

Play to Win

Making Firm Meetings and Retreats Personally Productive

By [Sally J. Schmidt](#) | Jun.21.18 | [Business Development](#), [Daily Dispatch](#), [Law Firm Culture](#), [People Skills](#), [Play to Win](#)



I participate in a lot of law firm retreats and meetings, but one in particular will always stand out. I was talking with representatives of the firm before the retreat kicked off when one of the partners pulled me aside, pointed out another firm partner and asked me who he was. Now, keep in mind that this wasn't a 1,000-lawyer firm; the firm had fewer than 100 lawyers. And I didn't even work there.

It is a good illustration of how siloed law firms often are into practice areas, offices or working teams. When attending firm meetings, the tendency for many lawyers is to sit with people they already know. Yes, you are giving up your time, sometimes on weekends, to attend meetings like this and want to enjoy yourself. But if you don't take a strategic view of your participation, you waste a great opportunity to build your internal profile and network.

How to Make the Most of Firm Meetings

Here are some suggestions for attending a firm meeting or retreat.

Introduce yourself to anyone you don't know. They could be new lawyers who joined the firm or lawyers in offices that you've never visited. If you're an associate, don't be afraid to approach partners. They could be your future sources of business ... or even your future partners.

Have objectives for the meeting. Don't go without a personal agenda. It could involve any number of things, such as:

- Meeting a new lateral who joined the firm.
- Building relationships with attorneys in a particular office.
- Talking with a colleague about a current client matter.
- Meeting someone you've worked with remotely but never met face to face.
- Meeting representatives of a particular practice area that might be helpful to a client.
- Talking with someone about teaming on a business development opportunity.

Act like a host. If there are outsiders at the retreat — and frequently there are, such as clients, consultants or other subject-matter experts — introduce yourself and welcome them to the meeting.

Be aware of your behavior. Colleagues will be judging you on your discretion in conversations, your temperament and integrity in games and your moderation in socializing. You don't want to be remembered as the one who missed the Saturday morning session because you partied too much Friday night.

Be engaged and professional. For example:

- Be prepared for the meeting: Read the advance materials. Bring the agenda. Know the dress code.
- Show up on time for sessions and events.
- Participate in discussions and roundtable sessions.
- Ask questions.
- Practice any parts you play at the meeting, whether delivering substantive information or participating in a skit.
- Put your phone away.
- Sit near the front. In fact, if clients are at the meeting, be sure all the front seats are occupied. I facilitated a panel of clients at a retreat once where a general counsel called out the firm's lawyers for sitting in the back of the room when there were plenty of seats near the dais.

Be gracious to staff members. Whether it's an administrative assistant helping with registration or the CFO giving a financial presentation, take the time to say hello and thank them for their participation. Remember, they make a valuable contribution to the meeting and the firm more generally.

Be Intentional

Given the activities (such as golf), timing (often weekends) and settings (e.g., resorts) of some meetings, it's easy to forget that they are work. But they are. By the end of the meeting, your colleagues will be thinking things like: Do I want this person working with my client? Do I want this person as a partner? Do I want to team with this person on business development opportunities?

By being intentional about your participation, the answers are more likely to come out in your favor.

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