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The **4** Secrets Of Surviving Meeting Evaluations

By Meryl Runion

Your meeting is over. The participants have all gone home. You worked tirelessly, fought dragons and won, and you deserve a parade in your honor. But instead of a parade, you get meeting evaluations.

The coffee was too hot. The coffee wasn't hot enough. Why weren't there more choices of herbal tea? The speakers were too technical. The speakers weren't technical enough. Why didn't you hire my sister to speak? There weren't enough session choices. There were too many session choices. Why didn't you repeat sessions so we had more than one chance to hear them? Why did you repeat sessions rather than offering more different sessions?

Feedback—whether you love it or hate it, the fact is that you need it. Some planners read evaluations and weep. Others read evaluations and get angry. The smart ones read evaluations and learn. What helps is if you know how to read evaluations to extract the gifts embedded in the barbs. Here are four steps to help you.

1) Recognize an evaluation for what it is—a reflection of one person's experience, opinions and preferences. Those experiences, opinions and preferences have as much to do with the nature of the person expressing them and what they bring into the meeting as it does with how great a job you did or didn't do. Evaluation information is useful information about attendees. Evaluation

information is a filtered reflection of you and the job you did.

2) Know that you can't make everyone happy. No one can, and it's not a sign of failure when you don't. What you can do is consider every complaint as a challenge to see what you can do to never receive that same complaint again. Yeah, yeah, I know you've heard it before...regard your feedback as an opportunity.

3) Be aware that people are 10 times more likely to tell you what they didn't like than what they did like. If you design the evaluations, ask for feedback on what they like rather than simply asking what needs improvement. That will increase the chances of a more balanced reflection of the event. Even with that, however, know that an imbalance of negative remarks does not necessarily mean an imbalance of negative experiences.

4) Accept the fact that most people do not know how to give effective feedback. Most evaluation feedback lacks grace. When you read an offensive evaluation, rephrase the comment to wording that is easier to hear. If you reword feedback in a way that is easier to hear, it will be easier for you to learn from it and respond to it.

For example, if someone says the award ceremony was self-serving and boring, tell yourself that they did not benefit from or relate to the award ceremony. You could not have possibly engaged

everyone. If someone says that the conference must have been organized by a bunch of morons, tell yourself that they thought the conference could have been better organized and ask yourself how this information can be used.

Rephrase everything they say that offends you to the best possible wording and respond to that rather than reacting to their inflammatory wording.

Reading evaluations can be like a visit to the Twilight Zone. You wonder if all these people were at the same event. They were, and yet they weren't. They were at the same event, but they experienced it through their very different filters. Evaluations are not just to tell you how the event you planned went. They are also to tell you how the event you planned was perceived through as many filters as there were people there. That information is both fascinating and priceless, if you can set your own filters aside and take in the information. See your meeting evaluations as the gifts they are. Then find someone to arrange that parade in your honor, which you know you deserve. §



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