intense--eye contact is acceptable, especially when you want to convey interest and sincerity. Some ethnic groups, however, look away to confer respect. There is no need for younger people to avoid eye contact with an older person.

The standard distance between two people should be two feet. French Canadians, however, may stand slightly closer.

Greetings are English expressions similar to those in Great Britain and the United States, such as "Good Morning", "Good Afternoon", "Good Evening", "Goodnight", "Hi", and "Hello."

"How are you?" is a popular greeting in Canada. This question does not require a literal-minded, detailed answer; a simple "Fine, thank you" will suffice.

Canada is a very open society, exercising maximum social tolerance. Boasting and ostentation, however, tends to be frowned upon or at least regarded with some misgivings.

Generally, Canadians like to consider themselves as tolerant of religious diversity, but many are uncomfortable with certain outward displays of religion.

In public, emotion is kept under restraint. Most Canadians try to be tactful when dealing with other people. For the most part, they will try to avoid arguing or causing scenes in public.

It is considered rude for people to speak in a foreign language in the presence of others who do not understand what is being said.

If you see an acquaintance at a distance, a wave is an appropriate acknowledgement.

Francophones usually are not as reserved as Anglophones. Moreover, they are often more likely to use expansive gestures, stand closer while talking, and touch during a conversation.

Generally, friends of the same sex do not hold hands.

If you need to point, use the index finger. Pointing at other people, however, is often considered unacceptable.

To beckon someone, ensure that you wave with your fingers curled toward you and that your palm is facing up.

The "O.K." sign, and the "thumbs up" sign are two popular gestures used for expressing approval.

To wave good-bye, move your entire hand facing outward.

If you want to give the "V" for victory sign, do so with the palm facing out. Attempting this gesture with the palm inward may cause offense.

Common courtesies such as holding doors open for the person behind you (male or female) are appreciated and often expected.

People using Automated Bank Machines [ATMs] expect the next person in line to stand a few feet behind them.

People routinely line up to pay for items in stores, procure tickets in movie theatres, and board public transportation. Even without a formal line, expect to be served on a "first come, first served" basis. Be patient when waiting to be served. Moreover, Canadians deeply resent people who push ahead in line.

Restaurants in Canada often have smoking and non-smoking sections. In an increasing number of Canadian communities, however, there are by-laws in effect prohibiting smoking in restaurants--and even bars. With the exception of the streets, you will find that smoking is restricted in most public places.

From time to time, Canadians may assume very casual seating positions. For example, you may observe them sitting with the ankle of one leg over the knee or resting their feet on chairs or desks.

Spitting is considered impolite and unclean.

Gift Giving

Traditionally, business gifts are given after you close a deal. Gifts may also be presented upon your arrival.

Gifts are usually unwrapped immediately and shown to everyone. If you receive a Christmas gift,

however, you may be asked to wait until Christmas Day to open it.

Thoughtfully selected gifts, preferably from your home country, are the best choices.

Select a quality gift that is at the same time not obviously expensive.

Christmas is a popular time for exchanging gifts. For business associates, good choices include practical items for the office and a bottle of liquor or wine. During the Christmas season, many stores and malls offer gift-wrapping services.

Taking someone out for a meal or other entertainment is another popular gift.

When you visit a home, flowers, candy, wine or liquor usually make welcome gifts.

White lilies are sometimes associated with funerals, while red roses are reserved for romantic occasions.

Gifts for women such as perfume or clothing are usually inappropriate because these selections are considered far too personal.

Prosperous Entertaining

Business meals are popular in Canada and, in most cities, there will be a variety of good restaurants to choose from. Breakfast meetings are becoming common as well.

Business lunches are usually short [1-1 1/2 hours] with lighter foods and often no alcohol.

When invited to a dinner, the best policy is to wait for your Canadian host to bring up the subject of business.

Invitations to dine at a Canadian home are relatively infrequent and should be considered quite an honour.

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.

When you visit a home, a gift of flowers, candy, wine or liquor usually make welcome gifts. Before bringing liquor as a gift, you might want to make discreet inquiries as to whether they consume alcohol or not.

If you prefer not to eat something, simply say, "No, thank you." In this culture, politely refusing a food item is unlikely to cause offense. In fact, it is usually more polite to refuse a food item than to show that you are forcing yourself to eat it.

If you are a guest in a home, wait for permission from your hosts before wandering from room to room. Often Canadians are proud of their home and will show you around willingly.

A few days after a dinner party, a telephone call or note thanking the host or hostess is a thoughtful and appreciated gesture.

In a restaurant, to call the server over, briefly wave to get his or her attention. To call for the check, make a writing gesture. In Quebec, nodding the head backwards or discreetly waving the hand will suffice.

Restaurants charge a Goods and Services Tax [GST] of 7%. Gratuities are not included in the bill, but you will be expected to tip 15% for good service.

Social Settings

Many impressions formed during a party, dinner or golf game can make or break a key business arrangement, whether or not business is discussed directly. Always carry business cards. Arrive at a party at the stated time or up to 30 minutes later. (Not earlier than the stated time, under any circumstances.)

The art of conversation is an excellent skill to develop. It's important to appear interested in the person you are talking to without appearing too inquisitive. Never ask someone their age, salary, or sexual orientation. Other sensitive areas such as marital status or political opinions may be brought up if the conversation has naturally evolved in that direction.

Table Manners

The fork goes on the left. The spoon and knife go on the right. If you have more than one fork, start with the fork on the outside and move inwards, a different fork for each succeeding course.

Food items go on the left, so your bread plate is on your left. Drinks, including coffee cups, should be on the right. When sitting at a banquet table, you may begin eating when two people to your left and right are served. If you haven't been served, but most of your table has, encourage others to start. Reach only for items in front of you, ask that other items be passed by a neighbor. Offer to the left; pass to the right, although once things start being passed, go with the flow.

Traditionally, the host or hostess is the first person at the table allowed to begin eating and drinking. Then, the guests may proceed with the meal.

Make a point of offering any main dishes to others before serving yourself.

The fork is held in the right hand and is used for eating. The knife is used to cut or spread something onto a food item. To use the knife, the fork is switched to the left hand or is laid down; to continue eating, the fork is switched back to the right hand. But, if you prefer to use the "continental" style of dining, in which the knife and fork are never switched, that is acceptable, too.

Bodily function noises (releasing gas) are never appropriate in public and are particularly rude when at the table during or after a meal.

When eating in a restaurant, be sure to note the level of formality and food and service style. For example, in Western style restaurants, diners must never pick up their bowl or plate while eating. In a more formal situation, you should not rest your elbows on the table.

Toasting

This is an artistic, salutary presentation. Toasts are a traditional part of special occasions

Toasting Tips

Toasts should be light in nature and short

One minute is best and three minutes is the maximum

Usually made immediately after dessert is served

Do not wait until guests have started eating

The toaster rises to their feet as a gesture of respect, and everybody else rises, if the recipient of honor is important enough, all must raise their glasses

Bow or nod of the head follows, and everybody sips the wine

Lightly tapping your spoon on your water glass is acceptable to get guest attention

The Host should be the person to make the toast

It is only proper for someone else to make the toast if they ask the host for permission

Who makes toasts, and when they wish to make them should be decided before the event

Toasts should be well thought out and should enhance the presentation of the event

An appropriate tone is:

Festive and light

Complimentary and appreciative

Politically correct

Tasteful

An inappropriate tone

Makes a political statement

Addresses controversial issues

Is delivered as put-down or "roast"

Is offensive to members of the group

Has an off-color, lewd connotation

If you have had several drinks, skip rising to your feet

Tipsy toasts are sloppy toasts

If humor does not come easily to you, do not try to be funny

Practice giving toasts at less formal occasions before you try it at an important event

The gesture

Eye contact

When the guest of honor or host is toasted, raise your glass and look that person in the eye and then bow (nod) your head

Host obligations

Rise to your feet as you get the groups attention for your toast

Wait until the servers have finished up pouring beverages and serving dessert before beginning

the toast

At a public restaurant an informal toast may be preferred - remain seated

Tipping

The practice of tipping began in coffee shops in London a couple of centuries ago. Tip began as an acronym: To Insure Prompt Service. Nowadays, it is standard practice in Canada. If the service provided has been poor or bad, you can, of course, decline to tip. If the service provided was good or excellent, to not tip is considered rude.

Tipping etiquette has been established to take the guessing out of what's expected from a patron. There have been guidelines set up to ensure that the person giving services receives ample appreciation for what he or she has done well, and in some cases, not so well. Tipping can be simple or elaborate, depending on one's personal funds.

In tipping etiquette, there are a few people who must be honored at all times. These people include waiters, bartenders, wine stewards, strolling musicians, restroom attendants, doormen who hail you a taxi, valet parkers at restaurants, hotel concierges, bellboys, chamber maids, hairdressers, barbers, personal trainers, employees who retrieve cars in a garage, car wash personnel, moving men, delivery men for groceries or florists, and shoe shine persons. Etiquette rules state that these individuals must be tipped after each service. In Canada, the minimum tip is approximately 10% of the total bill (some choose to tip on the total BEFORE taxes). The average tip would be around 15% of the total bill.

Who Not to Tip According to Tipping Etiquette

Professionals (such as doctors, dentists, etc.), hospital staff, airline stewards, ship's officers, train conductors, municipal or long distance bus drivers, employees of the federal government, private club employees, maids or butlers at a dinner party in a private residence, ushers in a theatre or opera house, plumbers, and electricians do not need to be tipped. Also, a busboy does not need to be tipped. If, however you feel the desire, it is proper etiquette to tip a busboy as you would a waiter.

Holidays can be a wonderful time to give a little something extra to those who usually do not get tipped on a regular basis for their services. Tipping etiquette suggests that at holiday time one should tip the following: personal assistants, housekeepers and/or cooks, cleaning personnel, nannies, babysitters, chauffeurs, kennel operators, dog walkers, a maitre d' of a much visited restaurant, personal trainers, hair dressers, shampoo persons, manicurists, shoe shine persons, gardeners, UPS or other parcel delivery persons, private garbage collectors, news paper carriers, building employees, and garage personnel. This is a special way to let these people know how much they are valued in your life.

Networking

1. Know who will be there and what business they represent.
2. Decide what you want to gain from this event and go for it.
3. Decide the number of contacts you want to make. Go for quality of contacts rather than numbers.
4. Prepare a 14-second commercial about what you do. People will remember you better.

5. Place your nametag on the right shoulder. (or left chest? Although it is common practice to put a nametag on your left chest, for a woman, the left chest would mean left breast. The shoulder is a more accurate placement instruction and although I didn't know this point before I researched it, it seems very logical to put it on your right shoulder because it is true, the eye would go there when shaking hands. A good practice to encourage.) As you shake hands, the eye automatically goes there.
6. Enter the room with confidence, observe the climate, and find someone you want to meet.
7. When you arrive, smile. It's the one signal understood by everyone.
8. Never think male or female. Think professional.
9. Never park yourself at the bar or at the food table. Get what you want, then circulate.
10. Never offer a cold, wet handshake. Keep your drink in your left hand.
11. If grazing, keep the napkin between the ring and little fingers, the plate between the index and middle fingers and the bottom or stem of the glass between the index finger and thumb, using them to stabilize the plate. After you take a sip or blot your lips, return the item to the left hand so the right hand is free to shake with the next person.
12. Be discriminating in handing out your business cards.