

by Camille Valvo

How not to stuff up your end-of-year event or staff party

EIGHT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW!

Recently I emceed the event from hell. You know. The speaker was an hour late. It was about 30 degrees – inside. The microphones were poor quality, thus sound didn't reach to the back of the room. The tables were so tight that socialising, networking and serving of food became a joke! Attendees situated at the back of the room left early. And there were many complaints about value for money – and rightly so.

Have you ever been asked to organise a staff function or end-of-year event? Nervously put it together though it wasn't in your job description or skill set? Figured you could "wing it" anyway?

As a professional MC, I work with a variety of meeting and event organisers – some being veterans in the business and others being nominated for the job at the last moment. As part of my pre-event services, I like to inspire organisers from the initial briefing. This could include crafting the run sheet, to suggestions of energisers or entertainers, to the best close in order to make a lasting and memorable experience. The choices are many and varied – but without proper preparation so are the risks that could turn your event into a circus.

Here are eight basic tips that, regardless of the theme or size of your group, will assist you in controlling the most obvious and frustrating event faux pas and guarantee your event is a heavenly experience!

1. Work with a run sheet.

Whether 10 or 10,000 – with all the key players on the same page with you, your program will run smoothly and to time. Be flexible, try not to cram too much in, and include all relevant contact details (venue, speakers, and other team members).

2. Choose a proper-size room for your group and objectives.

Too large – the group feels disconnected. Too small – networking is impossible and wait staff will hate you! Ideally no delegate's view should be obstructed by columns or poles.

3. Check all audio/visual equipment (and recheck!).

Yes, a microphone is essential, especially if the numbers are over 20. A pre-event check is critical, to ensure the sound reaches

everyone in the room and you are comfortable using it. Background music is great as long as it is consistent with the theme – and the equipment works.

4. Deliver the important and heavy information up front.

Your group can relax, eat, drink and be merry, and you will have delivered your key messages. You may also want to eat before you go – chances are you won't get time, and that one glass of bubbly will undo you!

5. Do not give the floor or microphone to anyone who has been drinking!

Unless karaoke, off-colour jokes and droning monologue is what you planned, a professional emcee or one confident person up front will ensure continuity and professionalism.

6. In case the speaker/entertainment is delayed or does a no-show, have a backup plan.

This is rare, but can happen – so if your program is flexible you may be able to swap things around while you wait. A quick trivia or team-building activity can keep attendees involved and entertained. (Or perhaps you can sing and dance?).

7. Thank everyone who contributed anything toward the occasion.

These people are the lifeblood of your event (and future events).

8. Relax and enjoy your event.

Take note of what worked and what didn't work – for next time!

Camille Valvo is a polished corporate MC, accredited speaker and 2006 President, Sydney Chapter of the National Speakers Association. She is involved in over 90 MC and speaking events each year and is the author of "How to MC a 1st Class Event" and co-author of "How to MC almost Anything". She can be contacted at www.emcee.com.au

