

To Lunch or Not to Lunch

The Up Side

The greatest single attribute of a lunch meeting is getting to know each other better and gaining the kinds of information you can tuck away and work with at your leisure to round out the picture of a person you're dealing with.

- Lunch can be a uniquely disarming experience, giving the lunchers a chance to discover other personal aspects that would never come up at work. The usual discussion of food, complete with likes and dislikes; the choices you each make; how fast or slowly each of you eats; your table manners; what, or if, you drink; how you each handle the waiter—all of these added dimensions give great meaning and value to lunch as a meeting-time choice, especially if you notice and absorb the personal information.

- You break into the middle of the day but solve that hunger problem I mentioned earlier, the one that causes people to be unreceptive and ungiven. Actually getting fed as they listen and talk causes people to feel more generous and less threatened.

- The kind of small talk you can engage in over lunch is unique in terms of typical work encounters. Sitting around a table automatically puts people in a much more relaxed and unwary frame of mind than any office meeting. The informality, the sense of community, of belonging, of jokes and chatting—the total pleasure state that eating itself brings—all these conditioned responses subliminally color any lunch experience. They generate a more outgoing and revealing flow of talk about any subject than the product-oriented discussions of focused meetings in offices or conference rooms.

- People have a tendency to tell you more about what they care about and believe in—much of it unconsciously—over lunch. This provides a great source of knowing more about what makes the other person tick. The conversation can flow from what motivates them and what evokes resistance to what their private lives are like all the way to who are/were their heroes and what are the meaningful influences in their lives.

- The sense of sharing and closer ties you both walk away with, if you can relax and thus get to know each other better as people, moves your relationship to a new level at work and is therefore a valuable investment.