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NEW IN THIS ISSUE!

On the Other Hand is a new department that will appear in the 2015 Spring and Winter issues. Our plan is to provide polarized perspectives on topics of current interest to meeting planners. In this way, we can diverge from presenting one person's view on a particular topic to providing expert (yet opposite) views that should make for juicy and/or spicy consideration from our readers!



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Do You Believe?



I admit it. Sometimes I worry about the future of meetings. I worry that this industry – and the many associations that we have created to support it – are precariously perched on a precipice worthy of the San Andreas Fault. And, I worry that while the way business is being done around the globe is imploding with transformational change, we, as an industry, are huddled under door frames built out of the way things used to be done waiting for the tremors to pass so that we can go back to life as it was before.

But what if there is no life as it was before? What if the future is now and we are still living in the past? What if the rules are changing faster than we are and over the next five years, it will take more to be successful in the meetings industry than it ever has before? Are you ready? Are we ready?

As the 2015 President of CAPS, I come from a rather unique background, having had a wonderful 10-year career as a meeting planner prior to starting my speaking business almost 12 years ago. The coolest thing, however, is that I believe as much in the power of meetings today as I did when I first started this journey more than 20 years ago.

Simply put – meetings rock. They are a unique opportunity to communicate, motivate, educate and, of course, to inspire. A well-crafted meeting can be the catalyst that creates community, provokes passion, teaches tolerance and, above all, cultivates change. And, as cliché as this may sound, I believe that great meetings can make a great difference.

It is precisely because I believe in the power of meetings that I feel compelled to ask, "Are you ready?" What role will you play in the battle to stay relevant? What charges will you lead in these times of revolution? What contribution will you make to the continuing evolution of this noble institution that we call meetings?

Because, we are more than a community. We are a global opportunity and there has never been a time when we have needed each other more to make the courageous choices that will be required not only to survive but to thrive in a future that has already arrived.

I took on the role of CAPS President "Because I Believe" in our industry, in our future and, most of all, because I believe in you.

What if the only thing standing between where we are today and where we have always believed we could be, is the courage to let go of where we have already been?

Toni Newman, HoF
2015 CAPS National President



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Dollars and Sense

Rationalizing a speaker's price tag

By Tonya Hofmann

All events, even virtual ones, are demanding and stressful. And, they're expensive. When setting budgets, event planners inevitably focus their attention on which speaker to engage and what the price tag will be. Working within a finite budget can force planners to narrow the field and make a simple dollars-and-cents decision. Thankfully, the market for speakers is always changing. What was seen as a dollar choice only a short time ago now involves more sense.

\$ THE SPEAKER'S MINDSET

In the past, many speakers had an "employee" mindset. A planner would contact them, negotiate the fee and travel expenses, book the time and the topic, and then have little interaction until the event. Speakers were paid for their time and their expertise and rarely offered anything extra. The "employee" attitude is still common with some celebrities, CEOs and sought-after speakers whose time is very limited.

Most of today's professional speakers have a more entrepreneurial mindset. Their goal is to create momentum and interaction, and their highest accomplishment at any event is to have done that well. Such speakers work with event organizers on marketing and promotion to help create excitement about the event, and are sometimes involved in attracting attendees, vendors, sponsors and even other speakers to achieve this goal. Well-delivered presentations at well-organized events earn name recognition for the speakers, get their message heard, drive sales and opportunities, and build their reputation as forces for true change.

\$ SPEAKERS' FEES

Like everything in today's market, speakers' fees are negotiable. The challenge is to figure out how to create a win for both the speaker and the event. While fees range from \$0 to thousands, under certain circumstances, even the most popular,

WHETHER YOU NEGOTIATE OR PAY IN FULL, THERE IS MORE VALUE IN TODAY'S SPEAKER CONTRACT THAN A FEE, AIRLINE TICKET AND HOTEL

sought-after speaker may speak for no or low fees. Working within your budget, you will have to decide how flexible you can be in your negotiations with prospective speakers. Open-minded and creative negotiations about fees can result in a fresh new approach that will benefit all parties.

Some speakers' fees will just have to be paid in full; the more popular speakers will have less time open on their calendar. To secure someone you absolutely must have, agree to the fee up front. You can always throw in other options for marketing benefits as bonus items for them to say, "Yes."

MARKETING

Whether you negotiate or pay in full, there is more value in today's speaker contract than a fee, airline ticket and hotel. Big-name speakers can add great marketing to your event. Use their name, head shot, bio, titles, videos, etc. to enhance your attendance package. Speakers who are not well known can still bring huge value if your marketing focuses on the brilliance of their presentations. Pump up your marketing to create a WOW environment so attendees look forward to the presentation.

CONNECTIONS

Speakers usually have large lists of contacts on social media and email marketing that can be used to drive more traffic to the event. Both the event and the speaker benefit from having more connections. With careful negotiations, most speakers will be willing to send out social media posts, place the information in their email newsletter or even create a specific email about the event. Speakers can also supply pre-event materials so attendees will get more out of the speakers' presentations. Other possibilities include posting details on their website, writing a blog or newsletter article, handing out fliers or post-cards at other events and personally connecting with people who might want to attend or be a vendor or sponsor.

AVAILABILITY

Attendees expect and appreciate more interaction before, during and after the event with those who are training, inspiring and motivating them. Greater speaker availability helps the retention of knowledge because it gives attendees opportunities to ask questions and discuss what they just heard.

Speakers are usually happy to sign on for more interaction; they want to be there for questions, comments, interaction, conversation and other opportunities to connect.

PRE/POST-EVENT INTERACTION

The payoff can be great when speakers are introduced in advance. They benefit by connecting with attendees and warming everyone up to their message before the event. Simple audio or video calls can be recorded and posted on YouTube to create excitement on the event website, in newsletters and via social media connections. Putting videos on the conference website helps with the website's search engine optimization because Google loves video. And, the attendees will, too.

After the event, a video or teleseminar offering a follow-up with the speakers will help ensure that the participants remember what they need to do with the information they've been given. The attendees will feel more empowered and motivated and will have immediate action plans to contribute to follow-up meetings. This approach also brings huge value to corporate accounts that are looking for reasons to send their employees to an event.

GIVEAWAYS

Speakers can offer giveaways or bonuses to attendees, sponsors and VIP guests. If each of 10 speakers was to offer a promo item or a ticket to a special webinar to attendees who sign up in advance, and each one is worth \$100, then you can promote a total value of more than \$1,000 in bonus offers! This is a great strategy to get people to buy their tickets early. Speakers also appreciate this since the attendees get to know about them ahead of time.

EXTRAS FOR VIPS/VOLUNTEERS/SPONSORS

Speakers can also bring extra value to special marketing and promotions or to certain individuals. For a thank-you party for volunteers or at events for your VIP guests, sponsors or vendors, speakers can do something special as a bonus – perhaps an exclusive webinar/ teleconference call with your special guests. This strategy gives your organization another marketing approach to promote VIP tickets or another reason for sponsors to jump in.

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\$ VENDOR BOOTHS AND SALES

Many speakers want to interact and sell products, sign books, or offer a contest or giveaway for lead generation. Sometimes, offering a booth or a table for such activities can be enough to reduce or even offset a speaker's fee.

If you don't want selling or lead generation at your event, then you might have to accept that higher speakers' fees will come into play. Because audiences can get only so much from a 30-minute or even a two-hour presentation, they need to go further with the speaker to create permanent and lasting change – and that's a sales process. If sales are out of the question, then it might be necessary to buy some books from the speaker for the attendees, provide contact information for participants, sponsors or vendors, or allow speakers to hand out contest forms. Be creative in the sales approach if a "pitch" isn't something you want.

\$ REVENUE SHARING

Is your event a fundraising opportunity? Many speakers will consider revenue sharing, in which they sell at your event and split the profit with you. If they offer something amazing on stage and/or at their booth, then they give the event a percentage. This could generate significant revenue for the event. Because you are providing speakers with a venue for sales, prospective new clients, an atmosphere of excitement and a unique marketing opportunity, they will be pleased to give back.

\$ TAX WRITE-OFF

If speakers are donating their time for a non-profit organization, they should receive donation receipts for their usual speakers' fees. They should also check with their accountants beforehand to find out what they can and cannot write off.

If you consider that each of the items described above has a specific dollar value, a fee rationale can be made for every speaker, whether it is a full-price, highly-acclaimed celebrity or a strong professional speaker with a notable track record.

Ideally, most of these ideas would be negotiated into a contract. At a minimum, aim to include all the negotiable selections that you feel are essential for both the speaker and the event. Most professional speakers will consider these options because, in today's market, there are many speakers, and they will all want to participate.

Most speakers will want to help you achieve your goals because these are usually their goals, too. When goals are aligned, the outcome is inevitable. The most satisfying time with speakers is after the event, when attendees, vendors and sponsors describe what an amazing event it was for them. That is often when the dollars spent make sense. **SOI**

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Critical Thinking



RE-EVALUATING EVALUATIONS

By Sandy Hughes

We often assume that our conference evaluations are designed in such a way as to provide us with both holistic and specific feedback on our event. What we typically prepare for these types of evaluation forms are questions which generate participant satisfaction ratings around event elements such as speakers, sessions, content, format and outcomes. We also include a host of logistical details covering parking, signage, ease of registration, scheduling and food quality.

However, as a university administrator supporting faculty in curriculum, course design and evaluation of the overall pedagogical process (and after attending a great many meetings and conferences over the years), I find it quite surprising how often these evaluation questions are so generic, despite substantial differences in themes, venues and intended purposes of the events. The biggest problem these types of standard surveys pose for meeting and event planners is that they are likely not getting us to the real viewpoints of participants. As such, they are not truly affording us the opportunity to critically assess the assumptions we've made about our participants, the content delivered and the intended outcomes for which we were aiming.

If we want to develop and execute

event evaluations that more acutely assess our event and the assumptions behind it, then it becomes more about understanding how to apply the principles of critical thinking to the evaluation process.

DEFINING CRITICAL THINKING

At the *8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform* (summer 1987), Michael Scriven and Richard Paul described critical thinking as "...the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action." Essentially, critical thinking enables us to apply a disciplined reason to our thinking which goes beyond our regular, often spontaneous, thought processes.

If we want to apply critical thinking to our evaluations, attributes such as clarity, precision, relevance and good reason should be our guiding principles. If we can more effectively use these elements to formulate our event evaluation questions, we will capture more relevant information about what we should start doing, what we should keep doing and what we should stop doing!

START WITH A CLEARLY DEFINED EVENT PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

Evaluation questions should be linked to the initial intended outcomes of the event. At the beginning of your planning, it's paramount to use critical thinking to ensure clarity around what, how and why you're organizing the event. A few good questions include:

- What is this meeting intended to accomplish?
- What could be the best outcome for this meeting?
- Who will attend and why?
- Will this be a one-time event on a current or upcoming topic, or is it intended to develop over time and attract attendees year after year?
- What is the specific knowledge, skills, networking that attendees will hope to take away from the event?

With these questions answered, it is easier to determine how the event goals can be accomplished, such as how to prepare a call for proposals (if appropriate), how to organize the schedule of events, how much free/networking time to allow, what type of venue would be appropriate and other details.

EFFECTIVELY BRIEF PRESENTERS AND SPEAKERS

Intended outcomes and clarity of purpose are also important pieces of infor-

mation to provide to keynote speakers. Usually keynote speakers are chosen based on their specific knowledge and expertise, experiences and roles. They need to know how to specifically tailor their expertise.

Sometimes a broad lecture is just what is needed; often though, a more focussed talk or participant-engaged workshop will help to better set the tone for the intended outcomes. Keynote speakers should be equally clear at the start of their talk by stating the objectives for their session to participants. They should inform, expand, clarify and provide additional questions to motivate the audience.

Resist the temptation to accept additional concurrent sessions based solely on a need to “fill the schedule” or as a way of bolstering attendance. This is where a rubric or other unbiased evaluation instrument will help you to ensure that your session selections are made for the most appropriate reasons.

CRITICALLY ASSESS YOUR EVALUATION QUESTIONS

When the goals and specific outcomes for your event are clear, it's easier to develop evaluation questions for participants that specifically align with these goals. Evaluations based on your intended outcomes can help identify the added value that the event brought to your attendees.

In terms of using critical thinking to assess conference objectives, it's important to ask evaluation questions that align with the attributes associated with critical thinking. Clustering questions around various aspects of the event is also helpful. It will help respondents to think about a particular aspect of the event more deeply. If you really need to understand participants' feelings about a certain aspect of the conference, it is good to ask more than one question about it, from slightly different perspectives, to ensure that you get an accurate picture of how participants felt. It is also a good idea to have a few open-ended

questions, as these will give attendees the opportunity to address any issues that you may have neglected to ask.

Create a draft of your proposed evaluation questions, then critically assess this draft using the questions below. Reflecting on these pointed questions will help you to determine whether or not your survey is really getting you to those deeper insights about your attendees:

- What precise information is to be gained from this question?
- Is there any bias associated with the way this question is phrased?
- Will participants be able to clearly understand the question so that the responses are reliable and useful to inform future events?
- Have I asked appropriate questions to inform future related events?
- What was the response rate when I used these questions for the evaluation in the past?
- Is it likely that respondents are only those who are really satisfied, or really dissatisfied?





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- Has an opportunity been provided for written feedback?

Considering these critical thinking questions regularly, as the planning for a meeting or conference progresses, is also quite helpful. Reviewing them repeatedly will provide you with greater clarity around the purpose and intended outcomes of your event, which will certainly be echoed in the event evaluation. This ongoing reflection will ensure that a more accurate summary of your attendees' opinions have been captured.

EXECUTING EVALUATIONS

The best time to ask for feedback is as soon as possible after the session/event concludes. Many events now conduct their evaluations online, which may work more effectively for an overall conference evaluation as opposed to the individual concurrent sessions because attendees don't always bring electronic devices to the session, or the time-frame between sessions doesn't allow enough time. Also, if you are conducting online surveys, ensure that your attendees are comfortable with and have easy access to the required hardware.

Sometimes, a keynote presenter will provide their own online survey tool. I suggest that you always review the survey instrument to ensure it meets your needs and doesn't contain bias. In this situation, it's likely preferable to include a few of the questions that might be important to the speaker into your evaluation, rather than the other way round.

Some planners judge whether they'll hire a presenter for a future conference based on evaluation results, so getting an appropriate response rate is important. Higher response rates give some confidence that you've heard from a good cross-section of attendees, not just the very satisfied or the very dissatisfied.

To help drive response rates, be sure to include information on the evaluation that tells participants that feedback is important, and how it will be used for future planning, etc. Also, ensure that

it's easy to complete the evaluation. If it's too complicated or too long, people will avoid doing it!

If you're really anxious for a high response rate, then an incentive (such as a discount on next year's conference) might be an enticement. Have members of the conference committee attend concurrent sessions to introduce speakers, keep track of time and ensure evaluations are completed.

EVALUATING THE RESULTS

If appropriate questions have been asked and the response rate is good, you have excellent data from which to determine how things went and what to do in the future. If you need detailed statistical analysis, you may want to work with an expert researcher who can evaluate the data at a more sophisticated level but, in general, this is not necessary.

Finally, review the results with all concerned. If necessary, assign various follow up tasks to individuals to ensure closure of the event. If you've promised feedback to concurrent session leaders, ensure that they receive it in a timely fashion and that you give them an opportunity to discuss their feedback with you (if that's appropriate). You may even want to share some of the key findings with attendees and let them know specifically how you are using their insights to shape your future programs.

Above all, a well-designed evaluation shows your participants that you care about creating a rich experience for them and that you are committed to doing an even better job next time around.

When they are developed with a bit of critical thinking, your evaluations will have greater credibility. This additional credibility will not only enhance future attendance at your program, but can also be leveraged to entice new sponsorship dollars. Especially when viewed from this perspective, thinking a little harder about your event evaluations is definitely worth the extra time and effort!

SOI

ETHICAL ISSUES

"But everybody does it!"

By Christopher Bauer

Every one of us involved with meeting planning is barraged by ethical challenges every single day. Who gets the perks for travel or hotel stays? Whose products or policies may make them an inappropriate event sponsor? What about giving and receiving gifts? What information can I share with my friendly competitors?

While we rarely think of ourselves as unethical, unethical behaviour, however unconsciously or unintentionally, occurs frequently. This article will explore that disconnect and make you aware of several potentially significant

costs of even unintentional unethical behaviour. Then, we'll look at some important tools for how you can more effectively spot frequently overlooked ethical challenges on the job.

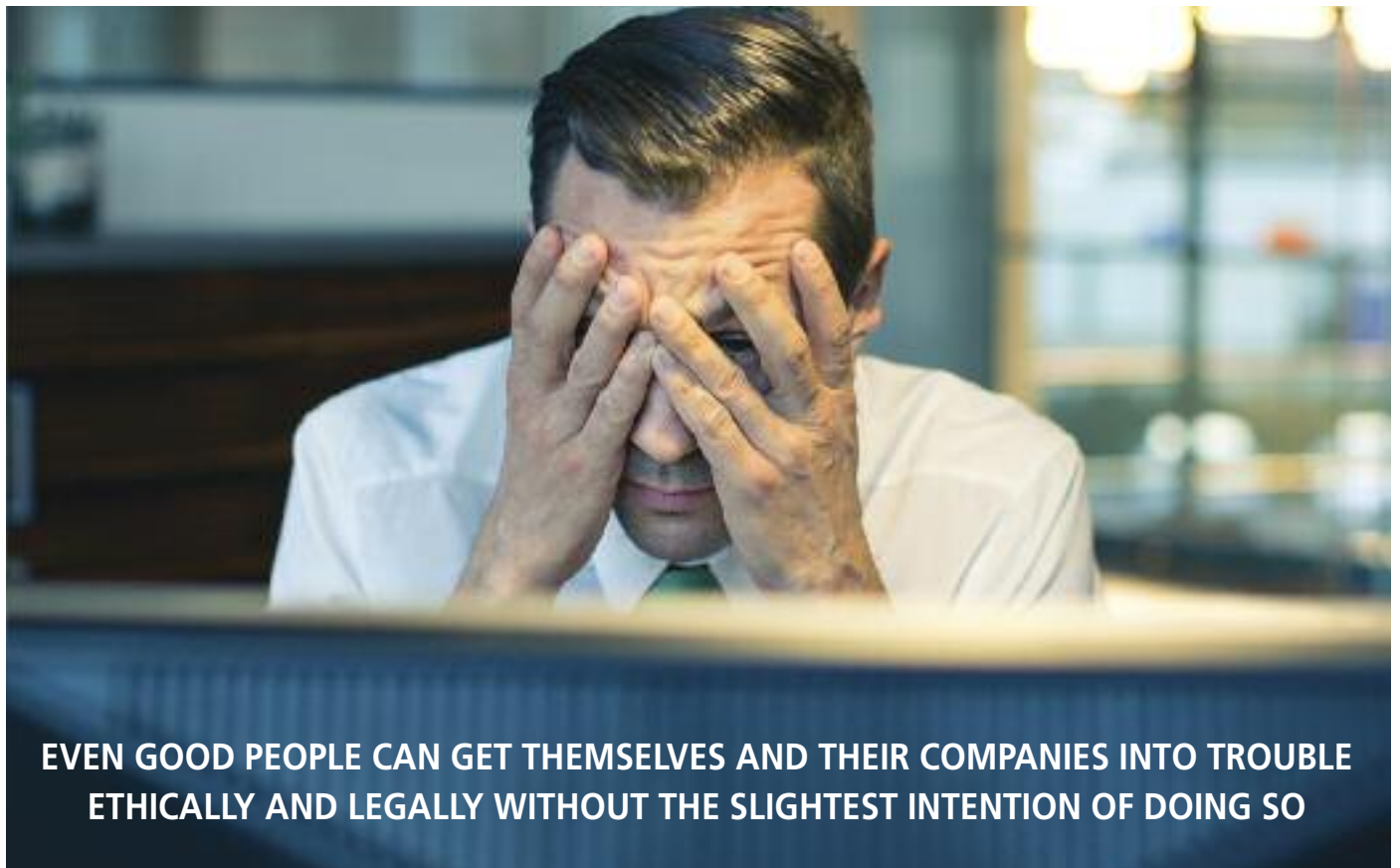
THE BOTTOM-LINE OF ETHICS

We often think of ethics as a kind of "Kumbaya" feel-good topic and forget that ethics problems can represent a serious risk to our bottom-line. Research across a wide array of industries by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners suggests that as much as five to seven per cent of your bottom

line is being lost each year to ethics-related problems.

There is a long list of such problems, but primary among them are: asset misallocation (including everything from raiding the petty cash or supplies drawer, to outright embezzlement); flawed or ignored contracts; and inaccurate timesheets.

The biggest ethics-related cost, though, is the amount of money your organization never even sees because a client, a potential client, or referral source sees or hears something about your organization that they don't



**EVEN GOOD PEOPLE CAN GET THEMSELVES AND THEIR COMPANIES INTO TROUBLE
ETHICALLY AND LEGALLY WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST INTENTION OF DOING SO**

MOST ETHICS PROBLEMS ARE CAUSED BY OTHERWISE WONDERFUL

believe is ethical; they won't do business with you as a result!

This is where most meeting and event planners can expect to experience their greatest financial impact. How you make decisions around critical event planning issues such as dealing with perks, receiving gifts or accepting controversial sponsorships, can unwittingly alienate existing and potential customers and referral sources alike.

PINNING DOWN THE ETHICAL LINE

Most of us are raised with the notion that ethics are all about rules. In fact, ethical choices are about what we do with the rules. In other words, ethics are about the underlying values and mandates that rules bring to life.

For example, most industries have explicit policies about gifts that can be given to, or accepted from, vendors. Meeting industry professionals have to try to navigate these rules daily to avoid both legal and ethical issues.

Most people do not fully appreciate that these rules are in place to prevent undue influence and conflict of interest. Without this fundamental understanding, there are myriad ways people can follow the rules to the letter and still be engaged in some kind of ethical issue. This is precisely where ethics live – in those underlying grey areas hovering around rules and policies.

If you find yourself saying, "Don't worry, this is legal," take an immediate step back and think about whether or not your planned behaviour is also ethical. Remember, something can be entirely legal but still be unethical.

Think about the values you and your business uphold; do your actions fully represent and underscore those values?

If the answer is "No," that's a sure sign that you need to rethink your decision. When your actions are out of alignment with your stated values, there's an ethical challenge you've missed.

You need to draw the ethical line at any point where your behaviour is out of alignment with the values you say you have. Take this one step further to include actions that could be perceived by others to be out of alignment with your values.

SHOULDN'T IT BE OBVIOUS?

Here's the funny/vexing/important thing about ethics – there are rarely right or wrong answers. If there is a clear, obvious correct way to do something, chances are you're talking about compliance with a rule or a moral issue where you have taken a stand based on belief or conviction. Ethics, on the other hand, are so often about the grey areas where one might reasonably argue a variety of ways and make good points from all angles.

For example, who gets travel perks: the person booking the trip or the traveller? Doesn't the person creating an event have good reasons to fund that event as fully as possible? And, don't event attendees also have valid reasons to not welcome support from certain sponsors?

These types of ethical dilemmas can get messy in a hurry if you don't have some ideas about how to think your way past the duelling arguments these issues bring to the table.

VALUES WITHIN YOUR VALUES

Let's talk about two powerful ways to listen and think your way through some often-complex ethical issues.

One of the easiest ways to spot an

ethics issue is to notice when your actions don't align with your stated values. That is presuming, of course, that you are absolutely clear about what your core values are. If you are unclear, one great solution is an appropriately written and implemented values statement.

A frequent problem with values statements is that they are often only public relations-type documents. To create a truly effective values statement, you'll need to take a deep-dive to uncover your most important and persistent priorities when making decisions. Those most important, most persistent priorities then become the core of your values statement.

You will know you've got solid a statement of your core values when three things have occurred:

- Your values statements will allow you or any of your employees to know, immediately, whether any behaviour is, or is not, aligned with the values you say you have.
- When you aren't sure how to make a decision, your values statement will provide guidance. Since ethical questions rarely have one absolute right or wrong answer, your values statement will help you know exactly what you need to consider to make the best possible decision within the given circumstances.
- Your customers can clearly see that your decisions are guided all day and every day by your articulated values.

If you're going to write or rewrite values statements, commit to doing the tough work it requires to do it correctly. Incomplete or poorly written values statements are a dangerous thing. Remember, it's supposed to be getting your entire organization onto the same

PEOPLE WHO MISS ENTIRELY THAT AN ETHICAL ISSUE IS BEFORE THEM

sled, so it had better be the right sled! If you run into a snag, don't be afraid to get help from an ethics consultant.

THE VOICES IN YOUR HEAD

This sounds a little crazy, but here is a fairly short list of rationalizations we tell ourselves when we are about to do something that's unethical. If you do nothing more than listen for these rationalizing voices in your head, you'll go a long way to helping yourself quickly discern when your behaviour is out of alignment with your values.

"I'm owed more than I'm getting."

Risk: You might be prone to take something for yourself that isn't actually supposed to be yours.

"That was a close one!"

Risk: If you are worried that someone might have caught you doing something it probably wasn't something good!

"It's such a small thing, what's the big deal?"

Risk: What's small for us could be huge for another stakeholder; if we ever find out at all, it's usually after the damage is done.

"Everybody else does it!"

Risk: Just because everyone else does it, does not make it right! A lot of people do things they shouldn't. Get clear about what is and isn't acceptable behaviour to you. Once you're clear, it really doesn't matter if people are doing it differently. Each of us has to act in accordance with our stated values and, of course, the law.

"That's the way we've always done it around here."

Risk: Are you doing this because you know it's right, or simply because it's a habit? Learn to discern the difference!

"Just this once."

Risk: Well, no, it almost certainly won't be. We all know that once you step over the line, it gets easier to do it again and again. That doesn't mean there isn't a time when we can stop ourselves but it's a whole lot easier if you don't start.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

You're a good person. Yet, even good people can get themselves and their companies into trouble ethically and legally without the slightest intention of doing so. In fact, most ethics prob-

lems are caused by otherwise wonderful people who miss entirely that an ethical issue is before them, or they don't know how to handle the situation correctly.

If you think you need some help sorting this out, there's no need to go it alone. There are a number of experts out there who can help you put a more effective approach to ethics into practice. It's a rewarding investment, not just because you know you'll be working in an ethical manner, but also because of the very real dollars and cents you will add to your bottom line.

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TED Talk Formats: The Debate Rages

The advantages and disadvantages of the popular TED format debated by two skilled presenters who are well versed with this format:

Deri Latimer, BMgt, CSP vs Sid Ridgley, MBA, CSP

On the one hand...



TED is a brain-friendly choice for your next learning event. You are able to keep your Timing tight, your Emotion engaged and Distraction disrupted.

Timing: Timing is everything. Keeping your program engaging, entertaining and educational is key to your success, and to your delegates' delight. TED Talks' "under 20-minute" format means you can create a program your delegates can digest in bite-sized chunks. Anyone who has sat through a 90-minute university lecture knows that your ability to absorb, much less remember, what you are learning in that time segment is limited. You, or your brain at least, will have "left the building" multiple times. Planning shorter speaking segments means you can build in brain-friendly activities for your delegates to talk about the idea just shared.

Emotion: TED Talks challenge the speaker to create an experience that is poignant, purposeful and punchy. Great speakers know that creating an emotional connection is what separates spectacular presentations from those that are just so-so. The emotional connection is also exactly what makes a TED Talk something "worth sharing." When you choose this format, you will also select skilled professional speakers who are able to distill even very complex matters into tasty tidbits that are going to stick in your delegates' minds and hearts.

Distraction: You know your delegates arrive at your event connected to all sorts of devices that are vying for their attention. Distraction is more likely to occur when learning segments are longer, rather than shorter. With a TED format, your speakers are tasked to ensure that the idea being communicated is done so in a succinct and efficient manner. It is exactly this tight parameter that inspires creativity, while also minimizing learner distraction. Having delivered a TED Talk personally in 2013 (*Choose Life*), I know the experience changed me as a speaker... for the better. It is indeed more challenging to create a meaningful, motivational and memorable experience that is specifically designed with the learner's mind in mind. **SOI**

Deri Latimer, CSP, is a TEDx speaker and author. She combines a business degree with more than 20 years experience engaging audience like yours to create positive, productive and prosperous places for people to work and live.

• www.derilatimer.com

On the other hand...



TED Talks is fast-food delivery of information and ideas. A TED presenter is required to fit (some might say force fit) their message into a specific format.

Shortfall #1: The subject matter is subordinated to the TED Talk criteria. All presentations benefit from having a well-honed and focused core message, but 18 minutes just simply isn't enough time to present it. A study of TED Talks (available online) reveals there are many opportunities for TED Talk presenters to refine their presentations to make them more complete and self-contained.

Shortfall #2: Length isn't everything and, in many cases, it may not be anything! It is not the length of a presentation that influences and inspires audiences; it is providing relevant, interesting content coupled with professional delivery. There are wonderful presenters who can keep an audience engaged, entertained and enthralled for hours while others have audiences begging for mercy after only five minutes. A fixed-length presentation is just a format, not a guarantee of an effective one!

Shortfall #3: An excellent TED presentation doesn't guarantee a speaker will be a great keynote, seminar leader or workshop facilitator. Using a speaker's TED presentation as your primary criterion for selecting speakers for your event is risky. The skills required to present a session involving audience participation are quite different from those required to deliver a well-rehearsed, one-way presentation.

Shortfall #4: Content, as brilliant as it may be, is more likely to be acted upon when audience members actively engage with it. The TED format does not allow for audience interaction and exploration of content. If there is a desire to have a presentation that generates some sort of change, simply listening to a speaker is not sufficient.

Although the TED format is currently popular, it is just one of many. My hope is that meeting planners will continue to be driven by achieving client outcomes as their most important criteria for designing effective meetings, and not be seduced by the popularity of one particular format. **SOI**

Sid Ridgley simplifies the complexities of people and organizational development when leaders want to create collaborative organizations that are customer- and employee-centric.

• www.sidridgley.com

By Patti Pokorchak, MBA



Patti is a small business sales coach who helps entrepreneurs sell faster and more effectively while becoming more confident in the value that they provide to their clients.

• www.SmallBizSalesCoach.ca

Helping Misguided Event Planning Committees

Be the pilot who steers an event into a great harbour

What do you do when a committee is heading in the wrong direction with a theme or entertainment idea that you know is going to be a flop? How do you sell a new idea, and convince the others that their idea may not be the best choice?

Making sure that your event's theme fits your target audience is key to a successful experience. So, what happens when, as a speaker or planner, you're called in to listen as they explain what they are thinking and your gut and mind are screaming – NO, NO, NO?

My business partner used to say, "Don't come to me with a problem, come to me with a solution." It's no good to simply point out that you don't think this will work without having something to back up that opinion and, more importantly, an alternative. You have to wow them and get them to change their minds.

That's when you realize that we are all in sales. Persuading a committee that has invested substantial energy and mustered up considerable enthusiasm for a theme, will not be easy. It's like turning an ocean liner around; it can be done, but it won't be quick or easy.

I put out a call to event planners to pick their brains on how they've had to defuse what could potentially be a client alienating issue.

When you need to handle situations like these and want to avoid alienating others, Marc Wilson of MWD Lifestyles suggests less is more. "Avoid changing the entire event as these people have already invested a lot in putting their ideas together," he says. "By incorporat-

ing some of their original ideas you instill a sense of ownership and camaraderie which results in less resistance and more support."

Sandy Geroux from WOWplace agrees. She recalls a situation where she was convinced changes needed to be made. "Once you become absolutely convinced, you must become absolutely convincing!" she says. "Because I was more convinced my positive plan would work than they were convinced that it wouldn't, I persisted by listing all the benefits of my plan for them as the organizers and for the audience. At the end of the event, everyone was on their feet cheering, clapping, whistling – exactly what anyone who runs events wants to have happen. The nay-sayers thanked me for sticking to my convictions."

Jeffrey Cesari of Shimmer Events says that he had to stop being politically correct, take the lead and tell a group that some ideas were bad and were not going to work. He was working with a shoe-string budget and clients with "champagne" dreams. By building the relationship on honesty, he gained their trust. The event was their best ever!

In Richard O'Malley's (theomalleyproject.com) experience, when a committee gets off on a tangent, you need to come at it in a non-obvious way. "Don't give them a judgmental line," he says. "Let them know how others have done it recently or that the logistics just simply do not work. In creative discussions, it is hard to quantify 'good,' so go to logical areas where consensus can be reached more easily."

Something that seems to be so obvious, but happens more often than it

should is, "Do you want to make an amazing experience for a few or a watered down experience for many?" Skimping on the experience could degrade the brand, so opt for a small, high-end event. In my example, we handpicked attendees by sending 100 custom-made, 3D elegant invitations with a bit of mystery and one-half of a gift included. We got the results we wanted.

Harris Schanhaut, Excellence in Event Effectiveness, says to ensure the theme is appropriate and connects with the audience. Greg Jenkins, Bravo Productions, suggests brainstorming the event by creating a few sketches to summarize the event without using words. He remembers being involved with one committee that was creating an event with a 60s theme. Most of the attendees were born in the 1980s. The event flopped because there was no connection to the guests. "If you have to explain the theme after guests walk into the room, it's a flop," he says.

In summary, step up, be a leader, forget being politically correct and focus on the desired outcomes. In the end, the committee members will only remember the accolades and standing ovation. Sometimes the destination is worth the occasionally torturous journey to a wanted result. Most people will regret not following their gut instinct. If you don't want to be one of them, you must be brave and stand up for what you believe.

SOI



Speaking of Colleges and Universities

By Stan Michalak

When Meetings Become Academic

Solutions for meeting planners are only as far away as the nearest university or college

Imagine a network of meeting venues stretching coast to coast, each with accommodations, catering, meeting spaces that are as varied in size and décor as in the number of available seats, helpful planners on staff, and an atmosphere of focus and contemplation without the distractions of families on vacation complete with children and pets or the 250 people who've assembled for the Smith/Jones wedding.

Such a chain of meeting havens has existed for decades – universities and colleges. They come equipped with everything you might need for a successful meeting; students spend years at such places contemplating life, growing their minds, discovering their future and sharing these treasures with other like-minded people. One would think marrying the corporate or association meeting plan with a university or college environment would be a sure thing or, to borrow a basketball metaphor, a slam dunk.

Perhaps it's our desire to hold meetings on mountain tops, or in dense jungles, or under the sea, or in a remote lodge in the wilderness that keeps us from seeing the potential that exists in collegial surroundings. We like to think that our intentions are good, but it's easy to miss the lesson while you're whale watching off the coast of B.C. And, in the final analysis, are we scheduling these exotic

events with an end result in mind or simply to attract attendees and generate a social media buzz?

As one planner puts it, "We've been upping the ante for years. Basically, for a repeat client, we're selling a meeting idea to the same attendees as last year and, if we gave them whale watching last year, what'll we do for an encore?"

Before you conclude that the university or college alternative to a luxury resort meeting is a musty old campus with monk-like cells and institutional food, consider what these centres of learning have to do to attract students. Marketing educational institutions is no easy feat and, in major centres where dozens of universities exist in the same space, the pressure to bring clients to their door can be as intense for marketers as Pepsi vs. Coca-Cola.

ENTER CUCCOA

If one subscribes to the theory of strength in numbers, the Canadian University and College Conference Organizers Association (CUCCOA) has an impressive roster of universities and colleges that hail from Victoria to St. John's and everywhere in between – an eclectic mix of more than 80 institutions that offer conference and events services to varying degrees based on their size and proximity to major centres.

Assisting members with professional development, networking and shared resources were the basic needs on which CUCCOA was founded in 1978 when a group of conference organizers recognized that a national association that provided these things would one day have a national voice and identity. Current CUCCOA president, Ruth Harland, says the fundamental question facing members hasn't really changed in 30 years.

"How do we promote the fact that we have all of this available space and resources, especially in the summer?" she asks.

Public perception also remains one of the biggest challenges. A good way to address old myths and fight misperception, says Harland, is to engage the community, not just the student body.

"Once you involve your community in an event that's larger than any downtown hotel can handle, you show people what you can do, what the university is capable of," she says. "Then, when you're talking to a group [client], you can cite those examples and, each time you succeed, you're building credibility."

Harland says having a full-circle network within the community of hotels, resorts, public attractions and tourism organizations is a tremendous advantage. And, she says the CUCCOA organization itself is also an eclectic collection of resources.

"For example, if you want to provide a green meeting, you can't beat B.C. for that, so a CUCCOA college in Nova Scotia might look to a B.C. member to provide information on what has worked for them in the past," she says.

Last, but not least, on the roster of challenges facing university and college conference services is resources, or the lack thereof. Conference services is an additional revenue

stream for any university or college, but the administration must be convinced with a solid business case that any outlay for additional housing, catering or technical requirements are investments that will pay off.

In the final analysis, nothing succeeds like success. Harland says successful events, of which any administration can be proud, are the proof required to battle myths and preconceived notions about what university and college conference services can provide, given the chance.

Three of CUCCOA's members face these challenges on a daily basis. The University of Toronto Scarborough, Olds College in Olds, Alberta, and Dalhousie University in Halifax have each developed a roster of methods to address their unique markets.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCARBOROUGH

The U of T Scarborough campus sits at the apex of horse-shoe-shaped Highland Creek, a suburban parkland in the heart of Scarborough. Even though the campus is part of the eastern GTA, the green space is a kind of "urban oasis."

"Right now I'm looking out my window at a forest. Around five o'clock, a little herd of deer will go by. It happens every day," says Deborah Hahn, assistant director of retail and conference services.

As part of one of the oldest and largest universities in Canada, U of T Scarborough, as a satellite campus, is as large or larger than many stand-alone universities in other Canadian centres. However, as many will argue, it's not about size; it's about perception. Marketing to the meetings industry is all about being competitive: offering as many options as possible for clients who are looking for specific experiences while correcting misperceptions about what they'll find on a university campus. And, doing it all with



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCARBOROUGH

competitive pricing models that routinely outperform traditional meeting venues.

"We have a 100-year old heritage home that has been updated for groups of up to 60 people that's deep in the valley surrounded by trees, and it's a part of the U of T Scarborough, but you wouldn't know it," says Hahn. "We also have ultra-modern facilities with all of the state-of-the-art equipment you'd need. We have a good mix."

Having just celebrated its 50th anniversary, Scarborough is the youngest satellite of the University of Toronto. As part of the U of T family, it works with the downtown campus to provide meeting space depending on the needs and size of the client. The cooperation extends beyond the university circle to the entire Toronto region resulting in myriad opportunities for meeting delegates to experience a variety of off-site activities. Hahn continues, "There are so many things to do that are just 30 minutes or less from campus: the Toronto Zoo, Canada's Wonderland, Ripley's Aquarium, that we could put together an entertainment package for any client."

In 2013, the university celebrated the 100th anniversary of its heritage home, Miller Lash House, and assisted the Highland Creek Heritage Festival to stage a summer fair that attracted more than 1,500 people who had never visited but who live within a five-mile radius of the university. It was the litmus test that proved U of T Scarborough conference services was fully capable of staging and managing events in concert with other university departments such as catering, printing and public relations.

"What we did is create standards that were not in place before, update older policies and obtain everyone's buy-in to support our efforts," says Hahn. "We now have a logistics infrastructure that works."

This July, the Pan-Am Games come to Toronto. How much spin-off business from nearby sporting venues will go to the U of T Scarborough remains to be seen, but there will likely be plenty to keep conference services busy.

Future challenges will include how much space the university can commit to meetings and events (a new conference centre is in future plans), accommodation (a new residence is in the design stage), and the need to stay on top of the kind of technology that planners may need to satisfy their clients (teleconferencing, remote access, etc.).

OLDS COLLEGE

About 90 kilometres north of Calgary is the community of Olds, Alberta – population 8,617. You might pass by on your way to Red Deer or Edmonton unless you know the gem that lies on the town's east edge – Olds College.

Founded more than 100 years ago, Olds College offers agricultural, animal sciences and horticultural programs while providing a unique venue for meeting and event clients. Kerry Moynihan, the director of guest experience at Olds, suggests clients can choose from a variety of accommodations based on their needs and their budget.

"If you want to stay at a four-star hotel, there's the Pomeroy Inn & Suites," says Moynihan. "Then there's the brand new Centennial Village, a \$35-million development which opens this fall and has space for 450 in individual rooms with private bathrooms. Or, you can stay in our townhouses."

For the truly hardy, there's also camping available on site. Moynihan stresses that the rural setting is not a reflection of the services they can offer meeting planners who are accustomed to a certain level of technology.

"We have Internet delivered at one of the highest



PHOTO COURTESY OF OLDS COLLEGE

speeds in Canada – 1 GB service on campus,” he says. Clients can choose from many different meeting room options from lecture halls to outdoor amphitheatres, but it’s the type of programs that the college provides to students that gives it a unique flavour – one which provides a rather unique shopping list of activities for meeting attendees.

In addition to the livestock one would expect to find at an agriculturally-centred college, Olds has wetlands, a botanic garden, a national meat facility with retail store and a brewery. Moynihan says these elements provide delegates with one-of-a-kind experiences.

“Do you want a beer-tasting experience at our brewery? Do you want to go on a farm tour or learn about treatment wetlands or horticulture? We use the assets of the college to create guest experiences,” he says. “We push well above our weight for an institution of only 1,500 students,” asserts Moynihan. “We have a good agriculture reputation and that attracts business. We also get a lot of attention from government and associations.”

Perhaps the one factor that separates Olds College from other institutions in Canada is the relationship among conference services, the college’s administration and the facilities that provide accommodations and catering. Rather than having to endlessly plead his case to the administration that conferences and events are good revenue sources, Moynihan says the administration is already on board, particularly at a time when Alberta’s gas-fired economy is tightening.

“We have to be very entrepreneurial and private-sector oriented,” he says. “We’ve added resources to our conference services to go out and generate more business and more revenue for the college.”

To add to this business mentality, Olds College no longer owns any of the accommodations on campus. The residences all fall under the College Housing Olds Co. (CHOC) which designs, builds, finances and runs the various facilities.

“We have to provide them [CHOC] a guarantee of 60 per cent occupancy of all the rooms over the course of a year, otherwise there are penalties,” explains Moynihan. “It’s in our financial best interest to make sure that we’re sold out.”

Moynihan goes on to say that rather than several departments running under one umbrella, Olds College is a series of partnerships on campus who share in the benefits of each working to support the other. It’s a business model that is rare among Canadian universities.

According to Moynihan, transportation can still be a wrinkle in an otherwise seamless meeting plan. While travelling to Olds is no problem for anyone with a vehicle, moving large numbers of delegates means that a shuttle service has to be mustered. Moynihan says transportation becomes a cost factor which has to be added to the overall meeting or event plan.

If that’s the biggest challenge Olds College has to face now and in the future, it is certainly ahead of the game.

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Truly an urban campus, Dalhousie University spans the width of Halifax, putting every major attraction in the Nova Scotia capital city in the university’s sphere. Conference sales manager, Natalie Gibbs, says the connection between the university, one of Canada’s oldest, and the historic port city is the *raison d’être* that attracts conference business.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

"I feel Dalhousie's reputation pulls in those clients who want to connect their event to excellence, innovation and leading-edge research that spans multiple disciplines," she says. "Together with partners including Destination Halifax, the Halifax Convention Centre and Greater Halifax Partnership, we offer an experience that connects participants with the city."

Attracting conference business starts with a conversation. According to Gibbs, that conversation begins when the client drills down to the purpose of an event and outlines what delegates are expected to take away from it. She believes that matching the intent and content of a meeting to a suitable venue should be the critical factor determining where that meeting is held.

"If an event needs to be held on a mountain top, then it should be held on a mountain top," says Gibbs with a chuckle. "When clients seek the right fit for the content or overall purpose of their event, many find that universities like Dalhousie are a great option."

Gibbs says her conference service team members have enjoyed repeated success thanks to their diverse backgrounds from both the public and private sectors, and their ability to work together to support major events. A good example is Dalhousie's Open House, an annual, university-wide initiative that welcomes prospective students and their families to spend a day touring the campus. While giving her team credit, Gibbs admits there were hard lessons along the way. For example, she learned to never assume what a client was looking for.

"Now, I take the time, every time, to ask the important questions around the intention and outcome of their event," she says. "I've quickly learned the difference between anticipate and assume."

There is no denying the thread that links Dalhousie and Halifax with Canada and the world – tourism. Other centres only dream of having the kind of tourism magnet that sends its beams out from the town clock on Citadel Hill.

"The tourism sector has changed dramatically," says Gibbs. "There are more choices not only in Halifax but worldwide. Our challenge is to develop new ways to be top-of-mind. We need to leverage our potential and partnerships to continue to bring conferences here."

Another challenge Gibbs cites is the myth that university food is institutional. As venues have evolved to meet changing needs, so too has the food on offer. Dalhousie (and other universities and colleges across Canada) pulls out the stops to provide top-of-the-line catering and food that is not only tasty but responsible.

"Dalhousie food services offers clients tasty, nutritious, well-balanced meals. They are rock stars of the sustainable food movement offering local, sustainably- and ethically-produced food," she says.

If you will excuse the food metaphor, the lesson learned from this spotlight on academic venues is that universities and colleges remain poised and ready to accommodate any variety of meeting tastes.

SOI



Stan Michalak is the creative director of Cutting Edge Communications, publisher of *Speaking of IMPACT* magazine.
• www.cecommunications.ca



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UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES
MEETINGS THAT WORK

While You're in the Neighbourhood

Having a BBQ for an all-vegetarian crowd is probably not a great idea for off-site entertainment

By David Gouthro, CSP



David Gouthro, CSP, is a facilitator and consultant to private, public and not-for-profit organizations. He balances a professional, sharply-focused mind with a playful spirit.

• www.theconsultingedge.com

When designing events that include out-of-town participants, most organizers want to squeeze as much value from their attendees' time as possible. This often means arranging for programming outside the traditional meeting environment. To do so successfully requires knowing your options, knowing your client and choosing the options that will provide the greatest value.

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

Contact the local board of trade, chamber of commerce or tourism department. They will generally have someone who will meet with you to show off what their city or town has to offer. Standard options are likely to include city tours, historical site visits, unique dining opportunities, concerts/sports events, university/research focused visits, etc.

Contact board members of local meeting-focused associations (MPI, CAPS, ADMEI, CAEM, CanSPEP, ISES, PCMA, etc.) to see what non-traditional "extras" they have tried successfully.

If you have a large group of out-of-town attendees from a particular country, contact a local association that offers business or social connections for visitors or new Canadians from that country. They can provide helpful ideas about what might be of interest to your group.

Explore the lobbies of major hotels, airports and ferry terminals to see what brochures of local attractions are available – then check out a few.

Review internationally focused tourism publications. Sometimes, planners are not aware of all the special possibilities in their own backyards.

KNOW YOUR CLIENT/AUDIENCE

Be very clear on the business objectives for your event. This will give you important insight into what peripheral activities will support and add value to it. Determine how success will be evaluated with respect to concrete, measurable outcomes as well as the more intangible aspects such as having enjoyable and memorable experiences together.

I have seen too many meetings where event planners (internal or external) found something that seemed like a fabulous idea (to

them) and sold their clients on its value. Unfortunately, it totally missed the mark because of lack of sufficient understanding on the part of the attendees. Taking animal rights conference participants to baby bull fights in Mexico isn't a good idea. Rock climbing with a group of high-cholesterol, overweight and highly competitive executives – not so good, either, nor is having an all-meat BBQ for a group with a large percentage of hard-core vegetarians. On the other hand, taking senior executives from credit unions from all across the country on a tour of local cooperative initiatives is a great idea. So is having a group of international research professionals included in a meeting with technology transfer specialists from several high-tech-oriented universities.

Avoid long bus rides to off-site events such as dinners, visits to local historical sites, performances or games. I have met very few meeting attendees (none, actually) who would agree that "the journey is the reward" when it comes to these types of visits. Even if the trip is by helicopter, make it quick!

Ensure that what you add to the meeting makes participants feel even better about attending. One meeting I heard about included an all-terrain vehicle excursion for a board of directors to help "build the team." Not only could they not talk to each other when bouncing their butts all over the mountainside, but when they were able to speak afterward, they were largely questioning the wisdom and value of incorporating such an event. It cast a shadow over the rest of the meeting.

As for spouse/partner programming, do not assume all spouses/partners are women who enjoy shopping locally. It is increasingly common for accompanying spouses/partners to be men. Many men enjoy shopping; many women do not. In some industries, the spouse is a key partner (formally or informally) in the business, so sending them off on a "special" program may be exactly the wrong thing to do.

Event planners should continue to be encouraged to develop creative programming for out-of-town attendees – this is often an area of key competitive advantage! However, when doing so, please keep in mind the three basic principles: know your audience, know your options, and choose the options that are likely to add the most value for your client.

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By Anne Miner



Anne Miner, bestselling author and international speaker, is a recognized customer relationship expert. Since 1987, Anne's company, The Dunvegan Group, has helped B2B companies maximize business retention and revenue growth.

• www.anneminer.com

There's Value in a Team

Leveraging speakers' expertise before the meeting

Whether your event is for 20 people or 2,000, you will certainly want to ensure that you get the most value from your speakers. From the moment the booking is confirmed, you and your speakers become a team, working together to deliver a fabulous experience.

Speakers have knowledge, gained through other events, which could make the difference between a good and great event. Why not ask them to share their experiences? By involving them in the planning phase for the event, and learning from their experience, you can avoid pitfalls and capitalize on positive trends. Your speakers will appreciate the opportunity to share their expertise and to help make your event a great success!

There may be differing points of view, so be sure to let the speakers know that it will be up to you to decide which approach you will ultimately use. Be sure to frame the conversation upfront by making your role clear; this will help to avoid controversy over your decisions later on.

PRE-EVENT PROMOTIONS Speakers are often asked to participate in pre-event teleseminars and webinars. What impact do they have on audience registration/attendance? How do you engage your participants in the teleseminar/webinar? Do you allow Q&A? Do you make a replay available?

MEDIA INTERVIEWS Media exposure is expected to build awareness and excitement for your event. Will speakers be available for media interviews prior to the event? Which media have the most interest? What press release content draws the most attention? Who should issue press releases – the speakers or the event organizer? What impact do media appearances have on registration/attendance?

SOCIAL MEDIA There is a role for social media in engaging your audience. Will speakers promote the event to their own following (if appropriate)? Will speakers post on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, someplace else, on your company's intranet or internal messaging system? What impact will this have on registration/attendance? Do they invite the audience to "tweet" during their presentations? How does this impact audience engagement?

ROOM LAYOUT There are several room layout options. What works best for the speakers so they can interact with the audience? Are tables required for writing? Will there be small group assignments? Will the room accommodate the recommended set up?

MUSIC Music is used to raise the energy of event attendees. What is the most popular musical backdrop for your audience and type of event? Who will supply the music? Will speakers want the audience to dance? Will the room layout permit this?

SPEAKER INTRODUCTIONS Speaker introductions set the tone for their presentations. What works best for speakers in terms of the length of introduction and content? (Be sure to get the correct pronunciation of their name and their company name.) "Voice of God" or emcee? Music? How do you create the most excitement?

AUDIO VISUAL TECHNOLOGY Regardless of the size of the audience, audio visual technologies will be required. Do speakers prefer to use PowerPoint and a projector or are they moving to flip charts or other props? Do speakers prefer to stay on stage or wander into the audience? How does this impact audio, screen projection and lighting?

HANDOUTS Speakers frequently offer audience hard copy/handout materials. When and how should handouts be distributed? In the registration package? Set out on the seats? Distributed during the presentation? If during the presentation, how do you keep the audience's attention? Have you tried "handout music" to fill the silence?

PANEL DISCUSSIONS Panel discussions present a range of perspectives. What makes for a lively panel discussion? Should speakers participate? Moderate? What is the best use of Q&A time allocation? Ask attendees to submit questions to the emcee? When would they be submitted – before the event or during the presentation? Should you allow attendees to ask questions from the microphone?

CROWD MANAGEMENT Crowd management can be a challenge. How can you fill the front of the room with enthusiastic attendees? Allow early entry or make the door opening a moment of drama? How do you get the audience to return quickly to their seats? Offer prizes or other rewards?

With the insights provided by your speakers, combined with your own knowledge and expertise, you will be in a stronger position to make the decisions that will ensure you have a great event.

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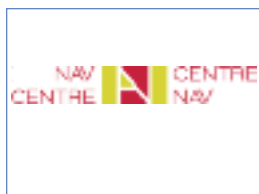
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By Michael Kerr, CSP, HoF



Michael Kerr, CSP, HoF, is listed as one of Canada's most in-demand speakers. Surf over to his website to discover how to put humour to work for more success in your organization.

• www.mikekerr.com

Deepity Thoughts

What's in a word? Well, there's four letters, for a start

Sometimes the perfect word doesn't yet exist to fully describe a certain phenomenon. For example, the cognitive scientist and philosopher, Dr. Daniel Dennett, coined the term "deepity" to explain something that sounds intelligent and deeply meaningful on the surface, but is actually really, really, really, um... not. One such deepity he suggests is the phrase, "There is no 'I' in team!" Yup. That's true. So what? There isn't a "we" or "us" either, Dennett points out, but if you reconfigure the letters, there is a "me" in team! (Now please head over to Facebook where you'll be able to apply the term deepity to every second posting.)

The term deepity fills a much-needed void, which got me thinking in a deepity kind of way, that there are perhaps terms missing or terms that need reimagining in the meeting industry lexicon. You're welcome.

Meetiness: The degree to which a venue suits a meeting function. For example, a spacious, well lit room with great sound and clear sightlines would have a high degree of meetiness, whereas Joe's Opossum Bar n' Grill, not so much.

Meatiness: The degree to which the carnivorous meeting attendees will be pleased with the dinner buffet.

Elevator Speech: The awkward conversation you make on the way to your hotel room with people you sort of know you're supposed to know but don't really know and you're stuck with them now in an awkwardly confined space and feeling extremely gassy after sitting all day. Classic elevator speeches include, "Fourth floor, lingerie," "Nice shoes," and "Hey."

Pillar Neck: The painful neck strain meeting participants experience trying to see the speaker around one of the many strategically placed pillars in a meeting room.

Pillar Envy: When a speaker is so coma-inducing, meeting participants wish they were seated behind one of the strategically placed pillars in a meeting room.

Pillar Face: One of the many dangers associated with walking while texting during meetings.

Pillarity: What jokes about meeting room pillars create.

Participhobia: The fear of being forced to participate in a speaker's stupid interactive exercise.

Meeting Panner: 1. Someone who hates meetings. 2. A meeting planner who can't pronounce their "Is".

Meet and Avoid: Like your typical meet and greet function, but for introverts.

Assimilate: To take in information or ideas while sitting on your ass all day. And no, I don't mean donkey. And yes, this is a crazy way to learn anything.

Wood Panelling: A really boring panel discussion.

Table Centerpiece: The obnoxious guy at your table who won't stop talking.

Ed Talk: Like a Ted talk, only 1/3 shorter.

Ted-X Talk: What happens when Ted has one too many drinks at the open bar.

Podium: When spoken slowly, how meeting participants from the deep south bill their travel expenses.

FlowerPoint: A PowerPoint™ presentation that's all style, no substance.

ShowerPoint: A PowerPoint™ presentation that drowns participants with too much text.

SourPoint: A really depressing PowerPoint™ presentation delivered by a bitter speaker.

HourPoint: A PowerPoint™ presentation that takes an hour to make a point.

Geaker: 1. A guest speaker. 2. A speaker who speaks on technology.

Motivational Speaker: A speaker who specializes in deepities, including phrases such as: "The universe wants you to want what you want," "You can be anything you want... as long as it's not a bird," "You can get what you want from the universe as long as you are in cosmic alignment with your soul's quantum purpose and fuelled by the quantum passion of a thousand starlit pixies," and, well... pretty much any sentence that includes the words "universe," "quantum," or "pixies."

If there are any budding neologists out there who have a suggestion for a word to add to the meeting planner dictionary of terms missing in action, please send them along to Mike at mike@mikekerr.com.

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