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Article by Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher in their TASTINGS column

'Boss, May I Suggest the Lancers?'and Other Wine Bloopers in Business Settings.

When we asked readers to tell us stories about wine in business settings, it brought back a flood of red and white memories.

Patrick J. McDonnell, of Lake Forest, Ill., recalled the time, about 20 years ago, when he was a new manager at a big accounting firm, accompanying a young partner to dinner with important clients. At a fancy steak restaurant, the captain handed the massive wine list to the partner, who was clearly uncomfortable.

"As the captain, waiter and sommelier hovered over his shoulder," wrote Mr. C McDonnell, now president and CEO of Jordan Professional Services, "he became anxious, and, after what seemed like forever, in as casual a voice as he could muster, the young partner said, 'I think we'll try the Lancers,' " the simple Portuguese rose wine that was in vogue in the '70s.

"After a very formal 'very good sir,' the sommelier went off to find the treasured nectar. I think the vintage selected was 'September.' When he returned, he carefully poured a small measure into the crystal goblet for tasting and approval. I could hardly watch as the partner swished it about in the glass, tasted it carefully and announced it to be 'a bit dry, but suitable.' "

We received more than a hundred letters, and one thing was clear: If war is the continuation of politics by another means, wine at business meals is a skirmish in a boardroom war, played out on a linen table cloth. Your handling of wine, whether ordering it or just drinking it, matters more than you think to your colleagues, and more than it should. Is it fair that your golf game matters? No, but get used to it. Unfortunately, sometimes people see your comfort or experience with wine not as a comment on your knowledge, but on your character.

Often, we felt we were hearing from two sides of the same table. On one side were people appalled at the cluelessness of their partners, clients or employees. John F. O'Keefe, a retired fundraiser from Los Angeles, recalls ordering a great bottle of California Cabernet at a business dinner, when, "to my horror and dismay, my client put ice in his wine, and made no comment about the quality at all. The wine was excellent, but I couldn't enjoy it as much as I would have, just observing it with ice in it across the table."

