



OHIO CHAPTER

define

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF MEETING PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL OHIO CHAPTER

DEC/JAN 10 ISSUE

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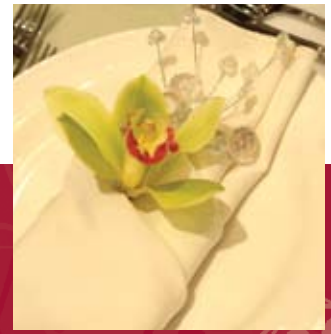
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MPIOH Mission Statement: To enhance the overall quality and awareness of the meetings industry by ensuring the professional development and growth of its membership through targeted educational programs and networking opportunities.

President's Column

By Mark S. Wallisa, CMP

Return on Investment-Measuring our Success

When the economic crash occurred last fall, the meeting industry faced a crisis we not seen since the aftermath of September 11th. Politicians in their never-ending quest to create villains and scapegoats unfairly and incorrectly labeled all meetings as junkets and boondoggles. The erroneous rhetoric had a disastrous impact on resort destinations as companies scrambled to cancel meetings so as not to give the appearance of impropriety. This was especially true of companies within the financial sector that received TARP funding, most notably AIG. If you recall, soon after receiving TARP funds, AIG held a previously scheduled meeting in Las Vegas for the independent brokers that sell their insurance products. These brokers were NOT AIG employees, but 3rd party agents that sell AIG products, along with competing products from other companies. Moreover, only 3 AIG employees attended this meeting, and yet the headlines screamed "JUNKET!" What was completely lost in the political hyperbole that followed was the economic value this meeting had to AIG's overall business. As those of us in this business know, to suggest that all meetings are a waste of time and money is utter nonsense. But never let facts get in the way of a politician trying to score points.

What the above situation illustrates is how absolutely essential it is for those of us in the meetings industry to be able to quantify the return on investment that meetings provide. If we cannot justify the value of meetings, nobody is going to do it for us. Meeting Professionals International has taken a lead role in measuring the return on investment of meetings at both the national and state level. At the national level, last fall the MPI Foundation conducted the 7th annual "EventView" research in conjunction with the George P. Johnson Company. The survey was conducted on over 1000 C-level executives across a wide spectrum of companies. For the 7th year in a row, event marketing was listed as the number one tool in terms of delivering the greatest return on investment, exceeding that of web marketing, broadcast and print, and public relations. Event marketing (meetings, conferences and trade shows) was not only listed as number one across a broad array of industries, but it increased its position from the prior year by four percentage points. It is interesting to note that the survey was conducted last fall, while at the very time the economy was imploding. The reason event marketing was cited as having the greatest return on investment is that face-to-face

engagement is the best way to accelerate and deepen relationships, and the fastest means to move people to action.

While overall corporate marketing budgets were expected to decline for 2009 (as most of us can attest), event marketing was to remain solidly in front of all other marketing disciplines.

The Ohio chapter of MPI also recognized the important of meeting ROI, and has devoted this issue to an in depth analysis of the topic. Meeting ROI was also the theme of our October chapter meeting, and Marge Anderson of the Energy Center of Wisconsin was the featured speaker. Marge's presentation "ROI in Tough Economic Times" was extremely interesting and informative. She outlined a five step process to determine ROI, beginning with; 1) Define the Objectives, 2) Communicate the objectives to the team, 3) Use the objectives to drive the meeting design, 4) Define the measurements of success, and 5) Determine if the results achieved? Marge also unveiled a specific formula for determining meeting ROI. It is determined by taking the dollar value of meeting benefit minus the meeting cost divided by the meeting cost multiplied by 100. The calculation will yield a percentage that equals the meeting ROI.

Ms. Anderson's presentation also cited specific examples of meeting benefits that could be inserted into the above formula to determine ROI. Those benefits included increased sales, reduction in costs, reduction in cycle time, reduction in employee turnover, less defects, increased membership, increased client retention, etc. The key take away from the presentation was the importance of establishing clearly defined objective for your meeting, along with precise measurements of success. Only then can you quantify and qualify your meeting as a success.

The assault on the meeting industry appears to have subsided thanks to some very successful lobbying efforts by leading meeting industry and business travel associations. However, as meeting industry professionals, we must never let our guard down when it comes to measuring ROI. We are the experts in our field, and we must continually demonstrate our value and success to senior management, along with internal and external stakeholders. Many happy returns!



Introducing the Newest MPIOH Members

By Crystal Culp

Dave Phillips
Sales Manager
Bartha Audio Visual

Dave is originally from Cleveland and moved to Columbus 12 years ago to work for the Bartha Audio Visual Company. He is looking to network and build working relationships and hopes that MPIOH will provide a great avenue for this and have a little fun along the way. After attending a few MPIOH meetings he decided to join us and he has also volunteered to be a part of the Membership Committee.

When Dave is not working he enjoys spending quality time with his wife and children and tackling small home improvement projects at their home. Dave and his wife also enjoy spending time at their cottage on Lake Erie. He doesn't have to go far for vacation, but it helps him get that "well deserved" time away. Please take time to welcome Dave to MPIOH!

Alec Windle
Executive Assistant
Quest Conference Center

Alec has worked at the Quest Conference Center for the last 2 years. Some of you may recognize Alec's name because one aspect of his job is to distribute CMP study group information to MPIOH members. Alec currently attends The Ohio State University and is majoring in Hospitality. He applauds MPIOH for their extensive educational meetings and feels that he is learning a great deal about the hospitality industry from others involved first hand.

Alec's hobbies are writing, listening to music and spending time with his 2 dogs. Visiting friends and family in Chicago with his girlfriend who is a native of the windy city is one of his favorite things to do. We would like to welcome Alec to MPIOH!

*Crystal Culp, Crowne Meetings Director
Crowne Plaza Dublin, Ohio*




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See It. Believe It. Capture It.

3 Steps to Transfer Your Leadership Vision Into Reality

By Jonathan Michael Bowman, Esq.

I'm walking through downtown Columbus, Ohio. It's early evening. The sun is low in the sky and casts a warm glow over the entire city. My eyesight becomes acute. I am looking. Searching.

What am I looking for? Something unique. Bold. I happen upon a cement staircase. As I get closer, I notice the sun's radiance is lighting up the metal railing, throwing a deep, bold shadow up the staircase. The scene comes alive right before my eyes. This is it! I have found an exciting image in boring cement!

I run down the stairs and – in my mind's eye – picture what this scene will look like once I turn it into a work of art. I am confident the photograph will look exactly like my mental picture. I raise my camera slowly and press the shutter release. Got it! That's the fine-art image I was looking for. I am a fine-art photographer, and this is how I capture my images. I see it. I believe it. I capture it.

Leadership works the same way. You have to see a mental picture of where you are going. Your confidence will help empower your team to capture your image and bring it to life.



Leaders see the extraordinary in the ordinary

See It

Every leader must have a picture of a place to go – a destination to lead people. Without a picture or vision, you cannot lead. After all, leadership means taking people from one place to another. Therefore, picturing a destination is the foundation of all successful leadership.

A leader without a vision is like a piano player without a piano or a kite without wind. Whether you have just become a leader or have been in leadership roles for decades, you should always keep before you a picture of your destination.

Without a clear picture of our destination, we fall prey to doing business as usual. Routine, sameness, and status quo overcome us. Leaders are – by definition – change makers. When you are called to lead, you are called to advance, move forward, and improve the situation.

Therefore, the ability to create a picture of your destination distinguishes leaders. For example, a photographer can own million-dollar equipment, yet take ten-cent images.

An artistic “eye” is what distinguishes photographers. Similarly, a fancy title, big office, or designer suit does not make you a leader. A leader's eye – your ability to picture your next move – is what makes you a true leader.

Here's a tip on setting your vision: Your customers and employees are a great place to start. Talk with them in person and ask them questions to help develop your vision.

- Where do you think the organization should go next?
- What do we need to accomplish?
- What should we improve?

See It. Believe It. Capture It. continued

When I was sent to the Charitable Law Section of the Ohio Attorney General's Office on special assignment to rebuild it, the section chief and I met in person with every employee. We asked similar questions and earnestly listened to their responses.

Yes, this was time consuming, but it proved extremely valuable. After we completed this task, we had a clear picture of where we needed to go. Your organization may be too large to meet with every employee. But meet *in person* with as many of your customers and employees as you can. The more people you meet with, the sharper your vision. As a bonus, they will be honored that their thoughts and opinions helped shape the organization's vision.

Finally, when looking for your vision, "see big." Don't set a tiny vision that's obviously achievable. If most people think you can capture the vision, it's too small! Great leaders see big pictures. This is one of the attributes that make them great.

Believe It

Once you set a pictured destination, you must believe in it. As a leader, you must be confident you and your team can bring this picture to life. If you – the leader – doesn't believe in the vision, who will? In fact, successful leaders are so confident, they start to act like they have achieved their clear-picture vision before they actually do so. These leaders have mastered something that few have learned: They "live in the picture."

In the movie *Back to the Future II*, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox's character) went forward in time and saw his future - future children, future house and his future giant-screen TV. He was actually "living in the picture" of his future. Of course lots of mishap and adventure occurred in his future since this is a movie. Still this example can help us visualize what it means to "live in the picture". You believe in your imagined destination so much that you start acting like you're already there.

I was forced to learn how to live in the picture through an impoverished childhood. By the time I was 17 years old, my family and I had lived in two homeless shelters, a church, a small fourth-floor attic, a hotel, and roach-infested public housing projects. In my teens, I worked

any job I could find. I bought the nicest suit I could afford and a black briefcase. Why? I had created an image in my mind of achieving a successful career that involved going to work in a suit. And I was living in the picture. I believed in this vision so passionately that I wore the suit and carried the briefcase long before I had captured my picture.

As a leader, I encourage you to learn how to live in your picture. Don't merely create a vision, but live it. Talk as if your clear-picture vision is already captured. Walk like you've already won! Don't wait for the future; claim your victory now. Live in the picture!

Remember, your confidence is important for you, and it's important for your team.

There's something about confidence that attracts people and makes them want to follow you. It also helps produce the "snowball effect." Imagine you're pushing a small ball of snow down a hill. As it rolls, it grows larger. Soon it gathers momentum and becomes self-propelled. As a leader, your confidence energizes the team until one person catches the vision. Another jumps on board and more follow. Soon, your team develops momentum and moves rapidly toward the pictured destination. They become highly motivated, energized, and focused on achieving the vision.

Capture it

The best way to capture your vision is to work with others as a team to achieve it. Employ the perspective of others. I firmly believe that people are the most underutilized resource in organizations. In fact, I like to say that people are the *only* resource, because everything else pales in comparison to this rich resource of ingenuity and creativity.

When I was getting ready for my first photography showcase, I rummaged through years of photos and selected what I thought were the best ones. My future wife happened upon one of the images in the "reject" pile and said, "I like this one." I didn't like it. And, while I cherish my wife's opinion, she wasn't privy to the photography classes I had taken or my years of photography experience. Nevertheless, I threw caution to the wind and included the photograph in the showcase. It was the most popular image at the exhibit! Regardless of his or her background and training, everyone has a unique perspective that can benefit the organization.

See It. Believe It. Capture It. continued

As a leader, do your best to capitalize on your team members' individual perspectives and the team's collective uniqueness. And I don't mean just the executives – I mean everyone! Find ways for everyone to take part in creating and capturing the pictured vision.

Finally, in order to capture your vision, you must get started *now* and keep moving. Growing up, my family's life was difficult. We moved around so much that I became an expert at packing on a moment's notice. My little red bag was always ready to go, filled with my most treasured gadgets and toys. Although this situation was challenging as a child, it taught me a rich leadership lesson: Don't languish in the status quo; you must keep moving forward!

As a leader, you must keep moving toward your pictured vision. In good times, keep moving. In bad times, keep moving. Occasional doubt and despondency is normal and typical among great leaders. What distinguishes great leaders from others is that great leaders keep moving even when they are despondent.

After I captured the staircase image, I walked a little more briskly. I was confident in my ability to "see better." That evening, I captured one of the strongest sets of images since I dove into photography years ago. My leadership lesson – and one that you'll experience too – is that when you capture a vision, you are energized, and you gain the clarity, momentum, and "oomph" to reach your next pictured destination. So go for it! Don't hold back!

See it. Believe it. Capture it.



Jonathan Michael Bowman, an attorney and photographer, is President & CEO of Clear Picture Leadership, LLC. He educates and inspires leaders and aspiring leaders to achieve a bold, clear picture vision. You can reach him at (614) 657-4295 or visit his website at www.ClearPictureLeadership.com.

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The Humor of Phil Sorentino

By Judy Stoff

The November MPI Ohio Chapter Meeting provided attendees the opportunity to experience the humor of Phil Sorentino. Phil is a communicator of Action Steps on attitude management, consultative selling, employee and customer loyalty and business and financial results. Phil had the audience laughing, howling, and yahooping during his presentation centering on "Customer Loyalty". Yes not customer service, but rather concentrating on ways to retain your customers through loyalty.

Four Steps to creating loyalty:

1. WHAT DO WE DO TO BE ACCURATE?
You have to be accurate.
Now, if you are inaccurate, but have superior recovery, you can increase loyalty because everyone knows, nobody is perfect.
2. WHAT DO WE DO TO BE AVAILABLE?
You have got to be available. It is a 24/7 world we live in. Are you giving out your home phone number?
3. WHAT DO WE DO TO CREATE ALLIANCE?
People want to know that you see the world through their eyes. What questions are you asking to understand their situation?
4. WHAT DO WE DO TO GIVE ADVICE?
The Ohio State University just raised a billion dollars. Their cost of goods was zero. Now they had expenses, by making phone calls and sending out pledge cards, but they had no cost of goods. Because people got advice, even though they paid for the advice, there is a subconscious need to be loyal.

Phil is a Certified Laughter Leader for the World Laughter Tour, a Past President of the Columbus Entrepreneurial Network, a member of the National Speakers Association and Past President of its Ohio Chapter. Phil has earned the distinction of Certified Speaking Professional, one of approximately 500 worldwide.

Phil and his wife Susan both are involved with Humor Consultants, and reside in Dublin, Ohio

Methods To Maintain Job Security In Insecure Times

By Dawn Penfold, CMP



Unfortunately for many, 2009 has not been a banner year. Quite a few industries have experienced heavy layoffs and downsizing. As every prospectus says, evidence of past success is no guarantee for future success or performance. So what do we do?

First and foremost, check the vital signs of your company. Business runs in cycles and various industries tend to trend together. Currently many financial service providers, real estate, and construction oriented companies are fighting to stay ahead of the curve. No matter how excellent you may be as an employee, if your company is cutting staff your comfort zone will shrink. One way to protect yourself is to make yourself as invaluable to your company as possible. Do not wait for opportunity to knock. Research what and how your competitors are doing. You can be a hero either by increasing revenues and profits, or through cutting costs and increasing efficiencies in tough times. If you do either, you will show your employers that you are committed to improving the corporate bottom line. Make certain that your employer knows your efforts are showing positive results as "name recognition" with your superiors can help you to weather any cutbacks at your organization.

Be alert to the vitality of both your industry and your company. Layoffs tend to occur within industries, rather than only at specific companies. Be proactive. As many job openings are never advertised (although why a hiring official would try to hire without posting on the Meetingjobs job board is beyond me), continual networking with friends and colleagues in your field may allow you a head start as opportunities present themselves.

Consider transitioning your skills to a new industry or sector of your present industry. Being adaptable can certainly pay dividends. If you are technically oriented

you may be able to transfer your tech savvy from industry to another. If you are a meeting planner you may be able to move from the corporate world to the association/non-profit sphere or vice versa. New procedures and methods will have to be learned, but the more adaptable and fluid you are will only increase your chances of success in your present position as well as helping to make any transition as smooth and short-lived as possible

Dawn Penfold, CMP
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APPRECIATION MPI OHIO CHAPTER MEETING

Join MPIOH members and guests for a special chapter meeting on February 17, 2010 at the new Embassy Suites Columbus Airport. Andy Masters will be the guest speaker. He has presented to over a dozen MPI chapters across North America, and is a proud member of the National Speakers Association. Andy has written 4 books and earned 4 degrees, including an M.A. - Human Resources Development, and M.A.-Marketing from Webster University. Mr. Masters owns his own speaking, training and consulting company, Masters Performance Improvement (MPI) which helps individuals and organizations become better at what they do.

Andy Master's topic at the Appreciation Luncheon/ Meeting will be a program on "Get MORE Done, in LESS Time, With HIGHER Quality, and LESS Stress.

Adventures in Web Surfing

By Pam Reinhard, CMP

The title of this recurring article is so descriptive of my experience with the Web. I am faced with challenges in my job on a frequent basis that I just know could be overcome with the right Web-based application. Typically, I have a handful of new sites to talk about that have done this, but this time I want to share one experience with Web surfing that has application in both my business and personal life.

Over the summer, even though we were more than six months away from our annual conference, my co-worker and I started thinking about ways to improve volunteer management. We struggle every year first to get people to volunteer to help us out as Session Presidents (moderators). Then when we do find people that will volunteer, many are just not ready to sign up online because the technology is too clunky. You know that virtual sound; sounds like ka-chunk, ka-chunk.

Anyway, we determined what we needed and wanted an online application to do for us. I then set out to find the right application. For reasons I cannot put into words, I Googled the words "volunteer management" for the first time in searching for a solution. I was quite surprised at what was returned to me...a whole slew of applications and software programs; each claiming to be the best.

First, I tested out VolunteerSpot, www.volunteerspot.com. This site offers a FREE online application to manage volunteers. It allows you to put in many dates and times that need to be covered. It also lets you specify how many people are needed. A unique aspect of this application is that in the same space that identifies the number of people needed, it also allows you to identify items that volunteers need to bring. In business, I probably won't use this, but I was excited that people could at least see real time the available shifts and know if the one they want is already taken. For the most part, this site is pretty user-friendly and offers quite a few features for a FREE service. This is where activities in my personal life come in; we are looking at using this for volunteers to sign up to work concessions at our middle school basketball games or to provide items for various school activities so that we avoid having too much of one item and not enough of another.

Next, I moved onto a service from a company called Wild Apricot www.wildapricot.com. The application here is more robust in that it is more of a membership database

product. So perhaps more than I need. Additionally, this service only offers a 30-day free trial. After that, the fees are monthly (or discounted for a yearly commitment) based upon the number of contacts in the database. I did not find this one to be quite as easy to use as VolunteerSpot. I tried out the 30 day trial, but it was just not that easy to use for what I wanted.



After doing some reviews of a few others that did not have much of what I was looking for, I landed on VolunteerHub www.volunteerhub.com. Again, no free service here, but a 30-day free trial. I decided that the trial was worth the time as I found many cool features described in the promotional content and saw some in action during a demo. This one seemed like it might be too good to be true, so we quickly set it up just as if we were using it with our pool of potential volunteers. We then had some of our members test it out and give us their feedback. Everyone had some good suggestions for us and felt that this application should provide what we need. Thus, the decision was made to subscribe to VolunteerHub.

The features we are finding most helpful with VolunteerHub are that it allows us to upload our graphics so that our members do not realize they have left our site; we can restrict access to the various volunteer openings so that only certain types of people can sign up; it provides automatic e-mail notices to the volunteers to confirm and remind; volunteers have to create an account so they can go online anytime to see their schedule. These are just some of the many cool features that attracted us to this product. And even though there is a fee involved, it is reasonable and will not break the bank for us.

We are set to launch this to our membership in late November/early December and they will be able to see exactly what is available. Veterinary Students will be able to sign up for either a Session Presider or Session Assistant position. The temporary staff that we hire to work registration can see the available shifts online and check their schedule. We cannot wait to use this as it has so much potential to make us much more efficient!

So that is my adventure. Some might call it research, but I prefer adventure...you never know what might be coming around the virtual corner that can change what you do.

Innovative Ideas for Successful Planners

By Joanne Corby

Try visualizing yourself as you read the following paragraph.

I'm not a meeting planner, I am a visionary. I can see what others can't. I see how people will get to the event, what they will eat, what they will learn, how they will have fun and why they want to attend. I also see who should be involved in the event to have it flow smoothly and within budget. I see the big picture because you've hired me to—and human resources (HR) and training departments don't.

Remember a time when meeting planners handled meeting planning, HR took care of HR needs and training departments concentrated on training?

Although these functions are still on opposite banks of the corporate river, bridges are being built. And now, more than ever, these distinct functions are facing common challenges that we must work together to overcome.

The Challenges: E-learning and Workplace/Family Issues

One of the fastest-growing learning methodologies is e-learning. This method is packaged in the forms of Web seminars, online courses, preprogrammed learning and videos/CDs. C-level management and HR administrators have welcomed e-learning primarily because of its cost-effectiveness. All functions agree, however, that the e-learning environment is impersonal compared to in-person instruction.

But will those opinions carry more weight than the cost savings? The American Society for Training and Development thinks it might be possible, noting that learners at a typical company get 20 percent to 30 percent of training via technology (that is expected to rise 20 percent within the next five years).

Workforce and family issues will also continue to impact HR, training and meeting-planning functions.

HR's focus is at the front end of the recruitment and retention challenge. Consider the looming baby boomer retirement wave. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says the United States will face a shortage of 10 million workers by 2010. To replace a generation slowly realizing that there is more to life than work, a new generation of workers will need a lot of training in a hurry. So don't close the classrooms or meeting venues. They will be needed for discussion, team learning and higher-level interactions.

As companies strive to compete in the global marketplace, family issues will continue to be an obstacle adding to an already burdensome array of challenges such as fluctuating foreign markets, differing cultures and languages and the need for increased security measures.

The Institute for Workplace Studies at Cornell University claims U.S. industry loses up to \$300 billion annually in absenteeism, diminished productivity, employee turnover, accidents and other medical, legal and insurance expenses. These increasing operational costs have removed funds from annual meeting budgets, thus affecting the meetings industry.



Overcoming the Challenges: Cross-training, Outsourcing and Collaboration

For meeting planners, simply sitting at the same table with the other two functions isn't enough. Understanding their challenges and knowing what their responsibilities are reinforces the strength of bridges. Meetings are still the primary method for adult learning. The need for strategic corporate updates, training and continuing education has never been stronger. The timing for cross-training could not be more germane. The pressures of getting the right talent will increase as we approach 2010, and employers who help workers develop the fastest with the least hassle will stay on top.

Cross-training in these three functions is prominent for several reasons. For the trainers still wondering what to call themselves, technical training is the only chance of survival. New technology may have slowed them down,



Innovative Ideas for Successful Planners continued

but it didn't negate their capabilities and expertise. They need to remember that new hires grew up on mobile phones, instant messages and the Web. While HR issues such as recruitment and retention remain critical, HR personnel have their eyes on benefits.

Significant increases in healthcare costs are expected to continue, and the current generation of HR leaders will be much more involved in aligning HR strategies with companies' overall business objectives. The last thing HR professionals are concerned about is meetings.

Outsourcing is a hot topic, whether it's outsourcing U.S. manufacturing jobs to other countries or moving in-house functions to outside vendors. Outsourcing is typically defined as a buyer transferring ownership of a process to a vendor or supplier with expertise in that process. Although most corporate leaders would like to have the work come from internal departments, with the pending workforce shortage it isn't probable. However, this probability assures a seat at the table for the independent planners, trainers and HR vendors. As for the corporate planner, outsourcing has positioned you to decide on the table and with whom you will sit.

According to The Outsourcing Institute's Fifth Annual Outsourcing Index, corporate expenditures on outsourcing services and technology is on the rise.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents are at the first stage (assessment) of the outsourcing process, 12 percent are at the second stage (RFPs), 12 percent are at the third stage (selection) and 17 percent are at the last stage (governance).

By the end of 2002, it was estimated that \$320 billion in corporate resources lay outside of corporations. According to the same survey, the top five reasons for outsourcing (in order of buyer company requirements) are to improve company focus, reduce and control operating costs, free internal resources for other purposes, gain access to world-class capabilities and access resources not available internally.

Now try to visualize the planner as an orchestra leader, one who knows the other two instruments (functions) can't create the same sound individually as they could

with an orchestra. In October 2003, meetings technology consultant Corbin Ball predicted, "Face-to-face meetings will remain strong. However, they will change in nature and move from the 'talking head' to greater interactivity and audience empowerment."

It is my prediction that the meeting planner will make the reservations. The planner's place setting at the table resembles that of a conductor. As an orchestra leader, you already see the big picture and understand the importance of meetings and how they impact our economy. Adding the other two instruments will be a natural transition. All that's left for independent and corporate planners is to make reservations with HR and training to create the music.

JOANNE CORBY is president of Melbourne, Fla.-based U Expansion Inc.—a corporate education company—and a member of the MPI Greater Orlando Area Chapter. She is an MPI Platinum Series speaker and holds a master's degree in human resource development and public administration. Contact her at joanne@uexpansion.com.

Members On the Move!

Congratulations to Julie McAleb who recently left Cardinal Health as an Executive Meeting Planner to consult in her own business at Encore Meetings and Events, LLC.

Julie McAleb, CMP

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The Fine Art of Making a Living and Living a Harmonious Life

By Stella Johnson

I read the message carefully, followed the directions and forwarded the assistant my original e-mail. Within an hour I had a personal message from both the planner who was “out of the office” for the week and her associate. They both promised speedy delivery of my request.

This happens all the time: Employees ostensibly “out of the office” set up an automatic forwarding message that they are unavailable. On the contrary, they constantly check their messages and continue to work 24/7 — a common practice that sometimes knocks their personal work-life formula out of whack.

The more meeting planners’ personal lives intersect with their professional lives, the more they may need expert advice to get back on track and achieve a harmonious work-life balance. Associations and trade organizations that cater to meeting professionals always feature a work-life balance component at conferences. Moreover, the Internet is replete with experienced productivity experts — speakers and consultants who tout self-help books and workshops devoted to time management strategies, work-life balance and more.

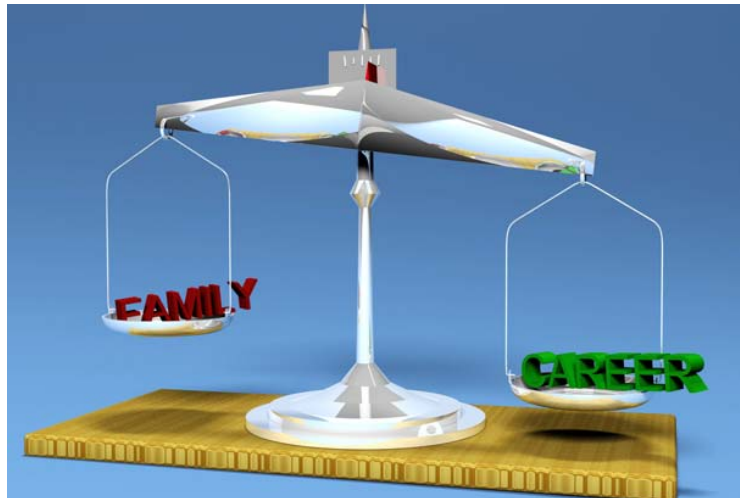
CNN.com features a cool tool on its Web site, a customized work-life balance calculator that shows via a pie chart how many hours one devotes to working and living. It’s a good exercise nowadays because, as CNN noted, current economic conditions make the quest for

a reasonable work-life balance even more challenging.

How do meeting professionals manage? We talked to several veteran planners who shared their trials, tribulations and tips: Meet Lisa McGowan, a married mother of three young daughters and founder of Winnetka, IL-based AWA Meetings, who followed in her

father’s footsteps and fashioned a career as a corporate meeting planner. Damian Mogilka, a charter member and the first president of the Wisconsin Chapter of Meeting Professionals International (MPI), taught his daughter early on how important achieving balance is in the meetings industry.

To stay organized, she keeps only one monthly written calendar for both personal and professional engagements.



“I am the mother of three children but I never travel on business with them, especially since we have enough of a hard time justifying our worthiness in this industry these days, and because I need to focus 100 percent of my energies on my client. Having my own business and young children with varied schedules and school commitments, I tend to work like a dog whenever I can just to be able to fit it all in. My most productive hours are 5 a.m. to 8 a.m.”

A Movement For Change

But “working like a dog” is not the best prescription for a rewarding, balanced, life advised Melinda Villagran, Ph.D., associate professor of communications at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. As an expert on the fine art of balancing the pressures and demands of professional and personal lives, the mother of four

The Fine Art of Making a Living and Living a Harmonious Life continued

noted that there is growing evidence that busy executives such as corporate meeting planners are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by communicating so much information through so many varied channels. Villagran observed, "More than a decade ago, such industrious people used the telephone, held more face-to-face meetings and maybe even had a beeper in order to make immediate contact with one another. Now we have cell phones, BlackBerries, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and, most of all, draining e-mails that take up precious time that we would normally devote to other aspects of our jobs."

Fittingly, Villagran encourages today's harried executives to stop being "mindless processors" who move bits of information from one place to another with very little thought about how to resolve the issue at hand. She observed that there is a real movement out there for change, one that encourages all of us to be "in

the moment," as we go about our hectic day at work and at home.

Villagran also noted that whenever a person is stressed, personally or professionally, the danger is they start to resist feeling anything at all just to avoid dealing with the source of their discontent.

"The next thing you know, your effort to avoid dealing with stress has left you feeling nothing at all about the joys of life, its small victories and the things that would normally make you smile. That's when illness can walk in," she said.

Finally, Villagran added, don't forget to think and feel, that's part of what defines us as human beings. Regarding the not so good things in your life," she asserted, "check it off that mental list and then, move on."



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The Fine Art of Making a Living and Living a Harmonious Life continued

Be Prepared

One meeting and event planner who seems to have mastered the life-work skills Villagran speaks of is Ron Johnson, president and CEO of San Francisco-based Mosaic Event Management Inc. Named twice a “Who’s Who” in the Bay area special events industry by the San Francisco Business Times, Johnson began his event and meeting management career in 1983 after he finished graduate school and accepted a position with Bon Appétit.

There, Johnson was responsible for handling meeting and event logistics for associations and Fortune 100 corporations. For example, he staged four 15,000-guest employee events for Apple USA. Johnson also was instrumental in handling hundreds of other corporate meetings in more than 50 countries, as well as high-profile events for such dignitaries as former Presidents Carter and Reagan, Queen Elizabeth II, Nelson Mandela and Pope John Paul II.

Following a stint with a major planning firm in Silicon Valley, Johnson in 1995 co-founded Mosaic Event Management. Currently, as president, he preserves and develops the integrity of the staff and company, and manages its growth.

“Meeting and conference planning requires the ability to effectively manage multiple operations simultaneously,” remarked Johnson. “As the leader of a planning organization, you must be able to step in and manage all aspects of meeting planning while managing the daily operations of your business; and be able to see beyond the drama of any emergencies that come along (like an invited speaker dying on the stage, which actually happened).”

Life’s been more than interesting for this talented meeting and event planner with its varied and convoluted professional challenges. But, what about the personal issues?

“Oddly, I have not experienced too many setbacks in life. I’ve been employed since the age of 14,” Johnson said. “I have not experienced problems beyond being poor throughout college and graduate school when all I ate was Ramen noodles. More than that, my ancestors are Swiss, and we’re known for being financially prudent and saving money, even when everyone else is out spending like a fool.”

Johnson added that before he married, he explained to his partner that his job required long hours, including weekends and holidays, and also included significant

travel during certain times of the year. But, the couple balances life and work issues with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. “I continue to work long hours, but I compromised on travel, holidays and weekends,” he said. They also sold their primary residence in “the city by the bay” two years ago to give Johnson an easier commute and to accentuate the work-life balance. “We purchased a historic building, converted it for my company and built an apartment atop as our primary city home. For further balance, we purchased an oasis outside the city to enjoy on the weekends and holidays.”

Also along life’s highway, Johnson takes time to practice yoga several times a week and enjoys gardening, reading and beekeeping on his rooftop garden. He added that he abhors cell phones and would love nothing more than to have them out of his life; although, he confessed, the Internet is invaluable for research and saves a lot of time that he wisely uses elsewhere.

Johnson’s good fortune extends to the recent economic downturn, which he described as “inevitable.” He wisely prepared for it and added that, “Mosaic has a standard business practice of having multiple-year contracts with many clients, and similar to the dot.com bubble downturn, we were not affected by the drastic shifts in business. This practice gives us the ability to see our operational income with a much wider perspective, and





The Fine Art of Making a Living and Living a Harmonious Life continued

we do not have to react to the pressures in the same way.”

Volunteering For The Fun Of It

“In every experience, good or bad, I have learned something new and grown from it,” said Eugenia Savarese, associate project manager for McVeigh Associates. “I find I can handle anything given the opportunity; and I try and do everything to the best of my ability and then take it to the next level. For now I am enjoying meeting planning.”

Born and raised in New York City, Savarese graduated from college in 1970. Although her career goal was to become a teacher, that never quite materialized and it wasn't until several corporate and even university positions here and abroad (her husband's job relocated the family of six several times to places such as Tokyo, Singapore and Hong Kong) that the English major entered the meeting planning field after she returned to the U.S.

That was five years ago when a neighbor asked her to manage a conference in the field of safety and security. She did that for two years, until her life was interrupted by cancer. “I had to take a break and had wonderful support from family, friends and coworkers,” she recalled. “But later, I was okay and got another job with McVeigh & Associates, a meeting and incentive management company with global capabilities, as an associate project manager, handling meetings solely for pharmaceutical corporations,” she said.

Now back to her healthy self, Savarese handles all communication with the client, identifying hotel properties, room setups, F&B, audio-visual, ground transportation, attendee management, décor and so on. “I prepare all budgets and manage any changes that come along, while adhering to all pharmaceutical guidelines. I've learned to take things as they come — one thing at a time. Otherwise, I just yell!”

Admittedly, this cancer survivor doesn't do anything in a small way and is a tough fighter who makes time to do things that matter most: She is a 30-year member of the American Association for University Women and

contributes her time to the Girl Scouts and Make-a-Wish Foundation. “I really get involved, often holding positions at the board level which, you could say, is what I do for fun.”

Like everything else, family is very important to Savarese, the proud parent of four children: a marine biologist, teacher of autistic children, a non-profit manager of a camp that specializes in trust-building activities and a college student. “My husband and I have been married for 36 years and, because of him, the children and I have been able to live wonderful lives, meet great people and have some amazing experiences.”

Those experiences came about because, as a family unit, they were always ready, willing and able to relocate to any global destination that her husband's job demanded. “Some people thought we were nuts to just pick up at the drop of a hat and move halfway around the world; but, we have visited some fabulous places and met wonderful people in Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, South America and North America.”

Savarese said she cooks family meals most nights. “Most of the household chores are my responsibility — except for garbage duty. We take turns walking the dog we adopted in Hong Kong, and I have a cleaning lady every other week who does all the major cleaning so that I can keep up daily.”

What does she like to do to unwind? “Helping others, particularly in issues of equity for women,” she answered. Other than that, I also belong to a gourmet group which meets every other month, rotating houses as we go.”

As charmed a life as this might appear, Savarese has paid the piper. For instance, the couple had to sell their house to pay college costs for their children which, she said, “really proved to be stressful because we are always at the mercy of a landlord and I never feel the place is my own.”

The family also went through savings and retirement accounts when her husband was working for a start-up company that didn't make it; and, of course, her battle

The Fine Art of Making a Living and Living a Harmonious Life continued

with cancer took its financial and personal toll.

“We’ll probably always have to work and will never be able to really retire. So, yes, there is always that stress that at any time we can have the rug pulled out from under us. But, my children have grown into fine adults who are well-rounded world citizens and compassionate of the problems of others — and that’s more than any parent can hope for.”

Social Networking A Plus

“Farm kids don’t know how to relax,” said Kathleen Haase, CMP, who was born and raised on a working farm in Wisconsin. Aside from a variety of farm chores she tackled as a child, her first “real paying job” was playing the organ for church in which she made \$25 every Sunday. Of course, I knew that this would never get me far, so I attended college at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and then headed to Minnesota to work for Dayton’s (department store) as a buyer. Eventually, I switched jobs at Dayton to event planning.”

Since then, Haase has held several planning positions, including one at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts as director of special events, and is now the group event manager for Boston Scientific Corporation (BSC), Minnesota. “Last year, our department went through several transitions and downsized. As you could imagine, my staff and I are busier than ever. Still, one person’s crisis is another person’s challenge. Of course, it helps to have an incredible boss, and mine has been a mentor for the past nine years.”

According to Haase, being blessed with a remarkable husband, as well as modern technology, helps her maintain her sanity. “Even if you’re on the road,

you always have your mini-laptop to keep abreast of everything that is still going on in the office. How did we ever survive without it?” she asked.

What does Haase do in her spare time? Simply stated, “Run, camp, play piano, read and spend quality time with my husband and two-year-old daughter, Emily.”

Although Haase reported that she has never had to deal with any off-the-wall circumstances, she has been involved in some extreme situations, one of which was one of her first events at Dayton — a major fashion show that was part of an after-party program. “Here are just a few things we worried about: the color of each flower in a centerpiece; positioning the stripes in all of the tablecloths around a room; placing chairs so many inches apart from each other around a 60-inch round; how many sheep we would have grazing on the sodded grass of Dayton’s parking ramp; the perfect outfit for each bartender to wear at each station; and on and on. It was a great introduction into the myriad amount of details that go into event planning, however, and I learned a lot.”

For this talented CMP, family life revolves mostly around her husband and daughter. “My husband is a Marine reservist, which takes him away from home several times a year. Since we don’t have much family nearby, I rely a lot on friends and neighbors to assist with major chores — thank goodness for them. They’re cheaper than therapists. Otherwise, it’s my own sense of balance between work and home that allows my husband to leave me home alone as a single parent, several times a year.”

Besides being a professional member of MPI, Haase likes to keep involved in a number of social networks as well. “It keeps my life full and filled with a variety of incredible mentors,” she continued. “Through LinkedIn, Facebook, Plaxo and other social networking sites, we are much more equipped to keep in touch with friends and colleagues than in years past. Again, how did we do it before all these modern enhancements?”





The Fine Art of Making a Living and Living a Harmonious Life continued

Haase's advice to fellow planners is to keep mornings for quiet time, if at all possible. Also, turn off CNN for a couple of days. If we all did that, we'd be better off."

When The Going Gets Tough

Meeting planner Haley Powers, CMP, was born and raised in the suburbs of Michigan and is an alumni of Eastern Michigan University. As a principal of Arcadia, CA-based InSiteful Meetings, she has worked in the hospitality industry for Marriott, Embassy Suites and Hyatt Hotels, and was an executive director for a convention bureau. She has taught hotel and restaurant management at UCLA and has helped planners prepare for the CMP certificate program.

Powers, whose first job was as a concierge for the Hyatt Regency Los Angeles, said that in the late '90s her eventual transition to meeting planning was a natural one. "I've got a reputation for loving contracts," said the single professional who loves to read, travel, garden and go to the movies in her spare time. "In fact, one of my favorite things is budget analysis, and researching every expenditure or fee."

One of the keys to her success, she claimed, is learning to have patience. "It's a skill I learned in the hotel business. I also have a terrific 'second,' Patsy Porter, and I often team up with a colleague, Nick Sotis of ProSites, both onsite and for special projects. I work closely professionally and socially with many past presidents of my MPI chapter, as well as with Libby Zarrahy from the Marriott Downtown on the CMP exam preparation class."

Back at the office, Powers keeps law and order through Porter who handles all e-mail and voice mails in her absence. "I always carry a laptop with me on trips. We get the basics out and, sometimes, I even find myself in the 'deep thought' mode in a hotel room and order room service."

Powers' life changed when her mother died in 1996, and she moved in with her father in order to cook for him, which she loves to do.

"The last eight years of his life, we (my father, my date and I) went to the movies, had dinner with friends,

bought season tickets to see the Dodgers (31 years now), gardened, traveled and laughed. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2006, but I'm still in touch with his secretary who is now 92 and living in San Diego area."

To keep her home life in order, Powers enlists the services of housekeepers twice a month. "More than that, I'm a pretty good cook and like to entertain for small dinner parties of six to eight guests. I love reading not only for the education but for the escape, everything from biographies to mysteries. But, when I really want to unwind, I watch "Law and Order" on TV or the History Channel (again, for the education and escape). Believe it or not, I especially like programs about war strategies."

What is important to this busy meeting planner? She lists MPI, of course, especially in the way of charitable work with the Ronald McDonald House and Habitat for Humanity.

Friendship is one of her strong points, too. "Recently, while on a trip to Ohio to see clients, I stopped in Michigan and planned a lunch with friends from elementary school. The town where I grew up was small then, and many of us have stayed close. My friendship circle here in Los Angeles, however, comes from church, the Dodgers and, as always, MPI."

Technology, she finds, helps her stay very focused and connected. "It took me a few years to get comfortable with 'disconnecting' when I have to, but the balance now works in my favor," she commented.

Never discouraged by any of the twists and turns that come her way, Powers is adamant about one thing. She firmly believes in her field. Ever the optimist, she's truly saddened when people get so discouraged, especially because of the economy. If the purpose of life is to grow, then travel, meetings and the fantastic people we meet along the way are the best gift to help us do that.

"I always quote that saying, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going,' Powers said. "I've lost more than a few friends and family members during the Vietnam war, or to cancer. So, I'm just glad to be alive, healthy and happy."

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