

## Hot Tips for Meeting Planners: How to Make your Event the Best Ever!

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### ① BOOK EARLY

To avoid disappointment, book your speaker(s) well in advance of your event. Les and Fran Hewitt have limited availability due to coaching, workshops, writing and recording engagements. A great speaker can make your event sizzle! An inexperienced speaker, booked at the last minute, can make it flop. Don't take risks, book early!

### ② COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Screw ups are usually caused by poor communication. Make a list of the people who will be involved at all levels of the meeting –e.g. Travel agent, speaking bureau, hotel / banquet coordinator printer, florist, audio video, speaker's personal assistant, Master of ceremonies, to name a few. Make sure you have all of their contact information including cell phones. Keep it in one file.

### ③ SCHEDULE TIME TO CREATE A DETAILED PLAN

Remember, it's all in the details. Great meetings don't just happen. At The Power of Focus Inc. we use a project mapping system called the SRA Map. This is a highly effective tool and can be used for any size of project, including major conferences. It is also valuable for team coordination. Contact our office for a FREE download of the SRA Map. Email [info@thepoweroffocus.ca](mailto:info@thepoweroffocus.ca).

### ④ MEETING ROOM ATMOSPHERE

This is critical. All too often meeting rooms are sterile and cold. Book meeting space that has several lighting options. For full day events chairs must be comfortable.

Make sure there is background music playing during registration and at the breaks. Music energizes the room. Use easy listening as a warm up or high energy Top 40 if you need the room really energized, for example, at a sales rally. Baroque music is excellent for concentration during workshop sessions.

Also check colour –is everything too bland. Ask the facility about table draping options.

Dress the stage with a few plants and flowers if appropriate.

Above all, set the temperature at slightly cool –no higher than 70 F. At informal sessions, advise attendees to bring a sweater to ensure their comfort throughout the day. We've learned that you cannot please 100% of the people 100% of the time!

### ⑤ ROOM SET UP

Seating. For theatre style arrangements, ask the facility coordinator to make sure chairs are set at least 3-4 inches apart. There's nothing worse than feeling squeezed in because chairs are placed too close together. Also, it's better to

under seat a room if the exact number of attendees is uncertain. Have a few stacks of chairs placed in a corner or in an adjoining room. These can be added later if required. A half empty room created by setting out too many chairs gives a poor visual impression.

Speakers appreciate a full room –the energy is much better contained. Also, avoid cavernous rooms –check out the facility well in advance. A cozy intimate, pleasantly full room is much better than 100 people in a room that is three times too big, with huge ceilings and hollow echoing sound.

## **6 AUDIO VISUAL**

The number one rule here is, test everything in advance. If you have not hired a professional AV company, make sure microphones have new batteries, and that laptops, projectors, screens, VCRs, teleprompters are set up properly and are all working.

Ask your speakers to do a sound and room check at least one hour before attendees enter the room. Last minute surprises are unprofessional. Good preparation will minimize, if not eliminate, any technology glitches.

Make sure the speakers have communicated clearly what their A/V and room set up requirements are, well in advance. Some requests may affect your budget!

## **7 REGISTRATION**

Make sure that attendees have very clear instructions ahead of the event – dates, times, location, how to find the facility, dress code, weather, airport information, shuttle / taxi service, hotels and pricing, meals, additional expenses not covered at the event and contact information.

Set up a special website if possible.

Also, to minimize last minute situations, set clear time deadlines for registration with incentives to reserve early.

To handle larger groups, have several registration tables. If attendees have pre-registered, have alphabetical lists made up to make it easy for them to check in and receive name tags, binders, handouts, meal tickets etc. Large colorful signs posted high on walls or on easels will make it easier for people to find their way. In larger facilities, it's a good idea to have a few enthusiastic greeters stationed inside the main entrance doors to guide people to the registration area. Extra signage also helps.

A quick and easy flow into the meeting room(s) is better than a mob scene around one understaffed registration table. Long line ups cause irritability and stress.

Have a meeting of your registration team a couple of days before the opening session to discuss roles and responsibilities and any outstanding issues. Select people who are enthusiastic, people oriented, and well organized. Have a few “floaters” on your team who can be available for emergency situations or to provide additional support to those who need it. Have a debriefing session a few days after the meeting, (or on-site if out of town people are involved). Use this for feedback, positive and negative. Make an Action List of things to improve that will help the next meeting to be even better.

Staff should be easy to identify –special T-shirts and large name tags are useful here. Unique hats also allow your team to stand out. Also attendee name tags are worthwhile. Have first names big and bold, surnames smaller, plus home town, province/state and country, if applicable.

### 8 FACILITY COORDINATION

Obviously a face to face meeting with the hotel or facilities coordinator is essential before the event. Prepare a thorough checklist of your requirements and make sure they have a copy that includes seating arrangements and any special requirements. Ensure you have the name and cell phone of the contact person who will be dedicated to your group on the actual day of the event. Make sure that such a person exists!

Other Hints: Before you even book the facility, ask for a few references and make the calls. Ask the tough questions about service, food quality etc.

Hotels: Negotiate a few complimentary rooms for VIP's or at least no-charge upgrades with fruit baskets. If there are a lot of people staying at the hotel and eating meals, you may be able to have the meeting room and /or tea and coffee free of charge. Remember, there's no harm in asking!

P.S.

Most important –check that washrooms are plentiful and close to the meeting room.

### 9 RUNNING ON TIME

One of the biggest challenges at conferences is starting and finishing on time. Make this a goal and communicate this to everyone on your team. Ask for ideas and feedback. Make a specific note to remind every speaker and M.C. what their specific time slot is and have them stick to it. Hold up 10 minute, 5 minute and one minute signs at the back of the room as reminders.

Provide adequate time at breaks and meal times for people to leave the room, check product tables, use washrooms, grab a coffee and return. You cannot move 500 people this way in ten minutes!

If you have open Q&A sessions, monitor these too. Often they run way over time.

Be fair to the speaker –professional speeches and workshops are carefully planned. Remind the M.C. to read the speakers introduction as is and avoid a mini-speech of their own!

### 10 OTHER BITS AND PIECES

- Consider creative door prizes and draws to inject some fun into the proceedings. Also, ask the speaker to donate an autographed book or CD album.
- Buy small gifts of appreciation for the people behind the scenes. Hand written thank you notes are also valued. Consider giving a gift of a book to each person attending the conference. We will autograph Power of Focus books and offer volume discount pricing.
- Speakers enjoy a specific testimonial letter within two weeks of the event, provided they did an excellent job of course!
- **Do not record** audio or video without the speaker's written permission.
- Handout materials –it's usually best to include these in the program binder. However some speakers prefer their materials to be handed out during their presentation. ASK!

- Above all, have fun. Coordinating meetings can be very stressful. Delegate well. Focus on your strengths and allow others to focus on theirs. Schedule a massage or two to relieve any undue tension. Even better, take a short vacation a week after the conference. Learn to laugh at the little things that inevitably will go wrong (and even the big ones!) After all, it's only an event –no doubt there'll be plenty more that you can make even better.

I hope these tips are helpful and we wish you great success as you plan your way into the future.

Sincerely,

Les & Fran Hewitt and  
The Power of Focus Team