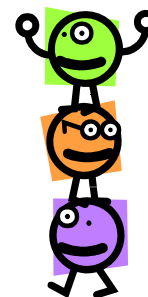


# Tips for Successful Meetings

By Suzanne Boswell



These tips are offered for planning and fine-tuning your meeting. They come from years of speaking to corporations, professional societies and associations. Some were learned as a Professional Member of the National Speakers Association, some come from the "school of experience" and others are from meeting planners. I hope that you find some ideas here to help make your meeting even more successful!

## Selecting & Booking Your Speaker

- Check speaker's track record, talk with others and if possible, preview the speaker. Experience counts! The more experienced the speaker, the more you can count on this person to handle the glitches that WILL arise! This experience is part of what you are paying for. The professional speaker knows how to make you, your organization and your meeting look good.



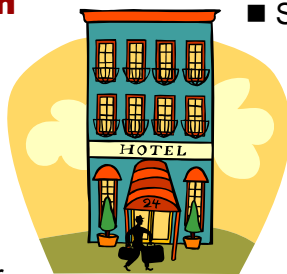
- Ask other meeting planners: Was the speaker easy to work with? Did the speaker interact with the group? How did the audience respond? Were there any unpleasant surprises? Did the speaker deliver what was promised? Was he professional on and off the platform? Would you invite this speaker back?

- The earlier you are able to book your speaker the better for you both. This is especially important when planning meetings for heavily booked Spring and Fall months.

- Booking early can also lock in lower fees prior to rate increases.

## Selecting Your Meeting Location

- What type of meeting are you conducting and what tone do you want to set? Convention centers are business-focused. Clubs and restaurants can provide a more intimate or personal feeling. Hotels can offer both. If you are considering a country club or golf club, there are other issues to consider. Is the meeting room



appropriate for A/V equipment? Some have expansive windows with decorative drapes that don't close – a nightmare for a presenter using image projection!

- The audiovisual company will have significant impact on meeting success. Does the facility have on-site or off-site A/V? An off-site company brings equipment, sets it up and then leaves to work with other clients. If equipment fails, it requires someone returning to the facility. With an on-site A/V, problem solutions are in the same building! Most clubs and restaurants use off-site A/V groups. Consider options carefully.

- When planning seating, tighter is better than looser. There is more energy in a room where people are seated close together than when they are spread out. This is even more significant if the room has a high ceiling. A very high ceiling can create a cavernous effect that may reduce a sense of intimacy and result in less audience responsiveness. A very high ceiling in a room that is too big for the size of your group WILL affect the mood of the meeting.

## Promoting Your Meeting

- Some speakers have materials available for use in promoting your meeting. Photos, artwork and promo blurbs add interest to mailings and can increase attendance. Ask the speaker what is available.

- Ask the speaker for a journal or newsletter article that might increase

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awareness and attendance of the upcoming meeting.

- Quotes from other meetings/audience attendees can increase interest in your meeting. Ask your speaker for quotes to use in promotion.

- Ask the speaker about ideas to promote his/her presentation. Speakers have seen what works for other groups and might have some suggestions.

- ALWAYS send your speaker one of your promo pieces. (Sending a draft to the speaker before printing can eliminate problems later on.) The speaker needs to know what your attendees have read and expect. A speaker should review this prior to the meeting to ensure that the presentation content is "as advertised." This step is key and is likely to increase audience satisfaction.

## Meeting Room

The three most common room setups for conference meetings are: Classroom, Theater, and Rounds. Be sure to check with your speaker who may have a preference for a particular setup. A brief overview of each setup follows:

- Classroom setup provides long tables for ease of writing as well as placement of refreshments. Attendees typically like this setup because of the comparative comfort. Ideally the tables are arranged in parallel rows in chevron format. This allows participants to more easily see each other as well as see the speaker if he/she walks down the aisle.

- Theater setup allows seating for more attendees. This seating is not as comfortable for long meetings because of the lack of table surface for writing. However, the fact that the chairs are closer together can increase the sense of energy in the room.

- Rounds encourage face-to-face interaction and are particularly effective for teams. The challenge is for the people who are seated so

that their backs are toward the front of the room. If this is a concern consider "Half-Rounds" wherein participants sit only on the side of the table that faces the front of the room.

## Audio/Visual

A/V components can make or break a meeting. In the simplest terms, the audience must be able to hear the speaker without distracting electronic interference and they must be able to clearly view the projected image.



## Meeting Photographs



- In advance ask a group member or staff member to take photos during the meeting. Action shots are particularly effective for purposes of promotion. They help to increase interest in upcoming meetings and also provide an interesting visual record of the event.

- Check with the speaker in advance to be sure that he/she is okay being photographed. If photos are okay, find out if there are certain times when the speaker will be doing something that would make a particularly interesting shot.

- Let the speaker know that you do want to get some audience shots but don't want to interrupt the speaker's flow – get feedback from the speaker to find out if he/she has any preferences on how this is approached.

## Care & Feeding of the Audience

- Audience comfort has a huge impact on participant responsiveness to the meeting. Assign volunteers to be room "comfort monitors".



- If participants are seated at tables, have water pitchers and glasses on each table. Or have water service available at rear of the room.

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■ Quality of food and its service can make or break a meeting. No matter how great is the speaker or the facility, poor food service can create disgruntled attendees and they'll talk about it! If your meeting starts very early in the morning and attendees have driven far, many will expect at least some coffee to start the day.

### Care & Feeding of the Speaker

■ Travel is stressful. The more the client can reduce speaker stress the better the presenter will be. Making arrangements for airport pickup can eliminate the anxiety of arriving in a new city & airport.

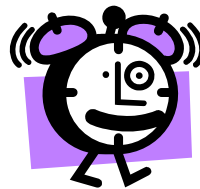


■ The host may invite the speaker to dinner the night before the meeting. Some speakers enjoy getting out of the hotel and welcome this opportunity. Other speakers prefer to have room service in order to rest from travel and prepare for the next day. Ask the speaker's preference.

■ If the meeting is not at the speaker's hotel, offer to have someone pick up the speaker, or arrange for transportation. It is crucial to have the speaker at the meeting location at least 45 minutes prior to the program start. (The more complicated or sophisticated the audiovisual setup, the earlier the speaker should be there!) By making these arrangements yourself, you help to eliminate some of the early morning jitters.

### Meeting Day Countdown

■ Test all A/V equipment and ensure that visuals can be seen from all corners of the room. Be sure the podium does not obstruct view from front row, and check if audience



heads will obstruct view of projected images. Ensure that overhead lighting doesn't wash out projected image. Bulbs over screens can be unscrewed to improve clarity.

■ Place a copy of the speaker's introduction at the podium.

■ Distribute evaluation forms before the presentation.

■ Review with the speaker how handouts are to be distributed.

■ Review times of breaks and closing with speaker.

■ Review how lights are to be managed during image projection.

■ Check with speaker if timing signals are wanted.

■ Stay on schedule! Audiences want the meeting to run as advertised.

■ At close of the meeting, request that audience members complete evaluations.