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10 Tips For Bringing Your Event To Life

By Susan Friedmann, CSP

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by: **Susan Friedmann, CSP**

Your job as an event planner doesn't stop with the meeting in the company boardroom. You may be called upon to organize an employee appreciation event, an awards dinner, a product launch, the celebration of a company milestone, a gala recognizing a longtime employee's retirement, an incentive event for the company's sales force, a fundraising event, a holiday celebration...the list goes on and on.

These types of affairs differ from your typical corporate business meeting, and you face unique issues and pitfalls when planning them. Rave program reviews are generally the result of the blood, sweat, and tears you devote to the project. A well-designed and well-orchestrated event is analogous to a good stage production. It's all about getting your act together and performing the right show for the right audience.

The following are 10 tips that zero in on the nitty gritty elements that can help earn your efforts glowing reviews (and make your mom really proud of you). As you begin each planning program, a key question to ask yourself is, "how can each activity engage the participant's interest?"

Tip #1: Decide When To Stage Your Event

Timing is everything. The decision about when to hold your event is determined in large part by what type of event it is. Ask yourself, is the event better suited for the day or evening? Do you want to hold it during the week or on a weekend? If your event doesn't have a deadline, would it be best to hold it during a specific season or time of year? Make sure to check that your event doesn't overlap with any religious holidays, and it's probably best to avoid scheduling during major sporting events.

Tip #2: Map Out A Location

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The first order of business is to decide whether to hold your event indoors or outdoors. However, outdoor events have several major considerations, the elements being number one on the list. Think tents, portable flooring, electric generators, and space heaters, in addition to a well thought out contingency plan. Also, be aware that speeches and audiovisual presentations are notoriously difficult to stage outdoors.

Tip #3: Consider Unique Environments

Hotel meeting rooms can get old very quickly and the thought of a unique environment can immediately add interest and excitement. Consider retreat centers, cruise ships or yachts, museums, stately home, sporting venues, and theaters. Realize that many of these venues work well for special functions, but they don't necessarily have adequate meeting facilities and equipment. Make sure you do your homework beforehand and abide by the "Meeting Planner's Golden Rule" – never select a venue without having seen it in person!

Tip #4: Set The Stage

The program plan you choose stems from the purpose and participants. Your four main considerations include: What is the main emphasis of the program - educational, business or social? What are your financial criteria - generate revenue, break even, or be a company expense? What are your participants' expectations? What is the optimum ration of educational, business, and social programming?

Tip #5: Create The Right Atmosphere

One key to a successful special event is to seek out entertainment or decorations that are unique and fun to spark excitement and add the right ambiance. Think outside the box and consider all sorts of amusements - strolling musicians, magicians, chefs' demonstrations, palm readers...anything out of the ordinary. Novelty is the key to your success. Keep in mind that entertainment that rave about can also come in the form of an elaborate coffee bar or startlingly beautiful champagne fountain. Remember to check all decorating plans with the venue in advance because many have restrictions on what they allow. For example, many establishments forbid helium balloons.

Tip #6: Create A Memorable Theme

Creating a theme for your event helps make it easier to organize food, décor, and other accessories, such as giveaway items. Select a theme that fits your participants. Consider choosing from the following categories: Fashion: The Roaring Twenties or An Evening at Ascot History: The Garden of Eden or A Renaissance Fair Politics: Fourth of July Celebrations or Women's Lib (political and historical) Popular culture: Wizard of Oz or An Evening with Dr. Seuss The arts: An Italian Affair or A Night at the Oscars

Tip #7: Integrate The Theme

Don't consider a theme unless you are prepared to follow it through your entire event. Don't limit it to a

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few posters on the walls, which just add lip service rather than real ambiance. For the most impact, integrate it before, during and after the event. Reflect your theme in your invitations and in any party favors that guests take home. Your theme should complement the tone and content of your event. Advise speakers and discuss with them how they can incorporate, but not overuse it in their remarks. A few extras to consider when integrating your theme: Make sure the theme is general enough that it is unlikely to offend anyone, and that it is meaningful to your group. Develop a meaningful slogan or message to go along with the theme to add a little extra when you promote the event. Consider having a special logo designed to enhance the theme and its possible message.

Tip #8: Hire A Professional Photographer

A photographer is a great addition to almost any event. Guests appreciate a visual reminder of the fun time they had at your affair. Arranging to have family portraits taken at an employee appreciation event shows your employees that you care about them as individuals. Guests at more formal affairs enjoy having their pictures taken while they're dressed up for a night out. Decide whether you want a photographer to roam among your guests taking candid shots, to set up in a central location to take posed shots, or both.

Tip #9: Entertain The Group

Participants look forward to the entertainment segment of a program. They want to have fun, enjoy themselves, and let their hair down, particularly after stressful and demanding sessions. So guess what? Your participants' stress reliever now becomes your stress maker. You have a true responsibility to choose the right entertainment for your group. Some options include the following: Music: Your choices include a band with or without singers, a soloist (instrumental or vocal), a disc jockey, or even karaoke. Spectacle: Consider hiring a magician, juggler, comedian, mime or hypnotist. Theater: Arrange a dinner theater performance, a one-person act, a murder-mystery experience, or corporate theater (which involves using professional or amateur actors to dramatize a company's image, a new product, or the history of an organization). Games: Involve your participants by planning individual games, such as a treasure hunt, or an event with a game show format, such as "Jeopardy" or "Hollywood Squares." Video or slide show: A picture is worth a thousand words. For a retirement dinner, consider creating a slide show featuring the guest of honor's accomplishments. For a sales meeting, provide a video demonstration of a new product.

Tip #10: Hire The Right Talent

As you think about hiring your entertainment talent, find out where and for whom they've previously performed. Make certain that you view a demo video. Watch for the quality of their performance and the audience reaction. Check out their references and ask some pertinent questions: Would you hire them again? How flexible, reliable, and easy to work with were they? How would you rate their act? What do they do well? What part of their act could use improvement? What were the demographics of your audience? (You want to make sure that this act would be a good fit for your participants.)

Written by Susan A. Friedmann, CSP, The Tradeshow Coach, Lake Placid, NY, author: "Meeting & Event Planning for Dummies," working with companies to improve their meeting and event success

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How to Grieve a Tragedy

By Stephen Bucaro

Bad things happen to good people. Have you lost your job or are facing bankruptcy? Has a cherished relationship ended or you have gone through a divorce? Maybe you received diagnosis of a serious health problem. Or maybe you are mourning the loss of a loved one. Unfortunately, these painful events are part of life.

If you have to endure such a tragedy, maybe you can find solace in your friends and in your faith. There is no way to completely avoid the pain of a tragic event, but I offer you a way to work through the pain. If a friend or loved one is grieving, you can pass this message on to them.

You should deal with the grief in three phases. You should carry on each phase for exactly 21 days before moving on to the next phase. Why 21 days? Because studies have shown that if an individual does the same thing for 21 consecutive days, it becomes a habit. That is the amount of time required to make a permanent life change.

Phase 1: Don't think about the event that is causing your grief. You may be forced to think about it in some way in order to take care of business related to the event. But otherwise don't think about it for the first 21 days. If the event comes to mind, think to yourself "I don't want to think about this right now", and dismiss the thought from your mind.

Every time the tragic event enters your mind, think "I don't want to think about this right now", and force yourself to think about something else. Usually friends and family will not be a problem because they will avoid bringing up the subject. For the first 21 days, keep pushing thoughts of the event out of your mind.

Eventually you will need to mourn, it's unavoidable. In Phase 2, you should think of nothing but the tragic event. How can this help? Even though you forcefully prevented the event from entering your conscious thoughts for the first 21 days, your subconscious mind was grieving. Now you need to deal with it on a conscious level.

You will be able to grieve with less pain now because your subconscious mind has already dealt with it. You can't put the tragedy behind you unless you deal with it on a conscious level. For the next 21 days, force yourself to focus on the tragic event.

If the tragedy is a broken relationship, think about the life you could have had if things worked out the way you dreamed. If the tragedy is the death of a loved one, think about the moments of your lives

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together. Focus entirely on how much that individual meant to you.

Phase 3: It's time to move forward. For the next 21 days, think only of your future life and changes you will need to make. Plan your new life. What changes do you need to make to carry on under your new circumstances?

Unfortunately, painful events are part of life. Bad things happen, but life moves on. My plan doesn't let you totally avoid the grief of a tragedy, and not letting yourself grieve would not be healthy anyway. I promise you, no matter what the loss, in the end, the human spirit will always survive.

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