

## FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Facilitator: **Dianne Devitt**

President, DND Consulting and author of **What Color Is Your Event?**

On September 17, 2019, a capacity crowd of NYC meeting professionals gathered at Steelcase to participate in MPIGNY's first Education Session of the 2019-20 year. Participants experienced an excellent session with expert presenters and a master's panel. Dianne Devitt facilitated the session and here provides answers to questions that couldn't be addressed during the session.

**Ways to directly link Meeting Design (and necessity for it) to ROI - any ways to measure hard metrics / analysis would be extremely beneficial for swaying management to take risk & be more creative.**

I like to measure in ROE – Return on Event as ROE combines both ROI and ROO (Investment and Objective). I do not believe that it takes additional budget investment to increase results; I believe it takes investing the budget where the impact can be the most. In meeting design, the focus is on people and on touch points. It is in the touch points that the conversion is made – to brand loyalty, to customer loyalty, to employee change, or whatever the objectives are of the event. How this is measured is by change within a six to 12-month period following an event. For example, a colleague worked for a major beauty company and had a meeting for specific hair products. Existing customers and prospects were invited. Following the meeting, the sales team focused on the prospects and within six months, new customers were onboarded and sales increased.



### **Tips for getting budget-concerned clients to consider new formats that would increase costs.**

People are not opposed to change or investment; they are opposed to changing their own behavior. I suggest taking baby steps to some clients and with others a complete 180. For example, one of my ColorUP! Strategic Design workshop participants was so excited to share her success story. She worked for a major financial firm and was organizing a meeting for the Risk Management division – on risk. She took a risk and had the game Risk as centerpieces in the meeting. Giving people Permission to Play™ creates trust and interaction. When your stakeholders realize the return increases, they are more inclined to invest in new ideas and formats.

### **Ideas for interesting meeting design on a shoestring budget.**

Be inspired (see photo from my book at right) everywhere. Take your theme shopping to the dollar stores, toy departments and other places where inexpensive items can be used as props. Secondly, the hotel or venue has furniture and whether it is round, square, rectangle, high or low, be creative with your set up to provide varying choices for people to learn from – be aware, do not block site lines or mix up too much as that will be distracting. USE your theme as a guide. Meeting design is about bringing pieces together – there you go, a giant puzzle for all to complete.



### **How to design and arrange a meeting or a debate for attendees of different backgrounds, career paths and mainly people from different countries, in a field like tourism, a typically multicultural work environment?**

I reference a case study just like this in my book, **What Color Is Your Event? (Available on Amazon)** One of my clients was a multi-national, engineering company and I was asked to plan a meeting for the SVP Human Resources for the top 200 people. One topic was D&I, Diversity and Inclusion. We went shopping in the hotel and set the stage with five different chairs from a board room chair, secretary chair, bar stool, banquet and soft seating. All different sizes and heights. I shared this idea with the CEO and SVP first and when the five people entered on the stage, and all stopped and looked, the visual said it all. I'm happy to say the woman (1 of 3 at the meeting) took the Board chair. Look for something universal, play music – classical music, use food as an icebreaker through tastings – read about this in the Food section of my book. Share common experiences.

**How do you see scenic and environmental design innovations in main tent general sessions impacting audience engagement?**

Oh, I love them. Budget allowing this element seeps into the audience being as reinforcing a theme and setting the stage – literally – for the meeting, event, exhibit. I have done much research in sensory communication and know that visual impact is long lasting and the emotional response to a dramatic visual creates the feeling and impact every planner strives for. Where I see this being most effective is taking what people see through scenic and environmental design and dissecting segments and pieces of it throughout the meeting – touch points. A visual could be on a napkin, on a sign, in décor, etc. It is critical in meeting design to link a thread, to connect all the pieces. I call it the Theater of Meetings tm. There is no detail too small and the big details must blend in as well. It can be as simple as having the keynote speaker’s background be an extension of the scenic design – make it real, ask how you can have audience involvement to touch, see, and absorb the message.

Creating the wow factor with little or no budget. – budget is never a restriction. Creativity is the Mother of Invention.

**As a corporate event moderator based in Europe [Amsterdam], I'd like to hear more about the US perspective of future event design [and obviously contribute where possible]. I'm happy to join this session during my stay in NY.**

In many ways Europe is ahead of America in thinking, creative process and understanding the dynamics behind organizational thinking and the power of designing a meeting experience. In the States, we are progressing through Universities and associations with inspiring and teaching not only fundamentals of planning but strategy and the importance of creative to stimulate, engage and motivate attendees. We have one certification program being taught as well as my workshops called ColorUP! Strategic Event Design that qualify for class hours. Many planners are tasked to deliver more creative meetings and they do not know where to turn or who to turn to along with their responsibilities as project managers and implementers. This is my focus on training and consulting in an Experience Strategist role. The opportunity exists to create positions in creative dynamics to support planners to increase the impact of their meetings and this is where the planner’s role comes in. Planners are the link between Marketing and vendors to make the meeting happen. They must understand that it is not their responsibility to do everything, but to bring in experts who can augment and support them. We are all a work in progress as we move closer and closer to the true communication industry realm.

