

COUNTRY: POLAND

FACTS:

Area: 312.679 km²

Population: 37.980.000 ethnically homogeneous

Government: Unitary semi-presidential representative democratic republic

Language: Polish

Religion: Christianity (Catholicism around 90%)

Currency: Zloty (PLN)

Time difference from CET: +2

Climate: Transitional between warm, maritime climate and continental

Capital: Warsaw (pop. 1,708,000)

National Day: Independence Day (11th November)

TIME:

HOLIDAYS AND VACATION:

In addition to Christmas, New Year and Easter, in Poland we celebrate such holidays as:

- Labour Day (1st May)
- Constitution Day May (3rd May)
- Corpus Christi on one Thursday (May or June)
- The ninth week after Easter
- All Saints Day
- Independence Day (11th November)

OFFICE HOURS:

Normal office hours are 9-17, in some public institutions also very common working hours are 7-15 or 8-16.

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS:

COURTESY:

Greetings in Poland are usually courteous and reserved. People behave quite formally when meeting strangers for the first time. The common greeting is to shake hands while holding direct eye contact. People

usually shake women's hands first before addressing any men present. Older women are greeted before other girls. The official form of greeting in Poland is the phrase "good morning". If You're meeting someone You already know You can say "Hi" or "Hello". In conversation, with people older than us and people we just met we use polite form like "Mrs. / Mr.". We call family members and friends by their first name. People with professional positions are addressed by their job as their title. For example: *Pan Kierownik* (Mr. Manager), *Pan Inzynier* (Mr. Engineer), *Pani Profesor* (Ms. Professor).

PUNCTUALITY:

Acceptable delay for meetings or events in Poland is 15 min. However, being punctual is very welcome and very much appreciated. In some meetings the delay might be considered as disregard or bad education. Lateness is a sign of bad manners and carelessness in Poland. People are expected to be punctual in both professional and social situations. However, tardiness is still fairly common. Furthermore, it is good to be flexible as events and schedules can be delayed or changed quite rapidly around unforeseen circumstances.

DRESS CODE:

Dress code in Poland is quite simple. Women should wear dresses or skirts that are not too short, in subdued colors. Gentlemen are welcome in black suits and neat, carefully ironed shirts with ties. Casual clothing can be considered inappropriate in public. For example, one would rarely be seen barefoot in public. People tend to dress neatly.

BODY LANGUAGE:

Keeping "normal" distance, eye contact and firm handshake are important. It is extremely common in Poland, likewise in other countries, to shake hands when meeting someone. In Poland, shaking hands is usually followed with the standard greeting which is *dzien dobry* (Good morning) - formal or *czesc* (hello) - informal. Handshakes in Poland are also very popular in formal situations. For example, during a job interview, it is customary to see the applicant extend his/her shake to the interviewer.

NEGOTIATION:

Polish workplaces and businesses are quite hierarchical. People are quite non-assertive to those in positions of power and managers expect full attention. There is a defined distance in between those who are superior and subordinate. It is unlikely for people to be cold with one another, but one is generally more formal when talking to their manager.

BUSINESS MEETING:

Meetings usually start with casual conversations, in order to let participants get to know each other. This facilitates further cooperation. Meetings start on time, with a maximum delay of 15 minutes. Expect to be

introduced by a third party or the host of the meeting if you are the guest Meetings tend to begin and end with small talk at the instigation of the host. Listen respectfully to anything managers have to say. Hard facts and concrete projections are more likely to appeal to them than broad claims or boasting. Arrogance is generally unappreciated. Be frank about your approach, but tactful regarding their feelings. Generally, Poles like to build personal relationships with those they do business with and get to know people's personalities. While people interact quite formally, there is a lot of 'professional closeness'.

NEGOTIATION SKILLS:

Poles have no tradition in the art of negotiating. We usually negotiate without prior professional preparation. Poles waste unnecessarily time - already during negotiation talks - on matters that should be known to them earlier from the documents and correspondence they have, or even thanks to seeking the opinion of a competent person. Although it is changing as more Poles have opportunities to practice negotiation tactics while abroad.

INVISIBLE CODES:

Polish language is one of the most difficult in the world. There are a lot of words that are hard to pronounce. We also have so-called "digraphs" like *cz, ch, sz, rz, dz, dź* and *dź* which are language twisters for foreigners. Poles also love to cut out words and names. We are very talkative and communicative.

ETHICS:

Polish people are very conservative, especially the elderly. We are proud of our tradition, customs and heritage.

COMMUNICATION:

Nowadays, you can talk in English in most public places in Poland, most commonly with younger generations. It encourages foreigners to visit Poland, or start work here. e-mail and telephone are the most common means of communication in our country. All telephone arrangements should be confirmed by an email. However, e-mails in Poland are less formal than letters. Both for e-mails and letters there are some rules on how to write them: for instance, "Madam" at the beginning and "Yours faithfully" at the end.

GIFTS:

Small gifts are very appreciated in Poland. Poles love coffee and chocolate or local beverages, so these types of gifts would bring them a lot of joy. The best time to give a gift is the beginning of the conversation. However, while doing serious business and negotiations it is rather not very recommendable to start with gifts, rather after the whole process or after the meetings in a more non formal environment.

REPRESENTATION:

Usually the business meetings are arranged in the conference room of the premises of the company and there is always coffee, tea or water offered at the beginning. When you know your business partner more the best place for a business meeting might be a restaurant. It is because, you can combine a meal with business negotiations, and as we all know it is easier to negotiate when we're full. Neutral and non-binding environment also favors good negotiations. Despite the fact that Poles are a very hospitable nation, we usually don't arrange business meetings in our homes. However, if this is the case, remember to be on time. This is very important because the owner of the house, would have prepared some meals for sure, and it would be very impolite to let him wait for you. During dinner try not to talk about politics or religion, just because it is a very individual matter, and talking about these topics could lead to misunderstandings.

OTHER:

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE:

The middle class is the largest social group in Poland. In most cases, they are owners of small property, e.g. small workplaces. They are mostly people with higher education. This group obliges to certain standards such as: proper expression or neat appearance. The lowest social group has the most unfavorable financial situation in Poland, fortunately, this group is a smaller and smaller percentage with time. Business owners own houses or flats in richer city districts. Among other social groups, flats in the suburbs are the most popular.

CHALLENGES:

- Political situation in Poland. Political influence in the business different between governmental business or private one
- Political assignment: more general aspects as business in the first meeting; knowledge of Polish history appreciated. Business person: more business topics
- Know your product, sure of yourself, prepared from content perspective (you will be observed) not all cards on the table, what are the roles, who has five power - kind of psychological game
- Bureaucracy to enter Polish market
- Topics of small talk: don't talk about politics, religion, sex

WHAT IS THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN:

Worst things to do:

- You might lose the contact = avoid political conversation, know current situation and the representation of government
- Politics might influence the atmosphere, but contact is business decision; in the worst case it will be just meeting without constructive conclusion in the end

- Unexpected costs; frustration, influence the deadlines, block situation
- Bad atmosphere, end of conservation
- Do not make comments that could be perceived to have a disrespectful undertone. Poles tend to be sensitive to condescension

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

- Avoid being unprepared (good to know current political situation)
- Be open for think of other topics but not religion, politics, sex
- Meetings on same hierarchy:
 - first meeting: CEO – CEO
 - second meeting: project level
- gender aspect: business world is primarily a men's world, but women are accepted
- Never ask woman about her age or marital status
- calculate extra money for bureaucracy

Be frank about your approach, but tactful regarding feelings. Be prepared for quite a discerning eye for fairness. If they are skeptical of your trustworthiness or business integrity, they may push back or avoid doing business with you. Avoid appearing as though you are only concerned about the outcome of the deal. They will be looking for an honest commitment to the process and quality of relations.