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17 Tips for Bringing Your Event to Life

By Susan Friedmann

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by: **Susan Friedmann**

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 appreciate 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 company's sales force, a fundraising event, a holiday celebration...the list goes on and on.

One key to a successful special event is to seek out entertainment or decorations that are unique and fun to spark conversation among guests. As you begin envisioning your event, picture the mood you want the environment to create. For example, determine whether you want to create a jubilant, celebratory atmosphere or one that is more serious. The ambiance you aim for depends a great deal upon the type of event you're having. If it's a product launch where you want to create an aura of enthusiasm and excitement, you'll likely lean toward an exhilarating atmosphere. If you're organizing an event for your employees and their spouses, perhaps you want the mood to be somewhat romantic.

Whatever you decide, the following seventeen tips will help you shape and enhance the atmosphere with the entertainment, decorations, and food you choose.

1. Think outside the box when planning the atmosphere at your event. Novelty is the key to your success. Give your guests something to tell their friends about!
2. Create a fun, interesting, and exciting ambiance using special stage settings, lighting, special scenery, music, ice carvings, flowers, centerpieces, candles, balloons, colored linens, printed menus, a photographer and gift items. Budget determines much of your wish list turns into reality.
3. Consider all sorts of amusements - strolling musicians, chefs' demonstrations, palm readers...anything out of the ordinary.

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4. Keep in mind that your entertainment doesn't have to come in the form of people. An elaborate coffee bar or startlingly beautiful champagne fountain will have your guests raving.
5. Vary your decorations depending on the type of event you're throwing and the venue you choose. Find out whether the facility has house decorations that it's willing to provide at no additional charge.
6. Check all decorating plans with the venue in advance since many have restrictions on what they allow you to do in their establishment.
7. Create a theme especially for a large event to help make it more memorable. In addition, it helps make it easier to organize programming, food, décor, and other accessories. Carry out your theme before, during and after the event for true ambiance and memorability.
8. Cut down on decorating costs by choosing a themed venue and then building your event around the décor rather than molding a venue to the theme you've chosen. For example, find an elaborately decorated ethnic restaurant, and then provide the musicians and entertainers from the appropriate area of the world.
9. Select a theme that fits your group and complements the tone and content of your event. But don't have a theme unless you're prepared to follow through with it.
10. Ask for theme ideas. If you're at a loss, consider having a competition soliciting ideas from your target audience. Your best ideas often come from others. But, remember to offer a fun incentive.
11. Consider choosing a theme from the most popular categories, namely: Fashion (e.g. The Roaring Twenties), History (e.g. A Renaissance Fair), Politics (e.g. 4th of July Celebrations), Popular culture (e.g. An Evening with Dr. Seuss) or The arts (e.g. A Night at the Oscars). Avoid the brainwork and check out

for the easy way out.
12. Choose appropriate entertainment for your 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. Options include: Music (e.g. live, disc jockey or even karaoke), Spectacle (e.g. magician, juggler, comedian or mime), Theater (e.g. dinner theatre, murder–mystery experience or corporate theater), Games (e.g. treasure hunt, or a game show), Video or slide show.
13. Make certain to view a demo video before hiring talent. Watch for the entertainers' performance quality and the audience reaction. Check out their references and ask specific questions such as: Would they hire them again? How flexible, reliable and easy to work with are they? Make sure that their act is a good fit for your audience.
14. Find out whether the entertainers need extra staging, lighting, or décor to create the right

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ambiance. Special requirements add to your bottom line - watch out, this could get expensive. Be sure that the venue approves any special requests. For musical entertainment discuss various options, such as low-volume background music, light entertainment during the meal, and lively dance music. Discuss how the entertainers involve the audience in their act. People enjoy both passive and active involvement.

15. Sit-down affairs work best when you include some form of entertainment. However, if you want something a bit different, look at alternative areas in the hotel, such as an indoor patio or pool area. Naturally, a plan revolving around an outdoor pool is contingent on the weather. It's best to have a back-up plan just in case the heavens decide to open. Buffets and barbecues also work well, but watch the price tag. These kinds of food functions often require extra labor, which automatically means additional dollars.

16. Don't serve anything messy for any event where food is served while guests are standing and mingling. Limit your cuisine to bite-size morsels that guests can easily eat with their fingers or a fork. Save money by opting for a few choice hors d'oeuvres in larger quantities rather than a large selection in smaller quantities. But remember to include some interesting vegetarian selections in your menu for guests who don't eat meat.

17. Make sure you have enough bartenders and liquor when serving alcohol at your event. You don't want to run out of beverages in the middle of the party or have long lines of grumbling, thirsty guests.

Consider whether you want to limit your guests to certain selections, eliminating expensive liquors and specialty drinks.

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 through coaching, consulting and training. Go to

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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

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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 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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