

Timely Tips for Planning Your Next Meeting or Event

You have been delegated the task of planning and organizing the next corporate event, be it the annual company sales meeting, a new product launch, employee appreciation event, an employee transfer or retirement sendoff, or a state-of-the-company presentation by the CEO. The enormous task of putting together and organizing all the elements of this event can be very stressful and overwhelming.

So much of putting a meeting together requires taking care of the details -- just like putting together a complicated jigsaw puzzle. Being a detail-oriented person is a definite plus. With the hundreds of pieces that make up the meeting puzzle, creating checklists is one of the best ways to monitor all the details.

Being the meeting organizer, one has to have a number of different skills, be a perpetual learner of skills he or she does not possess, or outsource the gaps. You must know how to manage time, evaluate results, apply a positive attitude, and keep a sense of humor throughout the planning process.

Tip #1: Determine your goals and objectives

Decide what the focus for the event is.

- Is it educational, business, or social?
- Should the event generate income or be a company expense?
- What will your audience expect to see and hear?
- If your event is multi-faceted, what percentage of business, educational, and social programs entail?
- What is the budget?

Make sure to consider the importance of your message and getting it across to your audience.

Tip #2: Determine the best timing

Timing is crucial; the type of event or meeting dictates some of the many things that you need to consider. Some of the items to think about are:

- What type of event is it?
- Should it take place during the week or weekend?
- Should it be held during the day or evening?
- Should it take place during a particular season or time of year?
- Is it best to avoid religious holidays?
- Will this event be affected by major sporting events?

Tip #3: Come up with a theme

Creating a theme helps with many other items on your checklist. You can integrate your exciting theme into the selection of food, decorations, entertainment, staff clothing, and giveaway items for the participants.

Tip #4: Once you create the theme thread it into everything

Consider designing a special logo incorporating the theme. Print it on all the meeting collateral, including badges, folders, posters, and meeting programs. If you are having special speakers invited to motivate the audience, determine if they can incorporate your theme into their presentation.

Tip #5: Investigate special venues

Hotels, party centers, and banquet halls can be ho-hum. Consider staging your event some place special. You might consider:

- Resort centers
- Cruise ships or yachts
- Museums
- Mansions
- Sporting arenas or
- Theaters

You need to make sure that they can provide all the meeting support required for your function. You will need to estimate the total number of attendees and make certain the venue can comfortably hold a meeting for the estimated size of the group. The best tool to use for correct sizing of the room is THE ARRANGER by MPI. It is an unbiased way to determine if the room size will be adequate for your group. Do not be swayed by the venue. Remember, they want your business so they are going to "make it fit." It is wise to do a personal site visit before your final decision.

Tip #6: Set time aside to do a site visit

After you determine the location, plan to do a site visit with the facility staff to:

- Validate room size
- Confirm room setup
- Determine audiovisual support
- Go over special requirements
- Preliminary plan food and beverage

Do this early in the planning cycle. You want to give yourself ample time to move to another facility if this one is not right for your attendees.

Tip #7: Provide entertainment and a special ambiance

Participants will look forward to being entertained especially after a stressful session that has been very demanding. Music, magicians, celebrities, entertainment and decorations can add fun and spark excitement to your event. Dinner theater performance or corporate theater, using actors to dramatize a company's image, new product or service can be very effective. For business meetings, special audience participation role-playing can provide a great way to deliver new methods of management in an entertaining and educational way. Additionally custom videos and slide shows are great ways to provide entertainment.

Tip #8: Capture the moment

Take many pictures, make sure that you plan to have several of your staff armed with digital cameras to capture as much of the meeting and other social portions of your event. Participants will appreciate a visual reminder of the fun time they had at your affair. You may consider hiring a professional photographer to capture the formal happenings of your event.

Tip #9: Consider hiring outside consultants

Hiring certified professional consultants to help plan and execute that special event will make it even more extraordinary and assist in boosting attendance. Consider hiring a person with a CMP (Certified Meeting Professional) and/or CMM (Global Certification in Meeting Management) designation. Ask how many meetings of this size they have planned. Ask for references. Often an outside prospective gives you a fresh and creative approach.

In addition, if the budget permits, consider hiring outside consultants for:

- Presentations
- Staging and
- Photography

Tip #10: Make sure you hire the right talent

Just as important as a personal site visit, make sure you audition the talent you hire. Get at least three references and CALL them. It is embarrassing to have a performer provide a routine that is wrong for your audience.

De-de Mulligan, CMP, CMM has planned and executed over 950 events. She is Ohio's only independent planner with both CMP and CMM designations. Meeting Professional International named Mulligan Ohio's Planner of the Year in 2006. You can reach De-de at 330.528.3523 or dede@mulliganmanagementgroup.com.