

**AN ANALYSIS OF SUCCESSFUL
EVENT PLANNING**

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO EVENT PLANNING

Event planning has become an important consideration for any entity wishing to promote its business. Promotional events are now necessary for any organization's marketing plan. Carefully planned events allow organizations a closer, more personal means of interacting with current or potential customers or supporters. The success or failure of a business can be determined, in large part, by the events it sponsors. Event planning can be defined as the coordination of all aspects of an event, including budgeting and program development. Designing and producing an event is analogous to a live stage production. Once the event begins, there is no turning back. There is no guarantee of a successful outcome; however, event organizers can plan, prepare, and be prepared for the unanticipated (Allen, 2000).

The recent growth of event planning is accredited to the success of the Los Angeles, 1984 summer Olympics, which demonstrated the importance of sponsor participation in promoting an event. This event prompted extraordinary growth in the business of event planning, such that by 1995, this industry generated \$4.7 billion (Association of National Advertisers, Inc. [ANA], 1995).

Success in event planning requires a coordinated action plan so that every detail is addressed. Primary consideration for this action plan should focus on the overall goal of the event. Additional factors to consider include budget allowances, food and beverage arrangements, date and time, location, promotional activities, and entertainment or guest

speakers. Event planners must always consider the potential for problems and develop alternate solutions prior to the event. The final step in event planning is to provide a means for evaluation of the event for future planning and improvement.

Event planning is used in any setting where promotion of a business's goods or services is of primary consideration. It can provide an effective marketing technique to help the organization achieve a desired goal of increased market share, for example. Well-planned promotional events leave a favorable impression on interested parties, investors and buyers. The level of success of a promotional event directly reflects upon the perceived success of the business itself. By hosting a successful event, an organization can demonstrate an attention to detail to its customers and potential customers.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF EVENT PLANNING

Event planning begins with the development of an action plan or a mission statement: i.e., What do we hope to achieve as a result of the event? A clear purpose is a valuable resource in planning budgets and time lines. The creation of an action plan can bring together creative energies from individuals who want the event to be beneficial. The action plan needs to include goals for the organization's event. These goals may include promoting products or services, funding for charitable causes, increasing public awareness of a cause or changing the public's perception of that cause (Wiersma, 1995).

The first step is to gather a group of key organizers. Key organizers may include the "organization's president, CEO, executive director, chairman of the board, corporate officer, and certain department heads" (Price, 1999, p. 4). The team must include decision makers and implementers. Decision makers are those who determine the overall guidelines and are ultimately accountable for the project. Decision makers are also responsible for the financial and legal aspects of the event. Implementers are the people who do the actual tasks required to carry out the project. These tasks might include organizing the speakers, catering and entertainment, along with any other duties that may be required to ensure a smooth event (Price, 1999). This group of key organizers might brainstorm by questioning why they are planning this event and what the organization hopes to accomplish. This exercise helps to develop an action plan.

Determining deadlines is a crucial element of any action plan. The key organizers must develop a time line in which tasks and projects are to be completed. Deadlines allow for smooth transitions from one step in the planning process to the next. Assigning duties to individuals to meet deadlines can assist the key organizers' transition from one step to the next. A well organized record keeping system is important to this process. As part of this record keeping system, a time line and calendar are useful follow up tools (Spalding, 1994). By assigning a time frame to each step in the planning process, the total resources required for completion of the project can be more efficiently utilized. A useful technique for developing a time frame is to visualize the desired end result and work back from that point. This technique is also useful to ensure that adequate time is allowed for planning the event (Allen, 2000). In addition, planning schedules, forms, and detailed checklists are useful in streamlining the planning process, but only if organized in a structured, easy to use manner. Organized files and records serve an additional benefit in helping to plan for future events (Price, 1999).

Once the key organizing team is assembled, the purpose of the event must be decided. Is the objective of the event to educate, entertain, or solicit donations from the audience? All of these purposes can be and often are interrelated. The end result of the event typically involves revenue. Regardless of whether the event is to sell a product or increase awareness, revenue is required to ensure the ongoing viability of that organization.

If education is the objective, one must first understand that the general public is apprehensive of an educational sales pitch. The promotional materials must focus on the

educational aspects of the event. For example, an educational event sponsored by sales agents might “. . . give agents an opportunity to provide people with valuable information without regard to the products or services they offer” (Huling, 1998, p. 44). Taking the educational route might give an organization more leverage with its prospects. This leverage is established by developing a trust relationship between an attendee and the organization, which should profit both at a later date.

Entertainment can provide a profitable forum for organizations. It is a widely recognized way for patrons to have fun, while they spend money. Some forms of entertainment are state fairs, festivals, sporting events, concerts, and timely celebrations. Revenue can be produced from ticket sales, games, food, souvenirs, and admission fees. Theme events are another approach to generating monies. Theme events can range from historical celebrations to recognized holidays. Timely celebrations can be held in conjunction with introduction of new products or causes. This can provide a good opportunity to introduce new clients to a product or new benefactors to a cause (Wiersma, 1995).

Soliciting donations is typically the underlying reason for major charity events. Unfortunately, events can develop a bad reputation if the audience perceives that money is the only mission. As Reiss (1998) reported, “While raising money is a key concern of event planners, too often it is the only concern. By limiting potential rewards to a single dimension, the possibility of even greater returns is often ignored” (p. 34). An experienced event planner recognizes the value of devoting more resources to developing the relationship with the client with a later payoff rather than a simple, quick return.

CHAPTER III

BUDGETS FOR EVENT PLANNING

The ultimate success of an event depends in large part on the budget preparation phase of planning. Preparing a budget is a crucial element in event planning, regardless of the size of the event. Essential steps in preparing a budget include the following: establish the goals and objectives the event planners want to achieve, periodic comparisons of the actual costs against budget estimates, and comparison of the actual total costs against the final budget allocation (Price, 1989). An accurate record keeping system, as noted in Chapter II, is an important element in the budgeting process. Cost sheets are a useful tool for budget planning and record keeping. A proposed budget can be laid out on a cost sheet as it is developed. This allows planners to determine what items can be included within the limits of the proposed budget. This process provides additional planning benefits by allowing the organizers to explore alternate choices that could be included within the budget parameters (Allen, 2000).

Establishing a budget for an event requires an accurate determination of the size of the guest list. Depending upon the theme of the event, possible invitees include government officials, corporate staff, local media, current or potential sponsors, organization members, and customers. Access to the event can be controlled through direct invitation, advertisement, or the purchase of tickets. Planning an event for potential customers requires attention to marketing strategies to determine a client base.

Lesonsky, Nagel and Guest (1997) list several helpful questions for targeting clients,

“Who are my potential customers? . . . How many are there? . . . Where are they located? . . . How can I persuade them to do business with me?” (p. 119).

Promotional activities must be included in the budget planning process. Promotion of an event can be in many forms: direct mail, publicity in publications or media outlets, Internet, or telephone solicitation. The key organizers must look at how much cost is involved per contact, how often the customer must be contacted and through which form of promotion. Letter and post card teasers are effective as an initial means of contact when an event is planned during a busy season. If the event is large and open to the general public, television advertising may be a costly, yet beneficial means of attracting people. If the event is on a smaller, more personalized scale, budget planners might consider mailing invitations or making direct contacts (Lesonsky et al., 1997).

Budgeting for event staff is another important consideration. Occasionally, the event site provides or requires the use of their staff in conjunction with the use of their facility. Organizational employees can also be used as a staffing resource for events. Budget consideration must be given to additional reimbursement for employees versus hiring professional event staff (Huling, 1998). The additional cost of professional event staff may produce greater payoffs in the long run.

Food and beverages can be very costly and can easily be underestimated if not carefully considered. Most hotels, restaurants, or catering services are willing to negotiate to develop creative menus that fit within a specified budget. A first step in this process is determining the fixed costs of providing the food and beverages, such as room rental or waiter charges. The number of guests is a significant determinant of expenses. Once

these fixed costs are known, the amount available to spend on foods and beverages can be decided (Allen, 2000). Cost saving ideas may include cash bars, use of wait staff to distribute hors d'oeuvres, use of napkins instead of plates, and providing fewer coffee breaks (Price, 1989).

Decoration is a variable budget item that can be controlled easily. Some venues include all the furnishings and decorations with the room rental. Venue selection might be influenced by the appearance of the building's interior and the purpose of the event. Careful consideration must be given to selection of decorating materials. Would it be preferable to allocate decorating resources on one area or spread decorations around for greater effect (Allen, 2000)? Floral arrangements are a popular decorating item that can vary greatly in cost. Careful oversight is required to prevent flowers, or other decorations, from exceeding budget limits.

Depending upon the theme and size of the event, budget consideration must be given to activities or entertainment for event participants. This is another budget item that can vary widely in cost, but well planned activities can provide substantial returns in the long run. A fun event is generally a memorable event. Before allocating significant budget resources for entertainment or activities, consideration should be given to the intended audience and their preferences. Event size and duration are other important factors to consider when budgeting for entertainment and activity expenses. Special events present the opportunity to reach large numbers of people as a captive audience and involve them with the organization in an entertaining manner. This fact should not be lost on event organizers when appropriating resources for entertainment (Reiss, 1998).

Profits from solid budgeting can occur in two different ways. Monetary goals can either be to break even or profit. “It may seem like a waste of time to plan an event just to break even; however, if you go beyond the immediate, there are some practical reasons for going ahead with an event which appears not to be a revenue generator” (Esposito, 1998, p. 26). Breaking even can evolve into a profit later because of the increased knowledge and viability of that organization. Obviously, profiting appears to be the best motivation for planning an event. Avoid the misconception that an event must be lavish to be successful. Careful planning and budgeting can ensure event success as well as later organizational success.

CHAPTER IV

CATERING IN EVENT PLANNING

Proper planning for catering operations is an important element for event planning that should be given consideration from the start of the planning phase. Food service operations can be severely strained by lack of advance preparation. Attendees will expect food quality and quantity commensurate with the amount of money paid or donated to the organization. Considerations in catering for an event include inspection of the caterer, determination of foods available, special needs of the guests, the number of guests, and the theme as well as the time of day of the event.

Prior to selecting a caterer, a thorough inspection should be performed. Issues to address with potential caterers include determining: Who their contact person is during the planning phase and during the actual event; The availability of printed prices for menu selection and the ability to confirm those prices in advance; Limitations to menu selections only, portion sizes, substitutions for dietary restrictions; Other charges that might be expected, due dates for payments, and possible inclusion of linens, staff, and eating utensils. Consideration should also be given to the types of service available from the caterer depending upon the needs of the event (Price, 1989).

Availability of foods is another important factor to consider within the planning phase. The time of year of the event can greatly affect the prices of vegetables and fruits. Utilizing the seasonal foods located around the region will make it less expensive than using out of season vegetables or fruits. It is important to recognize which foods are

available frozen or made from scratch. This will affect the time spent preparing specific foods and quite possibly the price. “Complicated salads can take up to three hours to make, while hot food usually takes one hour . . .” (Andorka, 1998, p. 46). Lunch menus should be light because people are generally more health conscious than in the past.

Special needs of the guests are vital to the catering of the event. Find out if the attendees are primarily women or men and if there are any distinctive dietary requirements. For example, an event attended by women should focus on smaller, lighter fare while men tend to enjoy a hearty meal. An ice cream social would not be appropriate for a diabetic function. Ensure that the caterer can meet the special needs of these guests. Are substitutions available for particular diets and, if so, how much advance notice is required?

Giving attention to the specific needs of the attendees, can reduce the amount of excess food prepared for an event. Attention to details also demonstrates concern for the happiness of the guests.

The event theme and the time of day are equally important in catering considerations. The theme or type of event will largely determine the types and amounts of foods served. If it is a black tie gala, white-glove service might be expected. A buffet would be acceptable for a pre-football game party. If a short reception is planned, butler service might be the best way to serve hors d’oeuvres. This type of service calls for a wait person to serve foods on a tray or platter to mingling guests while controlling portions. Typically an attendee will expect a full meal if the event begins at 6:00 p.m. If an event begins later in the evening, cocktails and/or hor d’oeuvres are permissible (Price, 1989). Even if the catering type is not directly stated through the promotional tool, these general

rules of etiquette appear to be understood by most people. Wisely selecting a theme and the time of day of an event will help to provide a unforgettable event.

CHAPTER V

CONSIDERATION OF DATE FOR EVENT PLANNING

Selecting the ideal date for the event is an intricate and important aspect of event planning. An event planner must consider holiday periods, popular event sites and their availability, the day(s) of the week, along with many other factors. This decision must be made early in the planning stages to ensure that the planner is able to choose the date appropriate for an event rather than accepting a date when a particular venue is available. This happens regularly in large cities where venues are booked for twelve to eighteen months in advance. July and August are low travel months for conventions while October and November traditionally are popular business months. Mondays and Fridays are usually not popular for business travel, and Sundays are rarely used. These days could be useful, however, as bargaining tools for selection of a site that might have previously not been an option (Fisher, 1998).

For an event that hosts international attendees, cultural awareness should factor into the date planning process. Thorough research may be required of event planners to accommodate foreign visitors. Internet sources, including the U.S. State Department's web site, can provide information on foreign holidays and other cultural aspects related to planning a date for an event (Carey, Meyers, & Constant, 1998). For example, it may be difficult to conduct business with the Chinese in late January, when the Chinese New Year begins. Likewise, it would not be wise to schedule events for attendees from Moslem countries in January, when the Islamic holy period of Ramadan is occurring (Stith, 1998).

An additional consideration for date planning to accommodate attendees from other countries is to provide recovery time from jet lag. Event programs should not be scheduled immediately after the arrival of an international flight as weary travelers may require a day to adjust. Cultural awareness helps international event organizers avoid embarrassing mistakes and make global attendees feel comfortable and willing to concentrate on the objectives of the meeting or event.

Awareness of the community in which an event is planned and the availability of community resources should be considered when planning a date for an event. Hotel availability may vary seasonally in resort areas. Regular airline service to and from a community may facilitate planning an event date, whereas variations in daily flight schedules may require more careful consideration. Other events occurring in the community may compete with a planned event for hotel and venue space, as well as the availability of transportation for attendees. Potential venues or host hotels can provide helpful planning information in the form of monthly conference booking patterns.

Planning for availability is not limited to facilities only, but extends to the availability of event attendees as well. The time of the year has a significant impact on the willingness of guests to attend an event. The obvious problem with scheduling a large event during the summer months is that personal vacations tend to occur during these months. The holiday periods of November and December can present scheduling difficulties as well. For corporate functions, business cycles and specific company schedules may compete for the attention of potential event attendees. A company with a January to December fiscal year would ideally convene in January to start their new year

and ensure attendance of corporate executives who have just completed difficult planning activities for the coming year (Fisher 1998). Corporate meetings planned at the beginning of a company's fiscal year can serve the additional purpose of disseminating information on new programs, new company initiatives, and any additional information that needs to be passed on to rank-and-file members of the organization.

CHAPTER VI

SITE SELECTION IN EVENT PLANNING

Key organizers should develop selection criteria for the event site. Site selection can be determined by location, cost, availability, capacity, and services included. This process includes finding the ideal location for the event based upon accessibility of the location for event attendees. Alternative sites should also be selected in case the first preference is not available. The facilities under consideration should accommodate the event's needs while also enhancing the accomplishment of its objectives (Lindsay, 1994). The factors to consider should include space available to accommodate attendees, handicap accessibility, and indoor or outdoor options.

Event venue selection will depend upon the space required to accommodate all of the expected attendees and event staff. The type of event is also a factor in determining the needed space. For example, a formal dinner requires more space than a cocktail party. Another factor to consider is the kitchen space available for onsite food preparation if needed. A commonly overlooked space requirement is the availability and accessibility of restrooms. Bay (1998) states, "Be sure to have a site inspection to see for yourself, a crucial step so there are no surprises" (p. 134). Regardless of the information received about the site, it cannot be fully evaluated until it is visited by the event planner. A site comparison form is helpful when evaluating different sites. Areas to look for in site comparison include the following: condition of the meeting area, ease of access to meeting rooms, size of rooms, audio-visual equipment, and staff availability (Lindsay, 1994).

Handicap accessibility is a necessary consideration for event organizers. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guarantees protection for disabled persons in the area of public accommodations. Compliance with the ADA is a legal requirement that event planners must follow. The special needs of certain attendees must be addressed. Determining the special needs of attendees can be as simple as asking directly. Specific needs identified by event organizers must then be clearly communicated to the hosting facility. ADA requires the provision of auxiliary aids and services to individuals with impairments or disabilities. The ADA also prohibits extra charges by a facility or sponsor to cover the cost of these aids or services. An event sponsor that fails to make these aids and services available can be held liable for failing to comply with the provisions of the ADA. The law is clear in identifying sponsors of an event as sharing joint responsibility with the facilities they use. Compliance with the ADA should be included in the criteria for site research and inspection. Site inspection criteria for event planners could include hearing amplified telephones, tactile and braille signage for room and facility numbers, flashing and ringing fire alarms, and limited obstructions in walkways. Facilities not in compliance with the ADA should be disregarded as event sites (Lindsay, 1994).

Options for outdoor or indoor events can be important factors to consider when selecting an event site. Inside events should be arranged so that pillars, projection equipment, or room decorations do not block the view of those in attendance. Darkened rooms are needed for some events using projection equipment, and not all venues will be able to comply with this requirement (Allen, 2000). Outdoor event venues should provide an unobstructed view of the presentation area, and a backup plan in case of foul weather.

Outdoor events present their own unique problems in compliance with outdoor noise restrictions while ensuring that the sound system can be heard by all attendees.

Environmental noise can create unanticipated sound problems. The site for an outdoor event, planned for the evening, should also be inspected in the evening to determine lighting requirements. Adequate power, indoors or outdoors, should be provided for presentation gear, computers, or visual projection devices (Radwan, 1998).

CHAPTER VII

PROMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

An effective promotional strategy can serve as the foundation on which to build a successful event. Advance publicity on behalf of an organization prior to staging an event can help to increase attendance and build public awareness of the program. A number of options for providing advance publicity are available to event planners including newspapers or other media outlets, newsletters, Internet sites, and direct written or oral invitations. Regardless of the promotional strategy used, event information provided in advance must include the event date, place, time, participants, and ticket prices; special entertainment details; and any other unique details of interest to potential attendees of the event. If tickets will be required, advance notice should provide information on ticket sale locations. Charity events should provide information on the group benefitting from the event (Wiersma, 1995).

An advertising strategy should be developed in conjunction with the promotional plan. Developing an advertising strategy requires as much research as possible about the potential market to target. Effective advertising provides a direct line of communication about the organization or event to potential attendees. Good advertising strategies create a desire in people to attend the event and act on that desire. For an advertisement to be effective it must be simple, easily understood, truthful, informative, sincere, and oriented toward potential customers. Advertising media vary in effectiveness, and event planners should consider a number of factors when developing an advertising strategy. The cost

per contact varies among advertising media. Some forms of advertising may be able to reach more prospective clients for a set cost. The frequency of contact also varies, and planners must decide how often they want to contact potential attendees. The advertising medium selected must appeal to the appropriate senses to maximize its impact. For example, a print ad for a jazz festival will not be able to appeal to a potential customer's sense of hearing. Advertising effectiveness can also be enhanced by restricting the message to those people who are known to be the most likely prospects. A medical conference would be better served by limiting advertising to medical journals, for example (Lesonsky, et al., 1997).

Developing a relationship with media outlets, either print or electronic, is crucial to the success of an effective promotional strategy. Media outlets are responsible to their readers, viewers, and listeners to provide timely and interesting information. Press releases for events must be provided in a well-timed, interesting, and informative manner. Media organizations are not responsible for writing or talking about an event simply because they have been asked to do so. The media organization will decide on the merit of an event's promotional press release. It is therefore important that event planners maintain good relations with the local media (Wiersma, 1995).

Newsletters and other forms of direct mail advertising are another promotional option for event planners. Direct mail advertising has the advantage of offering greater selectivity in targeting prospects and increased flexibility in budgeting. Newsletters are a popular form of direct mail promotion, along with more personal sales letters or broad based organization brochures. Newsletters inform existing organization members about an

event and can be targeted to new prospects as well. Properly prepared newsletters are informative and contain less sales hype than other forms of direct mail promotion.

Newsletters should provide clear information about your organization and the planned event, including the specifics of time, date, location, etc., as outlined earlier. The newsletter acts as an extension of the organization, and should convey a professional image (Lesonsky, et al., 1997).

Internet promotion is an increasingly popular option for today's event planners. The use of a web site to promote an event can be an effective means to reach potential attendees, but careful planning is required to develop a web site with maximum effectiveness. An organization must have the technology and the resources to create and maintain the site. Web sites with distracting graphics that take too long to download will drive people away from the site. One should ensure that the web site is instantly clear and comprehensible to anyone who reads it. The home page of the site should contain all the critical information about the event including the name of the event, the sponsoring organization, the date(s) and time(s) of the event, the venue and its location, and ticket information. On-line promotional materials should convey a professional image of the organization and capture the attention of the intended audience. A site that does not convey a professional image will not appeal to potential customers.

On-line registration is an option for an event, but it must be easy to complete. An excessively detailed on-line registration form is not needed to promote an event. On-line registration can be enhanced by offering web only discounts. Registration can also be enhanced with an option to print registration materials. A number of prospects will make

their decision off-line and require a hardcopy version of the registration form. Corporate events and trade shows can enhance the promotional qualities of their event web site by providing links to company or exhibitor web sites or e-mail addresses. Another effective on-line marketing tool is the free e-mail newsletter. E-mail newsletters are effective mechanisms for delivering repeated messages to a target audience. Web site visitors should be provided with an on-line option to register for a free e-mail newsletter. Event updates can then be sent to all e-mail subscribers periodically to maintain their interest. These updates should also contain links to on-line registration for the event (Fox, 1998).

Written invitations convey a sense of personal contact with potential event guests. Carefully worded invitations can create the impression of individualized attention to each recipient. Written invitations to an event also have the advantage of being selectively directed, providing event planners an effective means for determining a set number of guests. The variety of written invitations is limited only by the creative constraints of the event planning staff. The invitation should grab the invitee's visual attention, which then encourages more detailed examination of the specifics of the invitation (Wiersma, 1995). Some companies may prefer to use direct, personal contacts between salespeople and their clients to promote company events or trade shows. This informal approach of oral invitations conveys a sense of personal connection to prospective event attendees (O'Sullivan, 1998). Event planners will go to great lengths to create an eye catching and captivating announcement for high profile parties.

CHAPTER VIII

CONSIDERATION OF ACTIVITIES IN EVENT PLANNING

Choosing an event's activities or entertainment is a responsibility that must be meticulously considered. Knowing the audience is the first step into planning an effective activity that will be appreciated and memorable. If the attendees are part of the same group or club, celebrating a holiday, in a particular age range, or even from a specific part of the world, the event planner can tailor the activities to enhance the event. Certain themes also lend themselves to particular activities and entertainment. Keep in mind that what may be appropriate for one group might be offensive to another. For example, casino night might not be what a religious organization had in mind for their entertainment. Popular activities in event planning are speakers, music, and games that promote involvement with either the organization or each other. Strict guidelines should be given to any speaker, musician, magician, master of ceremonies or any other entertainer (Allen, 2000).

Utilizing a speaker can be a fantastic way to introduce new clients and maintain current clients in an organization. Speakers can give a sense of empowerment to their listeners, as well as a call to action. Well known speakers can easily consume an entire budget by charging upwards of \$50,000 for one speech. According to Caryn Meyers (1998), most organizations do not have the budget to spend that amount. "For \$7,000 to \$10,000, you can get a keynote speaker who is not necessarily a household name, but gets powerful results for your organization" (p. 16).

Care must be taken when choosing musical entertainment for an event. Know the audience and consider the type of event when making entertainment plans. Check references and get referrals for bands, musicians, or deejays. Ensure that the people hired to provide entertainment for an event are professional and reliable. Entertainer contracts should also be checked carefully for any hidden provisions. It is also wise for event planners to know who they are hiring to provide entertainment and should be familiar with their act. Thoughtfully planned musical entertainment can enhance any event (Allen, 2000).

As an alternative to more formal entertainment, participatory games involving attendees can provide memorable activities for any event. Audience involvement activities can be designed to educate the audience; which can enhance sales at a corporate event or increase public awareness and donations at a charity event. Audience participation in event activities can alleviate some of the apprehension that some people feel when attending large events with large numbers of guests. Through interactive participation, attendees can become more familiar with each other and the sponsoring organization (Huling, 1998).

CHAPTER IX

PLANNING FOR PROBLEMS

Successful event planners leave nothing to chance. Detailed planning and flawless execution are hallmarks of smoothly run events. As part of a complete and detailed event program, event planners must consider the possibility that something will go wrong. Unforeseen problems can arise at any time, and contingency planning is necessary for event planners to deal successfully with these problems. The best method to deal with these potentially troublesome situations is to prepare for them in advance (ANA, 1995). In developing a contingency plan, event organizers should place a high priority on monitoring the behavior and safety of event guests. Potential problem areas involve caterers or venue food service, scheduled presentations or entertainment, facilities, and parking

An effective contingency plan will provide a means for monitoring and dealing with the behavior of attendees. At any gathering of people, there is always a potential for rowdy or unruly actions to occur. Event planners should be aware of this and develop plans to deal with inappropriate behavior. This is especially true for events that serve alcohol. Alcohol is frequently the catalyst that fuels boorish or wild behavior. Sponsors of an event should be aware of the risks involved when serving alcohol. Attendees who have been over served present a tremendous liability for the sponsoring organization in the form of a potential lawsuit. Attendees who demonstrate behavior that could injure themselves, others, or the organization must be dealt with directly, but in the least confrontational manner possible. Event planners can anticipate these possibilities and take

action in advance to minimize their impact on the event. Group activities encourage friendly interactions between attendees and provide an alternative to drinking. Food should be readily available to all guests. Excessive drinking can be controlled by staffing the event with experienced bartenders, with instructions to stop serving guests who have had too much or are exhibiting a belligerent attitude. Disastrous consequences can be avoided by arranging rides for guests that have had too much to drink (Ligos, 1998).

Another potential problem area involves the catering, or food service, at an event. If food service is slow, attendees may become disgruntled, which could ruin the rest of the program. Multiple serving lines or additional wait staff could be used to alleviate the potential for slow service. The event agenda may have to be altered to keep attendees in a pleasant mood. For example, the after dinner entertainment could be introduced early to calm an impatient crowd. Other possible problems when serving food include the unlikely scenarios of food poisoning or someone choking on food. A thorough contingency plan also includes arrangements for medical attention of guests (McMahon, 1990).

Entertainment is another aspect of the event that could pose problems. A detailed schedule of events should be prepared ahead of time. This schedule must include everything that will occur on stage at the event. Potential problems can be avoided by scheduling additional time for speakers or presentations that may go on longer than planned. Accordion activities, which can be expanded or contracted as needed, are useful between scheduled acts. Bands, musicians, or other entertainers will have their own specific needs for performing at an event. Arrangements must be made well in advance to meet these needs and to avoid unnecessary problems (Allen, 2000).

Any number of problems can occur with the facility hosting the event. Event planners can avoid potential problems in this area by dealing with reputable and established facilities when selecting a venue to host an event. Adequate budgeting for a reliable host facility can go a long way to avoid future cost and embarrassment to a sponsoring organization. Even with the best facilities and advanced planning, disruptive or even catastrophic things may occur. Power failures, a loss of water pressure, or acts of nature can shatter the most flawlessly planned event. At such times, crises management skills are of the utmost importance for the event planning staff. While not every possibility can be considered, contingency planning should attempt to include these worst case scenarios and the most effective ways to deal with them.

The accessibility and availability of parking presents unique problems. The expertise of attendees at the event begins and ends in the parking lot. If a guest finds the parking lot inaccessible or full, unnecessary frustration will result. Contingency plans must consider the possibility that construction may block planned parking areas. Other events may also compete for space. Advanced planning for these potential problems should include alternative parking options. Venues with no available parking create their own set of problems. Hotels often give parking space priority to overnight guests (Allen, 2000). These situations require creative parking plans to ensure the smooth arrival and departure of guests. Trolleys, limousines, buses, or other forms of transportation can be used to transport attendees from an alternate parking site. Valet parking is a option when the hotel provides it or the event planner gains access to a nearby parking facility that is otherwise inaccessible to guests.

CHAPTER X

EVALUATING THE EVENT

The event planner's job does not conclude once the event has ended. Post-event assessment is an easily overlooked stage in the process of any production. Time should be scheduled for review with all involved parties. Questions to consider include the following: What worked?, What could have been done differently?, What can be done next time? A post-event report should be prepared for future reference based upon all aspects of the planning phase, as well as observations noted during the event itself. Future events will be enhanced by a thorough analysis of these details (Allen, 2000). Included in this post-event report should be objective performance evaluations of all those involved with the event production: planning staff, venue staff, caterers, entertainers, and anyone else who played a part in the planning or execution of the event. Subjective assessment of the event should also be included in this report, including a summary of the perceived success of the event, which is based on the expressed opinions of all those involved. The perception of success varies by who is rating the event. The planner may have a different perspective than the guests or client. Regardless of the turnout, thanks should be conveyed to all involved.

A meeting with the event sponsor, following the completion of an event, is a good way to determine the success of the event. Critiques by the sponsor can be helpful when planning future events. A more comprehensive assessment of an event will include evaluations by attendees. Attendee evaluations can take the form of open-ended written

appraisals or standardized ranking sheets. Event guests can also be contacted after the event and interviewed to determine their perceptions of the event. The interview process should be simple. Seek to determine what the guests liked and disliked about the event. Sponsors and event attendees can also be asked for suggestions for future productions. Asking for suggestions allows the event planner to determine the likes and dislikes of specific groups, which can be an invaluable resource for planning future events. Careful review of these suggestions also allows event planners a nonintrusive means to tap into the creative thoughts of a wide variety of people, thereby expanding future possibilities for event activities (Lesonsky, et al., 1997).

Time must be scheduled after the event to properly thank everyone involved in its production. Immediately following the event is the best time, since details will be more easily remembered. Form thank-you letters should be avoided. Specific thanks should be sent to all those who dedicated time and effort to the event. Care and thoughtfulness are important for thank-you letters since the same people may be called upon for future events. Event planners should refer to their detailed record keeping system as a reminder to who needs to be thanked. Collecting business cards from caterers, hosts, entertainers, etc. can be helpful for the correct spelling of names and correct addresses (Allen, 2000).

Thank you letters for event guests are proper in some situations. When guest thanks are appropriate, they should be thanked as soon as possible after the event. Contributors to charity events should be acknowledged for their support. Thank you notes for attendees at sales seminars or promotional productions serve an additional benefit of fostering potential customer relations. Thank you notes directed to potential

customers should also include contact information for the sponsoring organization.

Letters can also be sent to those who were invited but did not attend the event. These letters should include a brief summary of the event with an invitation to attend the next one. A brief but thoughtful note is an effective marketing tool for future events. It provides a cost effective method to enhance relationships with contributors or potential customers (Huling, 1998).

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

A number of factors must be considered when planning an event. While not every aspect of event planning could be presented in this limited amount of space, thought should be given to the elements of event planning presented. Successful event planners will reference multiple sources, especially past events, before undertaking the responsibility involved in producing an important event. Referring to academic event planning sources is an integral part of the initial planning stages of any event.

As the planning progresses, organizers are reminded to remain focused on the objectives of the event and incorporate those objectives into the planning process. Budget preparation is a crucial element in this process and may ultimately determine the success or failure of the event itself. Other vital considerations include catering or food service, selection of the date and site, promotional strategies, and event activities. Contingency plans must be developed ahead of time to deal with any number of potential problems. The final steps in producing a successful event include objective and subjective evaluation of the event itself, with thanks to those who put effort into the project.

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