

## Seven Steps to Getting the Hotel Contract in Motion, Part 2

*In negotiating, information is power. Here's how to make sure you are equipped with as much of it as possible.*

**L**AST MONTH IN THIS COLUMN, WE OUTLINED THE FIRST three steps to successfully negotiating meeting specifications with a hotel: setting the boundaries, developing a group profile, and researching the hotel's history.

Here are the final four steps.

### 1. Proposals/the Initial Contract

► Before you conduct a site inspection, review the hotel's written proposal outlining the meeting space and costs. Conduct preliminary negotiations, but make sure the hotel wants to play ball before you spend money making a site inspection.

► Ask the hotel to send preliminary hotel contracts. Make sure the contract meets the meeting's needs in terms of service and costs. Never sign a "preliminary contract" as you do not want to be held to it.

► Create an "additions to the contract" wish list that covers the needs of your organization. Send the

list to the hotel before the site inspection so the salesperson is prepared for the negotiations. Make sure the hotel is willing to accept the major parts of the additions list before you conduct a site visit.

### 2. Preplanning for the Negotiations

► The negotiations should be with the authorized person at the property. You do not want the person you are working with to say, "I need to get the OK from my boss before I sign off on this."

► Create and prioritize a mental "give and take" list of items to be negotiated. You may not need the same room rate extended five days before the meeting and can accept a three-day extended rate, but you may need six VIP rooms at the single room/group rate.

► Don't be afraid to ask for anything. The worst answer that the hotel could give is "no." Your com-

mon goal is to make a great meeting, so they should be amenable to working out solutions.

### 3. Site Inspection

► Conduct a site inspection at several properties to compare rates, their willingness to negotiate a contract, the space they assign, and how each venue addresses your meeting's needs.

► Don't conduct lengthy negotiations if the hotel space is not under serious consideration.

► View the space that was blocked for the group before you review the hotel contract/your additions with the salesperson. Know the product they are selling before you conduct the actual negotiations as the space may not be what you need (e.g., the pillar in the middle of the ballroom may not work).

### 4. Finalizing the Contract

► Review the negotiated hotel contract in detail with the salesperson.

► Never sign the contract during the site inspection. You need to think about what you are signing and make final changes on the contract based on what space you saw.

► You should get an updated hotel contract and update your contract additions. The contract should be as clean as possible so you can decipher all the points. If you have written all over a double-faxed copy of the contract, clarity may be an issue.

► Make sure everything is in writing, with all the details discussed included. The contract should be drafted with the idea that someone other than you and the hotel person might run the meeting. Anything agreed upon verbally will be lost if a new person takes over. ■

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