

Tips on how to manage a successful seminar or workshop

Two months before the event:

- ✓ Confirm your booking with the presenter and check requirements for equipment and room setting.
- ✓ Agree on who is responsible for printing course notes or handouts for participants.
- ✓ Confirm your room booking with the venue.
- ✓ Check that there is an appropriate reception area/foyer outside the room.
- ✓ Arrange for a table at the reception for name tags and anything else that needs to be handed out to participants.
- ✓ Book the equipment using an equipment checklist.
- ✓ Arrange suitable refreshments. Keep it alcohol free before and during the event.
- ✓ If you haven't used the facility before, check it out personally and ask for contact details for two recent users you can check with.
- ✓ Check room temperature and lighting controls. Are they easily accessible? Do they work?
- ✓ Is the room sound proof? If not, find out what will be happening next door.
- ✓ Is internal signage required at the venue? If so, where will it be located?
- ✓ Put all points agreed with the venue and presenters in writing AND ask them to confirm that they have received and accept the points you have made.

On receipt of registration forms:

- Send a confirmation letter or e-mail. In this ask registrants to check the spelling of their names and let you know of any variation required.
- Included with this letter/email a map of how to get to the venue and put this as a link on your website. Also included a map of the venue itself and again link it to your web site.
- Ask registrants to advise you of any dietary requirements or other special requirements, for example, wheelchair access.
- Suggest to delegates that it may be advisable to bring peel-on, peel-off clothing in case of variations in room temperature.
- In the confirmation letter, remind delegates of the commencement and conclusion times and objectives of the events.
- It may be helpful to include a pre-course questionnaire or briefing information for attendees.

One week before of the event:

- ✓ Confirm numbers, layout, equipment and wording for signage with the venue.
- ✓ Do your table plan and room setting.
- ✓ Does the presenter need a front table or a lectern? Do presenters need a display table or space for banners and other promotional material?
- ✓ Prepare your name tags, including ones for the presenters and any representatives from your own organisation. Ensure that you have a supply of blank name tags in case of name changes and unexpected arrivals.
- ✓ Prepare the opening and closing address. If someone else will be welcoming guests/participants, prepare tips for them on what to cover.
- ✓ Introductions for speakers: Keep introductions brief. Do not read out the speakers CV. This irritates attendees and wastes time. If required, this can be included in any written handouts.
- ✓ Have you appointed a timekeeper? It is important to start on time and to make sure all presenters keep to time. A good timekeeper makes sure this happens. Delegates and other presenters both get frustrated when the workshop/seminar doesn't run to time. Some presenters end up stealing time from other presenters who get less time to present than they had prepared for. Most unprofessional! Also delegates like to finish on time.
- ✓ Have you received the masters of any notes to be prepared for the event?
- ✓ If you have to arrange for the presenter's notes to be printed, have you double checked that you have the right notes for the right event and that all pages are there and in order?
- ✓ Have you received presenters PowerPoint presentations?
- ✓ Have you confirmed with presenters that they bring a backup copy of their PowerPoint presentation?

On the day:

- ✓ Be aware of the importance of first impressions.
- ✓ Arrive at least one hour before the presentation.
- ✓ Check that everything is in place and equipment is working.
- ✓ Check that signage is visible, correct and that arrows are pointing in the right direction.
- ✓ Ensure that there is coffee, tea and water for early arrivals.
- ✓ Have someone available to play the role of maitre d' to look after early arrivals and introduce them to one another. Don't overlook the importance of key people (yourself) from your organisation being there to welcome guests. Some things should not be delegated.
- ✓ Don't overload participants with written information. So often there is a clutter of pamphlets and A4 sheets about your organisation, sponsors, forthcoming activities,

general industry information plus the notes or workbooks required for the event. Keep it simple and uncluttered.

Room Settings

The size of room required and the way it is set out will depend on the type of presentation, length of the event and size of the groups. Also different presenters will have different preferences. Here are some general guidelines to take into consideration:

- For training courses and workshops, rooms that are too cramped will inhibit discussion. A bit of space helps people to feel comfortable and increases the energy in the room.
- Solid boardroom tables are a trainer's nightmare. They reduce group interaction and inhibit discussion.
- For any event that is longer than 90 minutes, it is preferable to seat people at tables rather than have them in rows of chairs theatre style. This gives them somewhere to put their folders, glasses and a drink and makes note taking far more comfortable.
- Classrooms style room arrangements tend to create a barrier between the presenter and the audience.
- Angling the tables in what is often called herring bow style tends to reduce this effect.
- Circular tables, if space permits, with people seated in a half moon setting create the ideal environment for many types of sessions.

Catering

We have seen thousands of participant feedback sheets for conferences, seminars and training workshops and courses lasting from a few hours to a few days. No matter what the topic, no matter what the country it is presented in, there will be more comments about refreshments than about any other aspect of the event. The next thing that will attract most comments is to do with the temperature of the room.

These are things that are within the control of the organisers. Get these 'critical non-essentials' right.

- If you feel that your budget does not allow you to provide adequate refreshments, there are three options open to you: (1) put up the price of the event; (2) get a sponsor to cover the cost of refreshments; (3) don't hold the event – If you're going to do it, do it well!
- Have coffee, tea, fruit juice and water available prior to commencement. It helps to keep the early arrivals occupied and gives them a comfortable environment in which to chat with one another. As well as being welcoming, this takes their mind off waiting.

- For evening events, provide light snacks rather than a heavy meal. People with a full stomach are far more likely to get sleepy.
- For evening events, where people may have travelled straight from work, provide the food and drink prior to commencement of the event. Again, this takes attendees minds off waiting and means that people who are held up still arrive in time for the main event. Some food can always be put aside for latecomers to take in with them.
- For all day events, make morning tea special. There are always some people who haven't had breakfast prior to coming to the event. As well, as things like muffins, fresh fruit is great for assisting energy levels at this time of day.
- Provide a good selection of food at lunchtime, including options for vegetarians, but don't go for a full on, cooked meal. Again, this will reduce the energy levels in the afternoon.
- For the afternoon break, as well as tea and biscuits provide some more fresh fruit.