



How to do business in North and South America

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It's International Trade Week, which means now is a good time to (re)focus on the world's vast appetite for British goods and services.

Key to achieving success is making sure you do your homework about the market opportunity and understand the nuances of different cultures. This will help you work out how best to influence, communicate and negotiate with your counterparts.

Our cousins in the United States are a case in point. With [the country reopening last week to travellers from the UK](#), now is the time to go meet them in person, shake hands and show you understand the world's biggest economy.



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Below are my top tips for working with Americans. I have also had many years of experience of working with companies in Argentina. While the economy has been in recession and inflation is very high, its economy is forecast to grow by 9 per cent this year. So for those going in with their eyes open, I've included my thoughts on their business culture.

The United States

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Transactions first, relationships second

American negotiators and leaders value speed because the business culture rewards those that are first, even if they're not necessarily the best. Those that can "do the deal" are held in high esteem, recognising the American preference for building relationships while working together, rather than requiring a relationship as the starting point.

Keep it simple, clear and measurable

Americans believe "what you see is what you get". So hidden meanings, irony, implicit or indirect communication will cause delays, misunderstandings and a loss of trust. Affirmative, confident, quantifiable ways your US counterpart "wins" will make the negotiations more successful. The more explicit and direct (and of course, diplomatic) your approach, the more interest and attention you'll receive.



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Make it my way

US business executives like to know you have configured your solution just for them. The menu of options has been designed to put your counterparts in charge, even if your menu is the one you offer all your customers and clients. While standardisation is what helped make American business such a significant force, its economy of abundance means executives like to feel invested in the product or service. The more they have a hand in designing it, the more committed they become.

Optimistic and entrepreneurial

Even with the pandemic, the spirit of optimism and entrepreneurship is surprisingly alive. According to a recent McKinsey report, *The Next Normal Arrives*, there were “1.5 million new business applications in the third quarter of 2020, far beyond what was seen in the great recession of 2008-09”. It shows a positive trend in entrepreneurship — linked to the underlying attitude whereby attempting something new is to be encouraged, with failure offering opportunities for learning and developing personally and professionally.

Argentina

Define your space

As Argentinians use many gestures and passion to get their points across, the personal space is much closer than in Europe or the US. Tactile by nature, they often touch during your conversation after handshakes. Expect much eye contact as a means of building trust.

Where's the passion?

When giving a business presentation to an Argentine audience, ensure you show your passion for the ideas, as emotional responses are not just acceptable but encouraged. Balance your upside arguments with the downsides as coming across as too gung-ho is seen with suspicion. Polish and fluency are expected and appreciated, so rehearsing your script is essential. Expect interruptions as you go, as well as a circular or non-linear exploration of the ideas at hand.

You look marvellous

How you dress tells your Argentine colleagues about your status and taste. Quality accessories, jewellery, shoes and suits really count, with an expectation that women and men are well-groomed with neat hair and nails. Dark colours are preferred with the “smart casual” approach best left to the US and western Europe. Even for casual occasions, best leave the shorts and jeans at home.



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Time isn't money

As relationships are more important than tasks, Argentine executives see time as a background force rather than something to be strictly measured despite their very long work days. Bear in mind deadlines are purely guidelines, with schedules and budgets fairly fluid as the priority is on getting the job done well, not necessarily quickly. Expect discussions to go off on many tangents as exploring the points around the project are more interesting than following a linear agenda.

Pleasure before business

Ensuring your friendly relationship is firmly in place before negotiating gives you permission to start the game of win/lose, the preferred strategy of many executives in Argentina. The dance will be slow, as concessions — yours and theirs — are made slowly and in line with their self-image as entrepreneurs.

Allyson Stewart-Allen is the founder of International Marketing Partners, author of the recently published 2nd edition of Working with Americans, and has advised over 240 businesses in 26 countries about the internationalisation of their brands.