

# THE ALLEN LUNCH: THE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE NETWORKING TOOL

Article by Herb Rubenstein, President, Sustainable Business Group

## *Introduction*

You have heard of the "Allen Wrench." It comes with every put it together yourself piece of furniture, "L" shaped, with six sides we use to drive or screw in fasteners to hold desks, chairs, and many other products together. You have never heard of the "Allen Lunch." This format for lunch is named after Jay Allen, of CXO in Denver, Colorado. On October 20th I attended my first "Allen Lunch" and I recommend it to people who want to get together with lots of people at lunch, but who do not want to go out for lunch every day or even several days a week. This article, which has been approved (and edited) by Jay Allen, himself, explains the format of the "Allen Lunch" in a manner that anyone can use it right away.

## *Explaining the "Allen Lunch"*

In any given month, many people ask Jay Allen out for lunch. And, he asks many people to go to lunch. Some of these people actually go to lunch with Jay "one on one," our traditional style of a lunch meeting. The "Allen Lunch" is different. For many of the people who ask Jay to go to lunch, and for many of the people Jay asks to go to lunch, Jay reserves one day or one lunch per month and all of the people who invite Jay or Jay invites are invited to the same lunch. The rules are simple. Everyone kicks in \$20 for lunch at Sullivan's Steakhouse in Denver (cash or check preferred, credit cards are accepted). Somewhere between 20 and a maximum of 30 people show up for the monthly lunch, by invitation only. A private room is reserved and each person takes one to two minutes to introduce him or herself. The lunch is from 11:30 - 1:00, although hard core networkers stay until 1:30. Business cards are passed around and people can state to everyone during their introduction where they have worked, the type of work they are looking for, and their hobbies as well.

## *Benefits and Limitations of the Allen Lunch*

The benefits of this type of lunch format should be obvious. Jay meets lots of people and gets a lot of business done. He gets to say yes to virtually everyone who asks him out to lunch and he get to invite lots of people to lunch without being out lots of time and money for 10 - 25 business lunches during any given month. The beauty of this lunch is that it can be organized the way Jay does it, or it can be organized within a large organization. Of course, one person must be the central organizer, but one day a month the Chief Marketing Officer of a billion dollar company could invite lots of people to the lunch within the company. Such a lunch would include all of the people the Chief Marketing Officer wanted to have lunch with and all of the people who wanted to have lunch with the Chief Marketing Officer. All that person would have to do is call the Chief Marketing Officer and say, "I want to have lunch with you," and since the date each month is set well in advance, the Chief Marketing Officer would merely say, "Of course, my lunch date is the 20th of this month and each person pays his or her own way." The limitations are equally obvious. There is no private time in an "Allen

Lunch." Lunch meetings on really pressing business that must be completed within the next few days must be done on a traditional lunch format. However, the benefits are enormous compared to the limitations.

### ***Conclusion***

A similar approach was used by the Autism Society of Colorado where I served as Development Director. Every Tuesday at noon people were invited to learn about Autism. No one was asked for money and the educational lunch, a version of the "Allen Lunch" was very successful. The "Allen Lunch" I attended had no sign in sheet because Jay Allen already had the contact information of almost everyone there. A sign in sheet might be a good idea. In addition, every once in a while, an "Allen Lunch" could include a featured 10 or 15 minute speaker. By and large, the "Allen Lunch" seems to take networking to a new level. Most of us can get 90% of the business we want to get done in "meet and greet" lunches in just a few minutes, and this time is certainly available to everyone at the lunch. People can bring guests, the restaurant is thrilled to have the business, and if you are the one organizing the lunch, you will probably save a lot of money on lunches each month and save a lot of time as well. In fact, you don't even need to have this lunch in a restaurant if you have office facilities with a large conference room or meeting facilities and can bring in great lunches. We got to choose from five items on a special menu on the lunch. Obviously, if you have such a meeting at your company or organization's facility, food selection may be limited. I recommend the "Allen Lunch" to everyone who has or wants to have more than five or ten business lunches where one on one dealings are not required. Lots of business can be had in a short time in a wonderful setting, and you will performing a community service, be able to say yes to lots of people who ask you out to lunch, be able to invite lots of people out to lunch with a low cost and little time expended, and it will create goodwill and help most any business or nonprofit executive who needs to network and meet and touch base with both new people and old friends on a regular basis. Come visit Denver and call Jay Allen at CXO and he might invite you to such a lunch, or if you are bold, you might invite Jay to lunch because either way the result will be the same. You will find yourself at an "Allen Lunch" thinking, "Why didn't I think of this?"

### ***About the Author***

Herb Rubenstein is the President of Sustainable Business Group a consulting firm to businesses. The headquarters of the Sustainable Business Group is Denver, Colorado. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc. - High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations (Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 1999). He also served as an Adjunct Professor of Strategic Planning George Washington University, and has been an Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurism at George Mason University and Colorado State University. He has his law degree from Georgetown University, his Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Bristol in Bristol, England and was a Phi Beta Kappa/Omicron Delta Kappa graduate from Washington and Lee University in 1974. His email address is herb@sbizgroup.com and he can be reached at 303 910-7961. For more information about the Sustainable Business Group, see [www.sbizgroup.com](http://www.sbizgroup.com)