

The Value of Entertainment

PMM5 Postscript™ Number 42

Background Information: Entertainment is often an essential element in meetings or special events. Max Suzenaar is the author of Planning Special Events (Chapter 32) in *Professional Meeting Management*®, fifth edition. In this chapter, he:

- Identifies the five different types of special events (receptions, luncheons, dinners, gala, fundraising)
- Offers tips and strategies for incorporating special events into a meeting
- Summarizes the process for designing, planning and producing a special event
- Identifies challenges in producing special events
- Identifies partners who can work with meeting managers on special events

PMM5 Postscript Use: Entertainment is often part of a special event. This PMM5 Postscript™ expounds on the strategic use of entertainment. It also expands the role of entertainment in meetings. 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:

- Combine entertainment and information for a more memorable meeting.
- Identify at least nine ways that entertainment helps support meetings and events.
- Categorize how different people respond to different aspects of entertainment.
- Connect the value between the entertainment experience and the meeting.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 32, Planning Special Events
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The Role of Infotainment

Most meeting managers are aware of the use of entertainment for special events. Entertainment can be a large-scale, traditional entertainer or it can be employed as a tactic (small-scale) to engage people.

“Infotainment” is a neologism (nee-AH-low-djism) or a newly invented word or term. Wikipedia defines infotainment as a general type of news media broadcast program which either provides a combination of current events news and entertainment programming, or an entertainment program structured in a news format. Infotainment generally refers to the segments of programming which overall consist of both “hard news” segments and interviews, along with celebrity interviews and human drama stories (Wikipedia).

The term applies beyond news media to meetings. Meeting audiences expect information to be packaged in an entertaining way. So infotainment is an element in successful meetings. Joel Goodman, who directs The Humor Project, states that the word Haha has the Latin root of Aha. Goodman restates what man has known for a long time — There is a link between being relaxed, having fun and learning or new realizations (Goodman).

Meeting participants demand meaningful information and interaction during meeting. Successful meetings will engage audiences' senses, minds and hearts in a, creative and strategically structured way. Entertainment can also be informative and support the overall message of the meeting. Thus even meetings without the “special-events” banner can strategically use entertainment.

Strategic Entertainment

While entertainment is traditionally thought to be for entertainment value itself, as Suzenaar points out, special events are more often than not, required to stand on their own serving specific objectives and having a strategic focus (Suzenaar, 2006, p. 500). The secret of successful entertainment at meetings and events isn't about creating an impressive “show.” The secret is to know and fully understand each meeting's (or event's) primary purpose, primary messages and intent.

Entertainment can accomplish multiple things at a meeting. In addition to being entertaining, entertainment can accomplish the following nine things in meetings or events:

1. **Set the mood/change the mood.** As meetings are emotional and rational experiences, a meeting manager might want to change or set a mood in an environment. Consider the many ways that entertainment sets a mood in a room. Entertainment:
 - Adds warmth
 - Creates a welcoming atmosphere
 - Creates surprise or delight when used sparingly and at unexpected times
 - Creates suspense
 - Adds energy
 - Calms or subdues
2. **Meet us at different points.** Many meetings endeavor to get people to change — to feel, believe or act differently. Change is a process and not an event. Individuals vary in levels of motivation or readiness to change. People at different points in the process of change can benefit from entertainment. Entertainment by its very nature allows for people to latch onto it

in an emotional way. Responses may vary from people to people, but many people are likely to connect emotionally with an entertainer.

Entertainment can help “find” people at various points and reach out to them with a message. Everyone doesn't need to be at the same “place” to identify with the message.

3. **Avoid the hammer.** Some subjects are too sensitive to broach head on — especially in a large group. The message can be “softened” through entertainment. Whether satire, humor, a skit or story, entertainers can be “spot” on with a message without alienating the audience.

The audience may not even be consciously aware of the sent message. Entertainment offers another medium to reinforce the message without directly hammering it through the minds of participants.

4. **Cause internal reflection.** Entertainment, by its nature, creates another version of reality. What happens on stage through magic or a play or other performance is real but the audience is an observer. This allows entertainment a platform to explore certain issues in a non-threatening way within meetings

Entertainment serves as a source for reflection, discussion and possibly changes.

5. **Explore safely.** The superhero, the tightrope walker, the animal trainer — these roles put entertainers in fearful situations with all the inherent dangers. Audiences live vicariously through these entertainers.

A clown, because he or she is not “taken seriously,” is permitted to attack the powerful. The clown allows the audience to laugh, often with the audience maintaining the pretense that they are laughing at the clown, not at the butts of his humor.

The entertainment serves as a metaphor for business or organizational challenges. Corporate life requires the skill of a tightrope walker...Some wish they possessed the power of the clown to challenge a dysfunctional organization.

Entertainment, serving as a metaphor, provides words and context to explore challenging issues.

6. **Laugh at ourselves.** Entertainment, especially humor, creates opportunities to better understand ourselves by laughing at our mistakes in a non-threatening way.

Most organizations want to encourage an environment of risk-taking, creativity and innovation where people understand that making an honest mistake will not result in shame or anger. When we laugh at ourselves, we are more adept at picking ourselves up and starting over. Demonstrating this through entertainment allows the entertainer to model a very desirable skill.

7. **Conquer fear.** In the business world being deficient is not strength. Showing fear of the unknown is not strength. However, regardless of how big and strong adults are, when we are feeling deficient in some way, we experience distress, ranging from minor irritations to frustration to fear to outright terror.

Entertainment offers perspective, minimizes the “fear” factor, or improves understanding. The end result: When people’s understanding improves in such a way that they can now deal with a previously frightening situation, or when the situation changes, is removed, or avoided, people feel delight, relief and freedom.

An example that many of us may relate to will help clarify — math anxiety. Math teacher and tutor Mark Wahl, author of *The Mathematical Mystery Tour* and other hands-on math resources, finds that humorous stories engage attention, clarify meaning in non-threatening ways and motivate previously fearful students to work more confidently towards understanding the subject. Students can memorize math facts under stress, but the development of mathematical intelligence and its use in mathematical thinking is best done in a relaxed environment which humorous stories facilitate.

8. **Foster creativity.** The essence of a joke is the incongruity that is thrown in. We go down one path when the punch line throws us for a loop and switches our thinking in a totally new and different direction.

Organizations are challenged with creating innovative cultures within their ranks. Organizations are challenged to determine unique benefits for their customers. Organizations are challenged to find unique ways of reaching their markets.

The essence of many entertainers is their uniqueness. The creativity involved in entertainment and the uniqueness can be a springboard for further creativity in the meeting.

9. **Make it local.** Entertainment provides a local flair. Meeting managers can tap into the local market for folk art, children’s groups, cultural entertainment or regional entertainment. This affords the meeting a unique flair and builds upon the site and theme.

By fully exploring the strategic needs of a meeting or event, a meeting manager can take advantage of one or more of these aspects of entertainment.

Entertainment appeals to the Multiplicity

Howard Gardner developed the concept of multiple intelligence. He identified that people are “intelligent” in eight ways. Below are Gardner’s categories and an example of a person who is intelligent in that way:

1. **Linguistic intelligence** involves sensitivity to spoken and written language. (Hemingway, Robert Frost)
2. **Logical-mathematical intelligence** consists of the capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically. (Einstein)
3. **Musical intelligence** involves skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. (Mozart)
4. **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** entails the potential of using one’s whole body or parts of the body to solve problems. (Surgeons, athletes)

5. **Spatial intelligence** involves the potential to recognize and use the patterns of wide space and more confined areas. (Architects, Christopher Columbus)
6. **Interpersonal intelligence** is concerned with the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people. (Oprah, Mother Theresa)
7. **Intrapersonal intelligence** entails the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations. (Freud)
8. **Naturalist** (added later) involves nature and the ability to commune with and survive in nature. (Darwin, Survivor winners)

Gardner's theory holds that people's intelligence varies based on the situation they find themselves in. A college graduate from the United States may be smarter than an Aborigine woman when solving a math problem but the Aborigine woman is definitely smarter than a college graduate if both people are in the bush in Australia.

Gardner's definition suggests that entertainment can appeal to a variety of forms of intelligence.

Examples:

People with Linguistic intelligence	respond to	jokes, puns, satire, funny stories and anecdotes
People with Visual-Spatial intelligence	like	cartoons, witty posters, funny pictures
People with Kinesthetic intelligence	respond to	humorous actions, role playing, audience participation, clowns
People with Musical intelligence	like	funny songs, jingles, rhythms and rhymes
People with Interpersonal intelligence and Intrapersonal intelligence	respond to	caricature, skits, pantomime
People with Mathematical intelligence	like	puzzles, music, limericks
People with Naturalist intelligence	respond to	animals

The Bottom Line

Entertainment can help carry, reinforce, support, strengthen, emphasize and bolster a meeting's purpose and message. If meeting managers use entertainment as a time filler to simply entertain, then they have potentially received less value than existed.

Why entertainment works...Entertainment works because it is:

- Engaging
- Interactive (possibly)
- Emotional
- Different

Entertainment works because it:

- Contains music (often)
- Contains lighting (often)
- Involves a story (usually)
- Provides a break
- Promotes movement (possibly)
- Provides a new medium (better than looking at PowerPoint slides)
- Contains humor, lightheartedness or fun (often)
- Serves as a metaphor
- Appeals to a variety of people on a variety of levels
- Appeals to multiple forms of intelligence as defined by Gardner
- Touches people on a variety of levels

Caveat: Entertainment alone can not save a poorly planned meeting or unclear message.

Summary

Suzenaar states that “creating the environment can be one of the most enjoyable tasks in staging a special event.” He warns that “inappropriate or exceptionally loud entertainment can detract from the experience.” (Suzenaar, 2006, p. 504). Meeting managers can supplement the entertainment experience when they strategically select entertainment that supports the purpose and message of the meeting. Meeting managers can also apply Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences to select entertainment that will appeal to the broadest segment of their audience.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. A survey of how today’s children learn suggests the increasing predominance of entertainment in the future. Consider the American history “game”, Revolution, where multiple players play a game in development at MIT about the American Revolution. The players live in the US from 1773-1783, and assume roles as farmer, slave, politician or merchant. Or Meacham, a game for middle scholars, learning chemistry and the properties of elements. Players select elements and strategies to equip their Métis with armor, batteries, capacitors and weapons, and then battle to determine the strongest. This game won the Limeade Foundation’s first “Hidden Agenda” content in 2004. A team of college students from the University of Central Florida developed Meacham.

What do you think upcoming generations raised on video games, Instant Messaging, MTV, the Internet, cell phones with vast computing capability will expect in meetings and events?

2. Often entertainment carries with it an emotional connection. How can this emotional connect benefit a meeting? Cite a specific form of entertainment or entertainer.
3. Create a plan to add a small amount of entertainment to a meeting (not a special event). Use the list of entertainment ideas from the information on Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences to get you started. Include at least 3 ideas in your plan.
4. How can a meeting manager incorporate entertainment into meeting breaks? How can entertainment be used effectively in presentations?

5. Entertainment can soften a tough message. Devise a scenario where a meeting message becomes more effective when softened through entertainment. Suggest what type of entertainment would be appropriate.

References

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