
Meetings Over Meals

Conducting meetings during meals is an important part of Mexico's business culture. When a Canadian first visits Mexico, the conversation at breakfast, lunch or dinner will likely focus on personal matters. But once a relationship has been established discussing business over meals is quite appropriate, and often expected.

The most productive meal is breakfast because the chance of lateness is minimized and there is a predetermined end to the meeting. Lunches tend to be less formal and can be protracted. Lunches are a big meal, usually eaten in groups, making a one-on-one contact less feasible. Dinner is the most social meal and can last for a long time. This meal is often used to convince someone or to win a favour. Dinner is often relatively formal and it is common for the bill to be paid by the person who initiated the engagement. Otherwise, a friendly argument over who has the honor of paying the bill is quite acceptable at any meal.

Reactions to Foreign Women

Canadian women who do business in Mexico will be treated with respect. Women will rarely be denied a request for a meeting and will usually be treated with the utmost courtesy. On the other hand, they may have to demonstrate their credentials to a larger degree than their male associates. Mexicans are preoccupied with status and they are unaccustomed to dealing with powerful women. Once a Canadian woman has demonstrated status and expertise, most barriers will be dropped and she will be free to take a lead role in business discussions. All the same, she may be denied access to some informal business channels accessible to men.

Unfortunately, business women in Mexico sometimes have to endure patronizing comments that would be considered quite unacceptable in Canada. These are a reflection of the attitudes towards women in Mexican culture, not an expression of disrespect for the individual involved.

Authority and Decision Making

Time has yet another meaning in Mexico when it comes to decision making. Business decisions are made at the top levels of management, which often include the owners of the company. Decision making is often quite rapid in contrast with Canadian corporate culture, which strives for consensus.

On the other hand, if a subordinate is handling a business issue, he or she is unlikely to commit to anything without the approval of a superior. This can take considerable time. In Mexico, management structures are usually vertical and middle management wields relatively little decision-making power. To avoid these kinds of delays, Canadian business missions to Mexico should include senior people with decision-making authority and, whenever possible, they should deal directly with senior managers or owners.