

EAT, DRINK AND GET MARY A JOB!



When business and pleasure mix, the rules of networking change | By Laura Schwartz

OK girlfriends, it's time to put down your food and savor your drink because you've just punched in on the virtual clock and it starts ticking...now! Happy hours, cocktail parties, dinners and drinks aren't just social events anymore. Even though you may think your job is nine-to-five, your career is 24/7! One lesson I learned after eight years working in The White House, is that as social as any event may appear, it's business. And, if there are two things I've learned while hanging out with my fabulous girlfriends in Chicago and watching today's Chicago women at play, it's that we're all powerful and we're all social, so get ready to harness your social power!

As the Clinton's White House director of events, I found that the fine line between business and pleasure has long been erased. I've decided to take this outdated etiquette and draw a new guide. Rule number one: Any event that appears "simply social," is anything but; it's up to the guest and the host to realize an event's profitability in her own professional and personal life.

Professionals have been taught for years that "networking" happens in meetings and professional organizations. And, in this digital age, singles are constantly encouraged to seek a partner online. It's time to identify keys to other doors. As a guest you can get more out of an event than free food and drink, and as a host you have the opportunity to create an event that's not just enjoyable but productive as well.

For example, take a State dinner at the White House. Aside from the fact that it's black-tie and the most coveted invitation in the political power scene, a State dinner is nothing more than a business meeting disguised in Versace and Carolina Herrera. At these events, major deals were clinched even before the President and visiting head of state asked everyone to raise their glasses for the first ceremonial toasts. Such deals were "clinched" for two reasons. One, the hosts were powerful and realized an event means more than just matching tablecloths and placemats. And two, some of the guests realized there's

more to being a guest than stealing the hand towels and gorging on the shrimp!

This new trend is something I've coined The Networking Power of Social Events®. For those of you who are already social butterflies, you'll need to learn how to repack-age your social power. For those of you who'd rather stand in the safety circle of your friends or with your mouths full in the corner, you'll need to practice and tap into your social power.

The possibilities to practice this are endless. Think about all the opportunities you have just in Chicago to buy a ticket to a charity event or gala. You don't even have to be invited (if nothing else, let Uncle Sam be your incentive and write it off)! You can create opportunities out of any one of the events listed in TCW's To Do calendar to rub elbows with someone whose assistant wouldn't ordinarily even return your call.

I'm not suggesting using your resume as a cocktail napkin when you go to one of these events. Rather, turn the immovable line to the open bar into a one-on-one "chance" meeting. You can easily use your passion for the evening's cause as the opener and arrange your next meeting in their corner office. But take note: Those three minutes in line are possibly the only three minutes you have. Because Back to the Future is still a fictional movie, you're going to have to make each second count. That's why it's pivotal as a guest to exercise all your powers even before you pick up your ticket!

Your networking power meter rests on various power points that you need to practice, plan and rehearse such as the Power of Preparation, Appearance, Conversation, Research, Date, Alcohol, Consummation (how to grab the chair when you're headed to the couch!), the Power of Your Business Card and Follow Up. Over the next few months we'll be looking at all these powers in detail. I promise, by the time you head out for all those winter holiday galas, you'll be draped in red, green and power. ■

As former special assistant to the President and the White House director of events for the Clinton Administration, Laura Schwartz has created and executed more than 600 White House events. Today, Laura lives and operates her company White House Strategies in Chicago and serves as an advisor to corporations, political figures, cultural institutions, social action groups, community organizations and event professionals. The Networking Power of Social Events® is the title of her upcoming book. In addition, Laura can be seen on the Fox News Channel and MSNBC where she is a national commentator on politics and pop culture.