



Photo by Ulf Burchholz

The Entrepreneurial Linguist

Judy Jenner

judy.jenner@
entrepreneurial
linguist.com

Judy Jenner is a court-certified Spanish interpreter and a Spanish and German translator in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she runs Twin Translations with her twin sister. She is a past president of the Nevada Interpreters and Translators Association. She hosts the translation blog, Translation Times (www.translationtimes.blogspot.com). You can also find her at www.entrepreneuriallinguist.com. Contact: judy.jenner@twintranslations.com.

Taking Clients to Lunch

This month's column is about two of my favorite things: lunch and clients, and was inspired by my colleague Anabella Tidona, a court-certified Spanish interpreter in California.

I have often written about the fact that it is a nice business gesture to take a current or potential client to lunch, even if you do not get an immediate project out of this small investment. It is amazing how different a business relationship can be once you have shared a meal. Please read on for my tips about the art of the business lunch, which I have acquired during many business lunches in several countries.

Extend an invitation. Simply e-mail or call and, if the person is not your client yet, you could say: "It was nice meeting you at XYZ. Since the weather is so great this week, may I treat you to an al fresco lunch at _____, which is very close to your office?" It is perfectly fine if you do not have a specific business purpose for the lunch. Do not worry about people declining, as a free lunch is usually an attractive proposition.

Pick a restaurant. Ask your lunch partner if he or she has any preferences. If the person is a vegetarian, it probably would not be a good idea to take him or her to a steak house. Pick a restaurant that is convenient for the client. Ideally, go to a restaurant (at least mid-range in terms of prices) at which you have eaten before so you know it is good and can make recommendations.

Arrive early. You should be waiting for your (potential) client, not the other way around. Arrive 5-10 minutes early.

Order wisely. You should be able to handle your lunch and the conversation at the same time, and do so gracefully.

Remember your table manners. I hope you listened to your mother, but if you did not, review some basic table etiquette. Also, be nice to the wait staff.

Make conversation. If this is your first long face-to-face conversation, it could be a bit of a challenge to get things going, but most Americans are proficient at small talk. Come prepared with some non-controversial topics, such as local sports, a recent event, something interesting that happened at the client's company, etc. Do not start the conversation with: "So, let me tell you about my business." Let the conversation develop organically. Most business professionals will, at some

point, ask about your business, so have something intelligent to say about it.

Ask questions. Most people feel very comfortable talking about themselves, so ask some questions that are not too personal, but still interesting. The point of this exercise is to find things that you might have in common. You could ask your lunch partner where he or she is from, about their alma mater, etc.

You need to pay. You should make it abundantly clear that this is your treat. No splitting the bill, and under no circumstances should you allow the other person to pay. This is where your business credit card comes in handy.

Follow the client's lead when it comes to dessert. If your client wants dessert and/or coffee, you should probably join him or her, even if it is just a few bites. No one likes to eat alone and feel guilty about eating dessert. You can go to the gym later.

Do not forget to enjoy yourself! Ultimately, clients do business with people they like, and this is your opportunity to spend time with a (potential) client in a casual atmosphere. You might just discover that you really like your client.

This list of tips is not meant to be exhaustive by any stretch of the imagination, but I think it is a start. Enjoy your next lunch!

Yahoo! Business Discussion Group

ATA members can discuss business issues online at the following Yahoo! group:
http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/ata_business_practices.

This column is not intended to constitute legal, financial, or other business advice. Each individual or company should make its own independent business decisions and consult its own legal, financial, or other advisors as appropriate. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of ATA or its Board of Directors. Ideas and questions should be directed to judy.jenner@entrepreneuriallinguist.com.