

The Oys & Joys of Working in

Tips and tricks for navigating the American workplace

Andrew Keene | November 2022
+1.414.943.9999 | andrewmkeene@gmail.com

Shabbat Dinner

Yes, even Shabbat has rules :)

- Plans are made at least a week in advance
- Check before bringing a guest
- Clarify your dietary restrictions beforehand
- Offer to bring something...and then
- Show up with something (wine, flowers, etc.)
- Avoid discussing American politics
- Send a thank you text/email either after you get home or the next morning

Communications

We do it a bit differently

- Email is still the dominant tool in the workplace. Respond timely to emails.
- SMS/WhatsApp is not preferred for work communication
- If you call someone, especially an older person, leave a voicemail with your phone number to call back
- Include pleasantries in your email but keep them short and to the point
- Spell check your emails esp. when using people's names
- Say “thank you” more than you think you need to :)

AMERICANS ARE

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE

What We Mean When We Say...

When an American says....	The American may mean...	An Israeli might hear / think...
We may have some challenges here.	There are problems here that must be solved.	Great -- finally things are getting interesting, challenge is good.
I might do this differently	The way it is getting done now is wrong and needs to be changed.	How you would do it isn't relevant, since there doesn't sound like there's any problem with the way we're doing it already.
Did I understand you correctly when you said Y?	I am amazed that you said something so wrong or stupid.	Looks like I need to explain again because they didn't understand the first time.
I would appreciate if you could get this to me by Thursday.	The drop dead deadline for this is Thursday.	It would be nice to get it done by Thursday, but not essential. Later than Thursday will also be OK.

When an Israeli says...	The Israeli may mean...	An American might hear / think...
You have to listen to me	I want to get your attention	You're ordering me around, how insulting!
You are wrong	I disagree with your point of view and want to discuss it some more so that we can reach agreement on the correct view	There's no room for discussion. Better back off.
Your presentation was OK	Your presentation was really good	You didn't like my presentation.
Why don't you do it another way?	I'm giving you a helpful suggestion.	You are really insulting my work.

Adapted (in part) with permission of Lucy Shahaar

Meetings

Americans love them!

- Show up **early**. Start on time. End on time.
- Check the meeting agenda beforehand. If you're organizing the meeting, include an agenda/goals.
- Double check that you haven't excluded anyone from the meeting invite - clarify with your supervisor who should be included. Some meetings should be very small, some should be much larger.
- Come prepared. If it is a group of important stakeholders, consider a slide deck.
- Know what decisions you need to make by the end, assign owners/volunteers, and clarify deadlines.
- Keep your work calendar updated so people can schedule meetings with you easily.
- Try not to interrupt other people or dominate the conversation (even if you are leading it)
- The meeting after the meeting is often where the real work is done.
- Disagree with **ideas**, not people. (Disagree without being disagreeable)

Workflow & Ways of Working

- Deadlines matter. Meet your deadlines or communicate before missing them.
- Clarify your working hours and then stick to them.
- If you have personal matters, block time on your calendar, and let people know you are out (don't have to give details)
- Clear roles and responsibilities - ask before jumping in to help someone else

Feedback

There's a few different flavors

- Americans like the sh*t sandwich method - critical feedback on a bun of compliments
- Feedback has a power dynamic involved
- Praise: a generic compliment not specific to any one action
- Positive Reinforcement: positive feedback on a specific action
- Corrective Action: swift correction to an action taken
- Negative Feedback: didn't like a specific action taken

Personal Boundaries

- Respect physical office space
- Texting is seen as personal (versus email)
- Don't show up unannounced at someone's house (or even with short notice)
- Don't call someone after 8pm (or so) either at home or cell unless they are expecting it
- Be mindful of personal space/boundaries in conversation
- Okay to be social with colleagues but colleagues are colleagues before friends

The Art of Schmoozing

It's not what you know, it's who you know!

- A way to converse casually, especially in order to gain an advantage or make a social connection
- Gateway to invaluable connections, opens doors to new opportunities
- Helps you understand the social landscape and community politics
- Helps build your stakeholder map
- Practice your elevator speech (who are you in 30 seconds?)
- Have 5 go-to questions to be interested (not interesting)
- Follow up!!