

Emotionally-Charged Meetings

PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 27

Background Information: Sandra Strick addresses strategies to address the adult learner in Chapter 18 of *Professional Meeting Management*[®], fifth edition. Strick notes many different variables that affect meeting participants' ability to learn (Strick, 2006, pp. 258-261). Later in Chapter 23 in the same book, Jeffrey Beck summarizes the importance of the environment when he states, "The psychological components of the meeting or learning environment include the attitudes and expectations of the attendee, the degree in which the attendee participates and intersects with the environment and the attitude of the speaker or presenter. All of these components must work together to create an effective environment that supports the learning objectives for an education session and/or the objectives of the meeting or event" (Beck, 2006, p. 357).

Although not explicitly stated, both authors recognize a rational and emotional component to creating great meeting experiences.

PMM5 Postscript[™] Use: This PMM5 Postscript[™] discusses the importance of emotion as a motivator and how emotions power meetings. It offers three strategies for creating meetings with emotional components. The PMM5 Postscript[™] also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Discuss the importance of rational and emotional components in meetings.
- Identify seven ways that emotional responses can support meetings and events.
- List the three components of emotionally charged meetings.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 18, Strategies to Embrace the Adult Learner.
Author: Sandra Strick, Ph.D.
Chapter 23, The Environment for Meetings and Events
Author: Jeffrey Beck, Ph.D.



Call to Action

Well-executed meetings should move people:

- into believing/knowing
- into feeling
- into action

Without rational and emotional “buy-in” from meeting participants, the likelihood of any participant being moved is quite limited. If the participants don't “buy” the message than what value has the meeting provided? Face-to-face meetings are great opportunities to persuade, involve or inspire.

Buying the message means that people remember, retain and learn. Learning is not reserved for training meetings. Consider this definition:

Learning — to come to be able and to realize

Learning is a change in the way people feel, think or behave. And learning has an emotional and rational component. The word “emotion” means movement [“to move”]. Meetings should have a rational or informational component and should take advantage of the emotional component to help *move* people to think, feel or behave differently based upon the meeting objectives.

Advertisers Harness Emotion

Advertisers know that persuading people to buy products relies on an emotional connection. During the National Retail Federation's 94th Annual Convention and Expo, Dr. Clotaire Rapaille, psychologist, cultural anthropologist and marketing expert, stated that, “Your customer's conception of your brand is formed from his first experience or “imprint” with your company, or more generally, with the products you sell.”

Without emotion, he said, “there is not enough neural transmission to garner a strong memory.” In the article, Live from NRF: Getting Emotional About Branding, appearing in the *Chief Marketer*, Rapaille cited the example of Folgers Coffee. Folgers takes advantage of the first impression consumers have with coffee to effectively market their product. The first impression is its scent. People smell the product when they are children, before they're old enough to drink coffee. The scent becomes linked in a person's mind with the emotional memory of coffee in his or her childhood kitchen. Rapaille found through surveys that 97% of coffee drinkers love the smell of it, while only 43% drink it because they like the taste. Folgers used that knowledge to create an ad campaign centered on the smell rather than taste of its coffee. Folgers' commercials focus on the customer opening the package and savoring the scent, rather than on the actual experience of drinking it (Weinstein, 2006).

It is important for meeting managers to create a similar emotional connection. This example also underscores the importance of the senses. Refer to PMM5 Postscript™ Number 35 on Sensory Meetings for more information on the effective use of all five senses in planning meetings.

Where Emotions Lie

In a matter of seconds, sensations, emotions and thoughts come together in the complex human brain. The human brain encompasses three distinct brains: the reptilian brain, the neocortex and the limbic brain.

The reptilian brain regulates heartbeat, digestion and other basic life functions. The reptilian brain also manages the flight or fight instincts. The reptilian brain supports neither emotion nor thinking. The neocortex houses the most advanced skills like speaking, writing, planning, reasoning, and awareness.

The limbic brain is the human emotional control center. This brain controls the logic of our emotions. The limbic brain maintains balance in our bodies. The limbic brain regulates not only temperature but fluid levels (thirst), energy levels and intake (hunger). The limbic brain also controls endocrine and hormone levels. Finally, the limbic system regulates blood pressure and blood sugar level. Certain structures of the limbic brain are involved in memory as well. Two large limbic system structures, the amygdala and hippocampus play important roles in memory.

An Emotional Build Up to a Better Meeting

What role do emotions play in executing great meeting? Emotions:

- **Trigger decisions** — Emotional memories that are stored in the limbic system help people make decisions. An emotional memory serves as a trigger to a situation automatically and quickly. Emotions influence people's attitudes and their own current and next action. Emotions play an essential role in perception, learning and, ultimately, rational decision making.
- **Filter information** — People rely on memories for filtering new information. The limbic system has an emotional filing system, indexing memories by their value for future experience. While the neocortex forgets facts and data, the limbic system does not. Information in meeting can call upon emotionally pleasant memories to cast a positive halo over new information. Just as Folgers Coffee takes advantage of early memories, meetings can also ride an emotional wave.
- **Experience the real and the imagined** — The amygdala in the limbic brain responds to both imaginary and real experiences. People can feel sadness about a past action, or fear a future possibility, even though these events are not really occurring. People will experience an emotional response as if these imagined events were actually taking place in the external world. This capacity allows us to call upon a person's emotional experience to persuade, inspire or motivate.
- **Respond to human touch** — Our limbic system has a need for human contact. The impact of limbic connection is seen clearly in the elderly. When one member of an elderly loving couple dies, the other feels that part of them has died too. Face to face meetings feed the limbic system.
- **Feed emotional intelligence** — The limbic brain feeds emotional intelligence. The limbic systems serve as sensitive antennas to the emotions of other people. This ability to feel the feelings of others and to project our own is called limbic resonance.

- **Create calls to action** — The limbic brain appears to be the source of the feeling of conviction that can change an idea into a belief. Meetings should create a force that lives beyond the meeting itself.
- **Influence learning** — Emotions and thoughts shape each other and cannot be separated. Emotions color meaning. Creating an emotional response is indispensable to retention of any messages contained in the meeting.

Emotionally Available Meetings

Meeting managers can create emotionally available meetings in three ways. A meeting can be emotionally friendly by paying attention to:

- **Environment** — the overall feeling in the room
- **Formats** — the agenda and the way it is constructed
- **Emotional state of participants** — a person's physical and emotional well-being are closely linked to their ability to think and to learn effectively

This PMM5 Postscript™ will explore each aspect more fully.

Emotionally Good Environments

A relaxed atmosphere that offers options for learning in individually satisfying ways is an emotionally satisfying environment. Gerald Edelman, chairman of the Department of Neurobiology at Scripps Research Institute and 1972 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physiology, offers a vision of the brain as a jungle in which systems interact continuously in a chaotic fashion suggests that learners would thrive in an environment that provides many sensory, cultural and problem layers.

Emotionally stressful environments are counterproductive to people's attempts to learn. Desired environments are safe, focused, stimulating and open. The limbic brain can sense whether an environment is hostile or friendly. The use of humor can help diffuse and turn-around a bad environment. Introducing a sense of fun can increase the energy level and generally improve the "feeling" in the room. Strive for meetings that operate in an environment where people feel free to ask questions, to offer a different idea and to be creative.

PMM5 Postscript™ Number 34 discusses the use of humor in creating emotionally desirable environments.

Emotionally Charged Formats

Implementing some of the below approaches will appeal to the emotional side of people's brains. The audience will make better connections and "buy" the message more if the information is presented in an emotionally-charged way. Some ideas include:

- Stories
- Metaphors
- Themes
- Social interaction
- Visual imagery/visualization
- Symbols
- Icons

- Drama
- Personalization

Successful creation of an emotional experience depends on using all of the senses and immersing the participants in a variety of complex and interactive experiences. Talking heads or subject matter experts should not be unilaterally excluded, but they should be part of a larger experience.

Pacing and creating a climax to the meeting also creates emotional connections. Moods and emotions can also be altered by music and color. Avoid meetings that exclusively focus on facts and figures without providing an emotional hook that will lodge in participants' limbic brains.

PMM5 Postscript™ Number 32 discusses many of these elements which keynote presenters successfully incorporate into their presentations.

Emotional State of the Participants

How participants feel is very important to their ability to focus and learn. If they are enthusiastic, intrigued, receptive and feel that the information is relevant and useful to them, then they will "buy" the message. Meeting managers can appeal to the emotional state of participants by doing the following:

- **Tell them "What's In It for Me"** — People want to feel respected and are seeking information in meetings that is relevant to them.
- **Acknowledge their "state"** — If people will not be easily persuaded, then acknowledge that challenge to the audience. If people had a horrendous travel experience getting to the meeting, acknowledge how they are feeling. Show respect for the participants' emotional state.
- **Allow them to guide the program** — Allow time for interaction, questions, reflection, or feedback.
- **Pay attention to their physical needs** — Breaks, food, temperature, and lighting are environmental conditions affect people's moods and emotions.

Summary

It is important that meeting managers create emotional connections during meetings. The emotional component will support:

- Creating the best mindset among participants
- Creating the best environment "mood" in the room
- Enhancing the memorability of messages
- Influence learning
- Triggering commitment and action

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."

The emotional component marries the attitudes and expectations of the participant, the meeting environment, the informational component with the speaker or presenter to create the overall meeting "experience." Meetings that focus exclusively on the rational or informational aspects of a meeting will fall short of delivering that meeting experience.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Curiosity is defined as a need, thirst or desire for knowledge. What makes people curious? Devise three strategies to cultivate meeting participants' curiosity about a meeting.
2. In the article, "Sense and Respond — the Next Generation Business Model", author Seung-jin Whang notes that we are moving toward sensing and individually responding to consumers in the marketing world. Instead of broadcasting uniform messages to a wide audience in an indiscriminate fashion, Sense and Respond (S&R) attempts to pinpoint the right individual with the right message or product or service.

Example: Imagine walking into a store and having a flat plasma screen greet you with the customized message, "Welcome back to our store. How did your last purchase of _____ work out for you? Come in and see our new collection."

In this retail example, sense and respond could, if properly implemented, reduce various costs such as excess inventory, poor customer service, low response rates to ad campaigns and running out of stock.

Sense and Respond advances the business model used by Dell Computers (build a computer to your specifications) by embracing the concept of mass customization (Whang, 2005).

- How can meeting managers track people's preferences to deliver them information that appeals to their needs and emotions?
 - How can meeting managers utilize past behavior and responses to influence future behavior?
 - How can meeting managers or speakers sense how participants are reacting to meetings mid-meeting and respond?
 - In the association world, how can meeting managers track preferences and past attendance to guide participants to register for future conferences or sessions?
 - What are the privacy implications?
3. What role do the following emotions play in meetings?
 - Anger
 - Fear
 - Enjoyment
 - Frustration
 - Elation
 - Guilt

- Excitement
- Affection
- Generosity
- Pride

How can a meeting manager harness any one of the emotions listed to accomplish a meeting objective. (Hint: Think about what types of meetings might apply to each of these emotions.)

4. How can a meeting manager take advantage of emotionally charged formats (see list in text) in a meeting? What are two or three strategies they can employ?

References

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