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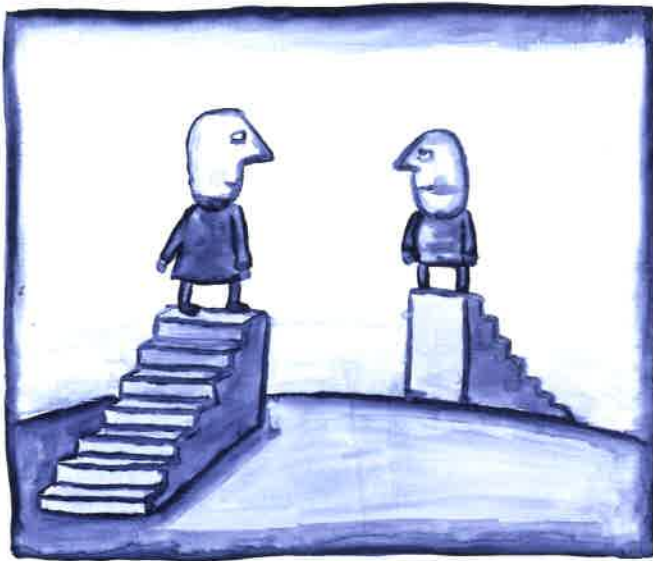
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Talking Points

Communication is Key to a Better Relationship with Meeting Planners

LINDA BYARS SWINDLING, BA, JD
Carrollton, Texas



Professional speakers and meeting planners could easily improve their business relationship through better communication. This may not be a news flash for many speakers, but the message came across in big bold letters in a survey sponsored by the National Speakers Association (NSA) and the Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter of Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The survey identified problems each group faces and suggested solutions which universally involved enhanced communication.

“A systemized communication plan can help you avoid unpleasant surprises,” says NSA President-Elect Chris Clarke-Epstein. “You won’t run into a situation where you think you’re doing program A, and the agenda has you doing program B.” She also suggests finalizing the agenda with the meeting planner prior to any presentation to avoid many of the typical problems that were uncovered in the survey.

Speakers Complain of Logistical Problems

Most of the problems were logistical in nature, and responses tended to point fingers. For example, speakers feel that meeting planners should check equipment, maintain checklists, keep distracting noise down and give them time to test the equipment. They want rooms that are the proper size for the group, with adequate lighting and sound.

They also want a knowledgeable contact person for glitches that occur.

Meeting professionals, on the other hand, said that speakers should provide them with an A/V requirement list and know their logistic needs far in advance. They feel it is the speaker’s job to communicate the details of the presentation and pre-test the equipment.

The survey found that both groups place responsibility on each other to research the organization, its needs and ultimate goals.

Speakers want to have all the information about the event, attendees and a theme beforehand. They want a well-delivered introduction and the ability to talk with audience members prior to the presentation. Cavalier attitudes from meeting professionals and being treated like another line item on the budget were among other complaints.

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."

Linda Byars Swindling is an attorney-mediator, consultant, professional speaker and co-author of The Consultant's Legal



Guide. Known as "The Peacemaker," Linda is committed to improving working relationships through communication and negotiation. You may contact Linda at www.lindaswindling.com.

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