



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

Topic: Last Minute Ideas

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### Welcome

With very few days left in August, I don't know about you, but I am working fast and furiously to do all the (usually fun!) things that I said I would do this summer. And I am doing the last bit of preparation to get my family ready for school. So its a bit of a last minute scramble here.

Has anyone had to put together a last-minute meeting? What can you do to insure a successful last-minute meeting? "Last minute" suggestions fill this issue.

Now, that T.I.M.E. is written, I need to dash off to buy some school supplies before school starts and fit in one last picnic...

- Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

P.S. Next month's issue will deal with training meetings in keeping with back to school.

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### Living on the Edge

We are living in an environment where lead times on meetings are shortened. The good news is that often the meetings fill "gaps" in our schedules (or sales numbers if we are supplying services.)

However, there are downsides to last-minute meetings. When you have less time, you

inevitably have:

1. Less time to develop the underlying plan for the meeting
2. Less time to create targeted marketing to attract or "sell" the participants
3. Less time for creativity
4. Less time for research
5. Less time to secure the right suppliers
6. Less time to prepare your agenda, program and speaker
7. Probably no time to develop contingency plans
  
8. Simply, Less time to create a compelling, valuable, memorable meeting

How can we get others to focus on the "losses" when things are done in a hurry?

When meetings are executing flawlessly, no one seems to understand or appreciate the effort. It's when things go wrong that attention is directed toward the behind-the-scenes coordination effort.

I believe the best approach is, not to describe the work and the time that is involved, but rather, to explain how much more you could do, if allocated the appropriate amount of time.

Sell the additional benefits you could bring, if you were involved in the preliminary planning stages. Sell additional creativity, additional research, etc. Tell them about the added benefits you can bring to the process.

Living on the edge is OK for the short term. However, it is not a healthy choice for organizations long-term. And we all pay a price in terms of our own stress levels.

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### How to Avoid Last Minute-ness

If everyone can benefit from increasing time frames and avoiding the last-minute meeting, what can we do to avoid this situation?

I offer these suggestions:

- Position one meeting as part of a larger effort.  
As part of understanding how your meeting fits into the larger effort, you will gain access to information about other meetings, incentive programs or events that impact the participants. Build a step into your process where you inquire about future plans.
- Ask the question.  
Stakeholders are busy doing their jobs; meetings are not always top of mind. Ask them about future meetings and needs.
- Tailor your tickler system to remind you to follow-up with people.  
Whether you use a paper system, Outlook or your PDA to keep you on track, create a way to remind yourself to check-in with people in advance. You may get

yourself invited to a key planning meeting.

- Document your improvements when you have been given adequate lead time.  
Be prepared to demonstrate and discuss, how additional time has resulted in improvements in prior meetings.
- Reinforce the message in your final planning meeting (pre-con) and the post-event evaluation (post-con).  
Without being obnoxious about sending this message, remind key people about "what could have been done". Set the stage for the improvements for next time. Especially during post-event evaluations, determine what changes you would recommend for the next meeting. Post-event evaluations are a great way to solidify relationships with stakeholders and key suppliers. Make certain that these conversations happen in a timely manner before details are lost. Build post-event evaluations into your standard process and standard forms. (More on this idea next.)

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### Before You're Stuck

Before you are confronted with a short time frame, what can you do within your own environment?

- Build a Process. For everything you do, build it as a process. Document it. Create a process that works. Reexamine and re-evaluate your processes so you can fine tune them. The time taken to do this will help you in the long run.

I just finished reading a great book, [The E-Myth Revisited](#) by Michael Gerber. In this book, "E" does not refer to "electronic" but rather "entrepreneurial". Gerber outlines a model for creating small businesses that can survive beyond the capabilities and imitations of their founding entrepreneur. If you run your own business, I highly recommend this book. If you want to run a more efficient enterprise within an organization and manage your staff better, I think you will find several gems in this book. In an easy-to-understand way, Gerber talks about the benefit of building processes within your business.

- Build a Template. Akin to building a system, create master checklists and master templates that will help you insure every detail is taken care of.
- Build Master Information for your Speakers and Participants/Attendees. Likewise, I have master documents that pertain, not to me, but to speakers or participants. For example, I have been planning "Study Tours" for the International Association of Conference Centers. I have a master document that I use to educate and clarify the responsibilities of the tour guides. Think broadly about what can be created as part of your templates or master information.
- Create an Organizational System to Support You. Each person is unique in what organizational system works for them. For example, keep master documents in a separate folder. Organize your events by folders on your

computer. Use color coding if that helps you. Make sure your email files correspond to your paper files and perhaps even correspond to your Windows file structure. (My PC nature is showing through; excuse any political incorrect omissions about the Mac.)

- Use Categories on your PDA or Outlook. Keeping notes and categories can help you find that contact that works for a translation service company that you met several months ago....Go electronic for database information. The search capabilities on key words, categories, and field names will be worth the effort.
- Adopt a Project Mentality to planning your meetings and events. Projects have a beginning, middle and an end. Projects also have goals and objectives. The clearer the target, the more likely you are to hit it. Define your meeting project by its overall goal or mission and set of clearly defined objectives. When achieve, the objectives relate to the overall goals and results in benefits to the organization.

When dealing with limited time, it is also useful to consider what are the Key Success Criteria. These are the objectives that, if all else falls short, we must achieve. The question I like to pose to unearth the real Key Success Criteria is "How will we know if this meeting is a "home run"?" The stakeholder's answer will tell me what is the single most important objective to achieve.

- Maintain a Creativity Folder. I maintain a list of 206 ideas for innovative ideas which accompanies my presentation "180 Ways to Transform your Meetings." Likewise, you can keep a folder of innovative ideas that you can accomplish on a shoe-string budget or a short time frame.
- Rely on your Suppliers to serve as partners and sources of ideas, creativity and support. Creating a team environment will allow you to increase your program value even with a tight time frame. Trusted suppliers with whom you have a pre-established relationship allows you to accelerate your planning process.

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### When It's Too Late

You're stuck. Short time frame. High Stress. High Impact Needed.

Here are some of my ideas:

1. Use online surveys to help understand your audience, increase attendance or for evaluations. There are many vendors including zoomerang.com, survey suite, and surveywriter.com. Once you have defined your information needs, you can build and launch a survey in an hour or so. Results are automatically tabulated for you, so its easy to analyze the results. Plus, people respond quickly to online surveys.
2. Many hotels offer the service of creating a customized Web page for your meeting. You can post meeting agendas, dress code information and links to

airports, ground transportation and weather.

3. Offer your participants something to do while they wait for the meeting to start. I recently created Word Search Puzzles (very last minute) using the following site: [Puzzle Maker](http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com) or <http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com>

You can use key words from the message, names, venues, agenda items, etc. The site supports cryptograms, hidden messages, mazes, etc.

4. Create an interesting agenda. Use acronyms on the agenda. Example: L-A-U-G-H - Look at some Ideas, Answer Questions, Understand New Procedures, Go for It, How will know we've succeeded. Or list the programs using unusual times, like military time. When you start and stop meetings at odd times, people are more likely to be on time. People pay closer attention to their watch for a meeting that starts at 9:07 am rather than 9:00 am. Create an area on your agendas for action planning or reflection. Include four large boulders/bubbles/circles so participants could capture 3 or 4 main ideas that they want to remember or actions they wanted to take as a result of the meeting.
5. When introducing speakers, don't read the biography. Listening to degrees and titles is meaningless and even boring to most audiences. Link the speaker and the audience. Tell a story. Ahead of time, ask the speaker questions like "How did you get started in this field" or "What's the oddest thing that's ever happened while you were conducting research?" Use the introduction as an opportunity to offer the speaker a personal endorsement. Use the introduction as a way to broaden the audience's opinion of the speaker and create anticipation.
6. Try a different format. You can utilize the World Café format pioneered by Juanita Brown Ph.D. and David Isaacs. Or create a buzz with Phillips 66 or Buzz groups.
7. Introduce people by categories. Create some interest to the mundane recital of introductions. For example, introduce people by the # of years in organization or birthday months.
8. Incorporate color into your session with colored paper or designer paper. This fast and easy tip will transform the look of a meeting instantly. And it will be easier for people to find the stack of paper during the meeting and later.
9. Use table top toys to create interest and anticipation. Toys also help increase creativity and diffuse tension or boredom. Even absent-minded, subconscious playing with a toy will open your mind to new possibilities, new relationships, and new contexts.
10. Find ways to increase audience participation. The reality is that people define the success of a meeting by the interaction with other people and the application of the information gained during the meeting. Yes, while they will complain about the food or the room temperature, meeting participants usually define a great meeting by what happens within the meeting. Coach your presenters on ways to connect with the audience. The August issue of Presentations Magazine has a great article entitled, "Oh No, Not Audience Participation!". If you don't

subscribe or missed the article, it should be available within a month at their website [www.presentations.com](http://www.presentations.com) or email me and I can send it to you. Click here [Audience Participation Article](#) or send an email to [stinnish@ameritech.net](mailto:stinnish@ameritech.net). The article presents the upside (great) and the downside (some) to audience participation. The author, Dave Zielinski, interviews many experts each of who provides examples and tips for increasing audience participation. Just getting your internal presenters and speakers to read this article and implement the philosophy should improve your meeting. I think it should be part of your master process, so if you want the article, don't forget to email me.

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### Freebies:

#### FREEBIES:

My list of 206 ideas in 32 different categories (icebreakers, speakers, nametags, introductions, etc.) is available as a free handout when you hire me to speak to your organization. My presentation is entitled, 180 Ways to Transform Your Meeting, and can be structured in a 1.5 -3 hour format.

**More FREEBIES** Interested in more information about Buzz Groups or the World Cafe (Suggestion #6)?? Please email me and I will send you more information on these two formats for meetings. Click here [Buzz and World Cafe Information](#) or send an email to [stinnish@ameritech.net](mailto:stinnish@ameritech.net).

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### Future T.I.M.E.

I will be doing the following seminars next month:

ITME Motivation Show: in Chicago from **September 16 - 18**

[The Measurement Exchange: Real World Answers to your Questions](#) on **Wednesday, September 17 at 2:00 pm**

[Can't We All Get Along: Increasing Program Value with Effective Supplier Teams](#) on **Thursday, September 18 at 9:30 am**

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 [rhopkins@ameritech.net](mailto:rhopkins@ameritech.net) for more details. [Or Click Here](#)

I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

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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  
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[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  
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March 2003: [Problem Solving](#) and (Freebie) Techniques Illustrated  
April 2003: [Marketing: Pre- and Post- Event](#) and (Freebie) Blogs  
May 2003: [Entertainment](#) and (Freebie) Storytelling  
June 2003: [Balance in Meetings and child caret](#) with (Freebie) Child Care at Meetings Tips  
July 2003: [Mobile Events](#) with (Freebie) Spnsorship

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