



# **Tomato Sauce, Spinach, and Other Sales Inhibitors**

## **Is 'Doing Lunch' Really Worth It?**

**By JAMES LORENZEN**

**Everyone has their war stories  
- some good and some bad.**

**Here's a little 'food for thought'.**

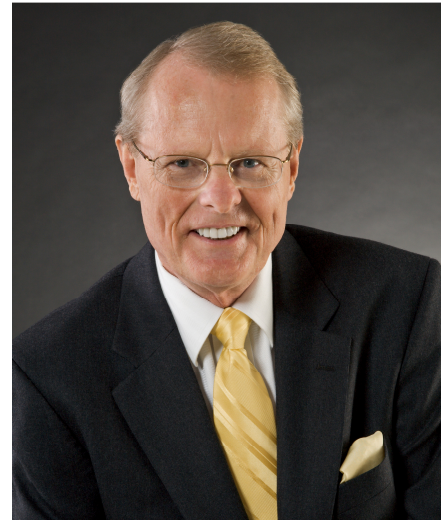
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Gardner Hathaway, LLC ▪ Post Office Drawer 119; Moorpark, California 93020  
805.265.5418 ▪ [speakingdates@jameslorenzen.com](mailto:speakingdates@jameslorenzen.com)  
[www.gardnerhathaway.com](http://www.gardnerhathaway.com) ▪ [www.jameslorenzen.com](http://www.jameslorenzen.com)

**Okay, I have to admit, I've never been a big advocate for business lunches,** at least for the purpose of selling new business.

I'll never forget an experience early in my career when as a young account executive I took two prospects to lunch at an expensive Los Angeles eatery only to hear them talk gleefully to each other – in front of me – about all the lunches they'd been able to pry out of my competition.

Obviously, it would be hard to be impressed with their manners, much less their character; and, it's one of those memorable times when I decided I didn't want a prospect for a client. Life's too short to do business with people you don't respect – and can't trust.

Learning experiences help us form rules we live by.



*James Lorenzen*

**My Rule: Use meals to solidify – not to create – business relationships.** My experience is people buy from people they trust and who add value to the relationship. This, of course, means that you must truly have your prospect's best interests as your first priority.

Meals, for me, are excellent vehicles for building upon a relationship. Truth is I don't like talking about business at lunch - or on the golf course, either. I like to learn about the person in those settings - meals are opportunities for listening - and save the business discussions for business settings.<sup>1</sup>

### **Do lunches work for other people?**

Sure! Consider Wayne Cox, an old friend who used to publish weekly community papers and shopping guides in Dennison, Texas. He enjoyed great success using lunches as a vehicle for ad sales. He'd pick-up the prospect in an expensive car and drive him/her to his country club! He told me, "I wanted to set the tone... I'm not talking about a dinky ad. I also didn't want to look like an up-and-down the street vendor." Judging by his success, it's hard to argue.

All of us are products of what we've found works well for us; but the key is to learn how other approaches succeed, too.

What did I learn? Maybe Wayne qualified his prospects better than I did when I was that young account executive. Maybe my lunch guests weren't prospects at all! Maybe I've

learned skills since then I wasn't using back in those early days. Woulda, coulda, shoulda.....

Oh, well, I still follow my rule to this day.

I did make an exception once, many years ago. After speaking at a management association convention in San Diego, Dick Wright – at that time President of Foster Grant – asked me to come to Scottsdale to meet him for lunch. Dick was a quietly unassuming person who didn't fit the CEO image most people have. But, his brilliance was evident to anyone who ever met him. He picked me up at the airport himself in an older car and we went back to a conference room at the nearby Foster Grant facility where we had brown-bag deli sandwiches and ice tea. It was the beginning of a wonderful relationship.

But, maybe I should change! Maybe – if Wayne's right - I should call the club! But, then, maybe a small local deli works just as well. I hope they're not serving spinach on Tuesday.

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<sup>1</sup> Superstar salesman Joe Gandolfo, author of *Selling is 2% Product Knowledge*, said he liked breakfasts – and talked about earning 50% of his commissions before 10 a.m.

James Lorenzen is an international speaker and trainer on sales, management, and organizational development based in Moorpark, California. Jim successfully built and sold five successful businesses in the early 1980s and has headlined over 500 national and international conventions throughout the United States, Canada, and the U.K. See [www.jameslorenzen.com](http://www.jameslorenzen.com) for more information.

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