



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Balancing Your Meetings

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Welcome

Hello and welcome to Summer!

Although Summer officially begins in the Northern Hemisphere on June 21, my "summer" begins when school ends! As a working Mom, summer brings on a new schedule. When you add "Travel" to the working parent's schedule, sometimes my system goes on overload! (Any sympathizers out there??)

For those of us who travel, being away represents a change in our routine, getting behind at the office and being away from our families. Multiple day meetings are a stress on all participants, not the least, working parents.

— What if. . . we could take our children with us? I had the pleasure of meeting Diane Lyons recently. Diane's firm, Accent on Children's Arrangements, offers a solution to make the "what if" possible. —

This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events addresses the topic of balance in meetings. Work/family balance, work/leisure balance, and other juggling acts associated with meetings.

To help your meetings achieve more balance, read on. . .

Sue

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Home Alone No More

Written by Diane Lyons, president of ACCENT on Children's Arrangements, dlyons@Accentoca.com or [Diane Lyons](#)

Many arguments prevail on why meetings don't require children's programming. Most of them are based on outdated beliefs, such as "my attendees are mostly men and don't bring children," or "my meeting is being held when the children are in school, so parents won't bring them."

The statistics dismiss these arguments. According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), one in five parents who took a trip last year – representing 16 million women and men – let their children miss school to be a part of their travel experience. Almost one million of those parents said they had extended a business trip into a family vacation.

The bottom line is this: professional parents are increasingly choosing to bring their families along on business travel. Reports by the Travel Industry Association of America indicate that the number of people who bring children along on business trips jumped by 55% between 1990 and 1996, and a 2000 Crowne Plaza Survey shows that 23% of business travelers added leisure time to their business trips and brought family along. In response, arrangements for children – including on-site childcare and youth programs, parties and tours – are increasingly being recognized as an integral part of a successful meeting itinerary.

Knowing that their children will be safe, secure, entertained and enriched by a well-run program encourages parents to bring them along to meetings. The benefits for the parent are obvious:

- Parents can turn their work time into family time
- Busy parents are better able to balance their personal and professional lives.
- They travel for business guilt- and stress-free knowing their children are nearby and well cared for.
- The friendships children form during group programs create additional networking opportunities for their parents.
- Most importantly, parents can share their travel experiences and their careers with the family.

For the children, the advantages are just as positive: spending more time with their parents, learning about their parents' job, exploring new places and making new friends.

But the great news is that the opportunities and benefits to the meeting and the meeting planner are also tremendous:

1. Increased attendance by parents who otherwise couldn't, or wouldn't want to, leave their children while they traveled
2. Probability that parents will stay the duration of the meeting and attend more events (they won't need to leave early to get back home to family or skip events)

- to care for children)
3. Greater participant/membership diversity
 4. Knowing children are near allows for more relaxed and focused meeting participants
 5. Family-friendly environments create great appreciation and satisfaction (and good publicity for the host organization)
 6. Family involvement promotes employee/member bonding, as well as increased company/association loyalty and motivation

Another opportunity associated with children's programs is sponsorship. Advocating family travel and demographic diversity through children's activities is an excellent avenue through which to attract new sponsors to a host organization. In many cases, sponsorship can completely offset the cost of providing the service.

Many planners have found that by offering a well-run children's program, they can reduce the liability risk of having unattended children in the meeting venue. Just because no children's programming is offered doesn't necessarily mean a parent won't bring a child along to a meeting; having unchaperoned children roaming the halls or being forced to have unqualified staff take care of children during a meeting are recipes for liability disaster. A well-conceived, well-run children's program, on the other hand, is a recipe for success.

Diane Lyons has been in the destination management business for 25 years and has specialized in children's programming for 12 years. She is the founder and president of ACCENT on Arrangements, a full-service global destination management company. Since 1991, its division, ACCENT on Children's Arrangements, has provided custom-designed children's programming worldwide for corporate and association meetings, conventions, corporate incentive trips and other special events. Visit her at dlyons@Accentoca.com or on their website at www.accentoca.com.

More than Babysitting

There are a number of important factors necessary for a successful children's program. All programs should, for example, carry a minimum of \$6 million of general liability insurance. There should be a favorable child:adult ratio throughout the program. The National Association for the Education of Young Children proposes a child-to-staff ratio of 1:2 for infants, 1:3 for toddlers and 1:5 for children up to 12 years old. Additionally, the program and its provider must meet all federal and state standards – from staffing to physical requirements – at the meeting destination.

Beyond these and other basic essentials, a successful children's program depends upon the less tangible factors of creativity, flexibility and customization. There is far more to children's programming than simple baby sitting, and no one solution can be applied to every situation. Programs must accommodate the specific needs of the children, taking into consideration their different ages, cultures and developmental stages.

For example, on site, ACCENT offers such children's services as Convention CampSM, group child care featuring crafts, games and various types of "edutainment," and Children's Special Events, such as theme parties with inflatables, character visits, live

entertainment and more. Offsite, ACCENT provides a host of Youth Tours designed to highlight the meeting destination's most unique cultural experiences.

According to Diane Lyons, ACCENT strives to ensure that every program focuses on "the double S plus the double E": safety and security, plus education and entertainment. Providing a children's program that is at once customized, creative, entertaining, educational, safe, secure, smoothly executed, affordable and in synergy with the meeting is no small task; selecting the right children's programming partner, therefore, can be paramount to a meeting's ultimate success.

Selecting a Partner

The challenge of providing children's programming is in selecting a competent partner to provide the service. Diane Lyons recommends that you consider the following when evaluating a children's program and its provider company:

- The company's reputation, reliability and background
- The company's specific applicable experience (Has the company worked with a group of the same size, diversity and complexity? Is the company familiar with the meeting venue, including its move-in/move-out and security requirements?)
- How long the company has been in business
- The strength of the company's references
- The type of insurance the company carries (Is a minimum of \$6 million of liability insurance guaranteed? What about sexual molestation and abuse insurance?)
- The company's safety, security and registration procedures (How do they handle identification, authorization and drop-off/pick-up logistics? Will there be a Security Guard present?)
- The credentials – experience, references and certifications – of the company's staff (Does the company conduct criminal background checks? Are the staff members CPR certified and/or do they have other first aid/medical training? Will there be an RN/LPN present?)
- The child/staff member ratio (Does it follow the National Association for the Education of Children?)
- The types, variety and level of creativity of the program (Does the company offer fully customized programs? Are the programs appropriate to the age, culture and developmental level of the group?)
- The balance between education and entertainment in the program
- The program's material requirements and space needs
- The program's hours of operation
- A detailed breakdown of expenses with justification (Who is paying for what?)

Chew on This

A new University of Minnesota report recommends that healthier food choices be provided at meetings. However, the practical experience of many is that the cookies and brownies are eaten while the healthy snacks remain.

I know that I have succumbed to the "Well I am not at home, so I can eat differently"

theory while at meetings. The key is to survey your participants, introduce change gradually, and document what food is gone and what is still left on the plate.

These facts gave me something to chew on...

According to the University of Minnesota study, a large blueberry muffin (4 inches) contains 250 calories and 9 fat grams, while a small (2.5 inches) is only 60 calories and 4 fat grams.

A large cookie (4 inches) is 280 calories (and yes, last week at a meeting, I ate two of them) with 14 grams of fat. A small 2 1/2 inch cookie is 50 calories and 2 fat grams.

Several Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton and Trump International Hotels are making healthier choices. They are placing bottled water on guests' pillows during turn-down service, instead of the traditional piece of chocolate.

Balance on a Budget

Ideas for restoring balance in your meetings and your participants:

1. **Yoga:** A yoga class requires very little equipment, offers people the chance to learn a new skill and can be held almost anywhere. Yoga stretches can revitalize better than naps. This tip, appeared in Meetings & Conventions May 2003, with an idea from Carol Dickman, yoga instruction, for extended plane travel:

Sit with your back against the seat, place your feet hip-width apart.

Inhale while raising your arms, and breathe out while bending your elbows, grasping the back of your seat.

Inhale while lifting your chin, resting your head on the seat back.

While breathing comfortably, watch your chest lift and push forward with each inhalation.

Finally, inhale deeply and as you exhale, let your body slowly return to a comfortable position.

2. **Organized Walks:** Schedule an early morning walking group around the property where you are meeting
3. **Physical Breaks:** Create a physical break with a second purpose. Examples: take a walk and discuss the content of the afternoon session, take a walk and reflect on what was discussed. An intense schedule with no time for reflection or sharing information is not the most productive environment for people to learn.
4. **Spur Creativity:** Physical breaks can also be used to spur creativity. Ask people to find something on their "walk" and ponder how it relates to the issue being discussed. Creativity can be spurred by linking two disparate, seemingly

unrelated things together.

5. Icebreakers: Plan an icebreaker with a personal focus. When people register, ask them to add their favorite hobby or favorite sport on their nametag. Everyone will learn more about each other and form new connections.
6. Getting To Know You: Another idea I have used: Buy extra blank ribbons for your nametags. Have people write their talents or skills on the ribbon and add as many ribbons as they would like to their nametags. All day long, people will see each other and learn about some unknown talent. The ribbons can be crafted to be more personal or serious. List another job that you would be great at. List one of your hidden talents. List some of your personal accomplishments.
7. Workout Networks: Create a way for fellow runners, avid walkers, or people who would use the gym to hook up with each other while they are traveling. Having a buddy helps me schedule in exercise whether at home or on the road at a meeting.
8. Support Groups: Offer a Weight watchers or AA session during the multiple day meeting.

Freebies: [More on Kids and Travel](#)

FREEBIES:

If you want more information about traveling with children, here are some great resources:

Family Travel Forum offers a free newsletter. Their motto is "Have Kids, Still Travel!" Go to their website for more information or for the newsletter.
<http://www.familytravelforum.com/> or [Family Travel Forum](#)

Travel Internationally with Your Kids is a website that offers real tips from real parents on how to travel internationally (or just long distances) with your children.
<http://www.travelwithyourkids.com/> or [Travel Internationally with Your Kids](#)

Selling Kids at a Meeting -- from those who did it:

Think you will have a hard time selling the concept of children's programs at you next meeting? Here is what management at other companies and associations have said:

"As our staff did our bowl wrap-up today, we evaluated every aspect of our trip to Miami and without question, the child care services were the bright spot in our week. Our parents were so pleased to have a competent, caring professional on site and caring for the children. I would also like to mention that outstanding programming was done with the children. They were entertained with a variety of arts and crafts, videos and games. The staff was attentive and took a special interest in each child. Parents were pleased with the security and the extra efforts that were made to insure the safety of the children."

- Pam Overton, Associate Athletic Director, Florida State University

"Please relay our special thanks to each individual who worked with the children and made the registration process and the entire evening flawless. Your organization made our experience in New Orleans all the much more enjoyable!"

- Allison Pfening, Meeting Manager, Walt Disney Corporation

"On behalf of the American Dental Association, please accept our thanks for providing excellent childcare during our October, 2001 Annual Session in Kansas City. The arrangements were excellent and we have received very positive comments from all of the families that participated. We hope to provide a fully-sponsored program again in 2002 and look forward to your participation as the day care provider."

- Jean M. Ferrone, Director, Department of Conference Services and Planning, American Dental Association

More FREEBIES To learn more about how to embrace the opportunities and benefits of offering children's programming at your next meeting, please contact Diane Lyons at Accent on Children's Arrangements and she will send you a free information packet featuring "Key Elements of a Successful Children's Program." Her complete contact information is Diane Lyons, President, Accent on Children's Arrangements, (504) 524-1227, email dlyons@Accentoca.com or click here [Diane Lyons](#).

Future T.I.M.E.

I will be speaking at the following events:

Meeting Professionals International World Education Congress : August 2- 5
[Can't We All Get Along: Increasing Program Value with Effective Supplier Teams](#) on
[Tuesday, August 5, 8:00 - 9:30 am](#)

[The Measurement Exchange: Real World Answers to your Questions](#) on [Tuesday, August 5 10:00 - 11:30 am](#)

Southeastern Florida MPI Educational Conference, MPI -SEC August 21 -23, 2003
[180 Ways to Transform Your Meeting](#). I am presenting on [August 21](#).

ITME Motivation Show: in Chicago from [September 16 - 18](#)

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me!

Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events will be accepting limited advertising. If you are interested in using this e-newsletter as a way to reach a targeted audience, please e-mail Ron Hopkins at rchopkins@ameritech.net for more details. [Or Click Here](#)

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T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: [Teambuilding](#) and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: [Green Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: [Values](#) and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: [Minimum/Minimal Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: [Evaluations](#) and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: [Politics](#)

December 2000: [Toys](#) and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: [Sales, Award Presentations](#) and (Freebie) Sales Tips

February 2001: [Change](#) and Communicating Change and (Freebie) Change Bombs

March 2001: [Open Space Technology](#)

April 2001: [Adult Learning Styles](#) and (Freebie) Learning Style Questionnaire

May 2001: [Trade Shows](#) and (Freebie) Trade Show Timeline

June 2001: [Emotional Intelligence](#) and (Freebie) EI Quiz

July 2001: [Presentation Tips](#) and (Freebie) Speaker Introductions

August 2001: [Ice Breakers](#) and (Freebie) Resource List

September 2001: [Facilitation](#) and (Freebie) Problem Personalities In A Meeting

October 2001: [Humor](#) and (Freebie) The Benefits Of Laughter November 2001:

[Customer Care](#) and (Freebie) Complaints

December 2001: [Slack](#) and (Freebie) Quiet Time

January 2002: [Teambuilding Options](#) and (Freebie)

February 2002: [Promotional Products](#) and (Freebie) Case Study

March 2002: [Multicultural Communication](#) and (Freebie) Multicultural Meeting Tips

April 2002: [Outdoor Learning](#) and (Freebie) Justification Checklist

May 2002: [Budgets, ROI, ROO, and ROK](#) and (Freebie) Budgeting Beyond Excel

June 2002: [Creativity](#) and (Freebie) Building the Case for Creativity

July 2002: [High Touch Technology](#) and (Freebie) Personal Technology Tools

August 2002: [Economic and Business Cycles](#) and (Freebie) Investment Strategies for meetings

September 2002: [Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers](#) and (Freebie) Learning Environments

October 2002: [Return on Investment](#) and (Freebie) Balanced Scorecard

November 2002: [Incentive Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Forum Synopsis

December 2002: [Resource Recap](#) and (Freebie) Resource Lists

January 2003: [Everyday Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Meeting Quiz

February 2003: [Diversity](#) and (Freebie) Survey Results

March 2003: [Problem Solving](#) and (Freebie) Techniques Illustrated

April 2003: [Marketing: Pre- and Post- Event](#) and (Freebie) Blogs

May 2003: [Entertainment](#) and (Freebie) Storytelling

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