

STOP BY, STAY AWHILE: Company Picnic: Dos and Taboos

By Rachel Wagner, July 2008

Let's admit it. You love the brisket at the company's summer picnic, but you're still a bit uncomfortable about attending this annual affair.

You question whether to attend at all, how casual to be with your boss' boss, whether to talk shop, and if it's smart to outshine the boss in a volleyball game.

Whether the invite is for a barbeque, baseball game, or other company-sponsored summer social with colleagues, consider these Dos and Taboos:

Do: stop by and stay awhile. Companies provide picnics to give employees an informal time of relaxation and fun. It's often looked at as "team building" and a chance to meet people from other departments. Your absence may not ax your career, but your attendance shows loyalty to your supervisor and your organization. Be sure to find your boss and greet him or her soon after you arrive.

Do: mix and mingle. Don't just hang out with those from your area. Introduce yourself to those with whom you may have only spoken to on the phone. Put a face to the name of the mail room supervisor or a manager from another floor. Introduce yourself to the company's CEO and senior managers.

Do: dress to impress. Find something in your closet between a pinstripe suit and a halter top. You want to retain a degree of professionalism, even at a picnic. Think how your boss might dress, not your cubicle mates. Smart choices for women include: capris, Bermuda shorts, not-too-tight T-shirts, or a sundress that's not too revealing. Men can ensure a casual yet professional look with khaki trousers, Bermuda shorts, and polo shirts.

Don't: let your guard down. Even at a company picnic, your professionalism is under scrutiny. Don't sabotage career advancement with slipshod manners, too much imbibing, careless conversations and inappropriate remarks. You want to be noticed—but in a positive light!

Do: be a good sport. Your weekend volleyball team may be league champs, but resist the desire to play hard. Encourage others to get into the game, even novices—and just have fun.

Don't: talk shop. This is a time to meet other employees and their families. Forgo the business chat and learn about each other instead. Spouses and guests will feel more included, too. Safe small talk topics—even with your boss' spouse—include the weather (especially if it's great for the picnic!), summer vacation and travel plans, or the latest local or sports news—i.e., any Summer Olympics fans out there?

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Don't: forget to show thanks. Before you leave, find the CEO and/or your boss, extend your hand, and thank him or her for a great event. Better yet, follow up with a handwritten thank you note; your thoughtfulness will definitely be noticed.

So, stop by, stay awhile. Seconds on brisket, anyone?

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