

CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH PEOPLE FROM



VENEZUELA



Greetings



It is appropriate to meet and greet others by offering a confident handshake. Once you have established a rapport with your Venezuelan contact, you may receive an embrace. Address others as *Señor*, *Señora* or *Señorita*, followed by their last names. As in most Latin American countries, Venezuelans will most likely have two last names with the first being their father's name and the second their mother's last name. Be sure to use both names. Individuals should not be addressed by their first name unless they have given permission to do so.

Conversation



Venezuelans enjoy discussing their country's history, arts, and sports, especially baseball and soccer. Topics to avoid include asking about the other person's private life, religion, and Venezuelan politics. Don't be the first to start making small talk. Instead, allow your Venezuelan counterpart to set the tone of conversation.

Gestures



Good posture is a must and should be maintained at all times, even when in relaxed situations. Venezuelans tend to stand very close to others, often less than two arms' lengths. Maintain eye contact. Be sure to avoid pointing with your index finger; instead, use your entire hand.

Business Attire



Venezuelans are very fashion conscious and follow European fashions closely. Be sure to dress in a conservative yet stylish manner. Pay close attention to accessories; these will be noticed if they are made by top designers. For women, although being professionally dressed is important, it is equally important to be very chic in appearance. This includes fine jewelry, heels and make-up.

Hierarchy/Family



In some privately owned Venezuelan organizations, hierarchy may be very well defined with a vertical pecking order. In other organizations, there may be a less defined hierarchical order. The family, extended family, and friends are very important. Machismo is very strong. Women have some restrictions on their social and work behavior.

Manners



Be sure to confirm your meeting a few days before the actual date. Small talk is an important part of the way Venezuelans launch meetings. Promptness will be expected in both business and social situations.

Don't snack while you are walking. Wait until you sit down before you eat. The continental style of dining will be followed, with the fork in your left hand and the knife in your right at all times.

Don't wear shorts or tennis shoes in public unless you are on your way to the beach.

Cognitive Styles



In Venezuela, outside information is accepted on most issues for purposes of discussion. However, Venezuelans do not change their attitudes easily. Their educational system trains them to process information subjectively and associatively. Their personal involvement in a situation is more important than the rules or laws that might be used to solve the problem. Expertise is less important than one's ability to get along with the group. Finishing projects does not seem to be a goal. Time does not create anxiety.

Currency

The official currency is the *bolívar* (abbreviated *Bs*). One *bolívar* is equivalent to 100 *centimos*; one *real* is equivalent to 50 *centimos*; one *medio* is equivalent to 25 *centimos*.

Ethnic Make-Up



67% of Venezuela's population are mestizo, although 21% is of European descent, 10% of African descent, and 2% are Indians.

Language



Spanish. However, English is the language of business in Caracas. There are also more than 30 Amerindian languages spoken throughout the country.

Religion



96% Roman Catholic.