



Supply Chain Operations & Technologies
 Supply Chain Vendor Compliance
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Since January 1996

I typically bring my lunch with me when I go on-site to visit clients. I've noticed that most other consultants I encounter do not do this. Granted it does take a bit of shopping planning and preparation discipline, two characteristics in which I'm fortunately very strong. It also takes a bit of social confidence to invite oneself to the lunch table among a group of strangers, but I'm a friendly chap and I think most people recognize this rather quickly.

I find lunching with a client's staff very beneficial in several ways:

1. It saves me money.
2. It saves me time.
3. It's more comfortable especially in the hot & humid South Florida summers that are prone to thunderstorms: who wants to go outside in that weather?
4. It's convenient in that I can relax and enjoy lunch rather than having to rush, important since I'm a slow eater.
5. I'm a very healthy eater so I can bring the "good stuff".

It gives me a chance to get to know and bond with a client's staff on another level. I'm careful not to open up personal conversations or delve deeper than I should. I try to stay away from hot topics such as politics and religion though I'm happy to chime in on sports. I won't comment on company gossip or offer up confidential information even if I have to be up-front and state that I do know something but I'm not permitted to disclose it.

It's nice to be able to sit down and meet some new folks too. I've lunched with both office staff and warehouse personnel. I don't mind if a client's employees get to know me more personally in return: people are welcome to ask the questions that nag at their curiosity, and I'll provide honest and appropriate answers in reply. I typically work rather closely with many of a client's employees and I want them to feel comfortable with me.

I get to learn things about a client's business that would not normally come up in other conversation. People might be a little more relaxed when chatting over lunch in the break room versus at their desks or in the warehouse unless we're in a secluded area. Since I'm a consultant and not company management employees generally feel more comfortable in confiding in me rather than directly with the executives. These bonus insights have really helped me to be a more effective consultant.

I'm careful to keep the insights I learn from casual conversation anonymous when appropriate and I've refused to "name names" on more than one occasion. I absolutely do not want any of a client's staff to view me as a spy whereby they need to mince words or withhold information when they communicate with me for fear of information or source being disclosed to company executives. However when the opportunity is right I make sure I give credit to the employee who passed along great insights or ideas so that executive management knows what a valuable resource they have in a particular employee.

To my consultant colleagues if you are not availing yourself of opportunities to get to know your clients better, you should. To the business owners and executives out there you should engage your employees more – at various levels of the organization chart – and really listen to what they have to say. Better communication and a free-flow dialogue of insights and ideas can have a profound positive effect on an organization and help avoid costly mistakes before they happen.

Thanks and bon appétit.

Norman Katz, CFE, CFS
 Katzscan Inc.



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