

The Secrets of Business Entertaining

by Marcia Wharton



You already are esteemed in your business communities for the levels of success you have achieved, and your clients respect you.

You would, however, like to take your success to the next level. Learning the secrets of successful business entertaining are essential in going to the next level in your business success.

Entertaining is an investment in your business

It's easy to take your clients for granted, so you try to show your appreciation to build the best client relationships.

Some of you send gifts of flowers, bottles of lovely wine or tickets to national sporting events.

You might give clients the opportunity to buy Broadway show tickets through your contacts.

Some of you arrange for cars to drive them around when they are in your city, and a few of you have sent clients on interesting trips.

Each of these expressions of thanks is meaningful, yet misses an opportunity for you to connect with these important people in your career.

Entertaining your clients not only shows your appreciation, but strengthens your relationships.

Those who entertain well propel their businesses and their careers.

Leaders in any industry use effective business entertaining to reach the next level of success.

Through entertaining, they not only express appreciation, but they also promote their images, differentiate themselves and build loyalty.

They deepen their most valuable business relationships.

They see entertaining as an essential investment in the long-term growth of their businesses, but it isn't business entertaining alone that catapults their success.

These leaders understand the nuances of expert hosting.

Paying attention to details

Here's a scenario: You have been invited to play golf. You show up in the parking lot, but you don't know if you should put on your golf shoes. You grab your bag and walk toward the clubhouse, hoping to see your host. You eventually find him.

On the first tee, you meet the other two players of your foursome. You don't know anything about them and barely get their names as your host races through the introductions.

You play a round of golf, have a drink, and your host says he had a good time. You walk to the parking lot and leave.

Now, here is a second invitation to play golf.

Two days beforehand, you get a call from your host.

He tells you where to drop off your clubs and park and where to meet him. He tells you that soft spikes are required at his club and that he has arranged for a guest locker for you.

He names the other people who will be playing with you and what they do, how he knows them and how you might relate to them.

You arrive at the club and go directly to the bag drop-off, where the attendant was expecting you and greeted you.

Your host greets you at the putting green, right where he said he would be. He shows you to the locker room, where the attendant calls you by name.

When you step into the golf cart, there is a sleeve of balls, ice water and a towel waiting for you, for which your host arranged.

You're able to make easy conversation with the other guests because of the information you have about them.

After the round, you go into the pro shop, where your host hands you a logo shirt from the club, as a memento of the day.

You have drinks and dinner at a reserved table with a great view of the course. Your host walks you to the parking lot to say goodbye.

A few days later, you receive a note thanking you for taking your time to join him in golf.

What a different experience for you, the guest!

The first story was simply an invitation to play golf.

The first host may have cared, but he didn't know the secret of showing it.

The second host knows how to plan, anticipate and ultimately delight you, the guest.

He knew the secret of making you, the guest, feel special by stepping into your shoes for the day.

Every detail was thought through beforehand to assure your total pleasure.

That's what took your experience as his guest to a higher level.

This example clearly shows you the difference between a missed opportunity and a highly successful one.

Keep this golf scenario in mind as you assume your role as host next time. The focus on details can be transferred to your own entertaining situation each and every time you have guests.

No matter what the form of entertainment, how you take care of your guest is the single most important aspect of successful business entertaining.

Find what works for you

One of the most capable hosts I spoke to within MDRT thoughtfully incorporates local and national fund-raisers into her lavish business entertaining.

Last year, when entertaining clients at a lunch in a hotel, she surprised her guests with an unusual party favour.

She bought 50 apple pies and attached to each a copy of the article about this unique pie sale that had caught her attention in the newspaper — proceeds went to victims' families of the September 11 tragedy.

This was meaningful to her guests because 21 of them had suffered losses in the World Trade Centre towers.

She has entertained at casual clambakes and formal holiday parties, and she took her staff to Paris, France, one year. She said, "You may not see immediate results of your investment in business entertaining, but down the line, it will pay off."

She has maintained a 97 percent retention rate with her customer base, and I would think her entertaining is a piece of their satisfaction and pleasure in working with her.

Another MDRT member uses his distinctive hobby, wild game hunting, to personalize a barbecue where he serves his own deer, elk and moose. There is no alcohol, and his

clients' families are invited to the Texas Ranger Museum, which he rents for his annual event.

He even plays a few numbers in the country western band. He wants his clients to get to know him as a well-rounded person, and business is never discussed at any of his events. It's all for friendship and relationship building.

By doing what is natural and comfortable for him, he puts his guests at ease.

Host an event you enjoy

Becoming an expert host takes practice.

These two hosts know themselves well and understand what it takes to please their guests. You can learn from them, but unless it's comfortable for you, you won't be relaxed enough to carry it off.

Let me share a story of a conversation I had with an MDRT member.

He doesn't entertain. He generously picks up all tabs when he's with clients — breakfast, lunches and dinners — but that is the extent of it.

He doesn't play golf well, yet many of his clients do. He said, laughing, "I would love to drive the carts, or I'd be better off as a caddie."

As we spoke further and I gently guided him along, he decided to try a wine tasting party with lavish hors d'oeuvres at a winery. He was comfortable with this venue, even excited. As a host, he will be more relaxed to welcome his guests.

With an open mind, creative muscle and a little effort, each of you can find your own right answers to business entertaining.

The most important criteria is to find a venue you personally enjoy where you will feel most comfortable and confident, and where you can focus totally on your clients.

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