

Canadian Workplace Culture for Newcomers

The culture of the country where you work has a big impact on the culture of your workplace. It is very important that you learn about Canada's workplace culture. This guidance is for newcomers working or seeking employment in Canada.

1. Non-Verbal Communication

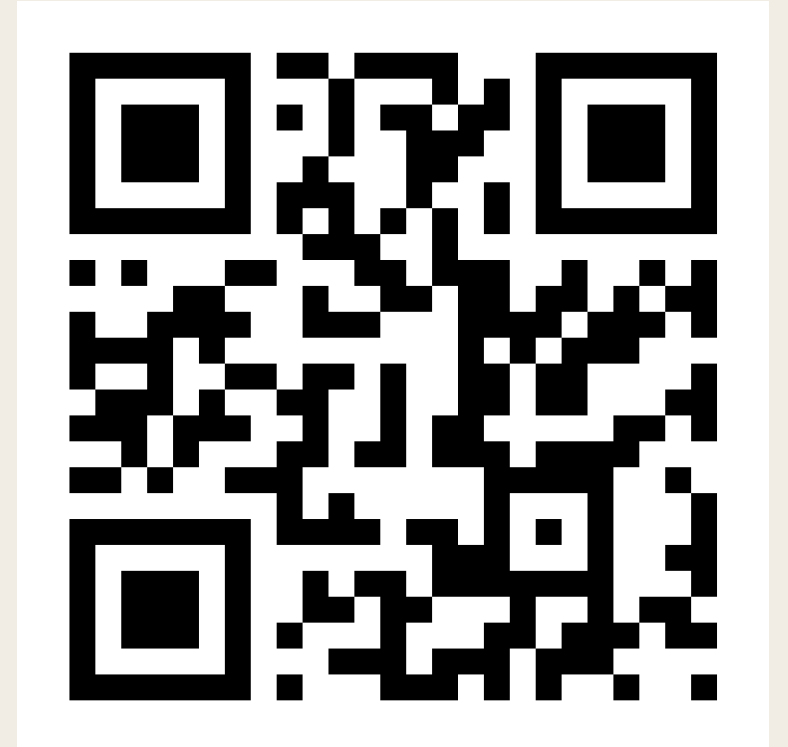
- Have good body posture
- Smile at people
- Firm handshake (if other person is comfortable)

2. Appearance

- Follow organization's dress code policy
- Face and hair clean and well-groomed
- Avoid strong perfume/fragrances

3. Greetings

- Introduce yourself with full name, using your first name then your family name
- Call others by their first name and greet them "hello/good morning/good evening" etc.
- Greetings to start the day and goodbyes at the end of the day make a relaxed and welcoming workplace
- Canadians often make small talk about safe topics for a short period of time (2-5 minutes) at the start of a day – talk about the weather, personal activities from the night or weekend before, personal plans for an upcoming evening or weekend, neutral current events e.g. sports, etc.



4. Personal Space and Eye Contact

- Avoid standing too close to others, average distance is about 1 metre or arm's length
- Try to make eye contact with everyone when speaking and listening – eye contact shows respect and interest in others

o Note: in Indigenous cultures, respect is often shown by avoiding eye contact

- Firm and quick handshake shows confidence; Canadians don't continue to hold hands after shaking
- Physical touch, other than handshakes, is minimal in many workplaces unless it's a required part of the job (e.g. health care) – especially between genders; excessive physical touch may be viewed as harassment

5. Workplace values and etiquette

- Be professional and kind to others regardless of occupation or status
- Canadians use polite vocabulary often: please, thank you, you're welcome, excuse me, I'm sorry, no problem, etc.
- Understand Canadian management style is more relaxed; generally, Canadian supervisors will want to use first names and will be open to conversations whenever they're available
- Be on time. On time means you are ready to work or ready for a meeting at the appointed time, so you may need to arrive a few minutes before that. It's important to let people know if you will be late or if you'll miss a meeting.
- Have professional and positive communication with co-workers, whether in-person or in writing
- Make small talk to show you are a good team player and to show interest in others
- Avoid talking about money/religion/politics/age/sex/salary
- Be careful about commenting on the appearance of other genders or giving them compliments about their physical appearance; these comments may be unwelcome and may be viewed as harassment
- Canadians often make requests and suggestions indirectly, e.g. "Maybe we could try starting the next meeting earlier so we finish on time"
- Canadians often give direction indirectly, e.g. "If you wouldn't mind starting on that after lunch, that would be great"
- Be a good team player and have a positive attitude, many employers value positivity
- Show initiative - if you finish your task, look for more to do; if you see a problem, propose a solution; volunteer for committees or other assignments
- Always ask questions when you do not understand; Canadian employers want you to ask when you have questions. New immigrant employees may "smile and nod" rather than ask questions but it's better to ask questions so work is done right rather than make mistakes.
- It is important to speak up about problems and stay calm during conflicts; know your workplace communication expectations, employers usually want you to discuss problems with the appropriate people only, e.g. your supervisor; yelling and shouting at coworkers or customers is inappropriate and may be considered harassment
- Avoid giving expensive gifts. Check with others about your company's policy or unwritten rules on gift-giving, as these can vary between companies.
- Consult your company's policy document before engaging in any office romance
- If office romance is permitted, please set clear and consistent boundaries to ensure that official hours are not misused for personal relationships.
- Separate personal life from work life; avoid bringing personal problems to work
- Be inclusive of others, particularly those from other cultures and backgrounds.