

Forbes

New Ways Business Leaders Are Building Rapport With Clients Outside Of The Office

By Rachel Weingarten

Way back when, businessmen met on the golf course to informally discuss their work life while socializing and catching up. Today, the golf course is not the only (or even the typical) after hours event. But, ironically enough, with a world of opportunities open to us, it can be tough to figure out where to take clients or guests after you leave the office. What is “the new golf course”? How and where are you building rapport clients when off the clock? Here are five recommendations to get you and your guests off the fairway:

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1. Give People a Taste of the “Local Flavor”

Many frequent business travelers complain that they rarely get to experience the city they’re visiting; they simply go from hotel room to boardroom and back again. You can help change that by recommending that your guests or clients make reservations at a Canopy by Hilton. Canopy is a new line of hotels which are more of an experience than simply a bed in a strange city.

At every location, Canopy by Hilton Team Members (known as “Enthusiasts”) are all neighborhood experts. John Vanderslice, Global Head, Luxury & Lifestyle Brands, Hilton Worldwide, explains, “They’ll know where a great local food truck is parked or where one of the best local bands is performing and will gladly share their recommendations spotlighting the best their neighborhood has to offer.”

You and your guest can chat with a Canopy Enthusiast to find out local treats and entertainment options and make one of the opportunities the focus of an evening out. In this way, you can take part in creating a highly personalized experience for your client or guest

2. Mix Business with Pleasure

Who says you can’t mix business with pleasure? Jan Arnold, co-founder of Creative Nail Design, and her team of nail care professionals create a “girls’

night out” atmosphere for editors and other media professionals during New York Fashion Week. In this way, Arnold not only shares new products, techniques, and designs with influencers and tastemakers, but she’s also treating them to a fun and pampering experience and demonstrating her company’s commitment to innovation and quality. So look at your business with new eyes: can you mix business with pleasure to give your clients or guests an enjoyable evening out?

3. Let Your Client Take the Lead

If you find it a burden to come up with an after-hours informal event, actively listen for cues as to what your clients or guests enjoy most. Makasha Dorsey, Creative Director of the Dorsey Group, regularly goes on what she calls “Walk N Talk” breaks with clients. One client in particular “likes to walk at Lake Baldwin to brainstorm. We walked and took photographs of the lake.”

How did Dorsey discover her client’s fondness for walks on the lake? “I found out just by paying attention to them when they went on tangents during meetings/interviews and by paying attention to what they keep in their offices.” The end result was not only a better working relationship, but better results. “I believe people respond better when they are in their element. Prior to going on a walk with a client, she couldn’t explain her goals to me. On the walk she became inspired.”



Comment below on how you are building rapport with clients outside of the office!

4. Think “Fun,” Not “Fancy”

There’s a lot of pressure to impress clients or take them to the newest, fanciest restaurant. Jared Staver, founder of Staver Law Group based in Chicago, says

he's a fan of "locations in which you can talk shop informally." For Staver, that might include a sporting event since "it's a relaxed, informal atmosphere where you can actually have FUN. This kind of environment is extremely conducive to business because it keeps things casual; there is no stress and certainly no sales-pitchy environment." And while he enjoys connecting with other lawyers at restaurants, he always tries to make it a fun environment. "I find that exploring cool new cafes and hole-in-the-wall restaurants is a great way to explore, enjoy a great meal, and talk a little light business.

5. Get Off the Beaten Path

Do you enjoy an activity or location that is a little more uncommon after hours? Suggest it as a tentative option and see if it resonates with your client or guest. For example, if unusual ales are your thing, feel free to suggest a field trip. Steve Kurowski, Operations Director for the Colorado Brewers Guild, has noticed both men and women alike enjoying the social benefits of brewery tasting rooms. "Breweries in Colorado are like afternoon coffee shops," notes Kurowski. "They are places that foster conversation, creativity, and communication."

Whatever you decide, remember to keep it light – this isn't the office, and any "business talk" should be informal, not intense. For non-business chat, Vanderslice says to showcase your personality, hobbies, entertainment, or relationships. "Socializing outside of work is a great way to strengthen your work relationships: just choose an easy topic that you can find common ground to bond over." You may find that a great evening out with a client brings you a "hole in one" sale back at the office!