



FIRED UP!™

Free Tips for Meeting Planners

How to Make Your Conference or Event Have Optimum Success

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While my primary function at events and conventions is to serve as keynote speaker, over the past decade, I have served as conference organizer for several non-profits and have learned a great deal, the hard way, from those experiences. I know you are all talented and savvy meeting professionals, but perhaps a few of these tips will Fire Up! your next meeting!- Snowden

1. **To make your attendees feel welcome**, have a volunteer greeter committee with special hats, badges or banners to indicate that they are there to help and make everyone feel comfortable. Pick individuals who are warm and outgoing with good people skills. Have a **special VIP table** to greet VIPs and a **special Sponsor table** to greet sponsors. (Note: at one event I attended last year, not having a special person to greet sponsors created lots of problems. Ruffled feathers and upset resulted and new policies were put in place.)



2. On name badges or name tags, have a sticker or color that indicates someone is new or a **first-timer**. Greeters will know to especially seek out and help them. Give them preferred seating and pair them on a **buddy system** with an experienced, long-time member who should meet with them at least 3 times during the conference, especially on day one. If possible, have buddies contact each other prior to event via phone or email.

3. Poll attendees before the conference about their interests and **set up a Twitter hashtag for postings** throughout the conference. Set up a **Facebook page** in advance and start building enthusiasm. Publish these Twitter hash tags and Facebook pages on your website and email about them. Encourage dialogue and get your speakers to do this as well to build interest for the event.

twitter

facebook

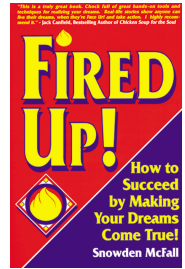
4. **Develop a conference time-line at least one year in advance of a major conference**. Keep adding line items with who is responsible for each by when, and share this time line with anyone critically associated with the conference. Modify and update as you go along and review after the conference to see if deadlines need to change. They often do.

5. **Adult learning research shows people learn best when they talk about what they have learned with another person right after learning new information.** A quick "repeat back what you learned" type of dialogue helps. There is some chemical reaction in the brain when a person feels "on the spot" and must remember what they have learned. Do this in pairs and not in front of the group, so as not to embarrass anyone. This process holds the information in the memory bank much more effectively than typical visual / auditory learning. Use when new critical data is being introduced. You may need to do the exercise several times throughout a session. Make it fun and have people switch partners and move around.

6. Consider various **giveaways and raffles** at every major event. Most of your vendors and speakers will be happy to donate something to get the free advertising. This ups the participation, interest and enthusiasm of your attendees.

7. **Have a trade show at your event**, with vendors displaying the latest innovations in the field. You can charge good money for this, minimizing your conference expenses and making it a win-win for everyone.

8. **Buy the book, CD's or products of the speaker** and give it away to all conference attendees as a way to anchor in what they have learned. Most speakers will give you a discount on large volume purchases.



9. Consider including a **5 minute exercise/stretch break** led by someone who does lots of aerobics, or if your company has an exercise program, by the aerobics teacher. Have them lead people in a get their blood going stretch and movement session twice a day during the conference. This is especially helpful after lunch when everyone feels sleepy- about 2:00 PM.



10. Have someone who is a good listener and a good people person interview attendees at the end of the conference and **get testimonials.** Use **video to capture these** and post on website, youtube, Facebook and Twitter. Nothing works better for promoting future conferences!

11. Be sure to do **volunteer recognition at the event**, perhaps even with awards and/or gifts. This will encourage future volunteers and let those who came forward feel gratified and appreciated. Be sure they get plenty of public recognition.

12. **Use evaluations every step of the way.** Consider electronic kiosks or surveymonkey.com Have someone analyze them and modify next year's conference based on the feedback. Show attendees that you listen.

13. Check with your speaker and ask them to create a cover page for their worksheet or AV visuals that features **your theme and logo for the conference.** Most will ask for this from you anyway, but give them the camera-ready artwork to make it easy for them to-do this. It will unify your entire event. Ask them to weave your theme into their presentation.

14. **Thoroughly pre-screen your hotel or convention site.** It is well worth the money to fly someone across the country to check out the facility and be sure it is right for your event. Sample food choices in advance. Be sure to develop a conference map to show where all the function rooms are. And also visit the guest rooms. Check to see which magazines come standard in each room. I recently visited a hotel a month before a conference where I was speaking, and I discovered they have a magazine which would have been very offensive to the attendees at my event. I had it removed.

15. **Have a greeting letter in every attendee hotel room**, or on the computer screen, welcoming them and giving them critical information and updates on any changes. It makes them feel welcome. Include coupons for prizes at trade shows, discounts at various vendors, etc.

16. **Use internal PR to create excitement about your conference at least 6 months in advance.** Have posters with them distributed throughout the offices and workplaces. For green conferences, use these electronically and broadcast every month. Include information in newsletters and fliers, whether electronic or paper. Get people excited by including interviews with the speaker in this literature. Share your Fired Up! enthusiasm and others will get Fired Up!, too!

17. **Little things mean a lot:**

- have greeters put stickers with the conference theme on people's name tags
- have promotional items as take-away gifts (have a vendor sponsor them & save money)
- have snacks all day- at 10:30 have fruit and danish at a break; in mid-afternoon have beverages and cookies or cheese (way to save money is not have dessert at lunch and use that dessert at 3:00 for the break)



- award achievers, and not just in the standard categories. Give public recognition to those who excel in courtesy, positive attitude, volunteerism, customer service, etc.
- multi-cultural / inclusion touches; various languages, ADA compliance, signing for the deaf, special interest groups

18. **Have an AV liaison at the hotel** and get all the phone numbers and contact vehicles to reach them. If your conference is complex relative to AV, have the AV specialist stay until everything works and have them check in every hour. Use walkie talkies and cellphones to stay in touch.

19. **Take extra:** LCD player, extra batteries for microphones, extra extension cords- just to be on the safe side.

20. Have a meaningful, both sex **spousal track** and invite spouses if it's the appropriate time and place. (My husband hated it when one conference he attended with me was targeted just to women and what he termed “fluff.”)

21. **Make your conference FUN** and memorable. Include music at every break and consult a sound studio about custom music for your conference. Perhaps one of your vendors will donate this. Use dramatic introduction music before each key segment.

22. **Show videos throughout the conference** in kiosks- show footage shot that day of people in action, testimonials, etc.

23. Consider **electronic reader boards** for conference sessions and schedule. See if vendor will donate these.

24. **Try the new trend of sofas** and assorted furniture at parties and socials scattered throughout. It will promote relaxation and more lengthy conversations.

25. **Celebrate your successes** as planners and take some much-needed down time after a conference. Then you can do a debriefing to see what could have been improved. Reward yourself and your team for a job well done.

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We hope these tips help you keep your attendees FIRED UP! and that you have OPTIMUM SUCCESS at your conference or event. If we can help you in anyway or field questions, please feel free to call us toll-free at 1-888-FIREBKS. And let us know how these tips work for you!

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