

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: BUSINESS PRACTICES

Business culture

The Fundamental Principles of Business Culture	<p>Although the UAE is cosmopolitan and tolerant (80% expatriates), Islam regulates people's laws and attitudes. Family and hospitality are key values.</p> <p>Hierarchy tends to be highly vertical. Bosses act in a paternalistic manner with employees. The same is true in family businesses: the head of the family is often the decision maker as well. Managers request input from stakeholders to make decisions, but delegate implementation to team members.</p> <p>It is imperative to take the time to build personal relationships and establish trust. Private and professional lives are not clearly separated. Face-to-face meetings should be favoured when negotiating in order to strengthen the relationship.</p>
First Contact	<p>Relations in the Emirates rely heavily on oral communication and face-to-face discussions. Secretaries generally do not have the power to fix appointments. Set up meetings no more than two weeks in advance and confirm a couple of days before the date arrives. It is better to set up a meeting through a mutual contact. Networks and exchange of services are very important in the local culture. Big businessmen usually hold a weekly "majlis", a form of meeting where one can go without an appointment and a very suitable place to socialise and spot key contacts. Another option is contacting an embassy for an Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS), a programme-arranging service where companies are referred to the most appropriate contact and appointments are confirmed. Regional trade shows are also an excellent way to meet potential partners and clients.</p>
Time Management	<p>It is important to arrive on time for meetings and not be in a hurry. The private sector works Sunday-Thursday from 9am-5pm and the public sector Sunday-Thursday from 7:30am-2:30pm (some offices are open until 4pm). Remember Muslims pray five times a day, so any meeting must work around that schedule. The official weekend in the UAE is Friday and Saturday.</p>
Greetings and Titles	<p>The Arabic greeting formula is 'essalamu 'aleikum' (may peace be with you), which is replied with 'wa aleikum essalam' (and with you peace). However, it is rare for Emirati businessmen to greet foreigners this way. Once invited to enter, one should take off his/her shoes if the floor of the room is covered by a rug or a carpet. During Ramadan, one greets by saying 'Ramadan Karaem!' (noble Ramadan) or 'Ramadan Mubarak!' (blessed Ramadan).</p> <p>If there are several persons in the room, one should always greet the oldest person first and then continue greeting counterclockwise. Emiratis have the tendency to grasp hands when greeting for a long time; one should not be surprised and withdraw his/her hand abruptly, but rather wait until the other person finishes the greeting. If the associate is a woman, male expatriates should not shake hands unless she presents them. It is also important to avoid prolonged attention towards her. If an expatriate woman has an appointment with an Emirati man, then she should not directly shake hands but wait until men present theirs. Always offer your right hand.</p> <p>Emiratis are quite informal with respect to the use of visitors' names. It is thus customary to call visitors by their first name preceded by 'Sayed' (Mr.) or 'Sayeda' (Mrs.).</p>
Gift Policy	<p>Gifts are not necessary, but they are highly appreciated, received with the right hand, and opened in private. Inappropriate gifts include alcohol-based perfumes, pork leather items, objects representing dogs, knives or gold jewelry. You should never refuse a gift.</p>
Dress Code	<p>One should not try to dress like Emiratis (it is in poor taste). Men should wear a suit and tie while forgoing flashy jewelry; women should opt for modest business attire.</p>
Business Cards	<p>For business cards, minimalist white designs with one side printed in English and the other in Arabic are recommended. It is also possible to print both versions on the same side or have two separate cards (one in English and one in Arabic). Cards must always be offered with the right hand.</p>
Meetings Management	<p>You should not start a meeting by talking directly about business; rather, talk a little about yourself or the weather.</p> <p>Trade negotiations demand patience and relationships are often built over a series of meetings. You should be formal and address the decision maker, the 'Sheikh', throughout your presentation. Meetings are rarely private. Emiratis are known to have very good negotiating skills and the spoken word is valued highly. Decision-making is long and any pressure tactic is viewed negatively. If there is some doubt about the outcome of negotiations it should not be expressed too negatively and the word "no" is best avoided. One should not feel offended when the host takes telephone calls during a meeting or allows other people to enter. Once a deal is made - either orally or in writing - expect the Arab counterpart to abide by it. Consult a lawyer before signing any document.</p> <p>Communication is often indirect and the use of hyperbole is common. Avoid crossing your legs or using the thumbs up gesture as both are offensive. Avoid discussions on any regional conflicts as well as comment that may cause public humiliation.</p> <p>Cafes, restaurants, and hotels are common places for business meetings. If a drink is offered, it should always be accepted as a refusal is considered as impolite. As for alcoholic beverages, it is a controversial topic and those drinks are best left alone in business negotiations.</p>
Sources for Further Information	<p>General information and cultural norms UAE guide Guide to Dubai and the UAE - etiquette, customs, culture & business Business etiquette in the UAE</p>