Canadian Workplace Culture

Tips and Suggestions

1. Meeting & Greeting
   When meeting someone for the first time it is courteous to:
   - stand up, if you are seated, and move toward the other person
   - shake their hand firmly
   - make good eye contact
   - Try to use their name right away – this is professional and helps you remember their name. Generally people use first names in the workplace nowadays. However, if someone is introduced to as Ms. or Mr. be sure to use this more formal greeting. Eg. It is nice to meet you Mr. Jones.

   *When passing people in hallways or arriving at work in the morning it is customary to say hello or good morning and make eye contact. The same applies to leaving at the end of the day.

2. Teamwork
   Canadian’s are very team focused in the workplace, and you will often see “teamwork” as a desired skill in job postings. How to demonstrate teamwork in the workplace:
   - Treat everyone with respect - Greet someone working in an entry level position with the same courtesy and enthusiasm as you would an Executive Director. Hold open doors!
   - Do not interrupt – it is considerate to give everyone time to share their thoughts
   - Show interest in people’s work, interests and achievements
   - Offer support when you see a coworker under stress or falling behind. This demonstrates teamwork, and the person might return the help when you need it down the road!
   - Try to put the needs of the team/organization before your own

3. Socializing
   Socializing and friendship are a normal part of workplace culture in Canada. Some small talk or conversation is expected and demonstrates you care about your colleagues. Pay attention to how other people interact in your work environment to determine what is normal and accepted.

   **Acceptable Socializing:**
   - Chatting over coffee and lunch breaks
   - Talking for a few minutes when you arrive at work in the morning about your weekend/night etc., or as you are leaving for the day
   - Socializing while walking to a meeting or waiting for colleagues to arrive

   **Not Acceptable:**
   - Talking extensively on the phone to friends/family while at work (emergencies or confirming what time to pick up your child is ok)
   - Engaging in long conversations during office hours
   - Gossiping or engaging in rumours about colleagues
   - Using slang and foul language that could offend some colleagues
4. **Punctuality**  
In general Canadians are punctual, and place importance on showing up on time for work related meetings and events. When a meeting is set for 10am, show up a few minutes early so you are ready to start right at 10am. Everyone is late from time to time - but it is courteous to call and let someone know if you are running late.

*For social events outside of work (Eg. Parties or dinner events at someone’s house) it is expected to be a few minutes late or “fashionably” late.

5. **Body Language**  
Owing to the fact that Canada is a very diverse country, there is a range in body language expectations. Generally speaking, when starting a new job it is best to be reserved and professional until you get a feel for what is “normal” in your workplace. Here are some tips:

- Most people feel comfortable having about a 2 feet “personal bubble” around them
- Adjust your body language to the situation and person (watch the other person for clues)
- Allow your colleagues to lead – if they demonstrate a low level of personal space (eg. touch your arm when talking to you), then it is probably ok to do the same to them
- Maintain good eye contact when talking to people to demonstrate you are listening
- Be aware of your body positioning such as slouching, crossed arms and fidgeting that could give the impression of being bored or angry

6. **Fragrance**  
Most companies encourage limited or no use of cologne, perfume and other scented products due to allergies and sensitivities. Try to be respectful of this.

7. **Email, Phone and Computer use**  
Remember your work email and phone line is intended for work purposes – try to avoid using them for personal reasons. Some employers have company policies regarding this issue.

   **Acceptable BRIEF computer or phone use for personal reasons:**
   - Family emergencies or family logistics (Eg. Child is sick at school, change in pick up time/location, elderly family member needs support).
   - To make a personal appointment or phone call only possible during your work hours.

   **It is best to turn off your cell phone or put it on silent. Avoid answering it unless it is an emergency or you are on a break.**

   Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are recognized as both professional and social tools. Generally speaking, if you are using Facebook and Twitter for professional purposes, it won’t be an issue, especially if it is part of your job description. However, for social use, or to chat with friends, it is not acceptable. Check with your employer to confirm company policies.

8. **Dress**  
Every workplace will have slightly different expectations and policies regarding clothing. In general, when you start a new job, it is best to dress more formally and conservatively that you think is necessary while you learn more about the workplace culture and expectations.

   Some organizations have “Casual Friday” and more casual clothing like Jeans are acceptable. Other organizations dress casually every day. Pay close attention to what is normal in your office before taking risks.