

Subject: Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events - September 2002



WELCOME

We have a new look and distribution process this month, so if there are any difficulties with the receipt of your issue, please email Sue Tinnish at stinnish@ameritech.net.

September is the traditional back to school month. This issue talks about where and how adults learn best. Paying attention to the environment will allow you to reap benefits as your meeting participants retain more information, are more engaged, and are energized (not falling asleep!).

Glen Ramsborg of The Ramsborg Group has collaborated with me on this issue. I welcome his expertise on learning environments. Additionally, Susan Morris of NewHeights Group provided excellent input on conference centers.

Your Organization Could Be Prominently Displayed Here

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 email Ron Hopkins at rhopkins@ameritech.net for more details.

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1. Do Adults still have to "Go to School"?

Learning is not reserved for school aged children. The concept of "learning" is usually used with reference to schools, training, and children. Do you really expect people to "learn" at a meeting?

The concept of learning is not (or should not be) far removed from meetings. Meetings are used to exchange ideas, solve problems, convey information, and motivate or reward.

Define learning as "To come to be able to and to realize" and you will soon realize that the idea of creating a conducive learning environment should be a top priority in planning effective meetings.

Learning is a change in the way people feel, think or behave.

In order for people to exchange ideas, solve problems, hear new information or even understand the motivational message, they need to have a REALIZATION. Meeting participants need to be able to retain and absorb messages and information. Meetings are about learning.

Furthermore, the reality of today's economic and technological environment requires that we all become life long learners. Employees want to receive personal and professional development. Association members give education and networking top priority for their membership.

2. Creating a Learning Environment

Contributed by Glen C. Ramsborg, PhD, President, Ramsborg Group Ltd.

Engaging the learner or attendee in the activity at hand is critical to the success of a meeting or event. With communication at the core of a learning environment ecosystem, internal and external factors influence the learner's ability to learn and remember.

Components of this "learning" ecosystem, on the surface, sound scientific. And, they are. When dealing with the human, it is imperative to consider these 8 scientific parameters in practical, usable terms.

Physiological – We all learn using our senses. Vision is the primary sense and being able to hear also is critical. Consider temperature. Learning and attention spans decrease 6 to 10 percent for every degree the temperature goes above the comfort zone.

Psychological – The arrangement of the room, color and lighting of the surroundings have a major impact on thinking, listening and concentrating. The psychological impact of one's surroundings, packaged together, impact a learner's psyche.

Emotional – Knowing the audience is critical. Learning styles, educational level, the type of message being communicated have a profound on the individual. Emotional associations forged by words, attitudes, situations, concepts and example can impede or aid the process.

Social/Cultural – Socialization plays a significant part in the learning process. Often, the seed of learning is planted in the formal presentation and the learning comes from networking, discussing, and interacting outside, such as during refreshment breaks, luncheons, team building exercises or other group activities.

Nutrition – The food and beverage consumed by the learner prior to and during learning activities have a remarkable effect on attention span and the ability of the learner to concentrate, learn and remember.

Physical – The physical arrangement of the learning space sends a message to the learner. It can encourage participation or be a distraction. The physical arrangement conveys a clear but nonverbal assumption about the learner's relationship with not only each other but also meeting leadership.

Technology – Technology continues to have a significant place in the learning environment. The tendency is to forget that the learner usually comes to an event so see and hear a presentation – the person. One does not want them to leave saying, "That was a wonderful slide show!" and miss the message.

Learning strategies – All put together, the type of programming developed must be appropriate to the message being communicated, the environment created and the desired outcomes. Lectures, panel discussions, nature hikes, or whatever the learning strategy employed, must fit together as a package.

For more information on the learning environment ecosystem, please e-mail Glen at gramsborg@ramsberg.com. Or you can visit The Ramsberg Group at their website – www.ramsberg.com. The Ramsberg Group is a full-service meeting management, educational programming/design, and production company that can assist in all of your meeting/special event needs.

[The Ramsberg Group](#)

3. Why Johnny Can't be Reached

Again, the science of learning can help your meetings be more effective. Although you don't need to be a neurobiologist, having some appreciation for how adults learn, retain and absorb information will create even more successful meetings and events. So for adult it's not about Why Johnny Can't Read, it's how to effectively reach John. Here are 5 principles to keep in mind when planning meetings or events:

1. Adults want to learn relevant, applicable information
2. Adults need to be involved and favor interaction
3. Adults like to be challenged and to have the opportunity to challenge
4. Adults learn differently and work at different rates because of each person's background, experiences, ability and learning styles
5. Adults need to be able to build upon their own knowledge and experiences

4. Ecosystems at Meetings

Taking into account Glen's 8 components of the learning ecosystem, what should you do for a meeting or event to make it more conducive to learning and absorbing?

Here are my practical suggestions for Reaching Your Audience:

1. Understanding and Acknowledge the Participant's "Whereabouts" – Deal with the reality of the audience and you will be on your way to establishing rapport. Even if you never personally speak at the meeting, the way the meeting is structured should always be striving to create rapport and relevance. Ask the question your meeting participants are asking, "What's in this meeting for me?"
2. "The mind can only absorb what the butt can endure." – There are good reasons for breaks. Moreover, there is a link between long term memory and physical activity.
3. Provide Variety (in style and methods) – This will combat boredom but more importantly it will allow you to reach a wider range of your audience.
4. Provide Opportunity for Interaction—Both informal and structured interaction should be part of the meeting. Group activities, case studies, question and answers are good elements to include.
5. Use Unpredictability – Keep your audience on their toes with a bit of humor, unpredictability and variety.
6. Allow Participants to Share and Display Their Skills and Knowledge – Remember the thrill of "Show and Tell" in your early days of school?

7. Offer people an opportunity to see, hear & write your important messages – This again appeals to multiple learning styles.

8. Allow for “down time” to absorb information- Adults are looking to apply information; that application may occur through reflection, sharing ideas with colleagues, etc. (See also my December 2001 issue on Slack for more information.)

Here are some additional Tips for Presenters:

1. Read the audience
2. Respond effectively to questions (Always say, “Yes... and” Never say, “Yes,....but”)
3. Regulate voice and body language
4. Use Imagery Techniques
5. Selectively Use Examples, Analogies, Metaphors and Stories
6. Involve and Encourage Participation

[T.I.M.E. December 2001 Slack](#)

5. Diversity = Differences

We live in a world marked by globalization. You may work for a global organization. In the United States, our population is extremely diverse. This diversity encompasses several characteristics including:

- * Ethnic diversity
- * Cultural diversity
- * Gender ratios
- * Age distribution
- * Physical capabilities
- * Experience

Knowing your audience composition will create more compelling and effective messages through your meetings and events. Keep the audience in mind whether you are planning the agenda behind the scenes or when you will be in front of the diverse audience. (The March 2002 issue of T.I.M.E. addressed multicultural differences and may be interesting reading or rereading for some. Or come hear me speak on Thursday on this topic at the Motivation Show in Chicago.)

[T.I.M.E. March 2002 Multicultural Communication](#)

6. When The Environment Is Important

Where you meet can influence the meeting’s outcome, effectiveness and impact. That is why people place importance on the location – the place of the meeting. But for certain meetings, you may want to expand your horizons beyond the traditional hotel location for a meeting place.

Conference centers exist for one purpose: To provide an environment that will facilitate and support meetings. They are designed to separate functions, minimize distractions and maximize convenience for conferees.

Conference centers can take many shapes and looks. The “types” of conference centers include:

- Conference centers with sleeping rooms
- Conference centers without sleeping rooms
- University conference centers

Remote/resort conference centers Ancillary facilities

The "conference center" concept is increasingly popular and many facilities now include the "conference center" words in their name. The International Association of Conference Center was established in 1981 to foster an understanding and appreciation for conference centers. They have also established 31 different standards for IACC approved conference centers. Here is a list of the main requirements:

1. A minimum of 60% of meeting space in the conference center is dedicated, single-purpose conference space.
2. Conference rooms are available to clients on a 24-hour basis for storage of materials.
3. Conference center offers and promotes a package plan which includes conference rooms, guest rooms, three meals, continuous refreshment service, conference services and basic A/V. (Non-residential package includes conference rooms, lunch, continuous refreshment service, conference services and basic A/V.)
4. Conference rooms have an unobstructed interior views.
5. Average group size -- 75 people or less.
6. Controllable level of lighting (50-70 foot candles at tabletop) in each room.
7. Wall surfaces suitable for tacking or other mounting of flip chart-type sheets.
8. Acoustical rating for sound transmission through all walls of conference rooms meets or exceeds 55-65 STC (Sound Transmission Class) for all fixed walls and 50-55 STC for all operable walls.
9. On-site standard A/V included as part of the conference package, typically: overhead projectors, flip charts, 35mm slide projectors, microphones and video playback equipment.
10. Dining facilities are designed to accommodate groups on a flexible meeting schedule (at the convenience of the group), at least for breakfast and lunch.

Some of the IACC standards were updated in January 2002. For a complete listing of conference center requirements, visit the IACC website at (www.iacconline.org).

[IACC Website](#)

7. Conference Centers Environmental Advantages

Coleman Finkel in his book, *The Total Immersion Learning Environment*, writes, "The environment is a contributing factor to learning. Affecting the physical, emotional and intellectual level of people creates a totality of the learning experience." Finkel is also the author of *New Conference Models for the Information Age*.

Susan Morris, formerly a Vice President of Brand Strategy for Marriott Conference Centers, identifies the 6 advantages that conference centers offer for optimal meeting productivity:

1. Distraction free conference surroundings
2. Dedicated conference rooms with consistent amenities
3. Experienced personnel to anticipate meeting needs

4. Conference dining and refreshment breaks that are ready when the group is
5. Value and convenience of all-in inclusive pricing
6. Recreational amenities that balance body and mind

Further, Susan notes some attributes of meetings that are well suited for a conference center:

1. Meetings with intensive agendas that require the full focus of attendees
2. When it is desirable to be away from the office
3. When the customer requires the expertise and attention of one contact person who is available for all of their meeting needs and requests
4. When the very latest in audio-visual technology is required
5. Appropriate for meetings of both shorter (2-3 days) and longer (a week or more) duration
6. For "smaller" meetings (15-20) or "larger" meetings (50+)

What types of meetings are suited for conference centers? Conference centers offer something for associations and corporate meetings. Here are some meetings that would benefit from a conference center environment:

- * Executive/board retreat
- * Strategic planning sessions
- * Sales training
- * Computer training
- * Management training
- * Intensive training or executive education
- * Meetings with extensive or state-of-the-art AV
- * Meetings requiring multiple breakouts
- * Experiential training (teambuilding/out-of-classroom activities)
- * Research meetings especially where scientists interact

Susan now applies her branding expertise through her own consulting firm, NewHeights Group. She can be reached at susanvmorris@aol.com or at 202-296-7256.

A special thanks to Susan for the background information she provided to me. Glen Ramsborg also shared with me his 10 years of magazine clippings on conference centers.

[To order The New Conference Models for the Information Age](#)

8. Humor: And the Number 1 Compelling Difference between

Meetings at a Conference Center and Other Meetings

The IACC website (www.iacconline.org) contains a full list of the standards for conference centers. However, just last week I attended a meeting at the Summit Executive Centre in Chicago and I noted yet another important difference:

The food service included Pepsi and Coke. As a Diet Coke drinker, I did think to myself, "What hotel would offer a choice of both Coke and Pepsi?" No offense to hotels or Pepsi drinkers, it is just a humorous and small example of the flexibility that conference centers offer.

For a list of other key differences and services offered at conference centers, email stinnish@amertech.net with the words CONFERENCE CENTERS. We will send you this month's freebie.

One final word on conference centers. Oftentimes people are put off by a conference center's Complete Meeting Package (CMP) pricing which is typically a per person per day charge. Only in T.I.M.E. do we offer a freebie! There are no freebies at a hotel. The cost of services will be somewhere -- whether it receives an explicit explanation or not. Another advantage to conference centers is that you will not be receiving additional charges for extra services. The pricing at a conference center is inclusive. When comparing pricing, be sure to consider the "typical" extra charges that can occur. In addition, also consider expenses that will typically be billed individually through your attendees' expenses reports as part of the overall meeting cost.

9. T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please email us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues:

May 2000: Teambuilding And (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding
June 2000: Green Meetings And (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises
July 2000: American (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 Skills 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: The Many Faces Of Teambuilding 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 Meetings and (freebie) Investment Strategies for meetings

10. Future T.I.M.E.

Come see me in person. If you are attending the ITME Motivation Show in Chicago, please join me for three different seminars:

- * Looking into the Role of Emotional Intelligence, Tuesday, September 24, 11 - 12 am
- * Beyond Logistics: Becoming the Valued Knowledge Worker presented in conjunction with Mike Hamilton of Synchronicity, Tuesday, September 24, 2 -3 pm
- * Communicating Effectively Across the Globe, Thursday, September 25, 11-12 am

Or call on me to help with the following "Interactionary Elements" for a Meeting:

- * Provide Facilitators
- * Customize a Teambuilding Program
- * Deliver one of my seminars
- * Reprint past newsletters for further distribution (Past clients have used my issues for Internal Speakers, Trade Shows, etc.)
- * Provide Links/Articles for your web site
- * Preparation for Internal Speakers
- * Training and Seminars (Development and Delivery)
- * Meeting Management Consulting

Sue Tinnish, SEAL Inc., Telephone: 847.394.9857, Email: stinnish@ameritech.net

In the meantime, I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button.

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