

LUNCH: A DECISION TOOL TO MANAGE YOUR SCARCE TIME.

How you decide to spend lunch time may influence how you are perceived. And how you are perceived may influence your stature and income potential. You have six options for lunch settings:

WHERE YOU EAT

AT DESK

INHOUSE CAFETERIA

OUTSIDE THE COMPANY

ALONE

WITH OTHERS

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HOW TO INTERPRET

If you are shy and you are an individual contributor who relies on no one by all means eat alone at your desk. You show your boss how productive you are and how dedicated you are. Good for you! This is certainly a good thing to do during “crunch” times with projects.

If you want to make a public statement about how busy you are and how dedicated you are, make sure you have lunch at your desk with your functional colleagues and discuss work while eating. This is a good strategy for building your in-house reputation as industrious.

If you are shy and your job involves working with others in cross functional teams, you do want to force yourself to eat with others in the cafeteria. Given the geography of office space, the cafeteria may be the only common place where you can meet people from other functional or SBU areas.

You can pick up important internal political information.

The juiciest grapes on the grapevine come from mouth to ear and not from computer terminal to eye. If you want to plant a rumor you want to do it over lunch and in a public setting like the cafeteria. You have deniability: “the other person must have misunderstood me!”

The important thing is do not be a slave to routine. Don’t sit at the same table with the same people. Mix it up. Sit with strangers. Broaden your network.

If your effectiveness would be improved if you had information about competitive trends outside your company, then you want to spend some time eating lunch with people from your industry but outside your company. You can be of great value to your boss if you are perceived as someone who can spot threats or opportunities from outside the company. If you are unsure about your job security, you want to take lunch as an opportunity to meet professional colleagues outside the company. Join an appropriate trade association and find colleagues in your association who work nearby. Call and say “let’s do lunch.”

A company that is obsessed with being seen as doing “best practices” in its industry would think you are providing value if you get outside your company building and have lunch with colleagues from other companies. This is a good way to position yourself as someone worth promoting to higher level positions.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR?

There are six options for where you eat lunch. And each option has tradeoffs.

The important takeaway in this article is that it is not important where you eat lunch. What is important is what do you want to be known for within your company and within your industry/profession? Answer that question and then ask, “Where should I have lunch?” using the six factor table above.

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