



According to Dealing with the Dutch by Jacob Vossestein

Do's and don'ts

The major do's and don'ts in the Dutch business world. Obviously, not everything is pertinent to every reader, as it depends very much on where he or she comes from. I hope these guidelines are quite helpful to you in dealing with the Dutch!

Do's

When working or doing business with the Dutch:

- Do come well-prepared, with detailed and practical information about your products, needs and capabilities;
- Do come to the heart of the matter quickly, within a few minutes at most;
- Do present yourself as punctual, modest and practical;
- Do try to give a positive but realistic and not 'overdone' presentation of you personally, your product and your company;
- Do concentrate seriously on the matter in hand, making only occasional small talk or jokes, until business itself is over and done with;
- Do state your opinions clearly and without too much emotion;
- Do consult your Dutch colleagues on all levels (but don't take up too much of their time);
- Do be prepared for criticism and learn to deal with it calmly;
- Do be critical and outspoken about the Dutch too - they expect and appreciate it;
- Do be open to compromise during any form of negotiation;
- Do take initiatives and don't worry about losing face by being creative or by asking questions;
- Do bring up alternatives when something is said to be impossible;
- Do ask Dutch colleagues for their opinion on your performance (but be prepared for very honest answers, and remember that they indicate involvement!);
- Do tell Dutch colleagues your views on their working environment and ways of doing things; 'constructive criticism' will be appreciated;
- Do ask subordinates for their opinion also, and show some interest in their personal backgrounds;
- Do tell your colleagues and subordinates a bit about your own personal background without bragging unnecessarily;
- Do participate in company rituals such as birthday 'coffee and cake', the '*borrel*' (company celebration), Christmas festivities, etc.;
- Do try to learn to speak Dutch, and do practice it even when the Dutch speak English, or another familiar language, to you;
- Do read and ask questions about Dutch history and society; this will help you to understand the Dutch better;
- Do try to keep yourself as well as your colleagues from generalizing and stereotyping.

**Don'ts:**

- Don't bring (or expect to be offered) expensive business gifts;
- Don't, during the introduction, boast about academic degrees, influential family connections, or relationships with important people;
- Don't overdress; see what other people are wearing, and when in doubt, ask the Dutch for advice;
- Don't ask direct questions about income and personal political views;
- Don't assume that everyone is married and has children - or is heterosexual!;
- Don't expect lavish meals or sightseeing tours in town. (But if you are offered them, it is obviously a good sign);
- Don't, as an in-company visitor to Dutch Corporation expect to be booked into the very best hotel in town (and don't do that for them either when they come to visit you!);
- Don't expect intensive personal coaching by people from the host company outside of working hours (and when they visit you, ask them if they perhaps prefer to be alone);
- Don't, when working with Dutch people, be 'bossy' to subordinates;
- Don't expect the Dutch to come for a drink after work, but continue to ask ...one day they will come;
- Don't forget, when selling, to mention any environmental advantages of your product;
- Don't expect (and certainly don't ask for) personal favours outside of a transaction;
- Don't shower Dutch people with compliments; it makes them uneasy; try to keep mind and emotions somewhat separate during working hours;
- Don't begin long discussions on philosophy, literature, art, etc., during introductions, business lunches or during working hours;
- Don't be tempted into long debate about the ins and outs of multicultural society when you feel the opinions to be too brash - unless you have a lot of time, of course.

Last but not least, don't forget that you are in another culture with an array of differences from your own culture. Seek to understand your Dutch hosts - particularly *why* they do things the way they do - and your experience here will be much more pleasant and productive.