

TIPS FOR STAGING A GREAT EVENT!

A free resource from

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Here are some keys for making sure your event goes smoothly and seamlessly. We want to give your audience the best chance to be entertained, educated, amused, and uplifted!

- 1. HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?**
- 2. WHAT ABOUT SEATING?**
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HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

A great length for a keynote presentation is about 45 minutes, and rarely longer than an hour. Keynotes are most effective when focused.

**Sometimes for a special evening event, it works to expand it to a longer, more varied program.*

Occasionally for certain groups, like caregivers or educators, I expand a Comedy Keynote Concert to as long as 90 minutes and include some material that goes into more depth about their specific challenges. Longer presentations like this usually require a speaker with some expertise in your specific industry. The keynote actually begins to border on a workshop or training experience.

How long is a good Concert/Entertainment event?

For an open-to-the-public event, like a community sponsored concert where you sell tickets, obviously a longer program is in order. (I usually do about two hours, sometimes with an intermission.)

If you have multiple performers, one huge mistake a lot of organizers make is giving each performer too much time. It's always better to leave the audience feeling filled up and wanting more, rather than filled to the point of boredom and tuned-out.

Don't keep the schedule a secret!

It would seem to go without saying, but make sure both the speaker/entertainer and the attendees/audience know *when* things will start, and *how long* each part of the program lasts. *Especially if two or more speakers/performers/events are back-to-back.* (Amazingly, sometimes even printed programs are not always clear on this.)

**Sometimes one part of an event (or one speaker/presenter) will run longer than expected, cutting into a 2nd speaker's time. Handing out awards and prizes, for example, can very easily run longer than you expect. This is a great way to handicap your 2nd speaker and make it hard for he/she to do a great job. Careful communication and planning can almost always prevent this.*

If for some reason you have to adjust your speaker's allotted time, try to give them as much notice as possible so he/she can make adjustments. It's much harder to adjust on the fly.

SEATING

Theater seating is more conducive to a great presentation (*generally a lot more!*) than banquet seating. The energy in the room is always higher when people are seated theater style. Having them closer together generates more laughter and keeps attention focused more easily. Noisy distractions like cups, saucers, servers are not a problem.

**The closer together people are sitting, the better the experience!*

If your event requires banquet seating, try never to schedule a speaker *during* a meal. When people are dining, almost all of them would rather enjoy their food and conversation. After the servers have cleared the tables and the dishes are no longer rattling, *then* bring out your speaker or entertainer!

How far from the stage?

In general, the closer the audience is to the presenter, the better. A big distance between the two just feels weird and doesn't foster rapport or intimacy. Ideally the first row should be 10-15 feet from the presenter. Try to arrange the stage as far from the entrance/exit doors as possible.

Indoors is always better than outdoors. Fewer noises, fewer distractions, more focused attention. If outdoors, try to have a tent with sides that close, and have the entrance in the back, away from the stage.

One of the most helpful things you can do is to have a meeting, or at least a conversation, with both your support staff and the venue support staff about noise and distractions. Things like chairs being moved, doors opening and closing, servers moving around. Encourage them to take steps to minimize all noise and movement during any presentation.

**Remember, the fewer distractions, the better your speaker will be!*

SPEAKER INTRODUCTION

It does make a difference, and is almost like an audience warm-up. An enthusiastic, articulate (and fun) introduction sets a great tone. Try to have an outgoing person who likes being in front of an audience do this. If the introducer knows or has some contact with the speaker personally, even better. Audiences pick up on enthusiasm and authenticity.

If the speaker's intro is more than one sentence, it's good to practice it. Especially if it's funny.

SHOULD YOU HAVE AN EMCEE?

Here's a simple tip that can pay dramatic benefits both to your event and to you as an event or meeting planner.

Consider having an emcee (or conference "weaver") to provide humorous interludes, musical moments, left-brain time-outs, professional introductions, and *continuity* to the day-long or multi-day event. Every conference I've attended where this was done, the response has been fantastic.

The National Speakers Association, for example, regularly incorporates this feature into their annual convention. This is a convention of world-class speakers, every one of whom is a fabulous presenter! If they recognize the benefit, you can imagine how it will impact your event.

(Full disclosure: this is one area where I specialize and regularly receive the highest evaluations at a conference. But there are others who do it also.)

SOUND AND LIGHTING

Don't scrimp on the sound! Budget for it. Many a great talk has been torpedoed by tech problems. Many hotel ballrooms have in-ceiling loudspeakers, for instance, which are often tinny and outdated.

Make sure all the microphones work and have backups. Make sure the sound is rich and full throughout the room, with no feedback.

Speaker/presenters have different preferences for microphones. Some like a wireless headset, some like a wireless lavalier (clipped to the clothing), some are fine with a wired mic on a podium or on a stand. They'll usually tell you if they have a preference, but it's good to ask and get their tech preferences in writing. (Example: it doesn't work for a guitar player like me to stand behind a podium!)

Powerpoint and video additions are a whole new angle, and need to be tested beforehand as well. Audiences love it when these work, and get bored fast when they don't. It's good to allow plenty of time for testing these prior to the talk. It's important to have fresh batteries for the remotes, and anything else, like wireless microphones.

If you're using a stage, make sure it's well lit with soft lighting. If you have spotlights, try not to blind the presenter! Most speaker/entertainers like to be able to see the audience. It's much easier to interact with them and develop rapport that way. This is another area to cover beforehand so everybody's on the same page.

PRODUCT SALES

If the speaker has books, CDs, or other materials to sell, let the audience know during the intro, and leave enough time at the end for people to peruse the table. Assuming the audience really connects with your speaker, they'll want to take something home to keep the experience fresh, and they'll appreciate having the time to pick it up and get it signed.

Some speakers have the ability, given a little time, to produce a special CD, DVD, or book for your audience. Often this can be done with your company info and logo on the cover. These make fabulous premium gifts for your attendees and keep the good feelings going long after the event. Ask if your speaker can do this and what it would cost. (It never hurts to ask!)

For a large group, most presenters would love to have one or two volunteers to help with sales. The ideal volunteer has an organized (left-brain) mind, is good with numbers (money), and likes people. Many times a speaker is happy to give free product to helpful volunteers.

EXTRA SPECIAL TOUCHES

Consider having other unexpected moments of fun for your audience! We all love to be surprised with something fun and out of the blue that shifts our state of mind, especially if we've been exposed to a lot of left-brain content.

Possibilities include:

- short funny videos
 - recorded music
 - live music
 - prize drawings
 - fun toys
 - the joke of the day
 - goofy gifts, etc.
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- Example: I once attended an event that had remote controlled mini-blimps flying around the room during the break! Everybody loved it.

We humans have a focused attention span that maxes out at about 90 minutes. After that, we need a break! (Especially if we've had a lot of coffee...) One of the very best things you can do is schedule your event with lots of right-brain mini-breaks between speakers and sessions.

More Help Available

I'm happy to discuss any aspect of staging an event with you, even if I'm not your speaker or entertainer. Feel free to call or email with any questions. I'm here to serve.

All good wishes for a fantastic event!

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