



TIPS & TRICKS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR ENTERTAINER

VENTRILOQUIST

. . . *or, "meeting planning for dummies!"*
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The vast majority of meeting planners do an excellent job preparing for speakers and entertainers. Unfortunately, a few seem determined to create environments totally unsuited for after-dinner presentations. You are probably an experienced meeting planner, but if you delegate the planning process, or if you organize meetings on rare occasions, follow these simple tips to get the most out of your entertainment.

Before you book the facility, ask what's happening next door. If your banquet and program is in a hotel ballroom, your event may be drowned out by what's happening next door. You could be competing with a high school band competition. Yes, it happened at one of my shows. Ask what groups have booked rooms adjacent to the room you are considering.

Avoid outside settings. A show outdoors can present a difficult performing environment. A small stage outdoors, basically includes "God" as a backdrop. Although beautiful, the stage and program can quickly appear small, unappealing, and almost inappropriate, compared to the beautiful surroundings. This special concern must be considered when performing outdoors.

Room size and set-up makes a difference. "People respond in a packed house." Schedule a banquet room which will accommodate the maximum number of guests you have attending. If that's not possible, situate tables and chairs towards the stage end of the room with open spaces at the back. Ask the meeting facility to set chairs for the number of people you actually expect to attend. Empty chairs drain the energy from a room ... the kiss of death. If you just don't know your guest count, place highly visible "RESERVED" signs on the very back tables, utilizing assistants to encourage attendees to sit in front leaving the back tables for late arrivals. If the seats are needed, reserved signs can easily be pulled at the last minute.

Be sure everyone can see. If your audience will be 100 - 150 people, ask the meeting facility for a small stage or riser, generally 12-16 inches high. Remember, as audience size increases, so should the stage height. The rule of thumb is a 16 inch high stage for audiences 150 to 300. Then 3 feet high for 300 people and over. But please ... don't do the reverse by putting your entertainer on a 3 feet high stage for small audiences ... overly tall stages are another kiss of death. Don't let the facility staff talk you into locating the stage in a corner of the room. Center the stage in relationship to audience seating and within 5 or 6 feet of the nearest audience members. Please, please, please, no open dance floors directly in front of the stage. Are you planning table decorations? Leave the balloons and monstrous flower arrangements off the tables. They block lines of sight. Avoid giant potted plants on the stage. They camouflage the presenter. Please do not put the stage in front of a projection screen. White screens make lousy backdrops. (See the attached Set Up/Room Diagram Sheet.)

Visualize the flow and events of the evening's agenda. Know how long the dinner will take to be served and eaten. Your caterer or banquet coordinator can tell you. Have you streamlined your awards and speeches so presenters and award recipients know exactly when they need to be available and on stage? Group photos should be taken after the event so as to cut out "down time." Give thoughtful consideration to the time slot for the entertainment. Please don't torture your audience ... and your entertainer by putting the entertainment at the very end of a long evening of speeches. An ideal start time for the entertainment is 15-30 minutes after the meal is concluded. Remember, a quality entertainer will leave your audience in an upbeat mood for the remainder of the evening's agenda. Make a calculated estimate of the total length of your evening's program. Is it too long? Remember, shorter is ALWAYS better. Another please, please, please... no ten minute breaks right before the entertainment. Transition right into the entertainment from speeches or awards. Do you have door prizes? Give those away AFTER the entertainment. "Giveaways" seem to illicit talking and restlessness. They're a great closer for the evening.

Your Master of Ceremonies will set the tone for the evening. Introduce the entertainer to your MC before the evening's dinner. This will afford both entertainer and MC the opportunity to communicate exactly how the evening will progress. Your entertainer will not want to be on stage when guests are still eating or wait staff picking up service items. People don't laugh with a mouth full of chocolate mousse and the clanking of dishes guarantee distraction.

Close the bar during the program. If people get up during the program to get a drink, it sends a psychological message to everyone in the room that they are no longer interested in the show.

The audience must be seated. Immediately prior to the start of the program, close hallway and kitchen doors. Be certain your MC has command of the room before introducing the entertainment. The entertainer wants to go right into his act, not having to garner the attention of his audience. People standing, talking or drinking can quickly change a captive environment into a struggling performer trying to hold their attention.

Video and audio recording is PROHIBITED. Today's modern technology affords many attendees the ability to record performers and speakers with the flip of a cell phone switch. As a courtesy to your performer, have your MC remind the audience at the outset they are prohibited from recording any part of the show without prior written permission from the artist.

REMEMBER

- **Successful meeting planning lies in the details.**
- **Providing quality entertainment adds value and memories to your meeting.**
- **Have a question? Please call!**
- **My phone number is 316-799-2631.**