

CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH PEOPLE FROM



CHILE



Greetings



Greet with a sincere and inviting handshake, accompanied by a smile and good eye contact, which is very important. Acknowledge all who are present by shaking hands. A group “hello” is often perceived as rude and impersonal. As friendships grow, handshaking is often followed by kissing, hugging, and back patting. Women kiss on both cheeks as a form of greeting. They don’t actually touch lips to cheek, but administer mock kisses by quickly touching cheek to cheek and kissing the air.

An individual can be addressed by using the titles Mr., Mrs., or Miss followed by the person’s surname. People can also be addressed by combining professional titles with surname. However, the use of professional titles is less common in Chile than in the rest of Latin America.

Conversation



Good topics of conversation in Chile include positive aspects of Chilean history and its economy, Chilean art and literature, wine and food, suggested tourist sights, Chile’s landscape, overseas travel and sports (skiing and fishing). Avoid conversations about politics, wars, surrounding countries, ethnic and social classes, and religion. It is acceptable to ask simple questions about a person’s family (if they have children, how many, etc.) but don’t probe. When conversing with Chileans, do not take offense if you are interrupted. Chileans perceive interruptions as a means of participating in conversations and an indicator that the discussion is interesting.

Gestures



Gestures to avoid include opening your palm and spreading your fingers; this communicates that someone or something is stupid. Raising a clenched fist over your head is perceived as a communist symbol. Pounding your fist into an open palm is a vulgar gesture in Chile. Flicking your fingers under your chin is interpreted as “I don’t know” or “I don’t care.” Avoid any behavior that may be interpreted as aggressive. Never use your index finger to point out another person or when calling someone to you; use your entire hand to do this instead.

Business Attire



For business, men should wear blue or gray suits, white shirts, and conservative ties. Women should wear blue or gray business suits and shoes with low heels. Both men and women should wear minimal, conservative jewelry or none at all. Avoid wearing outfits that are extremely bright or anything that would attract attention.

Hierarchy/Family



There is a definite hierarchical order in Chilean businesses. When scheduling meetings and also when greeting others, be sure to defer to the most senior person present. Family respect and loyalty are primary concerns in Chile, even taking precedence over business responsibilities. Extended families are often found living close together and tend to be very dependent on one another. Machismo remains an important part of Chilean culture.

Manners



Appointments should be scheduled at least two or three weeks in advance. Always confirm appointments before your visit to Chile and upon your arrival in the country. Be on time for business meetings, but expect Chilean counterparts to be approximately 15 to 30 minutes late. When invited to someone’s home, it is considered good manners to arrive about 15 minutes late. When invited to a party, it is appropriate to arrive at least 30 minutes late.

Chileans emphasize good table manners; European-style table manners are a must. Always keep your hands above the table and simply allow your wrist to rest on the edge; it is poor etiquette to keep your hands out of sight. It is proper etiquette to always offer a cigarette to those in your group before smoking one yourself.

Cognitive Styles



Chile’s business culture is less bureaucratic than other Latin American countries. Upper-level executives are known for efficiency. Contract agreements are followed rigidly, problems are resolved quickly, and payments are made as scheduled. Decisions are made by those who are clearly in authority. Attempts have been made to incorporate group consensus decision-making, but overall the power still belongs to the few at the top.

Currency



Unit of currency is the peso and the coin is the centavo. 100 centavos = 1 peso.

Ethnic Make-Up



Chile’s population of more than 14 million people is 94 percent mestizo, 3 percent native Indian, and 3 percent European.

Language



Castellano Spanish. Chileans are known for speaking a very conservative and pure form of the Spanish dialect. Upper-level business people and well-educated individual should speak English

Religion



About 74% Roman Catholic, 14% Protestant, 1% Jewish and the remaining 11% consist of atheists and followers of various religions.