



Top TEN Ways to Make Meetings

Fun

I'M NOT JOKING

Never, never, never open with a joke: "A golfer, a priest and a rabbi ..." Instead, begin with a story that sets the tone for the rest of the meeting. Talk about how you tried, where you erred, what you learned and how neatly it fits with today's meeting goal. If the story reveals your humanness, all the better. To err is human; to laugh about it is divine.

GET A MIKE

I know, I know ... you don't need a microphone. It's not for you; it's for them. One out of 11 Americans is hearing impaired. It's more fun for participants when they don't have to work to hear and understand what's being said. Be sure to provide clear sight lines so participants can read lips, see facial expressions and, where more than 30 people are gathered, get a mike.

SEE NO ... HEAR NO ... LEARN NO

Learning is fun when learning is easy. Do as Disney does — heighten the experience and engage all five senses. Can participants *taste* and *smell* the excitement? Jumpstart the day with rousing tastes and aromas of fresh baked breads, just-brewed coffee and high-energy foods. Can they *see* it? Give information life with colorful visuals that highlight key points. Can they *hear* it? Share powerful statistics and stories that touch hearts and spark creative ways to find solutions. Can they *do* it? Simulate exercises so participants can explore solutions and apply new learning.

THE BLADDER MATTER

The meeting is amazing, the content unrivaled, the presenter phenomenal, and if attendees don't get a break before the second hour, the experience is wasted! A full bladder is no laughing matter. Be sure your meeting agenda includes at least one 10- to 15-minute break every 60 to 90 minutes.

THEMES-R-US

Hawaiian luaus and Mexican fiestas can be fun and lively or overdone and distracting. Create a theme that is relevant. The theme, "DeTOURism: Alternate Routes for Delivering Excellence," for example, guided programming for the Brookfield CVB and got local businesses together during the I-94 restructuring project.

HAVE I TOLD YOU (LATELY) HOW I LOVE YOU?

Congratulations. It's your company's 10th Annual, 4th Anniversary or first ever. Keep the celebration alive by reinforcing milestones and achievements with session titles, sidebars, brainteasers and announcements. Celebrating your 10th Annual Founders Day? Display 10 innovations in the foyer, ask the president to share 10 embarrassing moments in the company's history, picture 10 defining moments in the brochure, offer workshops on "10 Ways To..." retain employees, improve service, grow sales, reduce stress.

ALL KIDDING ASIDE

Avoid "gotcha" humor that separates you from others by making you superior and self-abusive humor that makes you inferior to others. Use humor to create a community of equality that makes connections among people; a sense of oneness: "We are in this together." Share fun, uplifting stories about yourself that cause others to see themselves in your foibles.

TAKE MY COFFEE MUG ... PLEASE

If it bears your logo it's not a gift, it's an advertisement. Want to load a bag with 10 logo items for your 10th anniversary? Great, call it a promotion and give it away. Want to reward an achievement, draw for door prizes, thank the featured presenter? Give them something they'll use: a silver frame, unique paper holder, travel alarm clock. Trash bins are stuffed with junk participants won't tote home. If they can't eat it, drink it or use it, don't buy it.

PARTNER WITH PRESENTERS ON PURPOSE

As soon as you identify featured speakers, presenters and trainers, bring them in on the process. Include them in the planning, promotion and follow-up. Encourage partners to incorporate your meeting theme and logo in their materials. Invite breakout presenters to attend general sessions — citing funny moments from the morning keynote often regenerates laughter hours and days later.

WITHOUT QUESTION

Some of the best moments in meetings are unscripted and unplanned. Allow time for participants to ask questions. Never *try* to be funny. Respond authentically and truthfully. Take your audience seriously and yourself lightly. Build trust and rapport, fun will follow. ■

■ With a background in improv theater and stand-up comedy and 15 years of experience in training and management, speaker, trainer, hospitality expert and good-time guru, Robin Getman defines the word "funny business." As president of InterACT Group, Robin specializes in capturing an audience with humor and heart. Follow her tips on keeping your meetings fun and informative.