

PART 2

business rules and culture in Québec



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"It is crucial to spread the word about your company by joining associations and chambers of commerce, and by getting involved as a volunteer on a board of directors. That visibility will definitely pay off."

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Importance of culture in business

From one country to another, lifestyle, customs and daily habits may change. That's why it is so crucially important, for the success of your business, to understand the cultural differences, perceptions, stereotypes and values of Québec.

Some cultural mistakes can cost you clients or cause you to lose a business opportunity. You need to model your behaviour on the people who come from the country where you will be doing business.

To improve your understanding of Québec culture, make a list of the specific characteristics of your native country, the reasons you emigrated, the languages you speak and write, your religion, your old jobs, your personal and professional status, your beliefs, your family background, and so on. By becoming more aware of who you are and where you are from, you will improve your understanding of Québec culture. Montréal is a multicultural city where business is carried out in a variety of ways, so it is important to watch and learn.

Interpersonal relationships in business

To help you improve your interpersonal and professional relationships and nurture their development, we would like to share some tips and advice:

- Get involved in a business network
- Go to shopping centres and watch how people interact
- Buy books on Québec culture and expression
- Read books by Québec authors
- Speak to your neighbours
- Read your neighbourhood newspaper and take part in community activities

- Go see a performance or play at your local Maison de la culture
- Volunteer at your local community centre
- Go to neighbourhood events and chat with other families
- Take note of people's reactions to the things you say

Specific characteristics of the business culture in Québec

In Québec, there are a few business rules that are very important to uphold, even though they may seem official and officious. It is very important for immigrants to pay close attention to the specific characteristics of the Québec business world.

Attitudes and behaviours to adopt

We have put together a short description of some common behavioural traits of Québec businesspeople, but it is only by spending time with them that you will learn how to behave and react in various situations.

Customary practices

1. In Québec, when you meet someone for the first time and you are speaking to them in French, it is best to say "Monsieur" or "Madame" and to address them as "vous." In English, say "Mr." or "Ms." and use the person's last name.
2. After meeting with the same clients or business partners a few times, you can usually start calling them by their first name.
3. At business meetings, it is customary to shake hands firmly when you arrive and when you leave.
4. Quebecers are punctual and associate punctuality with respect. Always be on time, and if you think you might be delayed, call the person you are meeting before the meeting begins. Apologize for being late as soon as you arrive.

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5. It is best to arrive five minutes early for any meeting.
6. It is considered rude to speak in a foreign language in front of people who don't understand it well.
7. It is best to turn off your cell phone during meetings. If you are expecting an important call, put your phone on vibrate, slip out of the room quietly and excuse yourself when you return.
8. When you promise someone a service, a price, etc., you have to deliver what you agreed. Your credibility may be affected if you do not deliver what you promised. The value of your word is at stake!
9. In Québec, the hierarchy is relatively flexible. You may contact a higher-up or an executive directly, with no intermediary, to invite them to come and meet with you. Relationships tend to be friendly rather than formal.
10. Quebecers are curious and may ask you questions about your background without necessarily wanting to establish a personal friendship.
11. Government employees cannot accept donations or presents in anyway related to their official functions.

Recommended business attire

1. Depending on the kind of meetings you are attending, the appropriate attire may range from classic and conservative to relaxed (for example, business suit and tie for a negotiation meeting and more casual attire for a happy hour in a restaurant).
2. To avoid displeasing or distracting your clients or partners, please do not wear cologne. Some of the people you are meeting with may even be allergic to perfume.

Body language and eye contact

1. Direct eye contact is valued and appreciated in conversations between two or several people. For Quebecers, this attitude demonstrates your sincerity and interest in the conversation.
2. Quebecers rarely touch each other while conversing. They maintain a distance of about 60 centimetres. They feel uncomfortable when this personal space is invaded.
3. Common courtesies such as opening and holding the door for others, smiling,

and greeting people are appreciated and expected.

Professional and business discussions

1. In Québec, business meetings are structured around a schedule that outlines the points of discussion.
2. It is common to begin the discussion with some informal talk about sports, the weather, etc., and to end on a positive note. Business is discussed in the middle of the meeting.
3. Business cards are exchanged at a first meeting.
4. In Québec, men and women are treated equally in business. If a woman asks you a question, make eye contact and direct your response to her.
5. If you invite a business partner to a restaurant, make sure you take care of the bill, because the inviter is usually expected to pay.
6. For a business meeting at a restaurant, we recommend that you go somewhere you know well, so you can be sure there are no nasty surprises. If your guest orders a drink (wine, beer, etc.), it is considered polite to order one too. If your guest does not order any alcohol, it is considered impolite to do so.
7. Calmness and tolerance are valued by Quebecers during negotiations. Personal or disrespectful statements can spoil your business relations. Above all, avoid raising your voice and getting into conflict with your partners or clients! In general, people who stay calm are highly regarded.
8. During negotiations, be prepared to give reasons to justify an offer or a price.
9. During a business or negotiation meeting, Quebecers speak in turn. It is not considered polite to interrupt each other.
10. In conversation, it is better to go directly to the point, rather than speaking for a long time.

Importance and practicalities of business networking in Québec

Business networking means meeting with other people to develop relationships that will be beneficial for the business.

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You can participate in different activities organized by people in the business world in order to expand your network of professional contacts. These activities are often great opportunities to find business partners, clients, suppliers, mentors, and so on.

The kind of activities offered include breakfasts, lunches or dinner, cocktail hours, presentations, training events, etc. These events are often organized by Chambers of Commerce, associations or business groups. To become a member of a Chamber of Commerce or to learn more about the different business groups in your area or industry, turn to Appendix 6.

Tips and advice

1. Join a business group as soon as you can and get involved in organizing activities related to your area of expertise.
2. Québec businesspeople love networking activities – so join in and get talking. And don't forget to pass out your business card!

- Name of your business
 - Your first and last names and title (e.g., accountant, landscaper, owner, president, etc.)
 - Contact information (mailing address, phone number, fax number, email address, website address, etc.)
3. If you are embarrassed to go to a networking activity alone, find a friend to go with you the first few times. Over time, you will develop more confidence and be less embarrassed to go alone.
 4. Be prepared to shake hands and smile. These small gestures help start your business conversations on the right foot.
 5. Don't be passive at networking activities. Speak to others and take part in discussions to show that you are interested.
 6. Find a mentor. A mentor can guide you and offer valuable advice and references. •

Sample business card :



Here is the information you should put on your business card

NOTE:

You must have French business cards, although you may have cards in another language or bilingual cards. If the card is bilingual, the French must be at least as prominent as the other language.