

Intercultural communication

Latvians are polite and courteous. They can be extremely reserved. They do not readily smile, especially at strangers, and are not comfortable making small talk. They often appear to have little difficulty accepting what would be considered awkward silences in other cultures. This behaviour can make them seem austere. Once a relationship has developed though, some of the veneer will disappear. Personal matters are seldom touched upon in business.

Latvians are not especially emotive speakers. If you are from a culture where hand gestures are robust, you may wish to moderate them to conform to local practices. At the same time, they can be extremely direct speakers and task focused. Soft voices are expected. If you have a booming voice, you may wish to moderate it when conducting business with Latvians.

Latvians can be direct communicators, although they often temper their words to protect the feelings of the other person. As a group, they are slow to pay compliments and may become suspicious of compliments offered too readily and without sufficient reason.

Since good manners dictates that you do not publicly embarrass another person, it is important not to criticize someone in a public venue. Even the hint that you are unhappy could cause irreparable harm to your personal relationship.

Latvia is a low context communication culture. They do not require a great deal of background information and may become irritated if you attempt to explain too much. When asking questions, strive to be specific and ensure that the question is germane to the subject at hand. Do not ask questions for the sake of asking them.

Meeting and Greeting

- A quick, firm handshake with direct eye contact is the traditional greeting.
- Latvians have rather controlled facial expressions and are not quick to smile.
- Their initial reserve warms up after they get to know you.
- When greeting a close friend or family member, some Latvians offer a

light kiss on the cheek, although many do not, so it is not a universal measure of the intimacy of the relationship.

- Titles are very important and denote respect.
- When introducing someone, it is common to state their first and surname with the honorific title “kungs” for a man and “kundze” for a woman appended.
- Wait until invited to use their first name.