

What to Wear

What you wear to the first meeting should be dictated in part by the **type of client** you are meeting. For instance, if the meeting is with a large corporation and the event they are planning is a meeting of their board of directors, you should dress in appropriate business attire.

For women, this means darker-colored **pants, skirts, and jackets**. You can add a funky piece of jewelry, fashionable scarf or dynamite handbag for creativity. Men should wear **formal business attire** to this type of meeting, meaning a two-piece suit complete with shirt and tie.

If you are meeting with a team of volunteers from that same corporation to plan a company picnic, you can **loosen up** somewhat — meaning colored suits or separates that are put together well for women, and business casual (suit jacket and pants but no tie) for men. Instead of the typical dress shirt, a man may choose to wear a knitted turtleneck sweater. Having said that, beware that the CFO or CEO of the corporation will still want to meet with you after the volunteers, so don't get **too eclectic or faddish** in your dress style.

There are a few cases where you can **relax the rules** a bit. Let's say you have been contacted by a rock band to stage their latest CD release party. Arriving in a black business suit will probably make the group feel uncomfortable. And, while I don't think you should dress like Britney Spears on stage, you can certainly relax the rules and dress a bit more trendy.

No matter what type of meeting you are attending, the following rules apply:

- shoes must be absolutely **spotless**, in good repair (no cracked heels or broken shoelaces) and scuff-free
- do not wear **jeans** (unless it's event day and the event is a rodeo!)
- don't wear **workout gear** (tights, lycra, spandex, etc.)
- leave the **gum** at home (if you absolutely must have something in your mouth try a very small mint or use mouthwash just before the meeting)

Remember what your mother told you: You only have one chance to make a good impression.

Developing a Client Relationship

As mentioned above, while there is no guarantee that you will get a particular client or project, if someone has a need for your services and is meeting with you, you have a good chance of getting their business.

Your purpose during this meeting is to turn a **prospective client** into a **client**. The way to do this is by identifying what your client **needs** and **wants**, so you can communicate how your services will **benefit** them.

This is where your interpersonal communication skills will really pay off (if this is an area you need to improve). You can begin by giving a quick overview of your services; however, during your meeting you should mostly **ask** and **listen**. Aim to have your client do about **80%** of the talking. (Of course, take your cue from the client. If they prefer not to do a lot of talking, don't try to force it.)

Instead of describing all your services, focus specifically on what the client wants, and offer a few ideas for their event. Don't worry about someone stealing your ideas and then deciding not to use your services. The fact that you are willing to share a few innovative ideas will leave the impression that you have many more which you haven't had.

You should also emphasize the benefits of hiring you. By asking questions, you will likely find that one of the following is a benefit this person would be interested in:

- You can actually **save the client money** because you can negotiate lower prices with suppliers. (This will depend on both your fees and the relationships you have established with suppliers. However, you should definitely let them know that – even after paying your fee – the event will cost less than if they had organized it themselves.)
- You can save the client many hours of **time**. You could show them the checklist (critical path) of all the details that have to be organized, and ask if they have the time and energy to do all those things on top of their day-to-day busy schedules.
- You can find **reputable suppliers** and ensure there are no major event “**disasters**” because you have back-up plans in place for all suppliers and most circumstances.
- The client can enjoy a **stress-free event** experience.

Remember to focus on what the client wants. Ask them why they are interested in hiring an event planner, and what they think you can do for them. In answering these questions, they may talk themselves into hiring you!

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