

# Do's and Don'ts for Socializing with the Boss and Clients

By Dianna Booher

Allie's bubbly personality gave her an edge as regional manager of Men's Sportswear for a prestigious department store chain. As her departments became top revenue producers for the nation, her paychecks grew—as did her popularity. Soon, it was longer and longer lunches when she met with the buyers for seasonal purchases. Then after hours, there were plenty of clubs and cool places for young, working professionals to “chill” after hours.

With her fun-loving nature, Allie was always up for anything. But gradually, her “private life” after work was no longer private. She couldn't hide her sluggish lack of energy after a long lunch or late night. The repercussions of her social life—poor punctuality, bad time-management, and dwindling productivity—began to capsize her career. Her numbers started to dive, and suddenly, associates across the nation saw her very differently. When her stores dropped from the top tier to the bottom in a span of three months and remained there for the next six, Allie was fired.

Socializing with the boss, colleagues, and customers sometimes presents an inconsistency. What someone sees on the job doesn't jive with what happens after five. Consider these tips to make sure a couple of hours on your social calendar or holiday party don't crater a couple of decades of dedicated work:

- **Play host rather than guest.** Offer connections to people. See tasks that need doing to stay busy and give you a reason to mix and mingle and meet people at the center of some activity.
- **Make sure your humor is not hazardous to your health.** You're judged not only for the stories you tell but also for those you think funny.
- **Do not touch; do not pass go. Don't even think about it.**
- **Stand in the path of traffic.** Position yourself near the buffet, in the entryway, near the path to the restrooms. People will be obliged to speak as they come and go. You're bound to see people you know and be able to strike up some interesting conversations.
- **Drink like your work depended on it—moderately, if at all.** Socializing with the boss or coworkers is no time to have one too many.
- **Lead with your ears, not your mouth.** Refresh your memory about the guest list, where they work, what you talked about last time you met. Ask a question about their interest, and let them lead.

- **Don't become a bore. Leave the gallbladder surgery and sales goals for another day.** People want to know you have a life and can discuss topics other than business. And when business comes up, they expect you to select topics appropriate for a business social setting.
- **Mind your manners—make your mama proud.** They should be able to dress you up and take you out. Learn and apply the basic rules of etiquette (dining, tipping, email, cell phone use) and common courtesy. Technology and times change. Courtesy and thoughtfulness do not.

In short, your life after hours should not shock those you lead 9 to 5. And even if coworkers prefer the party animal as project leader, that may not perpetuate the image you want to leave with your own boss or client. People want to know that your behavior off the job doesn't negate the values you communicate on the job.

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### 563 words

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*For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.*