

COUNTRY: GERMANY

FACTS:

Area: 357.582 km²

Population: 83.019.213

Government: Federal Republic

Language: German

Religion: Evangelical Protestants

Currency: Euro (EUR)

Time difference from CET: +1

Climate: Temperate (in the north mild winters)

Capital: Berlin, pop. 3.644.826

National Day: 3rd October

TIME:

HOLIDAYS AND VACATION:

Germany has a relatively generous number of public holidays (*gesetzliche Feiertage*). Like Sundays, these days are designated by law as days of rest, meaning that banks and shops are often closed. Public holidays are usually counted separately to paid holiday leave, although you should check your work contract to make sure.

There are nine public holidays that are observed in all 16 federal states in Germany, including New Years' Day, German Unity Day and Christmas Day.

- New Year's Day (January 1)
- Good Friday (March/April)
- Easter Monday (March/April)
- Labour Day (May 1)
- Ascension Day (May 21)
- Whitmonday (May/June)
- German Unification Day (October 3)
- Christmas Day (December 25-26)

In addition to officially-recognized public holidays, there are several unofficial holidays, such as St Nicholas' Day (*Nikolaus*) on December 5, Carnival Monday (*Rosenmontag*) and Christmas Eve.

Schools in Germany have between five and six holiday periods per year, including Easter, summer and Christmas holidays as well as breaks in the autumn and spring. School holidays in Germany differ according to federal state.

OFFICE HOURS:

The average working week in Germany is between 36 and 40 hours. The majority of full-time jobs in Germany are seven or eight hours a day, five days a week, with an hour or 30 minutes' break at lunchtime.

Most often in the office: 40 hours per week, from 9h to 16h, lunch break from 12h to 13h.

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS:

COURTESY:

Germans are great hand-shakers, and they like to do so both when arriving and when departing. It is common for a person who is joining a group to shake hands with every single individual.

DRESS:

Workplace dress is still very often conservative in Germany. But this varies in different cities and industries and changes very much with the younger generation. Start-ups, newsrooms and some environmental firms often use a more casual dress code. Other businesses (e.g. Banks, Administrative Offices) generally stick to a conservative wardrobe – definitely no trainers or tennis shoes. Banking cities like Frankfurt tend to be a bit more conservative than Berlin with its big creative scene.

BODY LANGUAGE:

A short and firm handshake is the most typical greeting (including name own and company name). It's best to shake everyone's hand upon entering and exiting a meeting and not to shake someone's hand with one hand still in your pocket. Also, maintain eye contact. This doesn't mean to have an uncomfortable stare down. It's just considered friendly and honest to look at someone directly rather than off to the side. Nevertheless, a certain distance is often maintained (2 arm lengths).

NEGOTIATION:

BUSINESS MEETING:

When meeting a business contact for the first-time exchange business cards.

Although sincere smiles are welcomed, and people tend to be polite and hospitable to one another, physical and emotional expressions may be kept to a minimum upon initial introductions. Eye contact is generally expected during the introduction and conversation.

Germans are known for being direct, frank, and truthful about how they feel; superficial, small talk is rarely welcomed. During a conversation, visitors are often expected to express their opinions on topics such as

the arts and international events; however, they should be a bit more discreet when political issues come up. Nevertheless, Germans are relatively relaxed about discussing political issues and openly expressing their opinions here.

NEGOTIATION SKILLS:

When entering into business negotiations with German business people, there are several important points that you should be aware of to ensure a positive outcome from negotiations:

- Germans are competitive, ambitious and hard bargainers.
- Business negotiations tend to be analytical and factual. A well-researched speech with lots of graphs, empirical arguments, and statistics is usually preferred. A direct, matter-of-fact approach will be most appreciated.
- Business is hierarchical. Decision-making takes place at the highest levels of the company i.e. top-down. It is not appropriate to bypass an associate of equal ranking by consulting with his or her superior, even if negotiations take a long time.
- Deference is given to authority. Subordinates rarely contradict or criticise the boss publicly.
- Decision-making is often a slow and detailed process. Do not expect significant conclusions to be reached based on spontaneous or unstructured results. Every aspect of the deal you propose will be pored over by many executives. Do not anticipate being able to speed up this process.
- As such, decision making during negotiations is slower than in some other European countries. An impatient businessperson will be unlikely to garner the same respect as a patient, reasonably spoken individual. If Germans feel rushed to complete a business deal, they may perceive this as a lack of commitment and professionalism.
- You must be patient and not appear ruffled or irritated by the strict adherence to protocol. Germans are detail-oriented and want to understand every innuendo before coming to an agreement.
- Germans have an aversion to divergent opinions, but will negotiate and debate an issue fervently.
- Avoid confrontational behavior or high-pressure tactics. It can be counterproductive. Avoid contradictory statements, such as following a compliment with a complaint; the inconsistency may cause a German to reject your statements outright.
- Jokes, anecdotes, a “hard sell” approach (which may entail insulting a competitor), or spontaneous presentations are generally considered inappropriate. Slang language and colloquialisms should be kept to a minimum or better yet, not used at all.
- Decisions are often debated informally and are generally made before meetings with compliance rather than the consensus expected in the meeting.
- Final decisions are translated into rigorous, comprehensive action steps that you can expect will be carried out to the letter. Once a decision is made, it will not be changed.

INVISIBLE CODES:

Don't turn up late for an appointment or when meeting people. Germans are extremely punctual, and even a few minutes' delays can offend. Be five to 10 minutes early for important appointments and be sure to call the people you are meeting if you really cannot make it in time.

ETHICS: BUSINESS KNIGGE

Germans usually maintain an objective discussion in working life. Work talks are focused on content, after a short small talk you get to the point quickly. Germans want to convince with skills and therefore want to show them. As a result, they gain trust. They do not take the criticism on the factual level personally.

COMMUNICATION:

In private, the older person suggests using the informal *du* to the younger person. In the business world, the higher-ranking person—regardless of age and sex—would always be the one to suggest switching to *du*. A nice intermediate step is to address a person by their first name but then use the formal *Sie*. Always ask, however, before you decide to take this step. If you're not on a first-name basis in German, you can still switch when speaking English. But don't forget to switch back.

It is polite to address everyone by their family name and *Sie*. Do not leave off double-barreled names, such as *Frau Müller-Weber*. Names are inserted into conversation after every few sentences.

GIFTS:

In business, gifts have become uncommon. In the run-up to Christmas, business partners give Christmas cards with a small gift. Attention: check out, if your business partner is allowed to take gifts. In large companies and the public service sector are often rules for accepting gifts.

REPRESENTATION:

AT A RESTAURANT:

Beer and wine are part of a normal dinner and alcoholic drinks are usually offered to guests. Not drinking, however, is completely accepted. Do not insist on alcoholic drinks if a person has rejected your initial offer and don't order them for them. A German who rejects a drink is not just being shy or polite but does not want to drink.

IN THE HOME:

Bring flowers or a bottle of wine if you're invited to a German home.

OTHER:

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE:

Germans are extremely environmentally conscious and separate their garbage to facilitate recycling. If your neighbors spot you throwing recyclable glass or paper into the regular garbage, your relationship could be strained for good.

When customers enter shops, especially smaller outlets, they greet everyone in the shop (but they don't shake hands with everyone). The same is true of doctors' waiting rooms. So, practice saying: *Guten Tag* and *Auf Wiedersehen*.

CHALLENGES:

- Show expertise, that you know the technical details - show who you are and prove yourself. Show of a little.
- Language - get someone who speaks German
- Good references preferably from big companies. Germans don't trust them gut.
- Detailed plan, not just a big idea. Linear types. Think things through.
- Know the regulations and standards.
- Prove that you are able to deliver
- Trust, Bureaucracy

WHAT IS THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN:

- Not being able to answer the questions - then it's bye, bye...
- Misunderstand each other. Germans get annoyed easily when they are not understood. Not very patient.
- The reference is exaggerated or made up
- You will get rejected. (You could be invited to a second meeting to explain the details)
- lose money by paying fines, lose time, lose trust

WHEN IT WORKS WELL - WHAT HAS TO BE IN PLACE:

- You have a salesman, a nerd and German-speaking person. Preferable all in one or at least show that you have the knowledge with you (local rep who knows what needs to get done)
- learning the language
- having references in the country (other people who have done business with you)
- be persistent (if you get turned down the first time)
- keep deadlines
- commitment to learning the local procedures
- "Trust is good - control is better"

INFORMATION AND/OR KNOWLEDGE AND/OR SKILLS:

- Be on point - be direct, be clear. Be professional. Bring the right materials/proof of concept. Being successful will probably earn yourself a foot in the door (a very heavy iron door). And second chance to prove yourself. None buys in the first meeting. The social part comes later - strictly business in the beginning.
- Understand the high standard of the Germans. Know your competitors and who the company already works with. Know who you are talking to. Do your homework- what are the weak points. If the connection is personal or business, know it might take time to get a contract.
- Motivation, Positivity.
- Information about business partners.
- About decision-makers.
- Knowledge to be polite, cultural behaviors, empathic encouraging.

SITUATION - BEHAVIOUR - RESULT:

- Situation: do whatever needed to rescue the situation and correct
- Behavior: to show to be clean that you have that Confident, well organized
- Result: deal, company higher salary, new position Compromise
- Taking the time to prepare, you show respect and that you are serious. "Show due diligence". Somewhat different when you meet someone at a fair/exhibition. Know the region you are in - business etiquette differs somewhat depending on where you are. What to wear, how to act.