

Wining and Dining to Grow Your Business and Brand

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In his book, [Power Entertaining](#), author Eddie Osterland details how to turn entertaining into an opportunity to build and brand your business. In this edited excerpt, Osterland offers advice on hosting a memorable and successful event.

Power entertaining is about creating an experience for guests, built around great wine, great food, great company and great ambience. It's about giving people enjoyable memories that will cause them to remember you fondly and make them want to do business with you in the future. The following principles will help you take your business entertaining to a new level.

Think of power entertaining as a business-development strategy. You can brand yourself and your company by creating memorable and enjoyable social events that people will long remember and always associate with you. Hosting power entertaining events is a great way to become "a center of influence," because every event you put on for others is an opportunity to create an indelible impression in the minds of others. Creating a memorable experience doesn't need to bust your budget. Power entertaining is about offering people delectable samples of food and tastings of wine, especially of things they haven't had before or don't know much about.

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Be an enthusiastic master of ceremonies. Power entertaining is about making others feel special at business events you host. It's important to dive into your hosting role with gusto, extending the welcome mat to people as they arrive, exuding warmth and hospitality, setting the tone for why people are together and describing what the evening is all about.

Engage a sommelier or wine merchant to help plan and host events. They will be very knowledgeable about wine and will be able to help you design unique wine and food pairings to feature at your dinner or reception.

Introduce guests to new wine and food. At many corporate events the only alcoholic beverages people serve are cheap, garden-variety brands of Chardonnay, Cabernet, or Merlot. So instead, offer Sauvignon Blanc (Sancerre), Tempranillo (Rioja), Sangiovese (Chianti), and other wines that go well with specific foods.

Kick the evening off with Champagne. Before serving food, start by giving guests Champagne or sparkling wine as they arrive. People feel instantly special when you do this. It delights and dazzles them -- and what a first impression it makes.

Serve your best stuff first. Most people will arrive for your event coming from work, and they're likely to be famished. So instead of offering mixed nuts, pretzels, raw vegetables and potato chips, serve small sampler portions of foods like Scottish smoked salmon, foie gras, or, perhaps my favorite appetizer, jamón ibérico de bellota, a kind of Spanish ham that looks like prosciutto but is far more exotic.

Serve wines in pairs. Design entertaining events around side-by-side comparisons of different wines. This adds an intellectual dimension to your event or dinner party and can be a lot of fun, both for you and your guests. It also helps people mingle and injects a new social dimension into an evening, as people ponder what they've tasted and chat about it with their fellow guests.

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Invest in the right 'power tools.' It's important that you invest in some special bartending accessories to add panache, style and flourish to your events. It helps set you apart from everybody else who does business entertaining.

Among the necessities are nice wine decanters, a nice wine opener and classy glassware. Very few people or organizations have elegant wine glasses, so buy at least a dozen nice red wine glasses and a dozen nice white wine glasses, as well as a set of 12 Champagne flutes.

Stay attentive to your guests' needs. Too often I've been to business events where the designated "host" didn't do a very good job of mingling with others, introducing guests to one another and making everyone feel special. Many people dread going to business events that involve a social component, and many get nervous when entering a room full of people they don't know. Make efforts when hosting events to help people mingle, and if necessary, enlist others to help.

Give souvenirs. Give your guests a nice take-home souvenir of their evening with you. For example, I often put the pairings of food and wine together on glossy 4 x 6-inch cards so that people can replicate them. It might sound corny, but people love this stuff. And it will cause them to remember you well after the event has passed.

Learn how to work with restaurants. From time to time, you'll want to work closely with restaurants to plan and host events. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Know the wine list and menu.
- Work with the restaurant's sommelier to design the wine and food menu.
- Tip generously, in cash, before the event. Plan to tip at least 20 percent of the final estimated cost, and consider 25 percent to secure the best service possible.

Power entertaining can be an extension of your marketing and business development efforts and give clients and prospects a very positive "brand experience" of you, your firm, and your commitment to building and sustaining a strong business relationship with them.

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