

Cultural Information - Mexico

Source: [Centre for Intercultural Learning, Government of Canada](#)

Question:

I am a meeting a Mexican for the first time and I want to make a good impression. What would be good discussion topics?

Local Perspective:

To open communication with a Mexican is to treat them as a close friend. You talk about their feelings, family personal issues before anything else. Repetition of questions during the conversation is also expected. For example, how are you? Repetition is seen as if you really meant what you asked as opposed of only asking once. You have to show that you care for the personal well being of the person.

Question:

What do I need to know about verbal and non-verbal communications?

Local Perspective:

Personal space is about an arm distance. It is expected for females to shake hands and kiss on one cheek, particularly in a social setting. In a social setting usually a hug, kiss and shaking hands are common. Two men will not kiss each other, just a hug and shake of hands. You can touch someone while talking to them particularly if you are familiar to them or you are friends. A casual touch on the shoulder or arm is usually considered a sign of affection and not sexual harassment. Males with females should be a bit careful with this though. Better not to touch unless you are sure this is ok to do. A good measure for this is if the other person touches you, then it is ok to touch.

For business it is best to carefully observe each person's degree of comfort. At least shaking hands will be expected in any context.

Eye contact and a smile are important. A low voice could be considered sign of a lack of interest or boredom. Loud to medium strong voice is better received. Mexicans are not direct; particularly if they want to ask or complain about something, or if talking about themselves, their family, or work. Directness is ok when it is a compliment.

Question:

Are public displays of affection, anger or other emotions acceptable?

Local Perspective:

Very common. Mexicans are known for their passion and are usually pretty open about their emotions. Anger, happiness etc. are openly and loudly displayed.

Question:

What should I know about the workplace environment (deadlines, dress, formality, etc.)?

Local Perspective:

Better to go more formal the first day and ask how other people are dressed before choosing a style. Hard to go wrong by being dressed formally. People are judged a lot by their looks: the clean, elegant, and formal looks are always well accepted; the opposite is not. Women are usually expected to wear pantyhose and high heels, even in hot weather; particularly if working at an office or school. Women wear makeup and have their hair done. A woman who shows up at work with no makeup will for sure not make a good impression.

Supervisors should be addressed formally (*usted*) and by their last name. As a foreigner, it is advisable to be punctual, respect deadlines and not to be absent. The same should not, however, be expected of Mexican colleagues. The client, supervisor, colleague etc. might not be punctual or respect deadlines and might be absent often. Foreigners should always keep this in mind and give themselves plenty of time for this to happen. It is advisable to set up deadlines a week before the "real" deadline. Always to have a back up: family and friends for most, if not all Mexicans, are more important than any work related issue. If there is a death in the family or someone is sick, they will go with their family instead of attending a meeting or working on a deadline.

Question:

Briefly describe the local culture's attitudes regarding the following: Gender, Class, Religion and Ethnicity. What impact would the above attitudes have on the workplace?

Local Perspective:

Gender:

This is a very complex issue in Mexican culture. It is a matriarchal society where the "Mother" is the most respected figure in society. At the same time it is still pretty much male-dominated. Women nowadays do have influential positions, but their earning power will be lower than men. Women are still seen as sexual objects and the ones who should be in charge of household duties - even if they hold a full time position.

Religion:

Mostly Catholic. Very important part of most people's lives. Particularly for lower class and less educated. Religious holidays will be respected at work.

Class:

Mexican society is highly "classist" and elitist. The way you are seen by others and the position you hold in society will depend on the class you belong. People will treat you according to your class. Opportunities and education will depend on class. Class is usually determined by the amount of money you have: the more money you have, the "better" class you belong too. It is not impossible to climb to a higher class (e.g. winning the lottery) but still there will be several cultural issues that will make the climbing hard. A person can suddenly have money but if they did not have the adequate education (because they did not have the money) then it will be hard to get a job.

Ethnicity:

Highly influential as well in the way you are seen and treated. If you belong to an acceptable ethnic group you are treated with respect; if you don't you are discriminated against.

The discriminated ethnic person would have to struggle twice as hard to be accepted as the one whose ethnicity is accepted. Then attitudes in the workplace have an important impact.