

Ask Our Expert...

# Linda Allan



LINDA ALLAN

*Behaviour in business  
that's great for business*



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**Question:** I'm the Vice President of Business Development for a large company that operates internationally. Our salespeople frequently take prospects and clients to lunch or dinner. What advice do you have when entertaining clients over a meal to ensure we're behaving appropriately and adhering to the highest standards of professionalism?

**Answer:** First, remember that you are "hosting" clients – they are your "guests". From the start, be well organized, show them the extent of your hospitality, and remain in control (especially of the pace and mood at the restaurant).

- 1. Be specific about the meeting location at the restaurant.** State in advance whether you'll meet guests in the restaurant foyer, bar, table, etc. I've often seen clients waiting in the foyer for 20 minutes while their guests wait in a separate room or at the bar.  
**Tip:** Reconfirm your meeting a few days ahead. That's a nice way to remind your guests, and to give them the details again so they'll have them handy.
- 2. When accompanying guest(s) to the table, allow them to precede you.** They should follow behind the wait staff who will pull the best chair out (hopefully!) first. The head guest takes the first chair pulled.  
**Tip:** The host takes a chair facing the kitchen or service area. Not only does that avoid guests having those views, it ensures the host will be easily able to monitor the flow and catch wait staff's attention if necessary.
- 3. The host retains control of the wine list** – even if a wine connoisseur is among the guests. If unsure which wine to order, enlist the help of the waiter.  
**Tip:** To ensure a recommendation at your desired price level, point to the price of a wine on the list and say, "I was thinking of this wine. What do you think?" If your selection is not appropriate, the waiter will suggest an alternative – at a similar price level to what you pointed to.
- 4. As host, allow guests to order anything and make suggestions on what's good.** Whether host or guest, it's best to avoid ordering difficult foods.  
**Tip:** Most common difficult foods... spaghetti/fettuccine, mussels in the shell in a sauce, quail or anything with small bones, whole cherry tomatoes, olives with pits, hamburgers and piled high sandwiches.
- 5. A host is in charge of dealing with appalling service** - Deal with service issues discreetly after the meal once guests have left.  
**Tip:** If a problem is serious, it must be dealt with during the meal. Complain in private to your waiter or someone in charge. Never express your displeasure to guests or make it a topic of conversation during the meal. *Brought to you by:*