



Supping With the Devil

Here's the starter to the dessert guide for acing a dinner with the boss man (or woman)

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Dining with the boss – business lunch or a celebratory dinner – makes you feel special, like an insider. But it's not a night out with the pals, so you will feel uncomfortable and cramped. Follow these to make sure the dinner doesn't leave you with a career heartburn.

Dressing Down: What to Wear

When the boss invites you for dinner, it's an opportunity to create a better rapport with him. It is important to dress up appropriately for this occasion. Of course what you choose will depend if it is a formal dinner meeting or an informal one. The choice also rests on the age and dressing habits of the boss – some bosses like formal dressing. To not stand out, stick to formal dressing which does not mean black tie.

Depending on the rapport with your boss, ask him for the dress code. Even if he/she says casual, wear a recognisable brand of jeans or cotton trousers, and T-shirt preferably with a collar. Pair it with

closed shoes and not sandals – and definitely not chappals. Importantly, don't try to out dress your boss. So, this means none of the very expensive shoes, branded watches or suits.

For women, the rule is to dress up as they would for an office party and not a visit to the pub. When in doubt, stick to Indian look semi-formals or simple western formals with a buttoned-up shirt, trousers and leather shoes. Wrong dressing, read short dresses, can send wrong signals to the boss.

Present of Mind: Should You Carry a Gift

If the dinner is at the boss's house, it is appropriate to carry some gift with you. Select the gift as per the boss. If he/she is an avid

reader, gift a book. If he likes to maintain a good bar, carry a bottle of wine or single malt. And if there are children in the house, carry some chocolates. Make sure the gift is not very expensive. While handing over the gift, always hand it over to the boss and not the wife. If you are gifting a décor item or flowers, only then hand it to the spouse.

Talking Points: What to Talk About

Keep the conversation light and general at the dinner table. Do discuss the food and interesting stories around cuisines – it will make you sound more worldly wise. But don't comment on it negatively or even on the restaurant, if the dinner is at one.

If you are a female colleague and your boss invites you for dinner, depending on the situation & reputation of the boss you may politely decline

Avoid talking about work, unless the boss makes the first move and brings it up. Like conversations at an office party, keep the talk free of any controversial topics like politics and religion. Figure out the boss's interests and talk about that for most of the time but intelligently so that you don't look like a sycophant. Try and rope in the family into the conversation. Just start by talking of their interests and talents. Don't try and dominate the conversation.

You might not be as privileged enough to have a one-on-one with the boss but would be sitting at the table with 2-3 more people – from work or outside. On such occasions, don't try too hard to get the boss' attention. Relax and be a good listener. Once you have heard everybody out, you can expect them to hear your point of view.

Cheers to That:

To Drink or Not to Drink

If your boss offers you a drink, it is okay to accept but nothing more than a couple of small ones. And if the boss is a heavy drinker, you don't have to match him drink for drink. Drink slowly to keep him company. Definitely, avoid making comments on the boss' capacity to drink. And more importantly, try not to get drunk.

While eating, try to match his speed – it shouldn't be that while you are still sipping the soup he's looking at you after the dessert course. Forego the rule if the boss is a slo-mo eater or a food inhaler. Importantly, if the boss is a pure vegetarian try to have vegetarian food only and don't lick your chops while talking about how you had the most exquisite rare steak the other night – wrong audience. Keep the focus on your boss and not on the food (that's incidental). If he is making a particular point, go slow on your food and give him a careful ear. On the dinner table keep the mobile on silent mode and avoid taking calls or checking your phone for messages.

No Show: Can you Refuse an Invitation

Why would you want to do that? The dinner with the boss is an excellent avenue for building a rapport away from the office. However, if you don't want to accept the invitation on a particular date for any reason, make sure that the reason given is very genuine, believable and compelling. And add a request for another date. If you are a female colleague and your boss invites you for dinner, depending on the situation and the reputation of the boss you may politely decline.

If the dinner is at a restaurant, see off your boss to his car and make it a point to have eye contact till the car drives off. ■



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