

Professional Speaker

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You Can't
Do It Alone

Meeting Planners Talk

Pretend you're a fly on the wall, listening to meeting planners talk about you after a meeting. On a plane ride home from the Meeting Professionals International (MPI) convention in Toronto, two planners were discussing speakers. One meeting planner praised a speaker for the research done to prepare for the meeting. The other actually took the conference brochure out of her bag, circled a speaker's name and said she would never invite that presenter back. Which speaker would you rather be?

To ensure meeting planners are singing your praises, we interviewed three seasoned meeting planners to get their suggestions on leaving a great impression. Here are the results:

Do your homework about the audience and the organization.

"I look for a speaker—using videos and Web sites—who has substance of import to my audience of tax accountants," states Tracey Smith, CMP, manager of events programming for Research Institute of America (RIA).

"It helps if they are entertaining, too. But I dismiss those who use too many buzzwords, corporate or psycho-babble, and those who don't adapt their talk to my audience." Smith adds, "Speakers who ask for detailed information about the group they're meeting are always more professional. I also like the ones who are willing to take questions from the audience or meet with VIPs." Meeting Professional International's Meeting Planner of the Year,



Meeting Planners Complain of Sloppiness, Lateness, Sales Pitches

Meeting professionals, however, feel it is the duty of the speaker to familiarize themselves with the company and/or event, preview the agenda and customize the presentation. They said speakers are not always upfront with what they are willing to do. For example, some meeting professionals want speakers to be available to the press, allow time to sign books and not get hung up on ego. Their frustrations include speakers who don't arrive on time, fail to provide handout materials in advance and turn a great presentation into a sales pitch.

Betty Garrett, owner of Garrett Speakers Bureau, says it's important for speakers not to misrepresent their background, talent or content.

NSA Past President Terry Paulson, PhD, CSP, CPAE, agrees. "Deliver what you promise or don't promise," he says.

Possible Solutions

The results of this survey show that both professional speakers and meeting professionals are requesting more communication and more of a partnership relationship. For a successful event, all parties need to reach a clear understanding about expectations and obligations. Everyone should be clear and concise when deciding which duties belong to which person. It's a good idea to spell out this communication in writing and then confirm it in person. Don't assume someone else is responsible.

Both parties agreed that timelines, details and proper documentation were important. They also felt it was important to return phone calls and have face-to-face meetings prior to the event.

A sense of partnership and a good attitude seemed to be key in creating an atmosphere of success. "In dealing with each other, there has to be flexibility on both sides of the equation and everyone has to want to win," says Garrett. "You must have respect and the

right chemistry between speaker, planner and audience."

By communicating more effectively, professional speakers and meeting planners can establish a relationship beneficial to themselves and their audience. The end result is an event where everyone receives a standing ovation.

"When you're in a partnership with a professional meeting planner, it's like heaven on earth," says Clarke-Epstein. "A lot of tough details are easily taken care of."

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