



[DR. SHIRLEY SAYS...]

By: DR. SHIRLEY A. WHITE
President
Success Images

Reprinted from the September 2006 issue of BIC

Business dining: Seal the deal with a meal

The purposes of business entertaining are numerous. You can strengthen business relationships; woo clients; seal a major deal; or discuss details of projects, proposals and contracts. When you add good food to the occasion, the potential for goodwill is heightened.

Wheeling and dealing over breakfast, lunch or dinner has become a highly successful and popular way of doing business. Whether the occasion runs three hours with the accompanying tab hitting the \$100-plus mark or consists of half an hour over a cup of coffee, pizza or a hamburger, don't underestimate the value of sitting down over a meal to hammer out a business deal or build a relationship prior to discussing business. On the other hand, never underestimate how devastating not being able to properly handle that lunch or dinner can be.

Any type of business entertainment creates a situation in which all of your social graces and skills should come together, from your table manners and abilities as a host to your communication skills.

With that in mind, we will review a few basic guidelines for planning a breakfast, lunch or dinner. These guidelines will help make the experience more pleasant and profitable for you and your clients.

Planning the meal

With the old saying, "Prior planning prevents poor performance," goes another truism: "Planning

ahead and making proper arrangements eliminates the risk of disappointment, confusion and missed opportunities." Any planning you do in advance of the business meal will ease your job once you get to the restaurant and will make you and your guests better able to relax, enjoy the meal and close the deal.

When making arrangements, let the person invited check his calendar for the best date, then decide on a mutually satisfactory date and time. Always confirm arrangements a day or two before the meeting.

When choosing the restaurant, ask your guest for his preference. If the choice of restaurant is left to you, it is generally a good idea to choose one with which you are familiar. Time constraints and location should also be kept in mind when making your decision.

If you wish to try a new restaurant, call in advance to check on reservation policies, prices, hours of service, proximity of tables and types of food served. When making reservations, give your full name and the name of your company. To avoid embarrassment at the end of the meal, make it clear to restaurant personnel that you will be paying the bill.

Consider the situation

Should you find yourself hosting business meals with any regularity, it is a good idea to frequent a certain restaurant and establish rapport with the owner or the maitre d'. They will see that you are seated at a good table for business discussions and that your service is top-

notch. In addition, being welcomed at the restaurant by the owner or others will impress your business guests.

Whether your guest is from out of town or around the corner, never exceed your budgetary constraints. No business deal was ever consummated simply because someone took a client to the most expensive restaurant in town. Be aware that many restaurants have luncheon specials and special dinner menus with modestly priced meals. It is a good idea to call ahead of time and inquire about these menus, as well as whether or not you need to make reservations during the times these special meals are offered.

If your guests have been on the road for an extended period of time or have just come a long distance to meet with you, have pity on their physical condition. They may have had travel delays and other problems. Don't take obviously exhausted persons to a noisy restaurant where it is difficult to talk, much less think.

Also, consider the day of the week. It would be naive to request a quiet dinner, even at better restaurants, on a Friday or Saturday evening. A peaceful evening spent over a quiet dinner is much more conducive to the successful transaction of business.

For more information on the seminars and self-development products Dr. Shirley offers through her company, Success Images, please contact her at (225) 769-2307 or visit her Web site at www.successimages.com. □