



Tips for Having a Great Event

Having presented more than 3,500 seminars and being an attendee at another 500, I have learned some key tips to helping you have a great event and avoiding the mistakes that can ruin it.

Timing

The best events happen in the morning, 9:00-12:00, while people are awake and alert. Avoid events in the afternoon, after lunch or during cocktails. People are sleepy, tired and mentally drained.

Length

Three hour session with a break, or a 90 minute session. One hour is too short to establish rapport and deliver enough content. Two hours is too long for one session, yet too short to give a break.

Start time

Start precisely on time, regardless of where attendees are. This establishes the tone of this and future meetings. It shows respect for those who arrived on time and keeps the rest of your event on track. Someone must begin moving the crowd and making announcements 5-10 minutes ahead.

Late starts and creeping delays show disrespect for those who are present and it will have the “domino effect” of putting the rest of your day off schedule.

Then, in the future, no one will respect your event times and you'll forever start late. (The people who are late are already frustrated. The ones present aren't...yet.)

Breaks

One for every 90 minutes. Shorter breaks if they are staying in the same room, longer if they're changing rooms. If you worry about losing people at the break, then the break isn't the problem; it's the program.

Room setup

Center your presenter and keep the AV screen to the side. Only use a center screen if there is also a ceiling mounted projector.

Keep the first row of seating within 4-6 feet of this area to improve audience energy and engagement. Use a riser for larger audiences, but keep it to 14” to 18” height.

High stages or distant front rows kill the energy of the room and make it difficult for your presenter to connect.

Seating

The highest energy seating is theater style, simple chairs placed on the floor, with a narrow aisle, close to the presenter.

The worst-ever setup is round tables. It spreads the audience out, breaks presenter-audience eye contact, changes participants focus to their table partners instead of the presenter, and will absolutely kill the energy in the room.

There is NO good reason to have round tables for a seminar. (Awards banquets, etc. are different.) Sponsors usually use round tables due a meal. But you must decide: Do you want a good seminar or a good meal? You can't have both.

Two options: 1) Use narrow classroom tables that keep the audience facing forward, or 2) Venue permitting, have a meal set up on tables in one part of the room and seminar seating set in the other.

Chairs

Set for 10% under actual attendance, so more chairs have to be brought in. This creates the response: "The seminar was so good they had to bring in more chairs!" Fill the front rows first. Empty front rows with people seated in the back kill the energy and make your event look like a failure.

Hotels will usually try to over-seat, so they won't have to bring in more chairs. It makes it easier on them but more difficult on you. Have them stack extra chairs in the corners and cover them so participants can't get at them until you're ready.

Lighting

You must have a bright room with all lights on and all shades open. Do NOT dim lighting for the AV projector. Instead, get a brighter projector. Dark, "funeral home" lighting will put your audience to sleep.

Sound

Have a quality system, wireless lavalier microphone, multiple ceiling speakers then test them to be clear. For larger events, consider a professional sound engineer with remote sound system and mixer. Bad sound will kill a good event.

Coffee

Have coffee before the session and during breaks. Place cream & sugar at a separate station to ease congestion.

Food

If you are serving food, be sure you have a two-sided buffet area so more people may access it at the same time.

Presenter Introduction

To introduce your speaker, have a skilled introducer who is enthusiastic, has heard the speaker, is familiar with the introduction, and comfortable with public speaking.

This person MUST use a microphone, preferably separate from the speaker's. Do NOT let them avoid a microphone by saying "Oh they can hear me." Use this time to test the audio levels and get the audience used to the sound level.