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THE VOICE OF CANADIAN MEETINGS

FALL 2014

**CAPS**



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Learned by Meeting Planners**



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# Is the Professional Association Extinct?



I hear from people more and more that in this connected information age, associations, as we know them, are no longer relevant. It is the model of a past generation. Not surprisingly, these thoughts are often shared by those who have never been members of an association or those who were part of one but have since left.

I don't believe it is the existence of associations that is the problem, but the value they deliver which needs our attention.

In Lao Tzu's book, *Tao Te Ching*, it reads, "You can mould clay into a vessel; yet it is the emptiness that makes it useful (not the clay itself)." Usefulness comes from emptiness or from the space in between. A cup is only useful in what it can hold and contain in the space where there is nothing. Fill the cup and its usefulness becomes limited. Pour into a cup that is full and it overflows, containing nothing new no matter how much you pour. A cup filled with stale content will rarely seem relevant even to those that are thirsty.

Discovery and curiosity requires that we empty part of the contents of the cup to allow it to take on a new potential, perhaps risking a new flavour or blend.

The value of an association is not much different than the cup analogy. The collective experience fills our cup with information that helps us grow personally and professionally.

The true philosophy of discovery demands that we are open to the possibilities of change however fearful that may be. A sense of curiosity about our work has us searching for new ways to learn and deliver. The challenge, however, is do we take the time to reflect upon the contents or potential within an association or do we focus our efforts on the structure of the vessel?

In other words, if an association is no longer satisfying the needs of its members, should we empty some contents of the cup to make room for new ideas; reshape the cup to allow for more; or discard the old cup entirely, opting for a whole new vessel?

Herein lies the power of the professional association. Some believe it is an antiquated model of connecting and sharing information, while others still thrive in this environment. I argue that its relevance and usefulness will come from the empty space we create for new ideas. If we want to keep associations relevant and useful, I believe we would do well to look at them with a new sense of discovery.

Bob Parker, CSP  
2014 CAPS National President



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# No One Left BEHIND

## 12 TIPS TO MAKE MEETINGS ACCESSIBLE

By David Berman, FGD, FGDC



Successfully running an event that doesn't just accommodate but delights everyone, including people with disabilities, starts long before the day the participants arrive.

Take it from me. I was involved in planning, promoting, keynoting, moderating a town hall and wrapping up the largest conference on accessibility ever held in Canada, the International Summit on Accessibility 2014. The conference welcomed more than 500 participants, many with substantial mobility, visual, auditory and cognitive challenges, to our shiny new Ottawa Convention Centre in July, and provided valuable insights into running accessible events.

If you've never heard anything about dealing with service dogs and accessible PowerPoints, following these tips should help you avoid surprises, disappointments or embarrassment. And, you can do it all without having to trade off the quality of the event for your typical audience members while keeping your additional costs to a minimum.

### AIM TO DELIGHT ALL

When we design for the extremes, everyone benefits.

So much technology we all enjoy every day resulted from attempts to accommodate an extreme disability: telephones, microphones, amplifiers, transistors, talking ATMs, speech recognition... Although cuts in the curbs and buttons that open doors were originally for wheelchair access, anyone struggling with suitcases appreciates them.

Don't assume you must make tradeoffs, with everyone giving up a little convenience to make an event comfortable for people with challenges. Instead, by fully understanding what people need, you can ensure that most accommodations are either neutral to other guests or actually enhance their experience. Planning for the extremes will also delight the person who happened to sprain a finger the night before, the guy who forgot his glasses, or the presenter whose audio won't work on her video presentation.

Every special need is also a precious opportunity to create memorable customer service that everyone will talk about.

### FEAR NOT

If you don't have a lot of experience working with people with substantial disabilities, you may be afraid to do or say the wrong thing, most of all on stage in front of 500 people.

Though a tablespoon of fear of failure or embarrassment drives excellent preparation, you're going to do fine... as long as you do a bit of homework and recognize that you don't have to be perfect.

From the moment you start communicating an accessible event you are sending a strong message that you intend to respect and include everyone. That message earns you the liberty to make a few mistakes; people are going to want to help you succeed.

Should you offer to help push that wheelchair up that ramp? Should that blind person head to the cafeteria alone? Whenever you're not sure how to interact, simply ask, "Would



you like some help?" You have professional advice available at all times: people with disabilities are expert in telling you what they need.

### CHOOSE THE VENUE FOR ACCESSIBILITY

As you choose your venue, make accessibility a key criterion. Find out how accessible the building, the meeting rooms and the washrooms are. Are there lots of elevators? What about getting in from the parking lot or the public transit?

Older buildings can be challenging to remediate for universal access while modern buildings are more likely to have built-in features such as convenient ramps and curb cuts, accessible elevators, parking and washrooms and braille signage.

The designers of the Ottawa Convention Centre, reopened in 2011, went out of their way to exceed accessibility regulations. Learn how they did it at <http://ottawaconventioncentre.com/en/about-us/accessibility-for-ontarians-with-disabilities-act-aoda>.

When considering the layout of meeting rooms, start with mobility and lines of sight. Visualize how someone in a wheelchair or with difficulty seeing or hearing would enter and leave the room, take in the presentations, participate in the group, reach the mic, or access the presenter during breaks or after a speech.

Those with wheelchairs, scooters or service animals will always favour a position with the clearest path to the door, so they can be least disruptive when entering or exiting. Some won't use regular chairs and will require enough space to manoeuvre. A person with hearing challenges may need to establish a direct line of sight to the speaker to be able to read lips.

Disabilities or not, most people at your event will need to plug in a tablet, laptop or mobile phone. Arrange power outlets and power bars and tape all wires religiously so they don't cause someone to trip or serve as a barrier to a wheeled vehicle.

### IMAGINE EACH SENSE NOT AVAILABLE

Ontario's world-leading *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* lays out guidelines that go far beyond handicapped stalls in washrooms. For example, the rules state how Web content and documents must adhere to international guidelines for accessibility.

Consider every step of the experience for both users and presenters with each of these permanent or temporary deficits.

- You can't see at all;
- You can't see colour;
- You can't hear;
- You don't easily know left from right;
- You can't walk; and
- You can't raise your hands.

Imagine how a participant who can't see will overcome the deficit by hearing instead of seeing, perhaps with devices that read documents out loud, and navigate with assistance from sound, a cane, a service dog or an attendant.



The advertisement for the Prince Edward Island Convention Centre features a blue and white color scheme. At the top, the logo consists of a stylized building icon with blue and orange vertical bars, followed by the text "PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND CONVENTION CENTRE". Below this, the phrase "Meet on the Island" is written in a cursive font. A section titled "view of the WATERFRONT" includes four small images showing different interior meeting spaces. Below these images, the text "50,000 sq. ft. of meeting space" is displayed. The bottom half of the ad shows a large, modern building with a curved glass facade at night. At the very bottom, contact information is provided in both English and French, including the website "www.peimc.com" and the email "info@peimc.com".

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# Every special need is also a precious opportunity to create

Imagine how a participant who can't hear is going to see instead, by studying transcripts, watching sign language or reading lips.

Imagine how participants who can't move easily will access meeting rooms and washrooms in a wheelchair or scooter, or get noticed perhaps without raising their hand.

Imagine how a participant who doesn't "get" left and right or can't discern colours will rely on instructions with directions, colour or something like "beneath the dotted line." That user experience includes:

- Every promotion and reminder you send (in print, online, email or social media);
- Registration (online or in person);
- Interacting with Web-based materials;
- Transportation and directions to the building, the room, and to the seat;
- Perceiving and understanding all presented content;
- Enjoying meals, refreshments, activities and facilities; and
- Participating in post-event engagement.

## CONSIDER ANYONE JOINING FROM A DISTANCE

For anyone joining your event remotely, the distance learning experience will need to be accessible, too.

You can think of distance participation as a basket of temporary disabilities: not being able to see or be seen, hear or be heard, or otherwise interact in ways that are easy to do in person and when fully abled. You need to provide appropriate technologies so that people can participate remotely without missing anything critical.

Accessible distance learning is a big topic, involving careful selection of software, hardware, techniques and skilled technicians... so much that we have courses and manuals on just this topic alone. Seek out an expert if you wish to get this right.

## MAKE WEBSITES AND REGISTRATION ACCESSIBLE

Make sure your Web presence, electronic documents and emails conform to international standards for accessible publishing (WCAG 2.0 Level A or, better yet, Level AA for websites, email, Word and PowerPoint files and PDF/UA for PDF files). Accessible Web and documents will ensure that no matter what assistive technologies your participants use (such as screen readers that read pages out loud), they should be able to perceive and interact with your pages. It will also improve your search results!

Most importantly, any online forms need to be accessible so everyone can register without frustration. Even your paper registration form should identify where to find online accessible equivalents. (Tip: add a QR code to the online equivalent.)

Your registration form must capture information about any

special needs people have. This is how you'll know which disabilities to be proactive about accommodating. The trick is to ask in a way that respects privacy, while providing legal coverage for not necessarily accommodating every allergy or disability under the sun.

See our registration form at [www.davidberman.com/courses/seminarregistration/](http://www.davidberman.com/courses/seminarregistration/) for an example of how we capture this information.

Based on how people answer, a personal follow-up may be in order. For example, if someone identifies as hearing impaired, you could explore some options:

- Bringing in a sign language interpreter;
- Briefing presenters regarding lip reading;
- Providing captions/transcripts for audio/multimedia files;
- Provide speaker support in advance.

For those who identify as visually impaired, discuss with them:

- Whether they would like to receive speaker support and handouts in advance, and if so, in what file format;
- If they are bringing a service dog; and
- If they need any navigational assistance from the public transit system.

## PREPARE FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

A sign language interpreter can generally handle up to an hour of presentations. For a day-long event, count on hiring two interpreters, who spell each other off every 20 to 30 minutes.

Plan where the signers will stand. If you're videoing or have distance participation, the signers may be best in the frame with the presenter. Otherwise, it may be best to position signers off to the side. Either way, group the signers and participants who will make use of their service close enough to be able to have continuous eye contact.

Have the signers connect with the presenters beforehand. Signers will often ask for a transcript ahead of time so they can understand unfamiliar terms. They may also coach the presenters to avoid speaking too quickly or relying on unfamiliar acronyms.

## CHECK YOUR TOOLS

Unfortunately, most popular conferencing software – including Adobe Connect and WebEx – doesn't yet properly support people with disabilities. Some tools may even undermine your efforts.

For example, you may laboriously prepare a fully accessible presentation in PowerPoint, complete with text alternatives for every image. But when you share it via WebEx, WebEx only shows an old-fashioned flat slideshow of your slides: all of the accessibility features are lost.

One way to avoid losing the accessibility of a properly pre-



# memorable customer service that everyone will talk about

pared PowerPoint deck is to send the file ahead to any participants who wish to use it with their assistive technologies. They can then follow along using PowerPoint and their assistive technology (such as a screen reader) during the presentation, benefiting from all the built-in accessibility.

Choosing the right conferencing tool and strategies to support accessible presentations is complex but can save weeks of pain and expense for you and your presenters. It's a start to realize that your regular conferencing system might not support a truly accessible meeting. You may need to combine several techniques to take care of everyone in a given situation, such as ASL interpretation or real-time transcription in a separately broadcast window.

## CREATE ACCESSIBLE SPEAKER SUPPORT / HANDOUTS

Your presenters may need to adjust what and how they present, so you should include specific instructions and requirements in your speaker agreements well in advance.

Presenters who present a speech with no speaker support may simply need to provide a rough transcript of what they plan to say in advance (either for distribution to specific audience members or as an assist for interpreters).

Speakers providing handouts will need to submit them as digital accessible documents. Remember that some people with visual impairments can still read large print, so have your speakers prepare five copies of each handout as large print. Large print can be as simple as printing the existing handout on oversized paper: all wording should be in at least 18-point type and preferably in a sans serif typeface such as Arial.

## PROVIDE AUDIO DESCRIPTION

An accessible speaker who has people with sight impairments in the audience knows how to balance describing what's going on without overburdening the sighted audience members. This balance can often eliminate the need to distribute speaker support in accessible format, or for any video of the presentation to require the work of adding audio descriptions.

These types of things might need description:

- Something that is essential to understanding.  
*"I'm holding in my hands a Tasmanian tiger."*
- Slides or pictures that contain essential information.  
*"The graph I'm showing demonstrates that the percentage of tiger kitten videos on YouTube has risen from 23 per cent to 46 per cent, from 2010 till today."*  
*"I'm showing a picture of the service dog station at the conference. There are two bowls for drinking, as well as a dog-friendly touchpad for pooches to post on Twitter!"*
- Scenes in a video or movie.

To determine what deserves audio description in a movie or video, simply close your eyes while previewing and decide

what significant parts of the story are missing.

Remember that saying, "Notice how the blue line shows..." is not useful for those with colour deficits. Instead say something like, "The thickest line – that's the blue one..."

## ACCOMMODATE SERVICE DOGS

Service dogs are specially trained to help people deal with visual or hearing challenges, autism, diabetes, epilepsy or post-traumatic stress.

Legally, we can't refuse entry to service dogs and the etiquette pretty well boils down to this: If the animal is wearing a harness, it's on the job and not a pet. The well-being of the owner depends on the dog staying focused. Don't pet or play with the dog unless the owner invites you to.

After guiding an attendee safely to a seat, the dog may simply curl up beside the chair for a nap. Because service dogs such as Labrador retrievers or German shepherds are often quite large, make sure to reserve them enough space.

During a long event, dogs might need to go outdoors to follow the call of nature. Anticipate this, especially if they will have to pass through security all over again to get back in. In a large conference, consider setting up a canine comfort station with water and possibly snacks. Let the owners know what is available for their dogs.

## CONSIDER WHAT YOU'LL BE SHARING

To round out the accessibility of your event, think ahead to what will happen after it's over.

The key question: Will anyone need to review proceedings, minutes or a recording of your sessions or download slides after the event?

If so, plan early to make all aspects of the experience inclusive, including presentations, minutes, recordings, and the like. You may also need to recreate certain manuals, handouts, and learning guides to make them accessible. Multimedia will need captions, audio descriptions or transcripts.


## WHEN WE PLAN FOR EXTREMES, EVERYONE BENEFITS

There you have it. A lot to think about, because there's no limit to how far we can go to delight everyone, whether in reaching a broader audience, attracting and retaining the best community, conforming to regulations, or creating more social justice.

And, as our society proudly moves forward, you can seize your opportunity to help prove that no one ever needs to feel left out or left behind.

**SOI**

For deeper tips on accessible events, visit [davidberman.com/accessible-event-tips](http://davidberman.com/accessible-event-tips) or consider David's manuals and courses.



# The Good, Bad and Ugly

## Lessons Learned by Meeting Planners

Stories from a number of planners provide clear examples of what can happen in the meetings business

By Jo-Anne Hill

Most meeting planners learn on the job from meetings and events that went well and learn more from those that didn't go so well. Interviews were conducted with 10 planners from across Canada representing a cross-section of organizations from corporations, associations and meeting planning companies with a wide range of experience, from three to 25 years, and responsible for planning more than 200 meetings per year.

### CREATE A TEAM WITH SIMILAR VALUES

The most successful meeting for Anh Nguyen, principal at Spark Event Management, happened early in her career. She had organized a meeting for a project management organization. As the name implies, they were detailed planners by nature and meticulous about setting goals, defining processes and measuring everything.

The team that came together for this meeting evolved into a "well-oiled machine." Since the objective was clearly articulated from the beginning, everyone was aligned and knew what was expected of them because everything was documented and reviewed regularly. They enjoyed coming to work each day and performed better than a typical team. To this day, although everyone has moved on, they stay in touch and regard this experience as one of their best.

Nguyen learned the importance of selecting people with similar values to build an effective team. It's a winning combination of working at a quality level and creating a family environment where each member has the other's back. It makes working long hours easier and is critical when something goes wrong and everyone needs to pull together.

### NEVER PRESUME TO KNOW WHAT ATTENDEES WANT

That's what Roberta Dexter, owner of Plan Ahead Events, learned when she worked with a non-profit disaster management committee that brought together experts in their field for a meeting. In the first year, the committee felt they knew what they were doing and created their own agenda – eight hours of presentations in a one-way dialogue from the stage.

As the relationship and trust developed, the committee learned the value of a professional meeting planner. They gradually turned the agenda development over to Dexter's expert hands and the meeting shifted from traditional presentations to a less structured format. It became an exchange of information and knowledge valuing the experts in the room, not just those on stage.

How do you figure out what people want to hear about? Ask them! Have attendees complete surveys at the end of the meeting. Ask them during the program for feedback. Ask volunteers to listen for comments and ask the speakers and sponsors for their ideas and impressions.

What else is important? Dexter always incorporates FUN into every meeting.

### CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF ALL PARTICIPANTS

Her most successful meeting also had the greatest impact on Bettyanne Sherrer, principal at Proplan. The organization brought together front-line workers who rarely have a chance to get together. Not only were many of the audience members visually and hearing impaired, eight of the 30 speakers had similar disabilities. And, the meeting needed to be in both English and French.

The design of the meeting was critical with out-of-the-box ideas required to meet the needs of everyone present. In the end, other senses, like touch, were incorporated with technology to pull it all off. The result looked like a beautiful ballet that left a lasting impression on Sherrer and her team.

The biggest lesson learned? It's important to consider the needs of ALL participants including the audience, speakers, sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers and staff. What each person brings to the meeting is of equal importance.

It starts by asking a key question of the organizer: "What does success look like for everyone in attendance?" This opens a lot of doors and helps to ensure that planning stays on-track with a clearly defined goal from the very beginning.

### AN EXTENSION OF AN ORGANIZATION'S BRAND

Tsungai Muvingi, a special events co-ordinator with The Salvation Army, shared a story of a volunteer committee con-

vinced that the best way to raise funds was to host a gala dinner. Aside from the additional cost of the event, the idea was declined by Salvation Army executives as it did not fit with the image of the organization.

Muvingi's advice is that planners' need to be aware of the organization's brand image and view meetings and events through that lens. Meeting planners have a responsibility to respect the brand and corresponding expectations.

An event is a moment in time. It is a communication vehicle that is part of the whole communication mix – a messaging and delivery opportunity for the brand; it needs to be considered a part of the brand story and the organization's mission and vision. Given this perspective, it puts a whole new twist to the role of meeting planner.

### A CLEAR OBJECTIVE RIGHT FROM THE START

A key event each year for Sarah Jones, events and education manager, Building Owners & Managers Association of B.C., is a 770-person Christmas luncheon. After planning the event for many years, the association decided they wanted more networking time and, as a result, they changed the goal of the event. Jones and her team decided to forego expensive entertainment, expanded the reception time and implemented activities to encourage talking to new people.

The key lesson learned was to have a clear objective and to circle back at the completion to make sure goals are met.



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## ANTICIPATE EVERY CONTINGENCY

Over her 25 years of planning meetings, Lynn Beauregard, president of T•O Corporate Services, has learned to anticipate just about every contingency and to never assume everything will go as expected. As a result, she developed the acronym VAPOR:

- V Visualize your desired outcome;
- A Anticipate problems such as delays or no-shows;
- P Prepare for every contingency;
- O Organize to maximize efficiency; and
- R Re-check, check and re-check every detail again and again.

Case in point: she had just arrived in Newfoundland when it was announced that Hurricane Bill was going to touch down on the first day of a meeting. Her solution? Take a deep breath and calmly develop alternatives for attendees and staff knowing that a hurricane was completely out of her control.

Always have a back-up plan.

## THINK OUT OF THE BOX FOR CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Sandra Wood, manager, Canadian Medical Association, claims her most successful meeting was mentally and emotionally exhausting.

CMA's annual meeting of 700 attendees was scheduled to take place in Northern Canada and the meeting planning team started with literally nothing. With limited venue options, it was decided to use a local high school. This meant building a conference centre from scratch. Wood and her team had to create what a conference centre would have pro-

vided. It was double the work and double the cost.

The delegates loved it. It aligned well with how the agenda was designed including a "back to basics" charm! It was a good reminder of how much easier it is when you have experienced partners, such as seasoned caterers, who are flexible and can come up with creative solutions when faced with a challenge.

The biggest lesson was to think out of the box when facing challenges like unusual venues. Start by going back to the meeting objectives and think creatively to align the goals with the agenda and the venues. Saying no is not an option in the planning business.

## HAVE A SIXTH EYE

Daniela Caputo, president, Montreal Event Planner, has learned to have a sixth eye. What does this mean? Be aware of your surroundings. Watch body language so that you can anticipate problems before they happen and, when a problem does arise, go into solution mode rather than freak-out mode.

## DON'T MESS WITH WHAT WORKS

Things don't always work out as you expect. At the B.C. Association of Optometrists, Kathy Myck, executive assistant, thought she was ahead of things by planning the annual conference away from Vancouver during the 2010 Olympics. Teaming up with their Alberta counterparts meant a joint conference which required more hands to plan.

It turned out that the B.C. members didn't like being away from their practice and their families which reduced their attendance numbers. Those who did attend were not impressed with the combined conference program.

It was hard to receive this feedback from the members, but the message was loud and clear. Unless you have strong evidence to the contrary, don't mess with what works.

## RELATIONSHIPS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

"It's a bond of shared suffering," says Helen Van Dongen, principal, PinStripe Business Events. Her biggest learning challenge came when she was required to un-plan an event. With just one week left before a large corporate partners meeting for 500, company executives decided to cancel the event due to a major labour issue. They risked losing more than \$1 million in penalties with vendors and suppliers, but felt that the company's reputation was far more important.

With more than a year's worth of planning out the window, Van Dongen's job turned to unwinding all of the contracts that were in place and negotiating with each supplier to reduce the financial impact.

Because of the strong relationships she had created as a seasoned planner, she was able to reduce the penalties to less than 10 per cent of the total liability. She was able to reach an effective compromise with all affected parties, a credit to her relationships, sensitivity and deal-making abilities.

It is often the on-the-job experiences that provide the greatest lessons.

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# Saying You're an Expert DOESN'T MAKE IT SO

Some insights into fishing for the perfect speaker

then recognizing what you've caught

By Sharon Evans

**F**inding the perfect speaker to inspire, inform and educate your audience requires time, energy and due diligence to ensure they are truly what they claim to be. There is an age-old debate about whether to hire an expert who speaks or an expert speaker. What's the difference?

The definition of an expert is a person who possesses a skill or knowledge in some distinct field in which they were trained by practice; someone who is an authority or specializes in a specific area with which they have real life experience.

The expert speaker will be polished and have perfected the delivery of their topic – but it is generally intelligence gained through their own research, polished in perfected delivery that differentiates them from the former. Expert speakers are often well known for a small number of presentations they have given many times, with only slight content variations for their audience.

Enter a relatively new term – the *Thought Leader*. This term, adopted in the last 20 years or so, is given to someone who has a unique perspective on something universally known. They have new approaches to the way things have been done before and typically have published works that will stand the test of time. They have clarity in their thinking and have asked the right questions to arrive at their position.



Thought leaders consistently produce innovative ways of thinking. They are most often on the cutting edge of their industry and are known as authorities on the subjects they tackle. Typically, their focus is on the positive impact they can make in the world. *Thought Leader* is not self-styled – it comes most often from clients, customers, their competitors and, possibly, the media.

Being acclaimed as a thought leader is the greatest form of praise. Those who have earned it have generally made risky moves and taken controversial viewpoints. Their leadership in their topic area often comes after years of work. They are driven to serve and are known as inspirational characters that have often become popular by their viral publicity. From a TED talk, a popular book or blog article expressing their views, to a unique life path through business, they are discovered by the world.

Malcolm Gladwell suggests that one becomes an expert after 10,000 hours of practicing his or her craft. Experts love what they do and are empathetic to the world in which they feel compelled to serve. They want to improve the lives of people and the industries in which they work and are often driven to change the marketplace by proposing relevant research based on their point of view. They are fearless, quick to challenge the status quo and see speaking to an audience as a way to spread their message.

## FINDING YOUR SPEAKER

Ensuring you have made the right choice of speakers for your event is critical. There are many tools readily available for you to get this done. The best place to start is by researching the background of the speaker you are considering. Find out how this expert has gained experience in the topic you have targeted for delivery in your program. Ideally they will show up on page one, two or three of a simple Google search when you search their name, topic, and/or titles of their published works.

You can find out their background by starting with their LinkedIn profiles or a self-named website that they have created. Try to determine the number of years they have been working in the subject or industry and whether they were a pioneer or an innovator. What have they tried, learned, perfected or innovated? Next, move through the following categories and methods of validation.

## CONTENT

What have they published? Are they a thought leader or a merely a thought repeater? Having guest blog posts on sites such as Forbes or Huffington Post and TED Talks would indicate you've definitely got an originator. Your goal is to determine whether they are the pioneer of their ideas, or simply the curator and repeater of ideas from others.

Searching some of the keywords in their blogs and website content and determining replication of their ideas online will be a more involved process. Review the frequency and flow in their website content, and search for the events in which they participate, lead or host.

Co-hosting webinars, guest talks on radio shows and creators in information products may indicate their leadership. See the samples of their work in their blogs – are they walking their talk? Be sure to check out their presence on YouTube. Here you may see some sample speaking engagements and their engagement with their audience will be

obvious if they have a large number of hits on their video. Don't be fooled by comments below the videos unless you have a good sampling – if they are controversial in their views and are in commercial markets, competitors are almost always the first to throw stones.

Give the Twitterverse a look-see. Find their content categories based on the history in their posts, and the “hash tag” variety in their posts. For example, a speaker versed in Entrepreneurship might have #entrepreneurship embedded in at least 10 to 20 per cent of their posts. Take a look at the last 20 posts. What percentage are pure content, attempts to serve others or are purely sales-based or self-serving? You can get a good idea of their genuine nature with the ratios you see here.

Visit their LinkedIn Profile – how up to date is it? What are their projects? Who has recommended them? Check out the category of the specialties within the first part of their profile. If they claim expertise in a topic as a speaker and you can't really find evidence in their profile, you have found a suspect and not a prospect. What is listed in the LinkedIn publications section? EBooks will have less weight than published works as it takes a lot of confidence, funds and perseverance to persist through all that is needed to navigate the traditional publishing route.

## ENGAGEMENT

You've already started searching through their social media, but see if you can determine the main focus of their posts. Find out who has interviewed them and search for others talking about them. Twitter is great for this. Check out the bottom of their LinkedIn profile and view the groups to which they belong. Not all groups may be listed here but ensure they are engaged within their subject areas.

## RECOGNITION

Take a look at their LinkedIn Testimonials. See which categories carry endorsements. Look at their YouTube channel and view the number of people who follow various posts and also the num-

ber of LinkedIn connections they have. Here is a great place to view certification, awards and qualifications they may hold. If they are authors, check out what Amazon readers have to say.

## ACCESSIBILITY

What kind of connections do they make with their audiences? You'll see this if you join some of their LinkedIn or Facebook groups. If you are familiar with social media, take a peek at their Twitter conversations by searching with tools such as TweetDeck or HootSuite. If you are familiar with Klout, a newer tool that assigns a score for social media engagement, check it out. Check the associations to which they belong on their LinkedIn profiles, then search those association websites to see what is said about this expert. As an additional tool, check out their listing on both professional speaker association sites, as well as some speaker bureau sites. Now you are checking their professional speaking status and you may match this against any speaker “one sheets” that are found on their personal sites or through the speaking association sites.

## TO SUM IT UP

Using social media may be overwhelming for some, but your efforts will reap rewards. Your audience and peers may do their own research and it shouldn't take long to flush out the self-proclaimed expert from the real thing. Early research efforts can make a huge difference in the long run. You might not always be able to hire the true trail blazer but it's still worth it to make sure you are getting the best expert your budget can afford.

The title of *Expert* or *Thought Leader* is never self-proclaimed, but bestowed by others. You will want to reject self-nominators. As a final check, search for these self-anointed titles on your prospective speakers' LinkedIn profiles. If your budget and clients demand it, ensure that you choose someone who can truly catalyze the change you desire in your audience and create a memorable event experience. **SOI**



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# Deeper Connections: Weave the People

Consider a *Weave* as the catalyst for better communication

I am always searching for new ways to engage and connect participants before, during and after an event. Online surveys are a great way to gather and share key insights and characteristics in advance of a meeting. Photographs during sessions are also effective to recall connections made. When you put the two mediums together, you have the unique combination called a *Weave*.

A colleague introduced me to WeaveThePeople.com in 2010. I wondered whether it was a technology looking for a problem or if it was capable of significant impact. The answer came when I used it at a national meeting of co-workers who rarely met face to face. It was a resounding success! Since then, I have used it with groups ranging from 50 to 250 people, and hear consistently positive feedback.

What is a *Weave*? Quite simply, it's a type of social application similar to LinkedIn or FaceBook that enables meeting planners to connect meeting participants in a meaningful way before and after the meeting.

I spoke with Paul Caswell, founder of Weave The People, and he described the process of building a *Weave*. It starts with a discussion of meeting objectives to help direct the design. It then progresses to designing the content or questions you want to include or information you would like to share.

It opens with a rolodex of all participants represented by a photo. Users select any of the "mug shots" to reveal a business card of each participant including name, title or role and where they work. Beyond this, the information you



A *Weave* business card

can share is virtually unlimited and you can also tailor it to your specific objectives and focus, including: personal or work interests, something light such as favourite movies, an unknown fun fact, highlights from a profiling instrument like Insights Discovery or Myers-Briggs Types and important business questions that you'd like answered in advance.

Paul's organization then requests the information from participants and loads it to a private website. The presentation of this information is part of the impact.

The Web URL is then shared so participants can put a face to the name, learn more about them and share information in advance, during and after the meeting.

While this sounds great in theory, I checked in with Carol Crow, VP of HR at Matrix Asset Management, to share a live experience using a *Weave*.

"With a recent acquisition and merger, we had three companies coming together for the first time as one team, and they were located across the country, so many hadn't met yet," said Carol. "We needed

to find a way to connect them prior to the retreat to leverage our two days together. At the same time, we wanted to get everyone thinking about our core values, and what they hoped to get out of the retreat. By allowing staff to connect beforehand, Weave The People effectively broke the ice and, once they arrived, it allowed them to easily engage in ways that were relevant to our retreat objectives. Afterwards, staff continued to refer back to the *Weave* for the others' information and it enabled opportunities for future contact," she said.

As the Matrix example demonstrates, the *Weave* application is most useful if you are interested in engaging participants who do not interact often or connect face to face – perhaps because they are from different departments or different locations across the country or globe. It also works well if you are looking for a unique way to connect a group before the session even begins. A *Weave* can provide a striking yet simple way to get connections made and conversations started. For the facilitation team, the *Weave* proved very helpful as a reference of names and roles of participants during the session. More importantly, the value of the *Weave* reveals itself when you see participants accessing it long after the meeting closes. The *Weave* enables attendees to reconnect with the events and relationships that were started and then allows them to take these connections to a deeper level.

Explore [www.weavethepeople.com](http://www.weavethepeople.com) and check out the online demos. The power of the *Weave* truly reveals itself when you see it in action.

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## IN MEMORIAM



**Warren Evans, CSP, HoF, CSPGlobal**

On Friday, August 22, 2014, we all lost one of the “good guys.” Warren Evans, a leading figure in the meetings industry and especially within our own CAPS extended family, passed away after a relatively short battle with cancer. Under his initiative, with the strong support of a few others, Warren provided the guidance for the creation of our national association. He provided a voice for CAPS in the early stages of the International Federation for Professional Speakers (now the GSF) and was instrumental in getting the global association up and running.

Warren was not only a brilliant international speaker, he was also a complete professional, inspirational fundraiser and devoted family man. He had a talent for bringing people together to achieve greatness. He was beloved by conference organizers and event planners because of his meticulous preparation, superb delivery and attention to detail. If Warren Evans was on the program at an event, he was often the most popular speaker with both the audience and the organizer.

He spoke on stages throughout the world for more than 37 years and was a favourite of executives for his insight on change and organizational development. His most popular keynote, *Where In The World Is The World Going?*, was fully researched for each individual presentation and he proved to have an amazingly accurate ability to almost predict the future.

Warren was personally involved in coaching more than 175 of our CAPS members on stage presentation skills as well as many more from other countries who came to Canada for similar training. His leadership in the Laura’s Hope Foundation to raise money for research into Huntington’s Disease brought together the international speaking community in an unprecedented show of financial and emotional support.

We have all been fortunate to have known Warren. His legacy is local, national and global. It is unlikely that anyone else will have such influence on the organization of the speaking profession. Around the world, Warren’s words of wisdom will ring in our ears and be an inspiration to us all.

Alan Stevens FPSA, CSPGlobal and Kit Grant, CSP, HoF

By Dale Choquette, DTM



Dale Choquette, DTM is a personal leadership expert and delivers inspiring leadership and sincere communications. She is the author of *Excuse Me, I'm Being Audacious*.

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# Your Meeting, Your ROI

**As a meeting planner, you have more than enough on your plate. The last thing on your mind is sponsorship**

**S**ponsorship – it's one more thing to worry about and who needs that? You do. Sponsors can help you in so many ways; they should be active partners in promoting your event. They can help your association or your client bring in up to 30 per cent more ROI.

## WHY YOU WANT SPONSORSHIP

It helps pay the bills. If your budget is limited, having a sponsor can help defray some of the event costs. It can also allow for upgrading the event. For non-profits who may have little or no budget but want to put on an event, sponsors can provide the funding.

It allows for a bigger event. You've got the money, but past feedback tells you it needs to be bigger to get people to return next year. The extra income gained through sponsors may allow you to provide a more attractive venue, upscale food and/or speakers who will bring audiences back.

It can attract more participants. High-impact speakers and unique activities attract more participants assuming you have speakers and activities that match your audience. Both of these can come with big price tags. Having the right sponsors to help fund the event can give you the extra cash you need to do that.

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM?

You provide sponsors with an inexpensive marketing opportunity. They get their name out there and they get known. They make direct connections to your participants. All of that is good for brand recognition and future sales.

They get to sell their products or services to your participants. In other words, they make money at the event and they have future leads.

Let's face it, just about everyone wants to look good. Being a sponsor is a welcome spotlight on the company. They also have a captive audience.

## PLAN FOR IT

A well planned sponsorship program will bring results.

First, understand the membership list – who are they, what do they do, what do they need? You wouldn't bring in sponsors who

sold farm equipment to a group of project managers, unless of course, their project was building a farm.

Second, understand what they buy. What items, books, equipment, courses etc. do they use, need or want?

Third, get the right people to sponsor. Who is a good fit for my audience? You want sponsors who are experts in what they do and will make your attendees' experience better. Your sponsors also need to understand your attendees so that they can connect to them.

## IS THIS THE RIGHT SPONSOR?

Before looking for your sponsors, it's important to first decide on the event theme. Once the theme has been determined, you can begin to consider which sponsors best match your theme.

Group your sponsors by category. For example, at CAPS, we would look at photographers, copywriters, editors... you get the idea. Then find out if they have a connection with your participants. If they do, then they're a good candidate. You don't want to waste time calling people who aren't a good fit.

Once you've got your list and made the calls, then sit down with them and find out their goals for being a sponsor.

## SIGN THEM UP

Make your offer as attractive as possible. What is the value they'll receive in return for sponsoring? Why should they sponsor your event and not someone else's? Keep in mind that it's about how you can help them achieve their goals. Send an employee to the conference for free, post their name and logo on your organization's website, submit a newsletter or blog articles, whatever you can think of that will prove to them they will be getting a valuable return on their investment. Providing them with exclusivity can be a huge bonus for them.

Taking the time to develop a good sponsorship plan, including ROI, will greatly benefit your organization or association. It's about having an amazing event that's a win for your organization, your audience and your sponsors.

Thank you to Sean O'Dea, Cairncroft Management Ltd. and Andrew Thompson, Headline Sponsorship, for providing insight for this article.

**SOI**

# Canada's North

By Sheila MacLeod



PHOTO OF NÁÁTS'ÍHCH'OH NATIONAL PARK RESERVE COURTESY OF PARKS CANADA

## The True North Experience

“I think *magical* comes close”

When all other adjectives – even superlatives – failed, one visitor said “magical” was the nearest description for the full experience of her visit to Canada’s north. It is a terrific challenge, finding the words to describe a place with Arctic tundra, glaciers, boreal forest, fjords, mountains, lakes, seas, white-water rapids, a waterfall double the height of Niagara Falls, sunsets that surround you, rare and wonderful wildlife, dazzling nightlife and, above it all, the brilliant and astonishing Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. With direct flights daily from airports in major cities across Canada to key urban centres in the north, getting to this magical place is as easy as it is worthwhile.

All three territories – Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut (YK, NWT, NU) – offer hotels, conference facilities, banquet and meeting spaces with every necessary service for a successful business event, and many unique opportunities to help you surprise and delight your attendees. A little flexibility will expand your list of possible venues from the large hotels and convention centres to

include arenas, movie theatres, wilderness lodges, portable meeting spaces and a myriad of other distinctive venues for smaller groups. Here you will find all the digital conveniences you could possibly need, or fly your group to a remote lodge for luxury meals and accommodations with absolute privacy, including a total absence of cellular phone service. Imagine an entire event with no ringing to disrupt a speaker or texts to distract your participants.

There is no one striking aspect of a trip north; there are so many amazing things to see and do here. The natural realm – the land, the waters, the vegetation, the wildlife – is breathtaking and ever changing. There is an incredibly rich mosaic of cultures represented across the regions and it shows in the art, the cultural activities and performances, even in some of the architecture. The sheer range of exciting and rewarding things to do outside of the meeting rooms is unequalled. The people are friendly, the service is world class and the only thing that never seems to arrive on the supply ships (in summer) or airplanes is the frenetic pace of the big city.





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Nunavut stands out among the territories in that it is exclusively fly-in access. It also boasts more artists per capita than anywhere in the world. The newest and largest of the territories, it was settled more than four thousand years ago but only established as a distinct territory in 1999. About one-fifth of all of Canada's land mass is here. With no roads between the communities, air and watercraft are the main ways of getting around the regions, with the occasional possibility of snowmachine or dogsled expedition depending on the distance to your destination.

Iqaluit is the capital of Nunavut and direct flights from Ottawa make it easy to host an event at one of the hotels in this island location. You'll find modest rooms and executive suites, conference halls and banquet facilities; supported by dedicated staff, your event can run as seamlessly here as in any major urban centre. Venues and activities within the community are close together; transportation is easily arranged. An added bonus for winter travellers who depart in the afternoon is the potential to enjoy the glorious fuchsia sunset above the clouds throughout the entire three-hour flight back to Ottawa.

The many art galleries and studios in Iqaluit showcase an amazing range of work from the region's artists. The beautiful coastal hamlet of Pangnirtung makes a great day trip (by air) from Iqaluit. For trips of two or more days, it offers access to the majestic mountains, fjords, glaciers and ice fields of Auyuittuq National Park.

If you are looking for a way to create a decidedly different event in Nunavut that will remain as a treasured memory, you will find little else to compare with Arctic Haven Wilderness Lodge. Each spring and fall, one of the last healthy caribou herds in Canada migrates across a nearby lake in groups of six to 20 animals, occasionally up to a hundred at a time. From May to September, Arctic Haven provides luxury accommodations and meals in a remote setting from which they operate tours of the tundra and caribou migration, snowmachine wilderness safaris and kite skiing adventures.

Its sister lodge, Arctic Watch, is the most northerly resort on earth, located 500 miles above the Arctic Circle. In July and August, lodge visitors can venture out on arctic safaris to spy beluga whales, polar bears, muskoxen, arctic foxes and snowy owls. Fly-in access to both lodges is direct from Yellowknife, NWT.

If you happen to need a keynote to fit the locale, one of the lodge owners is Richard Weber, a polar expedition Guinness record holder and professional speaker. No one in history has spent as much time walking the Arctic ice. Seven treks to the North Pole and two South Pole expeditions have taught him a great deal about goal setting and achievement, lessons which translate well to the corporate world.

The newly created Northwest Territories Convention Bureau is designed to meet the growing needs of the meeting and convention market in the region. Funding for the



dedicated convention bureau was announced in June 2014 with the full launch by January 2015. Staff are busy engaging supplier partners in the NWT to attract even more meetings, conferences and events of all sizes. These strategic partnerships have already enabled meeting planners to hold events in both Inuvik and Yellowknife for more than 1,000 delegates each.

The Canadian Medical Association's delegates enjoyed the fact that using school gyms and other unusual, even portable, venues meant they mingled in groups of dozens or hundreds, never the full throng of 1,200 at once. Delegates from Mexico City were impressed with the contrasts between their city's population (18 million) and air quality, and the crisp, fresh air and quiet of Yellowknife, population 19 thousand. There is increased interest among conference delegations in coming north for their events. "Canada's North is seen as an exotic destination for meetings," said NWT Tourism executive director Cathie Bolstad. "If you will come, we will make it happen."

Conference planners can use Yellowknife as a hub to give attendees the convenience of an urban centre with venues to hold groups well into the hundreds, as well as direct flights from there to the many smaller wilderness lodges. Blatchford Lake Lodge is one such popular fly-in destination for groups of up to 35 seeking a remote, private and truly unique experience. Visitors enjoy exquisite gour-

met meals and fine wines in an entirely secluded venue that offers wireless internet but no cellular service. When Prince William and Catherine, Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, toured Canada in 2011, they called their stay here "magical." Only a 20-minute flight from Yellowknife, the lodge is utterly remote and without municipal power; a totally eco-friendly operation with its own solar power, water filtration and organic gardens.

Nahanni National Park Reserve is one of the first UNESCO world heritage sites and visitors can take in the awe-inspiring views of sulphur hotspots, the 90-metre Virginia Falls, alpine tundra, forests and mountain ranges on a flightseeing tour leaving from Fort Simpson, NWT.

In such a vast wilderness it is no surprise that everything is bigger and more impressive. After a day of trophy fishing or wildlife sightings, the only display worthy of the great expanse of sky is the Northern Lights. And the NWT is known as the "Aurora Capital of the World" for good reason, it just happens to rank among the best spots on the globe to view this spectacular solar display. Aurora Village in Yellowknife is recognized across the country for its viewing facilities which include afternoon activities, outdoor heated seats in winter, warmup teepees and even winter clothing rental if needed. Transportation from some hotels is included.

Canada's highest mountain, Mount Logan, is found in

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Canada's smallest territory, Yukon. The lively history and entertainment of the legendary Gold Rush is alive and well in Dawson City. Here, groups of up to 250 can meet in Gold Rush-themed buildings, see the show at Diamond Tooth Gertie's or pan for gold. "The Yukon is a surprisingly attractive, accessible and affordable year-round destination for meetings and conferences up to 400 delegates," said Alida Munro, managing director for the Yukon Convention Bureau.

Whitehorse has large convention centres and the Canada Games centre for events, meetings and conferences with many hotels and facilities located within easy walking distance of each other. There are festivals of art, heritage and culinary delights as well as marathons for eager runners. Kluane National Park, home to Mount Logan, is a UNESCO world heritage site just west of Whitehorse. Yukon has more than 4,700 kilometres of highway including Dempster Highway (the only public road in Canada to cross the Arctic Circle) and Klondike Highway (which follows the route used by gold seekers in 1898).

Gaze across a still, northern lake at sunset and you might find yourself thinking that this is where peace and tranquility were invented. That may be true, but excitement and adventure are also on tap in the north. Dogsled excursions, treks to view whales, caribou, wolves, or bears, white-water rafting, kayaking, award-winning meals and nightlife... the list goes on and on. In a place known for

endless summer days when the sun never sets, there are as many things to do as the day is long.

Visitor surveys in the north show great satisfaction. For an event in Western Canada, adding a visit to Whitehorse or Yellowknife is easily done and extremely rewarding. A guest at Arctic Watch Wilderness Lodge wrote: "This was one of the best experiences of my life. Canada's high arctic defies words. It is raw, primal and beautiful."

In addition to the beauty of the land, the people add their own personal and cultural nuances which help shape the experience of meetings in the north. Modern, classic, traditional, rustic, hotels, lodges, cabins, inns... whatever style and accommodation needs you have, you can find it there. And when thinking about a central location for your next event, consider this: Baker Lake, Nunavut is at the geographical centre of Canada.

SOI



Sheila MacLeod is a writer, advisor and researcher for word-based communication. She is based in Ottawa and has experienced the three-hour sunset flight firsthand.  
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# YUKON

# Hire Your Next Speaker...

...the same way you shop for shoes

By Dave Reed & Joe Heaps



Dave Reed and Joe Heaps have championed the use of technology in the speaking industry for a combined 28 years. Their influence extends to thousands of speakers, event organizers, speakers bureaus, and associations. The company they run, eSpeakers.com, helps event organizers find and hire the perfect speaker for their audience.

During the last holiday season, I went to a local store to buy a pair of shoes I thought would be hard to find online. I left empty handed, because I found myself wishing I could see other buyers' reviews of the various shoes and avoid choosing an unproven one. At the local store, I also missed being able to compare the features of two or three pairs side-by-side... I missed data-rich online shopping!

A growing number of event organizers go online when it's time to shop for a speaker, trainer, or coach, but there are some "gotchas" to avoid. Here are a few tips that savvy event organizers use to find and hire these professionals in order to avoid wasting time or hiring the wrong one.

## START WITH A PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY INSTEAD OF GOOGLE

Search engines, like Google, help you find the people who spend a lot of money on online marketing, which will rarely be the best fit for your event. Additionally, it can be tedious to sort through the many websites that show up in search results. Finding speakers with a search engine alone is like going door-to-door to get your neighbours' phone numbers instead of using the phonebook to see them all in one place.

In contrast to search engines like Google or Yahoo, a good speaker directory presents one location where you can browse through many speakers. In a directory, the information (fees, topics, videos, programs, reviews, etc.) is presented in a consistent format, which makes it much faster to digest. You also



get the most current programs and pricing because a quality speaker directory is updated by the speakers themselves.

## DON'T PROCRASTINATE

Planning ahead gives you a larger selection of speakers from which to choose. Speaker calendars aren't evenly filled: they are much busier in the next 60 days than they are further into the future. You'll have 10 times the available speakers for an event in 10 months as you'll have for an event next month.

If you are already in a last-minute bind, use a directory that shows speaker calendars and offers search results by availability date. These features save many hours of contacting speakers who will (genuinely) regret to inform you that they're already booked on your dates.

## ASK THE SPEAKERS FOR EXTRAS

Speakers know they are competing for your dollars and are often willing to add extra value to your purchase – all you need to do is ask for it.

For example, if you're hiring a keynote speaker, ask candidates if they'd be will-

ing to also do a breakout session without an extra fee. Perhaps the speaker would be willing to present a follow-up webinar to help cement the lessons taught in the live presentation. Does the presenter have workbooks or other materials they are willing to throw into the deal?

Don't be shy, and don't be afraid to be creative. If there's no specific extra you want, ask the speaker for ideas about what else they can do for you. You'll be surprised and impressed by the profitable offers you will receive.

## DON'T TAKE THEIR WORD FOR IT

One of the most valuable parts of an online shopping process is finding out the experiences others have had with the product you are considering. "KJ from Vancouver" can tell you that the shoe fit is smaller than advertised and that you should buy a size up for best comfort. Similarly, you can look at the reviews from past clients of speakers you're considering to get a feel for the value of their presentation.

Look for quantity and quality. An experienced speaker should have at least 10 solid recommendations on their profile. Look for reviews from organizations that are similar in size to yours.

Whether you are buying shoes or searching for a speaker, using a good online catalogue is a great way to go. It is easy to quickly evaluate many choices when they are presented in a consistent format; you can read about the experience of other buyers; and, you often get more for the same price since you are leveraging a competitive marketplace.

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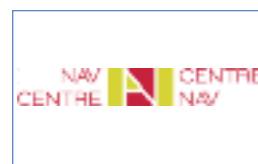


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# The Joy of Discovery

As they say in Newfoundland,  
"Stay where yer at and I'll come where yer to"

If the explorer John Cabot hadn't set foot on the rocky shores of Newfoundland in 1497, he likely would have been attending a meeting somewhere. Why? Because meetings are all about exploration, discovery and displacing the local inhabitants. But, mostly, they're about discovery.

At the last meeting I attended, for example, I discovered a pair of someone else's underwear at the bottom of the sheets in my bed. But let's focus on the more substantive and less disturbing discoveries waiting to be uncovered at meetings, such as discovering a new, unmapped town you had never heard of before because the hotel you booked is, in fact, not "a stone's throw away" from the meeting venue, but more like "three bus transfers, a six-kilometer stroll and a short gondola ride" away from the venue. A stone, in other words, roughly the size of Prince Edward Island. Ah, the joy of discovery!

The real adventure begins once you've immersed yourself among the native meeting participants whom you'll readily identify by their colourful plumage, strange dialect imported from the South Pacific island of Bureaucratese and, well, their name tags. (Exploration is much easier now than in John Cabot's time when hardly anyone wore name tags... other than Cabot's children, whose names he could never remember after being at sea for so long.)

Once you've settled into the meeting, the list of things to discover is like the lineup at the luncheon buffet or the opening remarks from the local mayor – seemingly endless.

After arriving late to every session on day one, for example, you'll discover that there is a two-hour time difference from your homeland. You'll discover that many of the PowerPoint presentations are neither powerful nor do they have a point. You'll discover that the "gluten-free, low-sodium, low-fat," luncheon option is water. And, if you're a woman, you'll discover that a one-to-one ratio of men's to women's restrooms was poor planning on the part of every facility designer on the planet.

Of course, the deeper purpose of meetings is to facilitate "self-discovery," also known as, "finding your own way back to the hotel after you've missed the last shuttle bus from the evening's offsite entertainment venue."

The truly meaningful self-discovery doesn't happen, however, in the dark alleyways down which you've accidentally wandered

in search of your hotel. The true business of meetings is, rather, to light the path towards even less travelled, more frightening and darker recesses. Yes, it's all about a journey into little used portions of your mind. (The size of this uncharted territory will vary from meeting participant to meeting participant, and may expand substantially depending on the location of the offsite entertainment venue.)

Which means meeting planners, speakers and facilitators must act like lamplighters, or more poetically, pigeons, or even more poetically, like belching, listing tugboats, helping to guide meeting participants toward the barren, lichen-encrusted most desolate regions of their minds.

This is a role the meetings industry must take seriously. Here are a few simple ways to encourage an atmosphere of deep discovery:

- Offer every meeting participant a headlamp and map. And encourage them to wear khakis and Tilley hats. (It's important they look the part.)
- Bring in speakers who will cajole, prod and poke participants, and not just physically (although that's important, especially after a late night), but mentally as well.
- Forget the namby-pamby, 17-minute, Ted Talk-style of presentations that barely scratch the cerebral cortex. To get deep into people's minds you'll need presentations that last hours, possibly going well into the night. A simple rule of thumb to adhere to: don't stop presenting until at least 30 per cent of the audience is crying. That's when you know you've made important breakthroughs and forced people to go deep inside themselves.
- Encourage passionate discussions. To help foster heated debates turn off the air conditioning and bring in those people who phone into talk radio programs. You know, like Al from Red Deer.
- Ask challenging questions that force people to make new neural connections, unlock hidden trapdoors, rearrange the furniture in their attic and, possibly, even rotate their tires. Questions such as, "What's up with that?" and, "Where are we? No, seriously. Where the hell are we? It took me three hours and a gondola ride to get here."

Follow this advice and you'll land upon the shores of a new-found land of deep discovery that even John Cabot would envy. Or, you know, Al from Red Deer.

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