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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

How Successful  
Planners Focus  
on Inclusion,  
Accessibility and  
Awareness

## THE POWER OF DIVERSITY

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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

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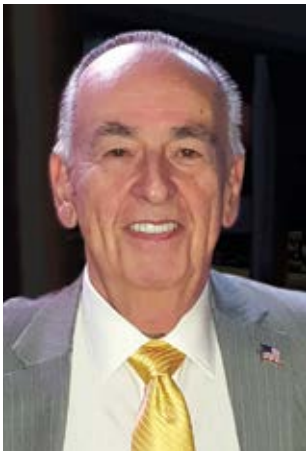




Understanding Diversity and Inclusion

Our cover story this month covers a topic that should be high on the minds of meeting and incentive travel professionals and their employers everywhere.

‘Diversity and inclusion’ is a phrase used loosely today, but to those employees who bring value and new perspectives to their employers, its importance cannot be overstated. Today, diversity and inclusion are considered critical elements for recruitment in the workplace and in retention strategy.



Federal law does not allow discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, disability, etc. There are more visible and invisible elements that make employees and potential employees diverse from each other than those defined and referred to here.

Although often used in tandem with diversity, inclusion is a separate issue. Inclusion should reflect a business environment in which all employees are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the success of their employer. Inclusion is important for the diversity efforts of employers to succeed. It has been proven that creating a diverse and inclusive culture will generate better employee engagement and productivity.

Aside from being a social, political, ethical and moral responsibility, there are important and meaningful benefits associated with diversity. A study published by the American Sociological Review found that businesses with the highest percentage of racial or gender diversity have higher sales revenue, more customers, and higher-than-average market share and profitability.

These facts alone should be enough to convince any business that fostering a diverse workplace is a top priority. But, when we break down the latest available statistics, it’s clearly evident that we still have a long way to go to achieve the goals of diversity and inclusion.

Harvey Grotsky

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## ATLANTA AIRPORT GOES SMOKE-FREE

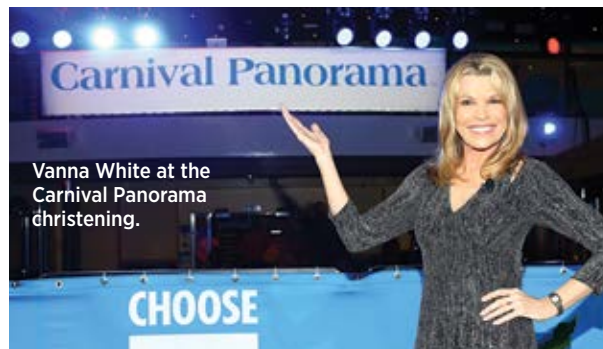
ATLANTA, GA — The world's busiest airport is making a dramatic change sure to affect thousands of customers. Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, which has been the world's most-trafficked airport in terms of passengers since 2000, went smoke-free in January. The airport said in a statement it will launch a 30-day accommodation package and give out complimentary lozenges to passengers with limited access to the exterior

smoking zones. To receive the lozenges, visit concessions locations in Terminals A, B, C, D, E and F. The airport has designated smoking areas outside of the domestic and international terminals, which are located at least 25 feet from the Terminal entrance. Persons under the age of 18 are prohibited from smoking in these designated zones, however. People who violate the ordinance are subject to a civil penalty up to a \$200 fine.



## FOUR CARNIVAL CORPORATION BRANDS WILL LAUNCH NEW CRUISE SHIPS IN 2020

MIAMI, FL — Carnival Corporation recently announced it will launch four new cruise ships in 2020 across four of its global cruise line brands — Iona for



Vanna White at the Carnival Panorama christening.

P&O Cruises UK; Enchanted Princess for Princess Cruises; Mardi Gras for Carnival Cruise Line and Costa Firenze for Italian brand Costa Cruises. These new ships build on the momentum of Carnival Corporation's four new vessels launched with rave reviews in 2019 — Carnival Cruise Line's Carnival Panorama, Costa Cruises' Costa Smeralda and Costa Venezia, and Sky Princess from Princess Cruises.

## NEW AAA DIAMOND PROGRAM REVEALED

ORLANDO, FL — AAA is unveiling a contemporized version of its highly acclaimed AAA Diamond Program. The program will remain backed by professionally trained inspectors using member-driven criteria

The program is replacing ratings with designations. The program is replacing ratings with designations.

Under the new system, previously One- and Two-Diamond hotels and restaurants will transition to the approved designation while Three-, Four- and Five-Diamond establishments will retain their designations. However, the 2020 inspection cycle will be the determining factor for all properties' future designation. Learn more about the changes at [www.AAA.com/Diamonds](http://www.AAA.com/Diamonds).



## LAS VEGAS HAS RECORD ATTENDANCE IN 2019

LAS VEGAS, NV — Las Vegas continues to prove itself a leading destination for both business and leisure tourism, welcoming a record 6.6 million meeting or convention attendees last year, a 2.3% increase over the previous year, according to research published recently by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

In addition to strong convention attendance, the destination welcomed 42.5 million visitors last year, up from the previous year of 42.1 million visitors, as the city continues to draw travelers seeking world-class dining, sports and entertainment experiences that can only be found in Las Vegas. With several new venues, attractions and events planned this year, its anticipated that Las Vegas will continue to attract strong visitation numbers.

## SITE CRYSTAL AWARDS SHOWCASE EXCELLENCE IN INCENTIVE TRAVEL

CHICAGO, IL — The 2019 Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Crystal Awards were presented at the SITE 2020 Global Conference in Vancouver, Canada. Since 1980, the annual awards recognition program, sponsored by IMEX Group, has brought industry acclaim to incentive travel companies. The winners are world-class organizations that excel in the design of unique, memorable group travel experiences that deliver measurable results for their clients. Eight companies from all over the world were honored for creativity in program design, marketing, corporate social responsibility and business results, as follows:

### The 2019 Crystal Award Winners:

- Excellence in Incentive Travel: North America: MFactor Meetings — Rewarding partners with a Crystal Ravel Ship to Vienna and Budapest.
- Most Impactful Effort Toward Corporate Social Responsibility as Part of an Incentive Program: Streamlinevents, Inc. — A program that included building an additional space for the Boys and Girls Club of Hawaii.
- Best Destination-Based Experiential Incentive Travel Program: Spectra in Scotland — A 700-person trip to Scotland including a trip to Edinburgh Castle and Royal Yacht Britannia.
- Excellence in Incentive Travel: Latin America & Caribbean: Travelier — Immune Life's trip to Bogota for 1,050 winners.



## REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES WELCOMES SEVEN SEAS SPLENDOR

ANCONA, ITALY — Regent Seven Seas Cruises, the world's leading luxury ocean cruise line, has welcomed to its fleet its newest ship — Seven Seas Splendor. Delivered at Fincantieri's shipyard in Ancona, Italy, Regent's fifth ship builds on the cruise line's rich 28-year heritage offering an Unrivalled Experience with every luxury included. The ship offers 375 beautifully appointed suites, ranging from 307 sf to 4,443 sf. It also includes five restaurants and three elegant bars and lounges, as well as a \$5 million curated art collection, more than 500 crystal chandeliers and more than 1 acre of Italian marble.

Helmed by Captain Serena Melani, the first female captain to take charge of a new ocean cruise ship, Seven Seas Splendor will sail her first official voyage from Barcelona, Spain to Miami, Florida. The ship will be christened by her godmother, the legendary supermodel and actress Christie Brinkley, at a glamorous and elegant ceremony at PortMiami. Seven Seas Splendor will also be showcased to global media and travel partners on preview sailings throughout February and March. It will cruise the Caribbean and Mexican Riviera, including two crossings of the Panama Canal and one unique Southern Caribbean cruise from Miami to New York City. In the spring, it will traverse the Atlantic Ocean once more for its inaugural European season, offering cultural and historically rich ports of call in the Mediterranean.

## HARD ROCK INTERNATIONAL PREMIERS NEW BRAND PROGRAMS

HOLLYWOOD, FL — Hard Rock International has expanded some of its amenities. Meeting planners can choose from special MICE-branded programs curated by Hard Rock International's preferred partners. With the help of School of Rock, Jeff Nolan, SongDivision, Scratch DJ Academy, Tangible Formats, Drum Cafe, DJ Drez & Marti and Clean the World, Hard Rock welcomes the opportunity to bring guests meetings experiences that rock. The partners revamped the popular, pre-existing brand program, Sound of Your Stay, with a meetings-specific spin, especially the Picks, Tracks and Wax offerings. Musically minded attendees cannot only listen to music, but can learn to play instruments and join with



Musically minded attendees can learn to play instruments.

others to create a Battle of the Bands or join a drum circle. They can write and create their own songs or learn to be a DJ. The more artistic among them can learn how to make company-branded or inspired vinyl artwork. They can relax by

participating in a music-infused group yoga experience. Attendees can also tour through the property's memorabilia, or spend time together helping to give back through creating hygiene kits to be donated to those in need.



## OMNI ORLANDO RESORT AT CHAMPIONSGATE ANNOUNCES PROPERTY RENOVATION

ORLANDO, FL — Slated to begin in June and completion in early fall 2020, all guest rooms, suites and villas at Omni Orlando Resort at Championsgate will be updated. Past guests will not even recognize the space as they walk down the brightly lit, beautiful plush carpeted corridors. David's Club, one of the property's nine unique on-site restaurants, known for their bourbons, crafts and cuts, was also reimagined in December. The restaurant's refresh includes new wall coverings, carpet, classic leather seating, gorgeous wood tables, additional flat-screen TVs and refinished wood flooring. For more information, visit [www.omnihotels.com/hotels](http://www.omnihotels.com/hotels)



## NEW RIVER WALK HOTEL UNDER DEVELOPMENT IN SAN ANTONIO

SAN ANTONIO, TX — Dream Hotels has announced a 2023 opening for Dream San Antonio on the city's River Walk. The property will have 217 guest rooms and suites; a rooftop pool deck, bar, and lounge; two restaurants on the street level, 10,000 sf of flexible meeting space, as well as state-of-the-art fitness facilities overlooking the San Antonio River. Dream Hotels are open in Nashville, Los Angeles, New York and Miami, as well as Bangkok and Phuket, Thailand. Overall, Dream Hotel Group has 16 hotels open and 20 others in various stages of development. For more information, visit [www.dreamhotels.com](http://www.dreamhotels.com).

## CELEBRITY CRUISES READY TO CHRISTEN ONE SHIP WHILE BUILDING ANOTHER

MIAMI, FL — Celebrity Cruises' much-anticipated Celebrity Apex is set to soon be christened. This is the second ship to be added to the lineage, which began with the 2018 launch of Celebrity Edge. Celebrity Apex employs the very latest culinary, spa and wellness trends and progressive entertainment offerings, and will sail the

Celebrity Apex is the second ship to be added to the lineage.

Mediterranean from April to October 2020, and the Caribbean from November 2020 to April 2021. In addition, the company has begun construction in France on its third ship, Celebrity Beyond, which is expected to be completed and delivered by the fall of 2021. For more details, visit [www.celebritycruises.com](http://www.celebritycruises.com).



## CIRCA RESORT & CASINO WILL OPEN IN LAS VEGAS AT THE END OF THE YEAR

LAS VEGAS, NV — Circa Resort & Casino will tower over the Fremont Street Experience in Las Vegas when the 44-story hotel opens at the end of the year. At 1.25 million sf and 777 rooms, it will stand as the tallest structure north of The Strip

and will become the first new build in downtown Las Vegas in 40 years. The Circa will have five restaurants and a two-level casino. It also will include what the owners claim will be the world's largest sportsbook in the city, as well as a rooftop pool amphitheater. The Vegas Vickie statue, which was removed in 2017 because of construction after 20 years on Fremont Street, will be a signature feature appearing in the resort's lobby.



## WYNN LAS VEGAS UNVEILS NEW MEETING SPACE

LAS VEGAS, NV — The 430,000-sf expansion of Wynn Las Vegas more than doubles rentable convention and meeting space at the Wynn and Encore on The Strip.

The two-level expansion features about 560,000 sf of convention space, including a 20,000-sf outdoor pavilion and four ballrooms. The convention center is powered by their 160-acre solar

facility and on-site rooftop solar panels.

Attendees at the convention center will also have views of the company's new 18-hole championship golf course, Wynn Golf Club. Sitting on the site of the former Desert Inn Golf Club, the course hosts several PGA Tour events yearly.

The resort already features approximately 192,000 sf of casino space.

## MARRIOTT MARQUIS SAN DIEGO MARINA LAUNCHES THEMED OFF-SITE MEETINGS/EVENT PROGRAMMING ABOARD THE ICONIC USS MIDWAY

SAN DIEGO, CA — Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina, the West Coast's premier meeting destination, announces the release of an exciting new catering initiative for meetings and events. The property invites planners to explore events outside of traditional meeting rooms for unique programming aboard the iconic USS Midway Aircraft Carrier and Museum. The program dubbed 'Meet Me at the Midway' is inspired by the hotel's proximity to the USS Midway — the United States' longest-serving aircraft carrier of the 20th century. 'The Midway,' located on the San Diego Bay at the edge of the downtown skyline, provides a truly exclusive experience for groups and individuals with a venue that boasts

an unmatched 360-degree view of the San Diego skyline, Coronado Island and Coronado Bay Bridge. Several inventive catering packages are also available. Planners can choose from available pack-



ages or create a unique experience all their own for a minimum of 300 attendees. For additional information visit [www.SanDiegoMarquis.com](http://www.SanDiegoMarquis.com).

## BCD MEETINGS & EVENTS HAS NAMED BRUCE MORGAN CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

CHICAGO, IL — BCD Meetings & Events (BCD M&E) has named Bruce Morgan Chief Operating Officer as the company continues implementing a three-year growth plan. He will have responsibility for managing all leaders from five regions, including APAC, LATAM, NORAM and the newly-created regions of EMEA



Morgan

and the UK. He brings 25 years of industry experience across various functions and global regions and has spent the last 15 years within the company. This latest move is part of the company's Vision 2021

strategic plan to expand its business through organic growth and strategic acquisitions in order to diversify its offerings, increase its global scope, and offer new and innovative solutions to its customers with a growing suite of products and services, which are now delivered in more than 50 countries. For more information, visit [www.bcdme.com](http://www.bcdme.com).

## THE RITZ-CARLTON SOUTH BEACH REOPENS AFTER BEING DAMAGED IN HURRICANE IRMA

MIAMI, FL — The renovated South Beach Ritz-Carlton recently reopened after being damaged by Hurricane Irma in 2017. The company invested \$90 million to transform the hotel from top to bottom. All 376 guest rooms, ballrooms and meeting spaces, hallways and restaurants have been reimagined. The hotel retains the Art Deco feel while adding new dining options, such as the new Fuego y Mar Latin American restaurant, as well as the DiLido Beach Club and Lapidus Bar. The hotel includes 20,000 sf of indoor/outdoor event space, including 11 meeting rooms and a 10,000 sf ballroom. The hotel also now has new window seals and a roof covering.



# Creating a Culture of Leadership and Innovation

## Want to Be More Successful? Forget Hierarchy and Start Striving to Create Leaders at Every Level

BY SCOTT STEINBERG

**L**ike today's most successful corporate executives are aware, leadership is less about exercising individual talent these days and more about one's ability to steer a workforce's collective capabilities and expertise toward achieving a common goal. Noting this, it's vital to make leadership a concept that scales. But to achieve this objective, you've also got to empower colleagues to have the courage to make hard choices and routinely deploy smarter ideas, no matter what challenges they may be facing. Luckily, a few simple strategies can help you get your workforce in the right mindset to take the reins here.

### GET IDEAS FLOWING

For starters, you've got to put programs and platforms in place that allow great ideas to bubble from the bottom up, not just flow from the top down. As studies repeatedly show, end-users for our services and solutions — everyday customers — are the No. 1 most reliable source from where successful and innovative new ideas tend to come. Frontline workers, those closest to these audiences, are often the most informed parties

in our organization. Likewise, to foster more frequent teamwork and collaboration, and incentivize staff to speak up, you've also got to make a point to create and offer coworkers more neutral forums, such as executive meetings and retreats, educational forums, online contests, or hackathon design challenges — where workers from across the organization are given 48 hours or less to come up with working solutions. This helps colleagues feel more comfortable voicing their opinions and taking action. However, finding ways to flatten executive hierarchies, open channels of communication, and create additional opportunities for colleagues to drive positive change is just the beginning here. As an organization, if you want to stay ahead of the curve, you've also got to make a point at event and meeting programs to champion concepts such as rapid learning and deployment to your workforce.

### GET RAPID FEEDBACK

If it helps to comprehend the value of making this shift in operating strategy, consider that the more feedback from any given operating landscape that you can get, and the faster you can get it, the more rapidly you can use this information to improve your

business plans and programs. As a result, the better off your organization will be. Likewise, it pays to remember that flexibility and agility are, at heart, the very essence of future-proofing. Put simply, the more opportunities you give yourself to pivot, and more sources of insight and resources you can draw upon when deciding which direction to go, the more resilient you'll become.

But to achieve these goals, it's just as important to recall that it pays to teach workers that the concept that a new strategy or solution has to be 'perfect' before you give it a try is self-defeating. In fact, waiting until a plan is flawless before you roll it out — because it stops us from moving forward — is an inherently flawed approach.

Rather, a better approach to driving positive change and innovation is to embrace the concept of a 'minimum viable product' model, and the idea that something just has to be 'good enough' before you deploy it. Because getting a solution to 'good enough' forces us to hone our time and efforts, and allows us to quickly gain real-world feedback faster that can help shape ideas for the better. It's often a springboard to something great.

Meaning that the more you can ingrain these principles across your organization at meetings and special events, and the more that you encourage smart, cost-effective risk taking, the more successful you'll be. Likewise, the more as an experienced team leader that you're willing to step back and let your people take the lead, the likelier the odds are that you'll have no trouble adapting to changing times and trends by adapting yourselves in turn.

### LET YOUR WORKERS SHINE

In effect, the more readily you, as a leader, work to give your people more chances to surface, share, and develop

It pays to remember that flexibility and agility are, at heart, the very essence of future-proofing.

new strategies and solutions based on the insights these audiences are sending, the more readily you'll put yourself in a position to succeed going forward. Keeping this in mind, executive leaders in every space would also do well to note that — while things are going well and you can most afford to take chances — now would be the best time to start making a host of smart investments in initiatives that drive constant learning and growth for their organization. And, for that matter, it's also the best time to encourage colleagues to get behind the idea of making more insight-driven decisions and educating themselves through a running process of trial and error that involves constantly playing around with new strategies and solutions.

That's because, as we were surprised to find while researching recent best-seller "Make Change Work for You," in uncertain times, the irony is that you've

got to take more risks, not fewer, if you want to get ahead in any space. However, while "risky is the new safe," so to speak, these risks have to come in the form of small, smart, cost-effective bets designed as ongoing learning experiments designed to help you quickly gain deeper insights into the shape of changing operating landscapes and make better and more informed choices as you get smarter. In addition, as above, to stay relevant, organizational leaders also need to start being more deliberate about putting systems and programs in place that can help front-line workers assume more of an ownership role in making key decisions.

### THINK FAST

Keep in mind in that things move fast in today's working world. Most organizations can now go from conceptualizing new services, solutions or programs to rolling them out in less than 90 days. Less than 30 days is more common than not. In fact, some institutions we consult for are launching new solutions every 6 weeks all year round, just for the learning experiences that these efforts provide. Likewise, as organizational leaders, we all now live in an always-on, connected age where the various audiences we serve are also giving us feedback and telling us how their needs are changing with every interaction.

The real question you should be asking yourself if you want your organization to remain competitive isn't "do you have what it takes to compete?" it's, "what role can you help play in facilitating change management?" and "are you giving your people all the tools and support that they need to be effectively listening, and smartly and rapidly responding to these insights?"

If you want to get better at operating in a world of constant change, today is the most opportune time to start challenging yourselves and your people to dare to think differently. Effective modern leadership is less an exercise in individual talent and more one that's about finding clever and cost-effective ways to bring a collective workforce's capabilities to bear. The more you make leadership a concept that scales, the faster you'll be able to solve any given challenge, and the more you'll be able to stay ahead of changing times and trends in the years to come. **IFM**



THE AUTHOR

Hailed as the world's leading business strategist, award-winning professional speaker **Scott Steinberg** is among today's best-known trends experts and futurists, and the bestselling author of "Lead with Your Heart," "Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty," and "Millennial Marketing: Bridging the Generation Gap." He is also the president and CEO of BIZDEV: The International Association for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships. His website is [www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com](http://www.AKeynoteSpeaker.com).



# 5 Ways to Develop a Budget-Friendly Incentive Travel Program

BY SARAH HILL

**I**ncentive travel offers a range of benefits for companies of all sizes, so it's no surprise that companies worldwide are implementing programs every year.

With the help of incentive programs, companies can encourage healthy competition in the workplace, provide extra motivation for achieving challenging goals and increase dedication and loyalty in the workplace.

But while there's no doubt that incentive travel programs offer a lot of value to businesses of all sizes, implementing a successful program can sometimes be a challenge, especially without prior experience.

So, we'll explore some of the most important aspects you should consider when organizing a budget-friendly and immersive experience that your employees won't forget for a long time.

## FIGURE OUT YOUR BUDGET

As any experienced agency will tell you, incentive travel planning starts with figuring out the budget you can allocate to the trip.

The easiest way to do this is by calculating how much ROI the goal you're trying to achieve will bring, which you can then use as a benchmark when deciding what percentage of that sum you can spend on the journey.

In many cases, incentive trips will have clauses of specific sales numbers or other accomplishments by the staff, so you should figure out how you can measure the progress of those goals and then determine what amount would be adequate to spend on the trip if the goals are met.

This way, you won't have to look at the cost as an expense, but can instead view it as an investment that will boost employee productivity and help your company achieve numbers that wouldn't be possible otherwise.

## START PLANNING EARLY

If you want to have any chance of planning a budget-friendly journey for the staff, you need to start preparations as early as possible, since that will allow you to carefully weigh your options and look for the most cost-effective destinations.

Usually, a good rule of thumb is to start planning the journey at least six months in advance, although even a year before the trip isn't too extreme, as that would allow you to get the most out of your budget.

What's more, when you set goals well in advance, you are also giving your team time to accomplish them, and can thus set more ambitious goals that would be hard to reach if the deadline were shorter.

Just as the best venue-finding services start looking for the best sites early, so should you identify potential opportunities. Look for special group packages and consider what types of trips could work within your budget while also providing an unforgettable experience for your team.

One thing to consider is the season during which your trip will take place. Sometimes, you may find that going to a particular destination during the off-season might allow you to get much more bang for your buck without hurting the quality of your trip.

## GENERATE EXCITEMENT

An incentive travel program won't be very useful if it doesn't excite your team, as they won't be motivated to work any harder if the reward isn't something they truly want.

So, you should be open to talking with your team members about their preferences and figure out which destinations sound the most appealing, and you could even consult venue-finding services about the options that might work best.

You could organize a company-wide survey, asking your employees what they like and then looking for the most common answers to develop a profile upon which you should focus.

Sometimes, you might find that the ideas you had beforehand are quite different from the results of the survey, so you shouldn't make any presumptions if you don't want to disappoint your staff and reduce the chances of them accomplishing the goals you set.

Even if your incentive journey is just a weekend getaway to another city, that can be a fun experience if you take the time to plan it out.

Some groups of people might get excited about a relaxed trip to a warm beach destination, while others could be much more responsive to an action-packed sightseeing tour of exotic or exciting places. So, you need to evaluate what the group preferences are before making any decisions.

Whichever type of journey you end up choosing, you should try to plan a memorable trip that everyone will want to talk about well after it is over, as that will not only help boost morale, but will also serve as extra motivation the next time that you want to organize a similar incentive journey.



THE AUTHOR

**Sarah Hill** is a content writer at Seven Events Ltd, a leading event company that specializes in providing event management services, venue finding and conference organizing. She started her career in the events industry nearly a decade ago. As time progressed, she became an avid event blogger, sharing her insight on corporate event planning. Visit [sevenevents.co.uk](http://sevenevents.co.uk)

## BE CREATIVE

When dealing with a tighter incentive travel budget, many companies are hesitant about choosing a specific trip, as they are afraid of disappointing their team if they don't go to a luxurious or exotic destination.

However, not all incentive trips need to go to the other end of the world. Sometimes, a creative and fun local trip can produce similar results in terms of motivating your employees and getting them excited.

Even if your incentive journey is just a weekend getaway to another city, that can be a fun experience if you take the time to plan it out and make sure that everyone has a good time.

In the end, while the journey itself is definitely important, building a stronger connection between team members can be just as vital, and that camaraderie can transfer to the workplace even well after the trip.

## COLLECT FEEDBACK AFTER THE TRIP

Finally, if you want to develop an effective and budget-friendly incentive travel program, you need to be able to steadily improve on your planning process and maximize every penny in the budget.

To do that, you need to conduct surveys and talk to your employees, asking them about what they liked and didn't like about the trip.

Remember, these are individuals with their own interests and preferences, and since the incentive trip is a reward, you should treat it as such and make sure that the majority of people enjoy it.

Over time, you should be able to refine your trips and customize them to make each the best journey possible for everyone involved, which will help you get the most out of the wide range of benefits that incentive travel can offer. **IFM**



# GOLF & SPA RESORTS

*These Venues  
Transform  
Ordinary Events  
Into Extraordinary  
Experiences*

BY NANCY MUELLER

**W**hat does it take to create an exceptional conference or meeting event? One way is by giving attendees golf and spa downtime where they can disconnect from daily workplace demands. Here, the goal is simply to relax, refresh and rejuvenate in a beautiful location, resulting in enhanced performance, productivity, creativity, health and overall morale, both for individuals and teams.

Jack Henry & Associates Inc. is a major player in providing technology and processing capability to banks and other financial institutions. Recently lauded in the Wall Street Journal for earning “the highest return of any stock in the Wilshire 5000 index over the past 30 years,” the company hosts an annual Golden Circle Recognition event for their top-performing sales people who are key contributors to this success. And, when they do, Steve Tomson, vice president of Sales & Marketing, explains: “We want these to be adventures for our top performers and a guest of their choosing. It has to be a 5-star recognition event that we want people to salivate over. This is really driven as a sales recognition event highly designed for relaxation and decompression.”

## AURA OF TRANQUILITY

Last year, the company selected Ojai Valley Inn to host 325 people for their special event. Not only did the property provide what Tomson and Donna Brinson, meetings coordinator, had envisioned; the property’s golf and spa facilities also added a level of unexpected tranquility. In fact, “I wondered if it was a little too laid back,” Tomson said. “But people said, ‘No, this is what we needed, a level of peacefulness.’ Everybody seemed at peace.”

Ojai Valley Inn is conveniently located between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. And while traffic from LAX is a fact of life, Ojai more than compensates by allowing guests to take advantage of a broad range of activities onsite and offsite. In the case of Jack Henry &

Ojai Valley Inn offered spectacular amenities for Jack Henry & Associates Inc.’s annual Golden Circle Recognition event.







Associates' annual meeting, this means for people ranging in age from 26 to 70.

Brinson cites the town of Ojai, with its variety of bars and restaurants, as a factor in the success of their event. So, too, was the ability to offer off-road jeep rides to the nearby Topatopa Mountains as well as busing people to Santa Barbara where participants were able to take a catamaran tour. "There are also lots of local wineries, so we took a trolley wine tour, too," she says.

In addition, for the group's welcoming reception, Brinson cites the property's Casa Elar, a spectacular, 5-bedroom 10,407-sf, gated residence designed after a Tuscan villa. And the dining experience at Ojai Valley Inn? "We do a special breakfast for the guests of the qualifiers. We held it in a stunning location, The Oak, an indoor-outdoor restaurant overlooking the golf course. We served mimosas and bloody marys and brought in a paper-marbling artist," Brinson says. "It provided a wonderful networking opportunity for the guests."

The Farmhouse, a 30,000-sf culinary and event center with splendid architecture and upscale atmosphere, became the ideal location for the company's farewell dinner, "inspiring one guest to exclaim, 'This was the best farewell dinner we've ever had,'" Brinson says.

In addition to The Oak and The Farmhouse for dining at Ojai Valley Inn, guests can enjoy dining options such as Olivella and Vine, a restaurant featuring California cuisine with Italian influences; the notable Wallace Neff Heritage Bar, offering classic cocktails and

small plates; family friendly Jimmy's Pub, serving pub fare, cocktails, brews and wines from the Central Coast; food and beverage service at Indigo Pool & Bar and Pixie Pool; and Libbey's for takeaway bites, beverages and customized picnic baskets to go. In-room dining is also a welcome option.

"There's a real sense of openness and feeling of exclusivity. You don't feel like you're on top of each other."

**DONNA BRINSON**  
Meetings Coordinator  
Jack Henry & Associates Inc.



ing is also a welcome option.

For Brinson, the fact that the property spreads over 220 acres is a huge benefit. "There's a real sense of openness and a feeling of exclusivity. You don't feel like you're on top of each other. To be set back in the valley is unusual and it offers wonderful variety and sharp contrasts in views." At Ojai Valley Inn, indoor meeting space venues range from 670 sf to 8,500 sf. "We're also heavy users of the spa experience, which was well-received," Brinson adds. "I appreciate that they have separate relaxation rooms for male and female, a lovely little gift shop and healthy food service at the Spa Café."

Currently, the spa is undergoing a \$3 million renovation, including a remodel of their two penthouse suites and public

Entertainment at Jack Henry & Associates' event at Ojai Valley Inn included paper-marbling classes, trolley wine tours, jeep rides, a catamaran excursion and more.

The Farmhouse at Ojai Valley Inn is a 30,000-sf culinary and event center offering everything from dining halls to classroom space. It hosts cooking classes, wine-tasting events, demonstrations and themed dinners.

spa areas, set to reopen early this year. Also reopening early this year is the signature golf shop for the property's destination championship golf course after undergoing a makeover to refresh the look and feel of the facility.

Without a doubt, Ojai Valley Inn provided "exemplary service," Brinson says. "We had great response from staff, and guests specifically mentioned their courteous behavior."

## TIMELESS ELEGANCE

For Jeanene O'Brien, senior vice president of Global Marketing and Communications for Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc. (IAAI), and a key decision-maker in signing off on the company's annual conference site, Sea Island shines in a class all its own. For an idea of just how much IAAI values its relationship with Sea Island, the company will host its fifth annual senior-level client event for between 180 to 200 people on site early this year.

Recent property enhancements at Sea Island's golf and spa resort include seven new cottages at The Lodge; the new Mizner Ballroom I and II, providing a combined room capacity of 500 in 5,073 sf; and a 17,000-sf Golf Performance Center that offers a comprehensive approach to golf from



customized instruction with world-class pros, club fittings, golf fitness and View Your Swing Technology. O'Brien also mentions a new bowling alley at the Cloister Beach Club, which previously housed a movie theater, as indicative of Sea Island's thoughtful approach to design. "It's so well-appointed, it looks like it's always been there."

Apart from the site's stellar location and climate, a stay at Sea Island "feels like I'm home and very welcomed," says Val Alitovska, IAAI's director of Corporate Marketing & Events. O'Brien concurs, citing the destination's extraordinary foundation of service as a main factor in their decision to return year after year. "That's really what's so incredibly different about Sea Island: the level of service is so ingrained, it creates a really cohesive and integrated experience that's almost invisible. From the moment you walk into the lobby, you know you're in an elevated, harmonious experience. Their level of service shows in everything, in every element, every thought." From remembering guests' names six months later to providing supreme flexibility in food and beverage options, and transforming meeting spaces on extremely short notice, the property excels.

Where Sea Island's exceptional service transcends the ordinary to extraordinary lies in the staff's ability not only to anticipate IAAI's meeting needs but, even more, to becoming a partner in the company's conference success.

Alitovska explains: "Over the years, the conference team has taken the time to learn who we are and our clients, and make sure that they're a reflection of our brand." It's that distinction that also resonates with O'Brien. "For a property to be able to support and elevate your brand, it really supports us from a business perspective," she says. "The feedback we get from our conferences is always incredibly high, usually 4.7 across the board; but, at Sea Island, it's 4.9, which speaks well to their brand alignment."

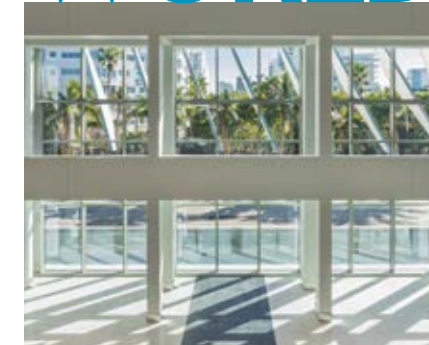
As for Sea Island's activities, the destination offers a plethora of familiar and unique guest experiences. Fitness enthusiasts can choose from among three golf courses, horseback riding, a shooting school, kayaking, paddleboarding, beach-bike riding and bird watching. IAAI guests especially enjoy Sea Island's signature 'Cast &

Blast' event, a combined shooting and fishing adventure. "It's such a unique experience — a jewel of an experience," O'Brien says. "One of our clients said: 'I've never experienced that before. It was so much fun!'" Whether enjoying wine activities where the staff share insights and hands-on experiences for guests, shopping excursions, yoga or day excursions, clients and guests have no shortage of activities from which to choose. "The property is so beautiful and relaxing," Alitovska says,

"that people will also simply hang out by the pool."

When it comes to more rest and relaxation, Alitovska says, "I love The Spa at Sea Island." The Forbes Five-Star, 65,000-sf spa and fitness space features a beautiful courtyard, plenty of treatment rooms, wet and dry saunas, and a variety of spa services, including treatments from massage and body to skin care, a full-service salon, and The Spatique and Beautique, a shop offering spa gifts, exercise wear and

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Kingsmill Resort, top and middle, provided just what the attendees at a Snow Companies event needed to relax. Bottom, Sea Island's 17,000-sf Golf Performance Center offers a comprehensive approach to golf.

skin- and body-care products. Despite its size, O'Brien finds that the same level of exceptional service and feeling of comfort experienced elsewhere on the property extends all the way through here. "I love their pedicures and their signature facial and Hydra-Facial MD. Despite the size of the spa, the space doesn't feel clinical at all." Plus, Alitovska appreciates that over the years, "I've had the same masseuse, and it's wonderful to see a familiar face when I return."

Alitovska sums up her experience at Sea Island, saying, "Coming here's a different world. You really feel a different energy, just a sense of comfort and timeless elegance. Don't consider hosting your event at Sea Island; just do it. They dig in with us to give us best solutions for our conference needs. They're there to be a partner with you."

For Sheri Trotter, senior vice president of Programs & Special Events at Williamsburg, Virginia-based Snow Companies, Kingsmill Resort, in Williamsburg, offered her 300 attendees what they wanted in a resort for the company's annual Employee Appreciation Party.

"Kingsmill is a location where your group will get the business done and will be able to relax as well," Trotter says. "The amenities offered, the environmental beauty and the attention to detail from all aspects makes a well-rounded meeting/event."

Kingsmill has two 18-hole golf courses — The River Course and The Plantation Course — and offers the Golf Channel Academy. The Spa at Kingsmill offers facials, massages, body wraps, and salon and beauty treatments, as well as wellness and body treatments.

"We are a local company and we needed an exceptional venue for such a special event to honor our employees for a job well done," she says. "The water view is magical. It provides a certain level of peace when on breaks or when having a meal and, after hours of meetings, that is a great respite. And it automatically comes with every package."

She adds, "We used a considerable amount of the event space at Kingsmill."



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The flow is exceptional, ambience is lovely and the service is always spot on. Now, let me tell you about the food. It isn't your typical conference facility food; it is so much more. It is fresh, creative, plentiful and always good, really good. The culinary crew is very good at what they do."

## AUTHENTIC WESTERN ADVENTURES

Set in a serene location in Colorado Springs, complete with scenic mountain views, The Broadmoor is a favorite group destination for Bethany Jones, a meeting planning consultant for NASBP. "We've always had a really great relationship with The Broadmoor, a Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond property. Just the service is like nowhere else. The staff always asks if they can do anything for you. Every single guest is valued and remembered. Our only challenge at The Broadmoor is that the room blocks sell out quickly," she says. "And while getting to Colorado Springs usually means having to make connecting flights, no one complains about it."

Accommodations at The Broadmoor offer plenty of options, from rooms to suites and cottages. "I also appreciate having tiered rates for different room types to meet different budgets," Jones says. Converted from what was once a private home, The Estate House, a 12,000-sf sanctuary, is located across from the cottages and offers more of a C-suite experience for smaller meetings. It also includes a chef's kitchen for culinary events. For special group gatherings, Jones likes to book The Broadmoor's 6,300-sf Cheyenne Lodge, a separate meeting and banquet space up the hill from the hotel, with shuttle service provided.

Jones finds The Broadmoor a good venue for a self-contained event as it boasts several restaurants and bars, including fine dining at the Penrose Room, Italian food fare at Ristorante

del Lago, regional American cuisine at Summit, plus prime steaks, prime rib and seafood at La Taverne. Guests can also explore dining options at The Broadmoor's signature cafés and lounges, such as Bar del Lago, Café Julie's and the Penrose Lounge. An impressive team of culinary chefs leads The Broadmoor's varied dining experiences, from upscale to more modest venues. Drawing inspiration both from their global travels and the local surroundings, the culinary team creates unique dining experiences ranging from contemporary European cuisine to casual burger and pizza fare.

Beyond dining, the property also features a new, high-end bowling alley. And no one has to leave the property to enjoy shopping excursions and a vari-

"We've always had a really great relationship with The Broadmoor. Every single guest is valued."

**BETHANY JONES**  
Meeting Planning Consultant  
NASBP



ety of other amenities. For example, with 43,000 sf available, The Spa at The Broadmoor offers 40 spa treatment rooms, a full-service salon and a state-of-the-art fitness center. Two award-winning golf courses, The Broadmoor's East and West courses, play host to national tournaments such as the 2018 and 2025 Senior Open, and offer unique

The Broadmoor's East and West courses offer plenty of challenging holes for golfers of any skill level.

ventures such as golfing with a legend in the sport, professional golfer Hale Irwin.

In addition to the property's golf and spa amenities, for truly authentic Western experiences, it's hard to top The Broadmoor's wilderness excursions and experiential adventures.

Guests can also hike the trails, go zip lining, sign up for fly-fishing camp with a private guide offsite, or learn about the sport of falconry at the beginner or intermediate level with The Broadmoor Outfitters. Rather read and relax in front of a fireplace? The Broadmoor has you covered there, too.

"We often go back to The Broadmoor for a reason; they're top-notch. The property is continually expanding. I really compliment them for not resting on their laurels. Everything is beautiful," Jones says. Beyond the recent conversion of The Estate House, The Broadmoor is excited about opening a new, more than 110,000-sf Exhibition Hall, including 32 breakout rooms, in the spring this year. The Exhibition Hall offers an appealing addition, especially for clients seeking space for large-scale trade shows other than convention centers.

Boulders Resort & Spa Scottsdale, Curio Collection by Hilton also offers top-notch golf and spa amenities. Its two courses — the 6,811-yard North Course and the South Course, at 6,726 yards — feature boulder formations and other Sonoran Desert terrain that offers challenging play for golfers. In addition, players can get a lesson from expert PGA- and LPGA-certified instructors. Attendees looking to relax via a shamanic tipi, meditation labyrinth, organic garden and/or reflecting pond should visit the 33,000-sf spa, which offers 24 treatment rooms, a spa café and learning center. **IFMM**

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Participants in an Aspen Policy Tech Hub event. L-R: Ryan Olson, Anil Dewan, Ginny Fahs, Steve Weis, Nicole Wong, Terah Lyons, Brandie Nonnecke, Allison Day, Karissa McKelvey, Ora Tanner, Betsy Cooper and David Albán Hidalgo.

# THE POWER OF DIVERSITY

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

PHOTO BY BRYAN WALKER TING

## How Successful Planners Focus on

## Inclusion, Accessibility and Awareness

**D**iversity and inclusion are big buzzwords in the insurance and financial sectors right now. But it's not always easy to go from talking about these ideals to incorporating them into every-day functions in the company — including meetings, leadership training and other corporate events.

For businesses that are truly committed to recruiting and retaining employees with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, making events both diverse and inclusive is more important than one might think. The hard truth is that people of a different race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion or age often aren't being given the same access to opportunities as people in the majority.

"A lot of companies that are trying to do good what they've done is they've recruited people who are different, but they don't necessarily nurture, mentor or highlight the potential in the different folks to climb the ladder," says Jessica Pettitt, CSP, owner of Good Enough Now, who is a speaker, author and educator who has been doing diversity and inclusion work for nearly 20 years. "If people are not being nurtured in the

organization, that organization should at least outsource it to a conference or other event."

Amy C. Waninger, CPCU, author of the book "Network Beyond Bias" and founder and CEO of Lead At Any Level, agrees with Pettitt. "When you have high-potential employees and, in particular, when you have high-potential employees who don't look like everyone in your C-suite, those are people you should send to conferences,"



says Waninger, whose business helps companies build leadership across its diverse employee population. “When people who are high-potential go into an environment where they feel stimulated and part of a community, and they see their employer is investing in them, they’re more likely to stay in the industry.” After all, it doesn’t matter how many people from diverse backgrounds a company recruits; if they don’t stay and advance into leadership positions, the firm will be hard-pressed to meet its diversity goals.

The other thing planners need to consider is what happens once people arrive and begin participating at gatherings. All of the attendees need to feel comfortable and included. “Just drawing in diversity does not necessarily create a successful event,” says Donna Brighton, co-founder of Leadership Uncorked, which uses wine to teach people about leadership. “When people show up, they need to be engaged and feel honored and be allowed to fully participate.”

As stated, they also need to see people in leadership roles who look like them and have a chance to grow or expand their network of people who are both similar and different from them, experts say.

## PEOPLE AND PLANNING

If Waninger could give just one piece of advice to people organizing events, it would be to include people with a variety of backgrounds and life experiences in the entire planning process. “The more perspectives you have on the front end, the more likely you are

“When people show up, they need to be engaged and feel honored and be allowed to fully participate.”

**DONNA BRIGHTON**  
Co-Founder  
Leadership Uncorked



to not miss anything on the back end,” she says. That might mean creating a planning committee to provide advice or hiring a diversity consultant who can offer advice on how to create a welcoming environment for everyone. “If you don’t have the luxury of increasing the team, then doing a better job of reaching out to potential participants to understand what their unique needs are is important,” Brighton says. “For example, something like food can seem simple, but there are so many allergies now. It can make people feel like they’re excluded because they have different food needs.”

One of the earliest decisions a planner must make is where to host their event. Before picking a destination or venue, it’s important to investigate local laws and attitudes that might affect participants, Pettitt says. Some states ban the use of gender-neutral pronouns or gender-neutral bathrooms in public facilities. The laws around medical cannabis also may be different, which can cause problems for participants with disabilities who use it routinely.

In addition, there are still parts of the country where people who are different may be made to feel very uncomfortable. That culture clash can lead to problems for everyone. “You need to think about, what are the users of the event used to and what are they going to be expecting at the event, and how are you going to close the gap?” Pettitt says.

Other venue considerations include ensuring the facility is accessible for people with disabilities. That means “the entire venue, not just the area around the main stage,” Waninger says. “That includes finding a hotel that will welcome everyone. It’s increasingly possible to find secure accommodation partners that offer a little extra in that regard.”

Says Pettitt, “Some hotels are starting to put rugs in the closets for yoga, stretching or for prayer rugs. They’re also putting an arrow in people’s rooms pointing toward Mecca.” These small stickers are unobtrusive for people who don’t need the information, but some properties have also taken the arrows as an opportunity to educate people, putting a small card on the table explaining why the sticker is there.

These small messages of education and acceptance give businesses an opportunity to increase diversity awareness in their company and industry. When a company asks people to indicate their pronouns on the registration form and includes them on name badges, it can start a conversation about why allowing people to specify their pronouns is important. “Then, they go

It’s important to investigate local laws and attitudes that might affect participants. For example, some states ban the use of gender-neutral bathrooms in public facilities.

back to their home communities more educated,” Pettitt points out.

Registration materials should also ask people if they need special accommodations for the event. “It’s amazing to me the number of folks who don’t ask this question,” Pettitt says. “Usually, the push back is, ‘We can’t accommodate everything.’ But you should ask. And if you can’t accommodate a request, let the person know that ahead of time.” Be sure to follow up on these requests one way or another. “That’s actually a bigger liability than not doing anything in the first place. Because you asked but now you’re choosing to ignore the information you got.”

To help young people or people with lower incomes, consider offering registration fees on a sliding scale, providing scholarships and helping people find options for carpooling or roommate matching. Companies are often hesitant to do the latter for liability reasons, Pettitt says, but they can direct people to an event Facebook group or similar service where people can connect with other attendees on their own.

Providing some in-depth guidance on the dress code can also make people feel more comfortable. Registration materials may state “casual dress,” but that could mean dressing casually in designer labels. Even if that’s not the case, people might fear they need to blow their entire paycheck on new clothes to fit in, which might scare them away. “Some conferences are using Pinterest and putting up pictures that say, ‘When we say business casual, this is what we mean.’ It shouldn’t be a boy and girl outfit, but a few options that show them what’s OK,” Pettitt says.

Chances are your event has measurable goals that will track data such as attendance numbers, workshop rankings on surveys and social media engagement. Be sure to establish metrics around equity and inclusion as well. “One of the things I think is really important is asking, what do things like diversity, equity and inclusion mean to us as a company?” Brighton asks. “Those are terms that are thrown



around a lot. In your event, how will you measure success? Does it mean you have a more diverse audience? Does it mean your program is more diverse? Make sure you’re clear up front.”

## RECRUITING DIVERSE PARTICIPANTS

When it comes time to recruit people for the event, “make statements from the outset on the website, press releases, marketing materials and anywhere else that you’re creating a space that’s safe for everyone,” Waninger says. Sharing that you’re looking to bring together a group

For businesses committed to recruiting and retaining workers with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, making events diverse and inclusive is important.

nothing wrong with looking to other industries for best practices and case studies on how to broaden the pool of participants. The Aspen Tech Policy Hub, a policy incubator run by The Aspen Institute, hosts an intensive fellowship program every year. The program places a high priority on recruiting diverse candidates and has done a good job of meeting its goals. Dr. Betsy Cooper, founding director, shared some of their secrets to success.

“One of the biggest mistakes people make when they’re trying to get a diverse group is they end up trying to do it within their network,” she says. “But if you’re just sitting around thinking about people you know, the group may not be as diverse. One of

the most important things you can do is make it public that you’re searching for these options and allow diverse voices to speak up.”

She adds, “On top of that, it’s really important to reach communities outside the ones you normally speak to and make sure they’re aware of that opportunity. If those communities aren’t visiting your website or following you on Twitter, they won’t see it.” Cooper recommends looking for people who have written articles or blog posts in the field on which you’re focused and contacting them. Another idea is to contact professional organi-

“One of the biggest mistakes people make when they’re trying to get a diverse group is they end up trying to do it within their network.”

**DR. BETSY COOPER**  
Founding Director  
Aspen Tech Policy Hub



of people with a variety of backgrounds lets everyone know they’re welcome.

Make sure people of different skin colors, ethnicities, genders and abilities are shown in marketing materials in an authentic way so people can see that commitment is genuine. Highlighting presenters with a range of life experiences will do the same thing. “If you want diverse attendance at this meeting, you have to get outside the stereotypes for the industry,” Waninger says. “If all of the panelists are CEOs who are 65-year-old men, that doesn’t invite a lot of people to feel welcome.”

In the spirit of diversity, there’s



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PHOTO BY BRYAN WALKER TING

zations that work with people from differing backgrounds and ask them to pass RFPs, meeting invitations or other materials along to their members. This is a great recommendation for events looking to recruit speakers as well as participants.

If the event will select a pool of participants rather than taking registrations from anyone interested in attending, Cooper emphasizes that it's important to have a transparent and fair selection process. "You risk going back to your own biases if you don't take the opportunity to select in a methodical way. For our program, we select people first based on their written materials, then through interviews. We score each piece of our experience separately. It doesn't remove all bias, but I do think it forces you to focus on the specific things you're looking for."

#### INCLUSION AT EVENTS

To ensure everyone feels comfortable at the event, Waninger recommends having a code of conduct in the program or posted in the event that says something like the following: "Harassment in any form will not be

tolerated. People who make unrepresented participants feel unwelcome will be removed." Pettitt recommends providing a cell phone or pager number in the event brochure people can call if they experience harassment. That way, the company can work to resolve the problem immediately.

"If someone feels threatened or unsafe, do you have a plan to protect them — and potentially to upset someone who is accused of behaving badly?"

**AMY C. WANINGER, CPCU**  
Founder and CEO  
Lead At Any Level



"I've heard stories about women being followed into their room, or women presenters who were harassed or made to feel very uncomfortable by questioners in the audience," Waninger says. "It's important for meeting planners to have a strategy in place in advance for how they'll deal with those situations. If someone feels threatened or unsafe, do you have a plan to protect them — and potentially to upset someone who is accused of behaving badly? It's so much more comfortable to think about those things and have a plan and follow that plan, as opposed to

The Aspen Tech Policy Hub, a policy incubator run by The Aspen Institute, runs an intensive fellowship program every year. The program places a high priority on recruiting diverse candidates and has done a good job of meeting its goals.

thinking about it in the moment when people are upset."

Brighton recommends having gatherings at the event where attendees can connect both with other attendees who are different from them and who are like them. "Events can have silos, and it can be challenging to be a new person in that environment and feel comfortable participating," she says. "Partner new people with someone who's been an attendee for a long time to make introductions and bring them from being an outsider to an insider."

However, many folks may also feel more comfortable when they connect with others with whom they have more in common, which Brighton found when she worked for an association that had a large contingent of people from other countries. "I always thought it was incredibly important to — rather than just hoping they ran into each other — bring the international participants together so they could meet and interact with each other," she says.

The old way of thinking about racial diversity was to insist on being colorblind and treating everyone the same instead of acknowledging the differences that made them interesting and full of meaningful contributions. Just as that outdated model of thinking is now gone, the idea of designing a 'one-size-fits-all' event may not always work.

Her Leadership Uncorked events use wine as an analogy for corporate leadership. But at one of her trainings, she had a person who didn't drink alcohol. She found a way to draw the same parallels using tea so that attendee could have a similar but unique sensory experience to everyone else. "Instead of saying, 'I'm going to design something that's gender neutral and friendly to everyone,' it's about looking at each unique individual and finding a way to make sure they're cared for," Brighton says. "Find alternatives so people are not excluded from the conversation."

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## The ABCs of the Meeting World's Healthy Food Scene

# (DON'T) LET THEM EAT CAKE

BY CYNTHIA DIAL

**“H**ealthy” is today’s across-the-board buzzword, even in the culinary world’s meetings scene. From planners to chefs, eating clean and organic are in the forefront of decision makers’ minds when planning a get-together to reward and motivate attendees. Here’s the inside scoop, though certainly not of the ice cream sort, on foods that are good for the body, eaten for energy and that nurture the mind.

### INSPIRATION AND INNOVATION

In alignment with the food-health-meetings link is Alexander deHilster, creative design manager for Meetings & Incentives Worldwide Inc. (M&IW), a global event management company that specializes in meetings, incentives and conferences. Having taken groups to the InterContinental San Diego, he’s worked in partnership with a nationally recognized health insurance plan provider.

The M&IW specialist describes a culinary reception at InterContinental San Diego, which was inspired and created by the city’s Little Italy Farmers Market. Each vendor/chef-attended station served its own menu selections under an individual logoed tent — complete with a list of all ingredients and food allergens. Decorated with white picket fencing, greenery and communal picnic tables, and featuring an acoustic duo for entertainment, it was overwhelmingly a welcoming and inventive success.



Where does deHilster go to get creatively inspired? “To keep up to date with top trends, I regularly check out sites like Gourmet magazine and Google to see what’s happening food wise.”

The payoff for the specialist’s over-the-years’ diligence is uncovering the unique — from build-your-own acai bowl bar and gazoz, Israel’s version of homemade soda, to smoothie shooters and afternoon happy-hour mocktails.

A significant display of deHilster’s creativity was featured on this recent menu sample designed to appeal to most food preferences/restrictions: hors d’oeuvres, including roasted carrots on crostini with ricotta and house honey, scallop ceviche on cucumber round with sweet chili sauce and wild mushroom vol-au-vent quinoa risotto cake bites. Entrees were a seafood station with grilled octopus, grilled chorizo, fingerling potatoes, fri-see, petite tomatoes, fennel and kalamata olives served in a clear plastic sphere chef-prepared to order. It was also available as a vegetarian dish and with non-pork alternatives, in addition to grilled lamb loin over Moroccan-spiced couscous with currants, pistachio and drunken sun-dried fruit served in mini copper pans, also available without lamb for vegetarians.

Among the event specialist’s guidelines are to have non-dairy options, such as almond or coconut milk, as he has several attendees who are dairy intolerant. He looks for food fare that is not heavy because he doesn’t want guests to fall asleep after lunch or during meetings.

His goals are not to order processed foods, to use superfoods wherever and whenever possible and to incorporate locally sourced foods. And if he goes with nostalgic fare, it’s always with a healthier twist. Why is it important to deHilster to work within such parameters? His response: “Most attendees want lighter, healthier fare.”

From planners to chefs, eating clean and organic are in the forefront of decision makers’ minds when planning a convention or event to reward and motivate attendees.

With meetings no longer seen as opportunities to overindulge, regardless of consequence, today’s planners operate by different rules.

“I do my best to always provide three to four different types of main courses, two to three different types of salads, three to four different side dishes and a variety of desserts to satisfy various dietary needs,” deHilster says. “In general, I also offer mostly vegetarian/vegan hors d’oeuvres so everyone can enjoy them. Even meat eaters don’t miss that we’re not serving beef sliders, lamb chops or chicken skewers. And I always tell

“We now see a larger impact of guests with health restrictions or allergies coming into the Lobby Bar & Grill during conferences.”

**CHEF JOSE MENDOZA**  
Pechanga Resort Casino



chefs: ‘I don’t want to see another portobello mushroom option,’ which is no problem these days as chefs are very creative.”

Mentioning that paleo, keto and Whole30 diets are sometimes requested, he explains that he works closely with chefs to come up with a varied menu that can accommodate almost all special meal requests, as well as providing items that appeal to those with no restrictions. One alternative is to serve deconstructed

options so everyone can add whatever ingredients they prefer to the dish. When needed, he sometimes provides two different options of the same dish, i.e. angel hair pasta and spaghetti squash.

“My first conversation with the chef is: ‘Are you flexible with the menu?’ I like to pick and choose, mix and add and collaborate with the chef,” deHilster says. “Most times my menus end up being very different from the hotel’s banquet menus.”

## CULTURE AND CUISINE

“Southern California’s culture and cuisine have always leaned toward healthier options,” says Amy DiBiase, executive chef at InterContinental San Diego. “However, the expansion of this mindset across the country has taken it beyond the status of a trend to an expectation.” She deems ‘elevated vegan’ a must and expounds that it should be imaginative — enticing vegans and non-vegans alike.

In the attempt to best showcase a destination, DiBiase thinks local sourcing is the first and most critical step in creating a dining experience distinctive to the locale.

“This needs to happen across the entire spectrum of ingredients — not just produce, poultry and seafood from farms, but also favorite neighborhood vendors, such as bakeries, coffee roasters, gelato makers or a hard kombucha brewer.” Foods, such as walnuts, quinoa, blueberries, acai berries, dark

chocolate, avocados, beets, spinach and kale, termed brain foods, have been linked to good health because of their content of B vitamins, magnesium and low glycemic load.

Taking the extra step, InterContinental San Diego divides its brain food snack breaks into categories based on attendees’ desired results — energy, gut health, memory or mood. Along the same healthy theme, DiBiase’s philosophy with respect to food is basic: “People feel better when they eat real, simple, fresh food — period.”

## FOODS CAN BE SELECTIVE AND SAVVY

“The world is becoming more food savvy, and meeting attendees are interested in every element of the culinary experience,” says Joanie Phillips, CITP, director, purchasing and design with One10 — a Minneapolis-based company experienced in travel and events, incentives and recognition and marketing services.

So, in addition to health concerns, elements of the culinary scene are expansive. To handle the attention to calories, gluten, meatless and more, Phillips’ awareness of food choices covers all the bases. Bullet points of interest to the event specialist are sweet and savory small portions; tasty, plant-based alternatives; milk alternatives, including oat, rice and coconut; energizing foods; lactose-free, nut-free, vegetarian and vegan accommodation, as well as adherence to kosher and halal food preparation. To address the popular grab-and-go concept, healthy options exist and include pre-built salads in a cup, power bowls and bento boxes.

## A RESORT & CASINO’S CULINARY LEADERS

Situated in Temecula in the heart of California’s wine country is the 1,090-room, AAA Four Diamond Award-winning Pechanga Resort Casino. It is known throughout the region for the property’s wide variety of eateries, including the Great Oak Steakhouse — winner of the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence. Culinary leaders Chef Hunter Gonzalez, catering and banquets, and Chef Jose Mendoza, Lobby Bar & Grill, which is part of the \$300-million resort expansion, have a dual commitment.

Gonzalez says that while their quest

is to bring the wine country and coastal feel to the property, the healthy food trend has also led his team to come up with more composed vegetarian and vegan options, as well as lighter fare offerings from their regular menu options, even down to the breaks. “We have incorporated a lot of house-made items such as granolas, pickled vegetables and even coconut water.” The chef has also introduced more superfood

selections, including nuts, berries, yogurts, kale, lentils, chia seeds, different juicing possibilities and more.

“We now see a larger impact of attendees with health restrictions or allergies coming into the Lobby Bar & Grill during conferences,” Mendoza says. The end game for this chef’s crew has been to adjust menus so that their most popular dishes can easily be modified to each attendee’s liking.



# THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE Details

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Planners and chefs are collaborating to come up with menus offering healthy and light fare. Heavy foods or snacks served during breaks can often put attendees to sleep during meetings or classes.

With a focus on house-made items for the Lobby Bar & Grill, Mendoza ensures that he and his culinary team know exactly what goes into their final dishes. “We have also started a small in-house pickling program where we pickle seasonal fruits and vegetables for use when not in season.” He continues that one of the biggest additions to Pechanga’s healthy-dining scene is its wellness menu, where gluten-friendly, vegetarian and vegan options reign, and gives a shout-out to its most popular dishes – Vegan Mushroom Chorizo served at breakfast and Mushroom Wellington for dinner.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

“Because of our location, we have the pleasure of a lot of health-conscious members attending our events,” says Aron Harrington, associate administrator, Southern California Credit Union Alliance (SCCUA), in Long Beach, California. The group has conducted meetings at Pechanga Resort Casino each June for the last few years, returning again this year. “With that said, we certainly see a big wave of people moving toward a plant-based diet and ditching meat altogether. You even see the big guys out there, like Burger King, adapting to this food trend.”

While the meeting planner doesn’t claim his organization to be the best at incorporating healthy choices into every meal and break, he ensures there is always a vegan and or vegetarian option when available and SCCUA has changed its snack offerings from typical sweet treats to more health conscious and mind-power items. With foods new to the scene – such as the West African flavors of moringa, tamarind and cereal grains, including sorghum, fonio, teff and millet; spreads beyond peanut, cashew and almond to include watermelon seed and pumpkin butter,



COURTESY OF JOANIE PHILLIPS

as well as soy alternatives like mung beans and golden chlorella, a type of algae – where do planners like Harrington go to stay ahead of the food curve? “Google is our best friend for everything, including healthy food trends,” he says.

Gonzalez adds: “Our chefs, myself included, are always looking to tweak our menus throughout the year to make sure we’re offering the best and freshest ingredients we can while trying to stay ahead of the curve on food

“We certainly see a big wave of people moving toward a plant-based diet and ditching meat altogether.”

**ARON HARRINGTON**  
Associate Administrator  
Southern California Credit  
Union Alliance (SCCUA)



trends and popular items.” However, his commitment to fresh, local products and healthy outcomes isn’t mutually exclusive.

Recognizing the effectiveness of this culinary duo and taking advantage of the resort’s setting, Harrington says: “When we host our annual conference at Pechanga in Temecula, we make sure that we offer attendees a local wine and brewery tour. Not only is this a fun social time for everyone, but it gets people interested and acquainted with the area’s home-grown flavor.”

### EVEN THE HEARTLAND IS HEALTHY

With more than 300 dining options within walking distance of its convention center and meeting hotels, and nearly three-quarters of those eateries independently owned and with chef-driven concepts, it’s little surprise that Indianapolis is considered one of the nation’s hottest culinary cities. Upping the ante is the locale’s proximity to rich agriculture, affording the city’s chefs and caterers the opportunity to collaborate with farmers, and infuse local produce and protein into its menus.

“When you think of Indiana, you typically think of corn cobs and pork tenderloins,” says Rachel Solano, banquet executive chef at JW Marriott Indianapolis. Although the hotel offers those items on some of their menus, these days there is much more. “We source local products as often as possible.

This is really where our ‘roots’ are most reflected in our menus,” Solano says. The chef adds that the hotel’s menus have significantly evolved over the years to be more inclusive for all allergies and even diets. “Keto and Whole30 hit with a vengeance and we want to have options for those who are on the path to wellness with food, so we’re introducing things like juice bar action stations, avocado toast, even gumbo made with jackfruit.”

In the end, it’s all about change. And it’s about embracing that change. **I&FM**

# SHOW ME THE MONEY!

## Healthy May Cost More, But It Doesn’t Have to Bust the Budget

**F**ood is no longer an afterthought. With food and beverage often representing the largest expenditure of meetings and events, it pays to pay attention to the bottom line, as well as to the end goal of accommodating attendees’ lifestyles.

### ALEXANDER DEHILSTER, MEETINGS & INCENTIVES WORLDWIDE

“Budget is forever a challenge, but I always make it work.” His tip is to order a certain quantity of food to make the budget stretch further. Not every guest eats every food

item, so he doesn’t order individual portions of everything for everyone. He also tries to add food items that were not originally included in the budget in order to provide an appetizing variety, especially for the a.m. and p.m. breaks.

### JOANIE PHILLIPS, ONE10

“Being sustainable and healthy isn’t always the most cost-effective

route. It’s a budget commitment on the client’s part.”

### ARON HARRINGTON, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CREDIT UNION ALLIANCE

Although it’s important to keep in mind the potential extra expense with healthy foods, Aron Harrington, with Southern California Credit Union Alliance, has seen a change. “We’ve found that over the past few years the price disparity really isn’t that noticeable and is worth the additional investment on our end to offer healthier foods at our events.” **I&FM**



## HEALTHY FOR THE PLANET TOO

**T**he long-term health of attendees shouldn’t be the only concern of the planner, as attention to the general well-being of the environment goes hand in hand with those working to be at their physical best. The following are some easy, yet effective, ways to make a difference.

In the interest of addressing the globe’s overindulgence, InterContinental San Diego’s Chef Amy DiBiase follows these guidelines: “We try to reduce waste on the front end through sustainable sourcing, cross utilization of ingredients amongst multiple dishes and smaller portion sizes. Unfortunately, the shift toward more reception-style events is not helping, so we also have to maximize composting and food donation opportunities on the back end,” she says.

Joanie Phillips, of One10, also practices a multi-pronged approach. “We promote eco-friendly serving ware such as bamboo, have water stations versus bottled water, offer canned beverages instead of plastic cups and utilize more bulk than individually packaged items, i.e. build your own trail mix instead of granola bars,” she says. Another idea is a logoed registration desk giveaway – a S’well water bottle, known as the container which keeps beverages cold for 24 hours and hot for 12 hours, that not only reduces waste but also solidifies the theme. **I&FM**

## FEED THE BODY, EXCITE THE SOUL!

### ALEXANDER DEHILSTER, MEETINGS & INCENTIVES WORLDWIDE

“I try to match the food as much as possible to the décor or the theme. Once, I did a seated French-themed event with a seven-course meal. The look of the room changed with each course and the food represented a culinary journey from the north to the south of France.”

### CHEF AMY DIBIASE, INTERCONTINENTAL SAN DIEGO

“Sit-down dinners are a rarity. It’s all about themed receptions composed of food stations paired with craft beverages. For dinners or receptions, it could be a simple table-side dessert preparation or a Champagne-pouring aerialist. People want to be wowed or, better yet, have a video that will wow their Instagram followers.”

### JOANIE PHILLIPS, ONE10

“Expect to see more dishes that are interactive or that are altered in front of the guest, such as a plate garnish that transforms when a soup is added or a dessert that when smashed reveals a melted chocolate sauce, or a layer that dissolves to expose something underneath.” **I&FM**



# STRATEGIES FOR EMBRACING TODAY'S UNIQUE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS

# THE FUTURE OF WORK

BY MAURA KELLER

Just as the meeting and events industry has evolved over the last several decades, so has the working environments in which meeting attendees, as well as planners themselves, work. This change in the working environments within the financial and insurance sectors, as well as other industries, has resulted in a need for innovative ways to make meetings a success in this ever-evolving work environment.

Today's flexible working environment is not at all reminiscent of your grandfather's working experience. In the '60s, work was primarily done by people working together in the same office. There were computers, but they tended to fill entire rooms and were expensive enough that most small businesses couldn't afford them.

"Work had to be done in an office. We shouldn't forget, either, that at this point in history in the U.S., women could still be fired from a job once they became pregnant," says Teresa Douglas, co-author of "Working Remotely: Secrets to Success for Employees on Distributed Teams." "Corporate America assumed that someone stayed at home to care for personal tasks and raise the children. Work wasn't flexible."

As Douglas explains, a mix of technological and cultural changes began to shift us out of this way of working. The 1980s brought computers that could fit on a desk, and laptops that weighed 25 to 55 pounds. It wasn't until the early 2000s, when technological advances that brought us ubiquitous Wi-Fi and lightweight computing devices, as well as smartphones, that work could become mobile.





“While we can’t point to one specific thing that brought about the demand for flexible schedules, increasing numbers of baby boomers and Gen Xers were hitting their mid-career stride and joining the sandwich generation,” Douglas says. “There’s nothing like trying to care for your parents and your children while holding down a job to make a person question why we need to go to an office if all of our work lives on our computers.”

That brings us to today, when you can start a business, hire people who live around the world and sell a product or service without leaving your home.

“According to Global Workplace Analytics, the number of people working remotely has grown more than 159% since 2005. Increased globalism is probably a large part of why work is more flexible now. It doesn’t make sense to hold everyone to a 9 to 5 schedule when you work in wildly different time zones,” Douglas says.

Drew Scott, senior vice president of Scott Insurance, says that, as technology has evolved across the decades, the ease of working remotely has increased. However, sometimes the technology at home takes a while to catch up to the industry standard.

“We offered our first work from home opportunity to staff in the late ’90s. However, when we became fully paperless, it became difficult for employees at home to upload and review detailed inspection files, etc.,”

Scott says. It was not until dial-up internet was replaced that the Scott Insurance home office could handle the required bandwidth. And, as systems became more and more web based, it was easier to work remotely.

“However, security concerns have only increased over time with web- and mobile-based applications,” Scott says. “Now, additional software is needed to safely password protect and verify remote employees.”

El Lages is the senior vice president of People and Culture at Flexera, a company that helps organizations realize technology’s power to accelerate their

“Even the conference call has taken on a new dimension with easy video access.”

**EL LAGES**  
Senior Vice President of  
People and Culture  
Flexera



business. Flexera handles software asset optimization for many companies in the insurance and financial world. As part of the flexible workplace, global companies now have access to teleconferencing and video conferencing, where you can hold meetings from anywhere, allowing freedom to connect from most mobile devices.

“The traditional restrictions of needing to be in a conference room real-time no longer applies. Even the conference

According to Global Workplace Analytics, the number of people working remotely has grown more than 159% since 2005. Advances with Wi-Fi, lightweight computing devices, and smartphones have ushered in the trend.

call has taken on a new dimension with easy video access,” Lages says.

Julie Morgenstern, author of “Never Check Email in the Morning and Other Unexpected Strategies for Making Your Work Life Work,” says there are a lot of benefits and power to the flexibility offered in today’s working environment. But, it’s a bit of the Wild West, with workplace productivity suffering without a lot of training or guidelines on how to work in such an unstructured workplace. Of course, remote workers also may keep non-traditional hours, so reaching them for an impromptu meeting may be more challenging.

“The 24/7 global economy in which we can work anytime and anywhere makes it hard to turn work off at night and on the weekends,” Morgenstern says. “That leads to inefficiency, burn-out, anxiousness and a loss of work-life balance.”

Other common challenges include a sense of isolation and disconnection from peers when working remotely and at different hours — which results in a loss of the ‘casual’ conversations that occur when people are working in physical proximity where a lot of information is transmitted and great ideas are born.

## TODAY’S FLEXIBLE WORK ENVIRONMENT & MEETINGS

As a result of this flexible work environment, companies tend to over-rely on remote meeting technologies as a cost and convenience savings without much regard for the effectiveness. “Some topics and meeting types work extremely well for virtual meetings; others really require and benefit from in-person get-togethers,” Morgenstern says.

Also, there are not a lot of strong guidelines defined or enforced on virtual meeting etiquette, and too often attendees are multitasking during video or phone conference calls — which diminishes the value of those meetings.

Sunkee Lee, assistant professor of

Organizational Theory and Strategy at Carnegie Mellon University’s Tepper School of Business, says there are several key challenges emerging from flexible work environments from the perspective of the company or organization orchestrating a meeting.

The first challenge is getting employees enough ‘face time’ with each other. As Lee explains, although advances in communication technologies have made it easier for employees to virtually interact, there are still unique benefits of interacting in person.

“Face-to-face interaction develops more trust between individuals and allows for the transfer of more tacit knowledge,” Lee says. “Such things as flexible hours and working from home lead to employees not being in the office at the same time, and lead to significantly less face-to-face interactions.”

Of course, people’s facial expressions convey many emotions and subtle opinions. When people have meetings over the phone, it is highly likely that these emotions and opinions will be missed. The more practical challenge is that, because people work on their own schedules in a flexible work environment, it is very difficult to decide on a date and time that works for everyone.

The second challenge is related to possible employee slacking. Although companies have developed some measures to prevent employees from slacking while they are out of the office or working elsewhere, those methods are far from perfect. Especially for tasks that have relatively long deadlines, it is unclear how much of their time employees are actually spending on such tasks.

“Third, there could be serious data security issues when employees work from home or elsewhere. Information is a key resource for an organization. When that information can be accessed outside of the office, it also increases the chances of it being leaked,” Lee says.

Companies tend to over-rely on remote meeting technologies as a cost and convenience savings, but some topics and meeting types benefit from in person get-togethers.

“The 24/7 global economy in which we can work anytime and anywhere makes it hard to turn work off at night and on the weekends.”

**JULIE MORGENSTERN**  
Author

“Never Check Email in the Morning and Other  
Unexpected Strategies for Making Your  
Work Life Work”



collaboration, technology and connection. As Douglas explains, most of us understand how to get work done in a physical office full of our coworkers. It’s tempting to think that working flexibly or from home is exactly the same as working in an office. It isn’t.

“You can absolutely connect and collaborate in the flexible, distributed workforce, but the tools you use to do so must change. Many of us have found that we need a mix of asynchronous and synchronous ways to work together,” Douglas says.

For instance, Douglas uses a combination of Google Sheets, Slack, ToDoist, Trello and Zoom to work with people on projects, to update her boss on what she’s working on, and to keep her portion of the business on track.



According to Scott, you can’t have a departmental meeting if certain members of the department are not on duty and work non-traditional hours. Communication is more difficult in general when you don’t have all staff in one place at the same time.

And, because of today’s flexible working environments, more meeting planners are finding the issue of technology needs to be addressed in a larger way than previously.

For instance, there is a learning curve for virtual meetings.

“Most of us had to learn the hard way to mute our microphones when we aren’t speaking. And the meeting host has to approach each meeting with a strategy. How are you going

to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak?” Douglas says. “Is your client silent because she has nothing to say, or because her internet is slow and she has a lag? Will you ask each person to talk in turn, allow attendees to come on mic whenever they want, invite attendees to type answers into the chat, or some combination of all three?”

As Lages explains, while leveraging teleconferencing and video technologies as an alternative to traditional meeting options are being enveloped in today’s flexible working environment, there are still technical issues that come up. Bad connections cause delays and interrupt meeting flows.

“Depending on the nature of the subject, there are times it is essential to have key stakeholders around the room.





Services like Google Sheets, Slack, ToDoist, Trello or Asana, and Zoom allow employees to go paperless, and keep team members updated on the status of projects and deadlines.

In these instances, scheduling can be challenging,” Lages says.

The good news is that you can solve 90% of these issues with patience and planning. And, if there’s one thing event planners do well, it’s plan. Douglas suggests getting into a video room and playing with the buttons to see what makes the most sense for the meeting’s size and style.

#### KEY STRATEGIES

So how can meeting planners adapt their processes to accommodate today’s flexible working environment? The key to successfully implementing meeting strategies among people who work within a flexible work environment is to clearly communicate the importance

of organization, scheduling and being aware of other’s time constraints or conflicts. And it’s important to remember that some people are simply not cut out for the rigors of setting and managing one’s own schedule in an untraditional setting — which can impact the ability to seamlessly orchestrate meetings of all types.

That’s why it is imperative for the employer to communicate expectations in advance — from turnaround time with project work to the expected attendance at off-site meetings and events. Also, employees making this change should have a space in their home that is strictly dedicated to work, and must acknowledge and find solutions for all distractions.

Morgenstern recommends meeting planners be strategic and intentional. Develop criteria and guidelines for meeting planning — including defining clearly what types of meetings work well virtually and which are best done in person.

“For remote meetings, be clear on topics and the number of attendee limits for teleconference only, and when the camera or Skype version is recommended. And come up with clear best practices and etiquette for meetings, such as recommended length, number of participants, no multitasking, cell phones put away and who is the note taker,” Morgenstern says. “To thrive in an unstructured new environment, we need to create guardrails and guidelines so people know how to make use of the flexible tools and spaces. It’s really all so new to people.”

Another strategy that meeting planners should utilize is over communicating. Start by asking colleagues and clients for their working hours — and be sure you know the time zone in which they work. Use a collaboration application that fits with your style of work. For some, this can mean a shared document in Google or Dropbox. For others, using a project management system like Trello or Asana makes more sense.

“This gives people a way to check in on the work and show what they’re doing during the hours that make the most sense for them,” Douglas says. “That allows you to use meeting time more strategically and focus on the details that really need to be talked out.”

Lages advises meeting planners be aware of the best platforms and technology offerings to communicate effectively, so you can have a real-time video with a seamless ability to share presentations and content.

“Ensure when booking on-site locations that, if you have remote participants, the connectivity is sound and the equipment will accommodate all parties whether on video screens or compatible phones,” Lages says.

#### THE FUTURE OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

As the world becomes more global, the way meeting planners and attendees work will become both less location dependent but more location significant.

Lacey Clark, principal of NW Recruiting Partners, an affiliation of Sanford Rose Associates, says it won’t be long before we’ll be interacting with coworkers in an office environment

from the comfort of our home office while wearing virtual reality headgear.

“Companies are choosing to give flexible work schedules for many reasons. Commute times are too long, it’s less expensive for the company to have ‘hoteling stations’ rather than a desk for

“Is your client silent because she has nothing to say or because her internet is slow and she has a lag?”

**TERESA DOUGLAS**

Co-Author

“Working Remotely: Secrets to Success for Employees on Distributed Teams”



Morgenstern thinks the open work plans and co-working spaces will continue to evolve and gain popularity — with people gravitating toward being around other people more, not less. But they will need to learn how to apply work processes and organization within the flexibility because we are all motivated by the same goals,” Morgenstern says. “We strive to make our unique contribution, accomplish great work, and be connected to others while having a healthy work-life balance.”

Scott adds that history shows us that flexible working environments will only continue to increase. “The

workforce continues to be more sensitive to the cost of living, the commuting experience, and the overall standard of living,” Scott says. “Certain lifestyles require that people work remotely. Employers cannot afford to limit their workforce by strict geographical restrictions.”

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## WHERE FLEXIBLE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS AND MEETINGS CONNECT

Employers should take the following steps to enhance the remote working experience as it relates to ensuring streamlined meetings:

- Establish clear expectations and guidelines about meeting availability.
- Use collaborative software and online platforms to help staff stay in touch,



and schedule regular calls and in-person meetings.

- Keep a schedule of workers’ on-site availability and where and how they can be reached when off-site to keep scheduled meetings flowing smoothly.
- Ensure employees have the resources they need, like a laptop, cell phone and the ability to connect to secure corporate networks.

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# OPEN ACCESS

## Best Practices for Making the Disabled Feel Welcome at Any Event

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

**T**he Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990. You might think that, as a result, all public facilities, including hotels, convention centers, arenas and other venues typically used for meetings and other events easily accommodate physically challenged people today so planners don't have to think much about it. Unfortunately, that's not always the case.

### THINK ABOUT INCLUSION

With the topic of inclusion very much in the forefront of meetings-related discussions, planners actually have a lot to think about to ensure that their meetings are not just welcoming but also safe for attendees with disabilities. Accessibility in all its variations is a highly complex issue, and planners have a multitude of considerations in order to meet all needs at every meeting, regardless of where it is taking place.

So what do planners have to consider? "Ease of use, inclusion and respect," says Holly Valenti, general manager at Hosts New Orleans. She also notes that, "It's a lot easier now than it was even just five years ago. Convention facilities, transportation companies, venues and even human resources are getting more and more familiar with the requirements."

That's true in the United States but, as our experts point out, that may or may not be true in international destinations. But there's also the importance of understanding what attendees may or may not need, and having a dialogue with them about that rather than making assumptions.

"Planners should not assume that a person with a disability needs assistance," Valenti says, and that's where respect comes in.

"A sign of respect is to ask attendees if they need assistance before acting," she cautions. "And, if you do offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, then wait for or ask for instructions; respect the person's right to indicate the kind of help that's needed."

Transportation is one key area where accommodating disabilities may come into play. "Typically, booking vans or buses with wheelchair lifts, for example, is not a hard task and they should be the same price as vehicles without a wheelchair lift," Valenti says.

But a planner's job doesn't end with simply finding and booking the vehicles. "One of the most challenging parts of this type of transportation," Valenti notes, "is ensuring that the driver is trained on how to use the equipment, as well as educated on how to respectfully interact with each attendee."

Sight and hearing impairment are among the typical challenges that planners have to think about.

"Just recently, we incorporated a closed-captioning system as well as a sign language interpreter during a general session for 2,700 administrative professionals," Valenti says. "Both services were projected onto the main screen above the stage during the keynote presentation so that all attendees were always able to see both services."

She notes that many large conferences typically have their own customized conference apps, which can be very helpful to attendees with disabilities. "These include schedules, conference info and transportation information," she says. "Typically, information for disabled attendees is included in this app, for example, special phone numbers to call for an ADA shuttle."



COURTESY OF HOLLY VALENTI

### ASK QUESTIONS

Asking and answering questions, regardless of the specific circumstances, is important. "Always ask questions about how you can best accommodate meeting attendees, and also respond appropriately to what attendees ask you or tell you. Understanding disability access needs and responding accurately, quickly and respectfully to

Planners should remember to provide transportation with the appropriate lifts for disabled attendees and ensure drivers are trained to properly operate the devices.

to be compliant because they're historical. Some locations may require considerable planning while newer venues may be fully compliant with access to ramps, elevators, visual cues for hearing impairments and audio cues for visual impairments. This is something to consider at the RFP and, if you're still determining the site, at the site inspection stage."

In some cases, depending on the location, planners may even have to consider moving an event to a newer or more fully compliant venue.

Like others, Endean points out that asking questions is key. "Things to consider range from ramps and elevators to accessible restrooms, including non-binary needs. It's also important to ensure that you're not creating obstacles with displays or loose cords, that you have power available to charge scooters and devices that enhance accessibility, and to think about how you are training your team to work with attendees with special needs."

Not all disabilities are visible, she

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**HOLLY VALENTI**  
General Manager  
Hosts New Orleans



requests for information, directions or assistance conveys genuine welcome," Valenti says.

Tahira Endean, CMP, CED, DES, head of events for SITE Global, says, "Steps taken and action required depends in part on where you are and how compliant the destination and venue are. A historical venue or city may have pavement or floor surfaces, and narrow doorways, that aren't required



notes. “Many are not, such as low vision or hearing loss, and chronic medical conditions that limit mobility, strength or lead to rapid exhaustion.”

Moreover, each disability is different. “Mobility, vision, hearing — everyone has a different need. Additionally, you might have attendees who have scent sensitivities and you may need to create a scent-free meeting, or there may be serious dietary challenges. Ask,” she says, “Don’t make assumptions.”

## DON’T FORGET PRESENTERS

Speakers and presenters must be considered, too. “Do you have presenters with physical challenges who must be on a stage? How will they get there? And what about presentations? Will attendees with different abilities be able to learn from and interact with presentations as expected?”

Endean has firsthand experience. “From no elevators to non-functioning elevators requiring us to take people through distant service entrances, to awkward moments when we have a back row available for wheelchairs and scooters and a participant who wants a front-row seat, to unbudgeted needs for ASL translation or requests that come too late to secure translation, the lessons have been learned the hard way,” she says.

Her favorite best example was years ago when a colleague was planning for a 1,200-person dinner with people coming off a cruise ship to a nearby venue for a dinner and dance event.

“The dance floor was unnaturally large at nearly 1/3 of the room, which made sense when the orchestra began to play and the floor filled up with dancers in wheelchairs — and million-dollar smiles all around. More recently, I was on an event where one participant had limited mobility and many people took turns assisting her, from wheeling her around, or supporting her on cobblestone or gravel walks, to assisting with luggage and getting drinks. It was all appreciated and she not only had a seamless experience, but also made new friends.”

Bottom line, Endean says, “Disabled

attendees want what we all want: A comfortable experience navigating an unfamiliar environment.”

The process has to start with registration. “If you ask attendees about limitations at registration, you have a good start on what’s needed,” Endean says. “Then over-communicate what they can expect from beginning to end. And, again, don’t make assumptions. Don’t assume, for example, that someone in a wheelchair wants to sit at the back of the room; maybe they prefer the end of an aisle at a midpoint or near the front. Ask.”



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One way to determine if your event is accommodating to disabled attendees is to use a wheelchair or crutches during site inspection to get a different perspective.

Not surprising, meals are a primary consideration. “Some people need regular healthy meals and snacks to function at their best,” Endean notes. “If you plan a buffet and there are attendees with crutches or a walker, how can they carry the plate? Does someone in a wheelchair prefer to be transferred to a banquet chair or stay in their own chair or scooter? If transferring is preferred, is assistance required?”

## CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

This, she adds, is just a small example of thinking through the experience from the attendees’ perspective. For a concrete understanding of potential challenges, Endean suggests planners go through the site inspection in a wheelchair or on crutches, or try to talk/listen at a networking reception with cotton stuffed in their ears to experience what someone with hearing loss experiences, or listen to an entire presentation with eyes closed to determine if it all makes sense without visuals.

Then, there are service animals. Is the venue welcoming to them and their basic needs, including water, food and relief facilities? When and how should communicating information to attendees and to event venues staff members fit into the overall planning? “It’s also important to know that service animals are not just for the blind; they’re used for other needs as well,” Endean says.

The fact is that there’s not a one-size-fits-all solution for making a meeting experience optimum for attendees with disabilities. “What I know for sure is that planning takes time and asking questions is paramount. For example, if deaf attendees require ASL/translation, these interpreters typically have to be booked well in advance, and there’s more than one sign language, just

as there are many spoken languages,” she points out.

Endean also notes that there are attendees whose first language isn’t the primary language of the event. “Having subtitled image magnification can offer a solution and several services do this in real-time,” she says. “Microsoft, for example, has been using Skype’s ability to do this in its own meetings for a long time.”

Technology is often the answer. “Many people rely on technology, including tablets and phones, to aid their navigation through the world. And devices such as LipSync allow

even those in ‘sip and puff’ chairs to use devices for multiple functions. Word-to-text translation, such as wordly, which offers podium-to-personal-device access, can also support hearing-impaired participants.”

In the case of visually impaired attendees, planners need to provide visual interpretation if a speaker’s presentation is reliant on visual aids. “It’s much like watching a TV show with the ‘describe video’ turned on,” Endean says. “You also can’t rely on visual signage to give cues on where to go, so having a human guide or audible cues, like when you have Google maps turned on, helps sight-impaired attendees navigate the conference.”

Endean thinks more apps to help challenged attendees will come. Meanwhile, she suggests that planners ask their mobile-app providers what they offer. “You may find they already have solutions for you. And groups such as Mobility Mojo are great non-technical resources for accessible travel, which, of course, is required for attendance at most conferences. Check them out.”

Talking directly with disabled attendees themselves, however, is a must. “Call them and ask human-to-human questions about how you can create their best experience,” she advises. “When you take time to ask what the need is and use basic human empathy, you can usually get it right.”

Tina McLaughlin, director, Global Operations and Excellence — American Express Meetings & Events, also agrees that a planner’s course of action is dependent on location, including domestic or international events. For example, she says, “In the United States, since ADA legal requirements were put in place, they ensure that meeting venues accommodate most disabilities. However, there may still be challenges in some older, smaller venues as they may have renovation exemptions. But outside of the United States, rules and

accommodations vary considerably and must be researched extensively.”

In terms of a planner’s primary considerations regarding accessibility, McLaughlin notes that it’s important to ensure that accommodations for disabled attendees allow for a variety of challenges. “Meaning, the needs of a sight-impaired person will differ from those of a person in a wheelchair.”

“If you ask attendees about limitations at registration, you have a good start on what’s needed.”

**TAHIRA ENDEAN, CMP, CED, DES**

Head of Events  
SITE Global



Beyond that, she points out that accessible entrances are important and there should be signage for closed-door meeting access. Planners should also know the distance of restrooms from the meeting space and be aware of the necessity for crowd control. “Large gatherings may cause mobility considerations,” she says.

Like other experts, McLaughlin notes that disabled attendees want the same things that all attendees want. “They want to feel included and not separated from other attendees and planned activities due to their disability.” Accessible transportation is one of

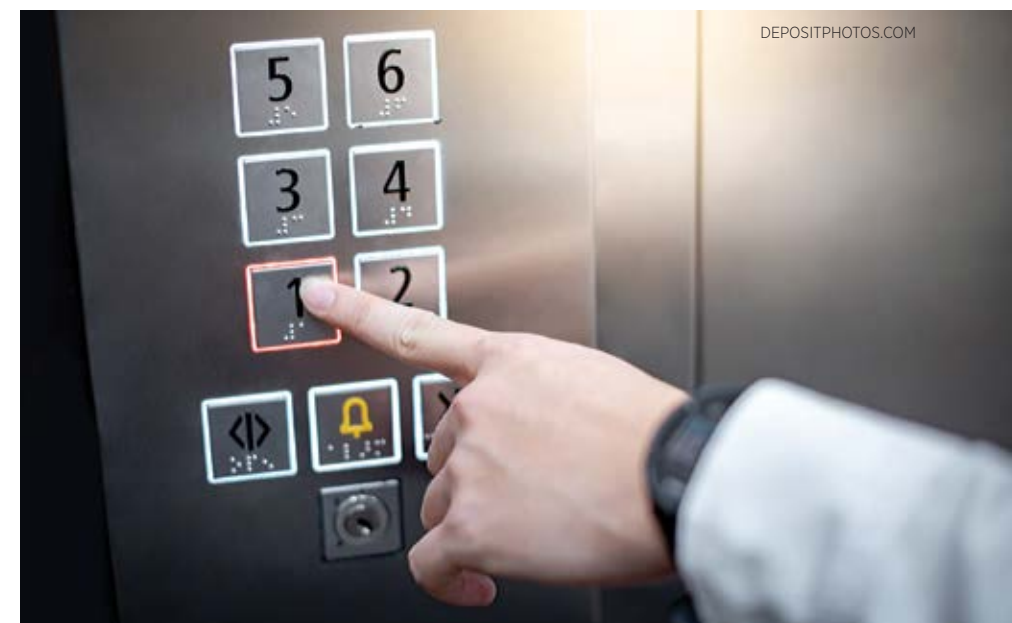
those issues that will likely vary markedly from the United States to international destinations. “Within the United States, this is easy,” McLaughlin says, “and ADA laws preclude any additional costs. However, this same level of access, and consistency in pricing and availability, will vary outside of the United States and should be researched carefully by meeting planners whose events are set in an international destination.”

Most experts have not found any issues with accommodating service animals at meetings, though one concern mentioned is that other attendees too often look at these animals as pets and want to interact with them, which is not appropriate while the animals are working. Education is the answer to that and,

if planners know a service animal will be at an event, it’s important to educate other attendees about what is appropriate and what is not.

Like many other things, accommodating and welcoming attendees with disabilities requires appropriate research, advanced planning and clear communication. But the bottom line is about human interaction. “Do your homework and communicate,” McLaughlin advises. “But, most of all, make attendees with disabilities feel welcome, included and comfortable so that they can focus on the purpose of the event and have a stellar experience.”

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The bottom line, planners say, is that disabled attendees simply want to feel welcome, included and experience events just like attendees who are not disabled.



BY MAURA KELLER

**A**s the director of Vibe, an event design and destination management company in Miami, Florida, Valérie Bihet has a keen understanding of the importance of face-to-face meetings within the events industry.

With more than 20 years of meetings and events experience, Bihet has worked intimately with the management, design and production of special events. Her event experience spans high-profile social occasions, nonprofit fundraisers, corporate meetings, conferences, product launches and incentive trips. As such, Bihet has seen the way technology has impacted traditional face-to-face meetings.

“Technology has changed meetings in a couple of ways. First, there is much more interaction between presenter and audience,” Bihet says. “New software allows you to ask a question during a presentation and the audience can answer in real time.”

Nick Morgan, author of “Can You Hear Me? How to Connect with People in a Virtual World,” says he’s seeing three main changes affecting the face-to-face aspect of today’s meetings.

First, meetings have become tech-savvy in varying degrees, with polling software, apps and holograms leading the list of technical innovations.

“That’s probably the easiest and least meaningful kind of change — it’s really just a reflection of the surrounding society,” Morgan says. Also, meetings have adopted a streaming element and often allow people to participate remotely via their computers.

“This is a real change that meetings have embraced without really thinking through how that should change what’s presented and how it’s presented,” Morgan says. “As a result, those watching remotely are most often an add-on rather than an actual new dimension of the meeting and little is done to make the remote viewer experience a satisfying one.”

# The Importance of Face-To-Face Meetings In Today’s Tech-Savvy World

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While technology has made it possible for fewer face-to-face meetings, experts say virtual meetings should not replace in-person, human interaction.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Morgan says the increased use of technology and virtual experiences in our work and personal lives has created a deep need for face-to-face experiences, which meetings can provide, “but not if they try to become virtual,” Morgan says.

So, with the advancements in technology and virtual meeting options, is Bihet seeing corporations and others leaning toward embracing technology and lessening the amount of face-to-face meetings?

Not quite yet. “With all of my clients, they have one or two face-to-face meetings a year with all of the top management,” Bihet says. “After that, if you have quarterly meetings, those can maybe be done digitally with conferencing. I really think that at least one to two per year, depending on budget, have to be face to face. It’s more powerful when people know each other in person. You have a better connection and people who grow up in a company need to know each other.”

As Bihet explains, people cannot only be behind a screen to offer an experience. You need to be connected with your emotions, which comes from in-person events. “That is what will tie a person to a brand, their bosses and the strategy and values of the company,” Bihet says. “All my clients — and I produce over 90 events per year — are proof that they still do face-to-face meetings. But it all depends on the size of the company. For one client, they are doing one big meeting of 850 people every three or four years. But when you are 100 people, they may do an event every year face to face.”

Indeed, Morgan adds that the primary reason to forego face-to-face meetings is cost savings.

“But it’s a false savings,” he says. “My research has found — because



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virtual relationships degrade over time — our virtual connections have a negativity bias. And, so, if those virtual relationships aren’t renewed with face-to-face encounters, they will wither and die,” Morgan says.

According to Melanie A. Katzman, Ph.D., author of “Connect First: 52 Simple Ways to Ignite Success, Meaning, and Joy at Work,” people are naturally wired to connect with each other. But in today’s work environment we’re often more focused on interacting with screens than with those around us. We’ve forgotten how, when and why to connect with people.

“Meetings are less efficient as participants attempt to be in multiple places at once, checking their phones and answering emails while only partially tuning into the proceedings,” Katzman says. “Wherever possible, I suggest having in-person meetings. The investment in face-to-face interactions repays itself as individuals are more motivated to help and more easily understand coworkers once they have met in person.”

Being physically present also plays a critical role in workplace success, which is largely determined by a person’s ability to tune into the needs of the people around them.

“That means you show up, put your devices down, turn unnecessary alerts and ringers off, and, most importantly,

mute your internal dialogue. Then, you need to pay attention to the person you are with. Engage your senses, see how they’re reacting, listen and pause to experience their mood,” Katzman says. “This is difficult if you’re connecting remotely. You can read people best if you interact with them in person. If all meetings are remote, you are encouraging robotic behavior and not taking full advantage of the passion and commitment that is unleashed when people come together on the human level.”

#### WHAT TECHNOLOGY OFFERS

Amaia Stecker, managing partner, Events & Fundraising for Pilar & Co., an event-planning agency, has more than a decade of experience planning a variety of events for corporate, nonprofit and social organizations. She approaches each event holistically, with an eye for detail and a passion for making the experience purposeful.

Stecker says technology is, and can be, a fantastic tool to reach new audiences that could not or would not normally attend an in-person meeting. It can also be a double-edged sword.

If that person has a strong experience with the digital tool or platform, they could:

- Be inspired to attend in person in the future.
- Like it so much that they never attend.
- Have a terrible experience and you’ve lost them.

“With an on-site, face-to-face experience, I believe attendees are willing to give a margin for error or understand external factors, such as the site, host city or hotels. Whether it’s your fault or not, you can usually get a second chance out of people,” Stecker says. “With a digital experience, like a livestream or a webinar, that margin is much smaller or nonexistent.”

Of course, if the whole experience is digital, then the logistics are simpler. “With mixed on-site and digital, the planner and producers have to remem-

ber the digital audience and continue to involve them, like the old TV shows referring to the audience watching at home,” Stecker says. “There are a lot of cool ways to do this with online polls, texting, commenting, livestreaming viewers from home back to the on-site event, etc.”

Stecker says having a virtual element to a meeting is also a way to simplify the on-site experience as much of the pre-event work and/or convention business, bylaws adoption, position statements, etc., can be disseminated in advance — saving valuable stage time for other things such as education and experiential interactions.

“I’m seeing a shift in the type and style of meetings being held. Those headed to digital formats are transactional in nature, such as a specific training with a take-away like a certification program or webinar,” Stecker says. “In-person meetings are really having to ramp up the quality of the experience and impact on attendees. The experience and impact also need to make sense and relate to the purpose of the event and why the attendee is there in the first place.”

Stecker says any decline in attendance at an in-person or face-to-face meeting is going to reflect the following factors:

- Cost to Attend/Return on Investment: Many companies have slashed their professional development budgets, so younger employees don’t have the sense that the annual meeting is a culturally mandatory event. And, if they haven’t built those relationships year-over-year with peers and mentors, attending may make them feel like outsiders and they won’t return the following year. They are certainly not going to pay to attend.
- Other life obligations: Let’s remember, the millennial generation, those born between 1981 and 1996, is huge. The oldest are in their late 30s and the youngest are just graduating college. The multiple demands of time

Nick Morgan, author of “Can You Hear Me? How to Connect with People in a Virtual World,” says meeting attendees connected remotely are sometimes neglected.

and attention have shifted, and attending the annual conference or other face-to-face, on-site meeting requires time away from actual work responsibilities; taking care of families and pets, which increases attendance costs; second jobs; other educational commitments and more.

• Simpler ways to network: There are myriad local networking opportunities that don’t require travel or long hours away from doing actual work. Local chapters of professional associations,

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MELANIE A. KATZMAN, PH.D.

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“Connect First: 52 Simple Ways to Ignite Success, Meaning, and Joy at Work”



and even fraternity and sorority alumni organizations, allow for people to catch a happy hour or lunch meeting rather than attending a multi-day event. Social media also allows for people to remain connected outside of the ‘reunion’ model that many annual events used to provide.

#### TAKE STEPS TO ENHANCE FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Making a face-to-face meeting successful takes effort and requires initiatives to enhance these meetings and make them as engaging as possible.

Katzman offers an example of how

in-person meetings trump remote ones. Consider this: a meeting planner sets a very high bar when she orchestrates an out-of-town meeting for a group. A packet awaits each attendee when they arrive. This includes a personalized welcome note, often on a local postcard, annotated one-page maps, suggested places to visit before the event officially kicks off, and a small envelope with local currency so the attendee can get a cup of tea and a sense of their new surroundings. In

advance, the meeting planner provides links to the photos, contact information and bios of the whole group. Afterward, she sends the seating charts so attendees can follow up with “that fascinating conversationalist to my left.” The event team is prepped beforehand as to “who might want to meet whom,” and they proactively find attendees and make the

introductions. The meeting planner continually scans the room for the person who was ‘feigning’ disinterest by playing on their phone, and offers to personally escort them to a guest who might share a common interest.

“By modeling such attentive behavior and creating the conditions for maximum interaction, the meeting planner infuses energy and happiness into what could otherwise be dull, obligatory corporate events,” Katzman says.

So why should meeting and event planners go to the effort described above? For Morgan, it’s quite simple:



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Face-to-face meetings provide a type of human communication that virtual meetings do not.

“We exchange more information via body language — building trust, creating connections and making strong commitments — than we possibly can virtually,” Morgan says. “All virtual relationships tend to degrade over time, so, there’s a deeper kind of efficiency — the efficiency of profound human connection — that happens much more effectively in person. Meeting planners should make the in-person richness of human connection clear because it simply cannot be done virtually.”

Bihet says the room setup plays an important role in face-to-face meetings, so it is vital to make it attractive. Also meetings should no longer have four- to six-hour presentations in a classical ballroom.

“You need to shake the mind up to keep attendees energized,” Bihet says. “Do more workshops where people are really learning about the company in a more hands-on way. Use those apps to engage them in the presentation and include entertainment.”

Morgan says the single-most important thing for meeting and event planners to do to make face-to-face meetings most effective is to allow for structured networking. According to Morgan, meeting planners tend to overload meetings with speakers in order to demonstrate a packed meeting, but it’s usually overkill.

“The second-most important thing is to allow the participants to have

structured ways to interact with the speakers and panels, so that there is a merging between audience and speakers,” Morgan says. This is rarely done but is astonishingly powerful for the audience when it is done well.

What’s more, meeting planners who want to enhance face-to-face meetings should focus on who is in the room. Make quick verbal introductions. Is it a big group? Ask a few questions that, with a show of hands, allows people to have a sense of their fellow attendees. If possible, place name cards in front of guests

“There’s a deeper kind of efficiency — the efficiency of profound human connection — that happens much more effectively in person.”

**NICK MORGAN**

Author

*“Can You Hear Me? How to Connect with People in a Virtual World”*



so they can be addressed personally and to help participants put names to faces.

“Assign seats to relieve social pressure, add an element of surprise and ensure exposure for people who might not otherwise meet,” Katzman says. “Company meetings of even six people are enhanced by shaking up who sits with whom.”

#### FUTURE VISION

Melissa Park, award-winning global event producer, says for a while, many corporations believed that virtual events were the wave of the future and that traditional meetings would be obsolete.

The ability to network, one of the most important factors for companies that often host face-to-face meetings is lost in virtual meetings, according to experts.

“While the virtual model has its benefits, mainly cost efficiency and easier access to key participants in a timely manner, the importance of human interaction and the relationships formed during in-person meetings became incredibly obvious very quickly,” Park says. “The level of human connection from being face to face, with its ability to read and feel someone’s emotions, cannot be replicated in any form of online delivery.”

Park says that, right now, most corporations are adopting a hybrid approach. Face-to-face meetings are used to create connections and begin to build relationships. Then, technology such as video conferencing, online chat tools and social/community groups take over to keep conversations going.

“While face-to-face meetings are more expensive than their virtual counterparts, successful corporations have recognized that the magic really happens when you bring people together into the same physical space,” Park says. That provides a value with which no price tag of an event can compete.

The key to success is identifying the format required to achieve the meeting goals and the desired level of impact.

“There will be ways for us as planners to continue to use technology to reinforce the power of face-to-face meetings,” Bihet says.

Experts agree that the real future of face-to-face meetings is to provide the vitality of human connection

that is missing from the virtual world. So meetings that succeed will double down on the face-to-face aspects of the meeting rather than the virtual. And they will have to figure out how to make the best possible use of the audience’s time, since that is increasingly scarce.

“At the end of the day, despite all the technology we’ve come to rely on, the future of work demands a professional, practical way of establishing quality relationships by connecting with each other first as fellow humans, and then as coworkers and collaborators,” Katzman says. “This makes face-to-face meetings more critical than ever.”

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Gateway Canyons Resort & Spa, in Gateway, Colorado, has appointed **Tim Mattos** as its new director of sales and marketing. Mattos brings more than two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, including various leadership positions. He will oversee all marketing campaigns and revenue strategies for the property in his new role.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has announced it has two new senior sales managers — **Randi Ferlito** and **Daniela Price**. Ferlito and Price will maintain relationships with key accounts and generate new group business for the hotel near Orlando, Florida. Both have had experience working with Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin Resort prior to their new positions.

BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, has appointed **Estelle Mapp** as its new director of sales and marketing for Costa d'Este Beach Resort & Spa, a Gemstone Collection property in Vero Beach, Florida. Mapp brings nearly 15 years of professional hotel sales experience to her new role.

The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay is pleased to welcome **Clodagh Larkin** as the California oceanfront resort's new director of meeting and events. Joining the resort from The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba, Larkin brings dynamic international experience within The Ritz-Carlton portfolio.

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa, in Orlando, Florida, appointed **Tami Corday** as its new director of event management. Corday has a background in the hospitality industry and has worked in food & beverage, catering, event planning, hospitality management and customer service.

JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa in Orlando, Florida has named **Jamie Jordan** as its new director of sales and marketing. Jordan brings more than 26 years of hospitality leadership experience with Marriott International. Jordan will be creating and executing a marketing plan to lay a foundation for the hotel's success.

The Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta All Inclusive & Spa in Mexico has named **Maria Laura Venegas** as its new director of sales. With more than 20 years of hospitality experience, Venegas has expertise managing segments such as tour operators, leisure groups, MICE and ecommerce. An expert in Mexico's hospitality industry after leading impactful marketing and sales initiatives for national brands such as Camino Real, Brisas and Park Royal, she will be responsible for working closely with all aspects of the hotel and ultimately generating sales and leads.

The Live Aqua Beach Resort Punta Cana, in the Dominican Republic, which is slated to open this spring, has appointed **Marc Andre** as its new director of sales and marketing. Aside from managing all aspects of the hotel's grand opening, Andre will oversee and manage sales staff and reservations to maximize revenue and ensure the achievement of marketing goals. He has been in the hotel sector for more than 30 years, working for leading hotel chains such as Grupo Presidente InterContinental, AMResorts and Grupo Playa.

Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa announced **Cory Baum** as its new director of sales and marketing. Baum joins the property from Hyatt Regency Jacksonville in Florida. Baum has previously worked at other Hyatt properties and has received numerous awards and recognitions.



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