

Technologically sophisticated and open for business

Swedes are trustworthy and like the chance to negotiate with foreigners, says Sergey Frank



How to negotiate

Sweden is a modern country with a highly developed civil society.

It is a world leader in innovation and technology and one of the most advanced countries in information technology and telecommunications. Moreover, it has cut its corporate taxes in recent years, making it a more attractive place to invest. Germany, the UK and the US are its most important trading partners.

Doing business in Sweden means dealing with people who are familiar with technology, appreciate a high

standard of living and are open for doing business on an international scale.

Swedes are open-minded when dealing with foreign business partners so a formal introduction, via a third party, is not always necessary. Most Swedish people speak and read English fluently, so an interpreter is rarely necessary. Your Swedish counterpart is likely to be open, polite, honest, trustworthy and happy to give you his own perspective. He or she will help you find out what you need to know and will be happy to take part in brainstorming sessions to find solutions to problems. A sense of humour is important and similar to the English taste for irony.

When you start doing business, your Swedish counter-

part will be understated, again in an English way. Punctuality and a structured agenda are appreciated and over-confidence is regarded as inappropriate.

Although success is important, you should avoid appearing too profit-oriented. It is better to discuss your proposal patiently and consistently than to oversell.

A well-documented presentation focusing on technical quality and service rather than price is appreciated more than a hard sell.

Be aware your Swedish business partner may be inflexible over prices. Avoid highly inflated initial offers. One general principle of communication applies throughout Scandinavia: less is more. So provide a realistic initial offer with enough margin for concessions.

During negotiations, you will find Swedes good listeners who like a co-operative dialogue, emphasising tech-

nical details and without giving too much importance to small talk.

As far as non-verbal communication is concerned, do not approach your Swedish partner too closely. And do not regard silence as negative – there may be no rapid or immediate reaction to a proposal. Instead, you will experience a calm and cautious atmosphere during any business negotiations.

Everything seems to be fine when dealing with Swedish counterparts. Yet do not forget that Swedes tend not to start negotiations as quickly as you would in, for example, the US. They may become uncomfortable if confronted by a dominant and extravert business partner.

Swedes consider it impolite to interrupt another speaker in mid-sentence, especially if this interruption is not concerned with clarifying questions. Have

patience: Swedish executives like to base decisions on consensus. They are team-oriented and will not contradict colleagues openly.

The idea of "fair play" is important to Swedes, especially in their social system and culture. In their management culture, Swedish bosses are not supposed to be overbearing or to use force to achieve their goals.

Thus, your partner will usually try to find win-win solutions in which both parties will receive a fair amount of the profit. This behaviour also affects hierarchies, which are relatively modest in Sweden. The model of management is egalitarian. Women play a big role and both men and women take leave for sick children, sabbaticals, or to study.

Swedish managers like good food. However, a working lunch is for just that: to carry on speaking

about details of business.

Socially, most Swedes are friendly, generous hosts. Business entertaining is done at lunch or dinner and mostly in restaurants. An invitation to someone's house is rare and a great honour. During dinner there will be formal toasts – to which you should respond with a short speech. Good, subtle humour is appreciated in your response on such occasions.

Make sure you arrive on time. Evening meals are taken relatively early and your Swedish counterpart will expect you not to leave soon after dinner, as in many east Asian cultures, but to stay for a while and to continue chatting, for example, at the hotel bar.

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