
Doing Business in Mexico

The general aspects of Mexican culture discussed in the previous section are reflected in some very specific behaviour in business relationships. The following sections include suggestions about how Canadians can deal effectively with Mexicans and minimize misunderstandings.

Formality

Mexican business people are much more formal than Canadians and Americans. In major cities, business dress is relatively formal, even in casual meetings. Although clothes don't have to be expensive, the right clothing can convey a status that is very important to most Mexicans.

Mexican names usually include both the father's and the mother's last name. It is proper to use this full name both in face-to-face communications and correspondence until the person is on friendly terms. Never use first names until invited to do so.

Mexicans are very status conscious and people are always addressed by their occupational titles. Titles are an important formality because they indicate a person's educational status. Even a bachelor's degree carries the title *licenciado*. This is not surprising considering that only about 1 percent of Mexicans have the opportunity to attend university.

Handshakes are very important, even among friends and business associates. When the relationship is closer, the *abrazo*, hug, is common.

Mexicans like to give gifts on many occasions. The appropriate response is a return gift of smaller or equal value on an appropriate occasion. Canadiana gifts, flowers or wine are usually appropriate.

Friendship and Trust

Mexicans value personal honor very highly. The need for trust in business relationships is partly a consequence of a cumbersome legal system that cannot be relied upon to settle disputes. Business relationships are therefore based on friendship and trust. A Mexican cannot fully trust his or her business partner until they are personal friends. But it takes time for a foreigner become a *persona de buena mader*, trustworthy. For this reason, it is common during first encounters to talk about almost anything but business. This can be very time consuming, and is often a source of frustration for Canadians anxious to get down to business. What may appear to be a waste of time to the Canadian, is typically an essential period of evaluation for the Mexican counterpart. From the point of view of a Mexican executive, the purpose of this evaluation is to assess the visitor's status and to demonstrate his or her own position. Just as important, it is an opportunity to become friends and establish trust.