

# deals & meals

BY MICKEY GOODMAN

If you're *eating lunch* at your desk, here are 23 reasons to break the habit.

**GONE ARE THE DAYS OF MALE-** bonding, three-martini power lunches in the confines of wood-paneled, men-only clubs. Today women are the champions of the power lunch, and they don't need martinis to accomplish their mission. Problem is, too few women take advantage of the midday meal.

Nancy Sacunas, president, CEO and founder of Sacunas Stoessel, an integrated marketing agency in Harrisburg, Pa., admits she doesn't get out much. "Lunch is one of the most productive times of day for me. I can get more done sitting at my desk in that hour than any other time."

Many other busy professional women feel the same way. When she was a

corporate executive in the publishing industry, Alyse Hart ate in too. "I was trying to succeed in a man's world," she says. "I felt that eating at my desk was heroic. I had to make myself available at all times."

But Hart and countless other successful women now know that if you're sitting at your desk, **you're missing far more than a good meal.** When she left publishing and moved from New York to Woodland Hills, Calif., to found Corporate Recovery, Hart realized she could not do business unless she did lunch. "I also do coffee and take long walks with potential clients," she says. **"It's a way for them to take time away from their desks."**

**The strategy has paid off.** Hart, who

coaches women on surviving in the business world, says, "If I've taken them to lunch, **there's a 90 percent chance we will do some business.** Either **they will book me as a speaker, refer me to others,** or sign up for sessions or a workshop."

Lisa Carvalho, a shareholder at Steefel, Levitt & Weiss in San Francisco, learned her lesson early on. Ted Steefel, the late founder of the firm, was aware that his lawyers often spent lunch at their desks — particularly the women. "Ted used to walk the halls at lunchtime excoriating all the lawyers eating at their desks and declaring **they should get out of the office for lunch with clients.**" Carvalho says. "I've taken that advice to heart and it has paid off." She recently took an in-house counsel to lunch. "As it turns out we didn't discuss business nearly as much as kindergarten choices. Within two weeks, she sent me a new case. I am sure that **if we hadn't lunched, I wouldn't have gotten the business.**"

Her most productive power lunch was unplanned and took place in a modest café. "At the end of the lunch, I **felt comfortable enough with my opposing counsel to propose an untraditional wrinkle** in our settlement that **moved the negotiations forward substantially.**"

Carvalho thinks this approach works especially well for **women** because they have **"better relational skills, and lunch is the perfect place to flex that muscle."**

## Inside Out

Many executives believe that power meals can also take place *in* the office. Vickie Milazzo, CEO of the Vickie Milazzo Institute, which certifies registered nurses as legal nurse consultants, **attributes her company's 300 percent growth to the business lunch.**



Every Friday, her entire staff – from shipping clerks to executives – shut down the phones and meet over lunch in the conference room. “I ethically embezzle the ideas of my employees,” Milazzo says. “Most of our best ideas have come from these group lunches.”

Until an employee spoke up at one lunch, offering loans to students was not part of the business model. A fact-finding committee recommended government-backed Sallie Mae financing to provide students with affordable loans so the Institute could receive its money up front. These students account for 30 percent of the Institute’s revenues.

According to Milazzo, the lunches work because they empower employees and allow them to air complaints and make suggestions. Bonuses – 17 percent in 2005 – and revenue growth, plus extra days off, are announced during these lunch meetings. “Our \$15 per hour employees are thrilled because most have never been eligible for bonuses before,” she says. This open communication has paid off in lower recidivism and increasing profits. Says Milazzo: “We can’t expect employees to treat customers well if we don’t treat them well.”

### Introduction Queen

Lucy Rosen, president of The Business Development Group in Garden City, N.Y., knows lunch results in revenue too. “It’s not about me or my business. I put people together,” she says. “It’s the best form of business development you can ask for.”

She has the numbers to prove it. Eight years after startup, the company has doubled in revenue and now represents some of Long Island’s leading corporations, including Community National Bank and Apple & Eve juices.

Rosen met Tracey Gittere when the two were honored at Long Island’s inaugural class of “40 Under 40.” They were the only two women in the prestigious group. Gittere, a former TV newscaster and current president of Legendary Events, set up lunches for Rosen with Long Island business leaders. It paid off in spades. Rosen has been named to the Top 50 Women Hall of Fame and received the 2006 Pathfinder Award for Women in Business.

According to business development

# lunch + lead


These women say **lunching out** boosted business

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**SUZANNE BURNS >>**  
VP AND GENERAL MANAGER, EATON CORP.  
Since 1994, she’s helped bring in more than \$2.3 billion and brokered 15 international joint ventures with the help of the business lunch.

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**LUCY ROSEN >>**  
PRESIDENT, THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP  
Eight years after startup, the company has doubled in revenue.

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**BECKY JACKSON >>**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, CHANDLER, ARIZ. (CHAMBER OF COMMERCE)  
“Intel donated over \$30,000 of state-of-the-art equipment and is funding a training center for \$50,000 per year.”

*“Within two weeks, she sent me a new case. I am sure that if we hadn’t lunched, I wouldn’t have gotten the business.”*

**LISA CARVALHO** STEEFEL, LEVITT & WEISS

specialist David Nour, managing partner of The Nour Group, Rosen is on to something. “The rest of the world builds relationships first, from which they do business,” he says.

Instead of calling her noontime meetings “power meals,” Marla Letizia, president and CEO of Mobile Billboards of Las Vegas, calls them “gratitude lunches.”

“Breaking bread is actually a very sacred ritual. Men have been doing it for years,” she says. When she wants to say thank you, Letizia takes current and potential clients to a fabulous place like the Bali Hai Golf Club, where the staff immediately brings over her favorite Pellegrino. “It makes me feel special in front of my client, and the client feels like a VIP too,” she says.

In five years, Letizia has grown her company from a single roving billboard truck to a \$2.4 million business. Clients

include Saks Fifth Avenue, the Luxor Resort and Casino, and the Sahara Hotel and Casino. “Lunches have helped position me and my business,” she says.

Her favorite tip: “Never talk business unless the client wants to go there.” It’s not about closing the deal, she adds. It’s about building a long-term relationship. “Anyone I’ve ever taken to lunch or dinner has moved the relationship to the next level.” One of Nevada’s largest wine and spirit distributors signed up two years after their gratitude lunch, she says.

While specifics vary, the consensus is that sitting at the desk to save time or money may turn out to be the worst business decision a woman could make. How’s that for indigestion? 🍷

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