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Event Entertainment News You Can Use

Industry News: Creating Alternatives When There Are None. by Dana Lynn Bernstein, CMP
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Scenario:

You organized a black tie dinner for 350 people and booked a 10 piece band. A few hours before the dinner, the band shows up in casual clothes and you notice that the lead singer is not the same one you met when you first heard them perform. The good news is that there is time before the dinner so you are not in crisis mode – yet. The bad news is that you were specific in the contract as to what the band members were to wear and who was to perform. In a pinch, you may not have any ideas how to fix both problems. However, you can call the person who booked the band and the hotel CSM to brainstorm while the band is setting up.

Negotiation is about achieving better alternatives for both parties through cooperation. Make sure that the alternative is better than the status quo of not having an agreement or each side will not see the solution as attractive. Always look for mutual gain so the other side has something at stake and is therefore willing to make an agreement. Don't make mountains – if the other side thinks they will be put out or not gain as much by accepting your idea, they will either walk away or be a reluctant partner. Make it easy for them to say "yes." For a successful negotiation and to get better compliance, the other side needs to be enrolled in developing and shaping the solution.

Sit down with your negotiation partner and make sure you are on the same page and agree to work together to come up with solutions. Define your purpose before you begin. You cannot solve a problem if you have a different diagnosis of what the problem is. Identify shared interests.

If you perceive the problem to be a crisis, you may not be able to create as many alternatives. According to William Ury and Richard Smoke, a crisis has four key elements: (1) high stakes - such as attendees are aware there is a problem, you will lose time, money, reputation, etc, (2) little time is available to make important decisions or play the diplomatic game – there is a sense of urgency, (3) high uncertainty about what is going on, how to handle it, and the outcome, and (4) narrowing options to deal with the issues.

Deescalate the potential crisis and get as many ideas on the table through brainstorming and active listening so as not to limit or pigeonhole yourself. The more ideas, the better the negotiation. Evaluate all alternatives, consider enhancing them, and then discuss if it does not fit your needs – you do not have to decide or get stuck on one alternative. Alternatives are subjective and thus based on perceptions - you generally think your suggestions are better. Do not make pre-mature judgments or criticize the ideas, as it will inhibit your creativity and theirs. Be sensitive to the other side and how they will receive your comments to their ideas. Be both specific and general so you increase the playing field of ideas. Invent agreements and ideas of different calibers – some of the most craziest ideas, when tweaked, will be the right fit. Throw ideas out and invite the other side to add to it.

In brainstorming, make sure the environment is safe for a free flow of ideas. Sit next to each other and not across the table like adversaries. Have a facilitator to write all ideas down with no specific categories such as realistic, crazy, etc. Do not think of how the idea will be implemented as that may stifle the flow. Discuss and agree to the ground rules – especially not criticizing the ideas. After all the ideas are on the table, mark the most promising ones, add to them if needed, then evaluate and decide.

There is no single answer to any problem. If needed, call in experts and get their opinions. Possible solutions to the band scenario above: (1) call local tux rental or retail stores to see if they have any tux's in stock that can be rented or bought at the companies expense, (2) find out if the hotel or any local establishment that serves high-end parties has any tux's or better suits you can borrow, (3) if the band is local, have a messenger go to their place of business and get proper attire. (4) change the band's attire from a tux to a suit – they may be easier to come by in a pinch.

If the band member is different: (1) call the person booking the band and find out what happened

(the singer could be sick), (2) listen to the band play to hear if the replacement has equal or better talent, (3) ask the person booking the band to send a new singer on site if the replacement was not good and, of course, you should have a clause in the contract that allows you money subtracted from the invoice if you are not satisfied with the replacement.

Keep focused on solving the problem, actively listen to the other side, make it easy for the other side to want to work with you, and mostly have fun with being creative - which will keep you in a positive mind set. Your goal will always be to have the best meeting and experience for your attendees. Work together.

Dana Lynn Bernstein, CMP, has been planning domestic and international meetings that range from 10 – 1000 attendees since 1992. She taught contract law, negotiation, and pre/post conference management in Kean University's CE program for 8 years, and has over a dozen articles published in various magazines and newspapers on significant key issues of meeting planning. Ms. Bernstein received her BA in Communications and French from Rider University; a CE certificate in Hospitality from New York University, and has a Masters Degree in legal studies/dispute resolution from Montclair State University. She can be reached at 973-686-3436 or dlnb@marksonder.com.

Click here for the source's Time Management Calendar for Chief Entertainment Officers

Click here for the source's book and notes: [Event Entertainment and Production](#) \$122.00 (2008)

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