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# Power lunches help seal money-making deals

**Atlanta Business Chronicle by Joanna Soto Carabello, Contributing writer**

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Etiquette standards may be relaxing in other parts of society, but social mores are alive and well in the business world. Perhaps in no other situation are good manners put to the test more than at a business lunch.

Power lunches have become a necessity as professionals try to squeeze the most out of every minute of the workday. Knowing how to be a gracious host and guest in these settings isn't just about showing you were raised right; it can make the difference between landing a client, sealing a deal or impressing your boss and not.

"In today's business world you are judged not only by your technical skills, but also your soft skills, your people skills," said Barbara Hickey, president of the Etiquette School of Atlanta. "Graciousness is not dead."

The keys for a successful business lunch or dinner can be boiled down to two factors: planning and communication. Using foresight when picking the location, choosing what to eat and planning when to conduct business during the meal helps you avoid some unpleasant and unproductive situations, according to etiquette experts and business professionals.

When you invite someone to a business lunch, clearly explain the purpose of the meeting, who will attend and how long it should take.

Clear communication is important in any situation, but especially when a business lunch involves men and women, according to Karen Foster, a clinical psychologist with **Corporate Psychology Resources Inc.**, an Atlanta-based firm providing leadership assessment and training.

"I think in today's day and age everyone wants to be clear about expectations, so they need to be addressed up front," Foster said.

Hosts should choose restaurants that are relatively quiet, offer a variety of menu items and are conveniently located for their guests. During the meal, hosts need to be aware of the time and not allow things to drag on too long. At the same time, guests need to make their schedules

flexible enough to provide sufficient time to discuss the business at hand.

Finding the right time to talk business during a meal also is crucial to a productive meeting.

"There are too many variables going on while we're eating ... in order to effectively focus on the discussion, presentation or negotiations. So usually I try to do that either before the lunch is served or after everyone has eaten," said Robert Bradshaw, an Atlanta real estate developer.

Both parties should resist ordering foods that are messy or complicated to eat. Alcohol should be avoided at lunch meetings, Hickey said, and it should be limited to one drink at a dinner meeting.

For Mike Smith, an institutional equity sales representative for **Jefferies & Co.** in Atlanta, the power lunch isn't just a necessity, it's part of a strategy.

"I've always argued that one hour face to face with a person ... is worth five or six times that amount of time over the phone or e-mail," said Smith.

### **Business lunch etiquette**

**Stating the purpose:** The reason for the lunch meeting and who will attend should be stated at the time of the invitation.

**Paying the bill:** The host picks the location of the meeting and always pays for her guest's meal.

**Picking the place:** Choose a quiet restaurant that is easy to access and provides reliably good food and service.

**Arriving early:** Hosts should arrive early and greet their guests at the door.

**Ordering food:** Avoid messy foods.

**Choosing a drink:** Avoid alcohol.

**Run on time.**

**Following up:** Send a handwritten "thank you" note to the host.