

# Concerned About the Entertainment Expense Budget The Boss Will Pay For? You Should be!



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: [StephenSays@bellow.press](mailto:StephenSays@bellow.press)

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @stephenviscusi, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

*Dear Stephen:*

*I have been in floor covering sales for many years, and I am thinking of accepting a new position selling similar products because my company was recently purchased by a PE firm, and I see the writing on the wall. Lateral move but all good. My clients are mostly made up of A&D firms who do a lot of high-end hospitality and some contract/commercial design. I am fortunate in that I believe I am going to receive two similar offers which meet my income requirements.*

*Here is my dilemma. I enter-*

*tain my clients a lot, and I do it first class. For instance Lunch and Learns from special caterers, manicures for client groups, and I even brought in a yoga instructor once to teach breathing. Also, lunches and dinners at trendy new hot spots the designers love to go to. This is sort of my thing I have done for most of my career, and I can prove that it pays off in sales. Upscale entertaining has resulted in client friendship and loyalty. I routinely spend \$3K a month on entertainment, all legit. I work for a small company, and they never cared about*

*the expense as long as the sales came in. During every interview I mention this, and sometimes the new prospective bosses seem taken aback, other times they say they do not entertain like that but they are open to it if it gets results. I know I need to move on from my present position, and I know the A&D clients I work with love the way I entertain them, so how do I know for sure that I will be able to continue? What's the norm?*

*Signed,*

*The Entertainer*

## Some of your clients may not want showy entertainment just lower prices on products, and that works, too.

Dear Entertainer:

The norm is that there is no real norm. Most companies have T&E budgets for each sales rep, but they are flexible. In your case, you entertain pretty extravagantly, and it produces sales so most companies wouldn't care. Yet if a company has other sales reps producing equal business for less money, then your entertainment expenses may be an issue.

Take a look at the new company's style. Are they a "down and dirty" commodity or do they market quality and design? Sometime during the interview (not the first thing to discuss but not

the last thing either) push for an entertainment budget (not including travel) and explain why it would benefit the company. Get into specifics of the where, why and how much you spend on Lunch and Learns and some of your other innovative ideas. And by the way, make sure they don't get the impression they will be financing boozy parties that get expensive and don't accomplish much. Also, be aware new tax laws may work against some forms of business entertainment formerly deductible — like manicures, yoga, holiday gifts or sports tickets. It may be that only food-related expenses are deductible.

I trust you about changing jobs, and it sounds like it is time. But it also may be time to learn how to build relationships without buying them — believe in your products and services and yourself. Some of your clients may not want showy entertainment just lower prices on products, and that works, too. For the record, it is important to have good questions to ask a new prospective employer, but equally important to already have thought through some of the answers. Sounds like you need to spend some more time thinking about that.

**Stephen**