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# BUSINESS MEANS BUSINESS

When your relationship with a client flourishes, be careful not to sabotage it. LINDA ALLAN teaches us how.

**W**hat do you do when a client wants to move their relationship with you beyond the required norms of business? Recently, I've had various clients invite me and my husband to a black tie event, a meal at their parents' home, and even their wedding. I accepted all these invitations graciously, honoured that they thought of me so fondly. But there was no obligation on my part to accept any of them. So how do you decide what to do? How can you ensure your existing relationship with your client won't be compromised? Here are a few things to consider.

Accepting any invitation beyond your norms of business with a client opens the door to a changed relationship – one that's closer and more personal. Ask yourself if that's what you want. If it isn't, it's best to politely decline with a gracious, heartfelt explanation. After all, we all have a life beyond our work and commitments to family and friends. Having proven ourselves to them professionally, a worthy client cannot fault us for our personal priorities beyond the bounds of our business with them.

Should you decide to become involved with your client on a more personal level, remember that it's really still business, or as I've coined, "socio-business." Don't compromise your high standards of behaviour and dress by crossing the line of formality as you would with friends. Be yourself and relaxed, but don't lose sight that this is a client-provider relationship

and will be for as long as they're buying products or services from you.

Be discreet in what you say. Don't divulge information that is sensitive, confidential or too personal. Resist any temptation to take part in gossip and conversation that's inappropriate or offensive in any way. Your integrity is on the line.

Have the good judgment to maintain high standards of conduct, even if others are letting their hair down in the name of friendly fun. Don't eat too much, drink too much, talk too much or otherwise behave in a manner that's disrespectful in any way. Discretion is key. You'll be respected all the more for keeping to the standards you've shown them in all your business dealings.

Always dress appropriately and a notch above the requirements of the invitation. Many people equate a lax appearance with slack business practices. Your dress and grooming outside the office will alert others to your impeccable standards.

Remember that these invitations could lead to new clients, so don't sabotage your chances of winning new business!



**LINDA ALLAN,  
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Raising the bar in the corporate world, Linda Allan is a certified management consultant with vast experience and significant credentials. Specializing in business behaviour, brand image

and etiquette, Allan's seasoned advice is often sought by industry leaders, Fortune 500 companies, television and radio shows. [www.lindaallan.ca](http://www.lindaallan.ca)