

Business Culture Differences: Lithuania - Great Britain

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Some myths about the Brits

We like formality

It may have been true once, it is not true any longer. These days it is often said that Americans are more formal – they use “Sir” and “Madam” more often in speech and often they dress more sharply too.

We are reserved and unfriendly

Again, it used to be the case that the British had a deserved reputation for being reserved. We have become significantly more open and friendly during the past 20 – 30 years.

We can all be trusted

Generally the UK is still a relatively uncorrupt place, especially as relates to dealings with authorities. This does not mean that you do not need to do due diligence on your potential business partners.

Some old truths that still apply

We like punctuality

It is only polite to be late when you are invited to someone's house for dinner. For business meetings punctuality is still expected.

What you wear will be noticed

Although business casual has become prevalent in many companies, it is still advisable to dress formally for a business meeting. However British style is generally understated, we are suspicious of ostentatious displays of wealth.

It is hard to find out what we really think

It is often quite hard to know what a Brit is really thinking at any given moment as we tend to hide our feelings. It means that whilst we will usually be talkative and polite, you might find this communication superficial.

More generally about British business culture (1)

Common law vs Civil law

The difference between English common law and European civil law systems can still be felt. Despite all of the increasing bureaucracy of the past 20 years the fact is that there are still fewer formalities to running a business in the UK and in general the British worry about them less.

Differences of scale

Do not forget that small UK companies are still big by Lithuanian standards with more middle management structures. Decision-making therefore takes more time. However, often power will not always be concentrated in the hands of the chief executive.

More generally about British business culture (2)

Meetings

In general the British prefer small, constructive meetings to big gatherings. Try to ensure a balanced number of participants from both sides and that each participant has a contribution to make.

Handshakes

British shake hands less than Europeans although it is still usual to do it at the start of a business meeting.

When you shake hands and someone says “how do you do?” the correct response is not to give an answer, but also to say “how do you do?”

More generally about British business culture (3)

Plain speaking

Plain speaking, or rather the lack of it, can be a problem during negotiations. A British person will often go out of his way to avoid saying no or giving a straight answer. Our language has many more synonyms and figures of speech than Lithuanian. You will need to learn to translate.

Closing the deal

The British in general love a good compromise. This does not mean that in business we will not try to drive a hard bargain, but in general we dislike extremes. Keep this in mind when choosing your negotiating strategy.

Advice to Lithuanians



- ☺ Smile more
- ☺ Learn how to make small talk
- ☺ Remember that there is more to life than business
- ☺ Be proud of being from Lithuania but do not be obsessed by it either.

