

TOP 5 ROOKIE MISTAKES

**THAT CAN TURN YOUR
EVENT INTO A BIG FAT FLOP**



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First attempts at creating an event don't have to result in disaster – but when they do, it's often the top five rookie mistakes that seem to be responsible. A quick read-through of this short guide will help you make sure you don't join the disappointed ranks of first-time event planners who fall prey to these insidious pitfalls.

Mistake #1: Lack of Organization



When we say “lack of organization”, the vision immediately rears up of total chaos and confusion. While that is certainly a possibility if someone doesn't do their homework and combines that with overconfidence, where a lack of organization usually catches rookie event planners out is in one teeny-weeny area.

Depending on which teeny-weeny area that is, the results of that one error or oversight can be catastrophic!

For example: You forgot to designate someone to confirm that all your four guest speakers are coming. Half an hour before the event, when three are still missing and you haven't heard from them, you finally realize this.

Turns out the missing three never bothered to confirm. One realized she had a conflicting engagement, one decided not to go after all (but was just as disorganized as you and forgot to inform you) – and one just plain forgot you existed, because her kid busted a front tooth and distracted her from writing your gig into her calendar.

Oops.

So you are left with a long, long, interminably long period of dead air – and one other highly-conscientious guest who is absolutely livid that she was involved in such a fiasco. Your reputation is in the cesspit, and you look like a flake. Okay, so that's admittedly an “army boots” example of what can go wrong – but it does happen. And even lesser mistakes can result

in a cascade failure, which is rather like what happens when one domino in the row hits the next one in line.

But it doesn't matter what mistakes one *could* make: You can easily prevent them by making sure **you plan your event carefully, follow a schedule and a system, assign follow-up as well as tasks** – and diligently use a **checklist!**

Mistake #2: Lack of Interactivity and Guest Control

This is, in part, actually a “new” mistake: A craving and demand for interactivity is something that has been universally sweeping through all cultures – and it has finally, in the last year, caught up with event planning. Gone are the days when people would stoically sit through a three-day presentation in a Spartan auditorium, listening to a series of guest speakers droning interminably on and on: Nowadays, people want to give immediate feedback and control their own input and event conditions (“guest control”).

So do your best to build interactivity and “guest control” into every element of your event – from preliminary buzz to follow up.



Ways to introduce organic, lively interactivity and attendee control include:

- **Providing online Apps** so that people can register themselves, make their own bookings, make easy travel arrangements, choose their seating, select the menu of their choice for meals, and more. And providing online Apps is a great strategy whether or not your event is online or off.
(You are also empowering them by allowing them to use their mobiles and do all this on the go – something the majority of the world's population seems to prefer, nowadays.)
- **Providing social media Pages and platforms** where people can make suggestions and requests, provide feedback, ask questions, take surveys and enter contests.
- **Creating a flexible event structure.** Give people choices – what classes they take during the event; whether they register up for a morning or afternoon session; what they want to discuss (limit the choices: A, B or C); which speaker they choose for a timeslot – speaker A or Speaker B; where they want to hold the workshop – outdoors on the hotel patio or indoors in Conference Room B.
Remember – the more control and choice they feel they are getting (even if you are very carefully limiting their options to prevent disorganization and chaos) the more event attendees seem to like it, nowadays.
- **Creating “Live” events.** You can do this whether or not your event is a local one in a physical location or online. When it comes to the latter, not only do we have Google Hangouts and interactivity options built into programs like GoToWebinar, but YouTube itself has now created streaming video so you can hold events live, on air.

Mistake #3: Micro-controlling Guests – and Guest Speakers

In your anxiety to do a great job and keep things organized, make sure you don't swing too far in the opposite direction. By all means create structure by having a fixed time slot or a fixed minimum time allotted to each guest – but don't cut them off in mid-sentence and especially don't turn into the Event Planner from a Very Hot Place by constantly sending them reams of long emails; each one detailing exactly what you want them to do, how you want them to do it and scheduling them down to the last minute.

If you have a format you want people to follow, create a “Guest Speaker Welcome Package” instead and use this to send them all the guidelines, FAQs and instructions they need in one go. In your package, include brief, well-organized notes with lots of white space letting them know essential information – such as “Note: 1-10 minute question period at the end of each guest’s presentation”.

Keep the instructions to the bare essentials. Your Guest Speakers are likely busy people who have done this far more often than you have: You don’t want to burden them with unnecessary reading material – but you do want to provide clear information they will be happy to know (without having to ask).

And be aware of your own personality type – is micro-controlling likely to happen to you?

Mistake #4: Not having a Contingency Plan

Part of the event planning process involves thinking up everything that could possibly go wrong – and making sure you have contingency plans for these potential pitfalls.

Suit your contingency plans to actual event conditions. For example, if you are planning an outdoor wedding, decide:

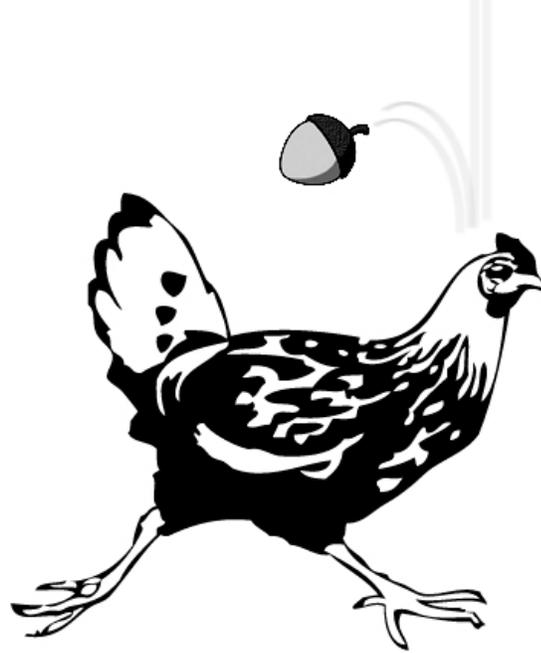
- What you will do if it rains
- Who will instruct the guests on following this contingency

If you are feeding three hundred people, make sure you keep a first aid kit on the premises with at least three or four fresh Epi-pens, in case someone has an allergic reaction. (But of course you will have asked guests to let you know if they have any serious food allergies!)

And what if a guest speaker doesn’t show up – or you can’t hear her when she does log on, and there isn’t time to do more than a few seconds of troubleshooting? Do you have **additional material to present**? Another **“emergency” guest speaker** lined up, ready to jump in?

What if a key staff member or guest falls sick on the day of the event? Who is going to fill in for them? If it is a staff member, who will take over their duties?

These are all things that have to be allowed for, when planning an event. **You don't need to catastrophize and imagine the worst** – but you do need to make sure you have back-up plans for any sort of likely hitch.



Mistake #5: Procrastination and Last Minute-it is

Not doing your homework usually leads to “last minute-it is”. That’s where you discover, five minutes before your event starts, that you forgot to create guest handouts; or that you forgot to test the sound system and your main guest speaker’s microphone isn’t working¹.

Procrastination is another bad habit that also leads to “last minute-it is”. You suddenly realize that you didn’t confirm the number of attendees – and you’re short sixteen lunches!

If procrastination is something you regularly struggle with in other areas of your life, no doubt it will sneak into your event planning too. It might help to recognize this tendency early; and if you catch yourself doing it, try to figure out where it’s coming from in this case:

¹ If you had created a contingency plan – which you didn’t because you were too busy procrastinating – you would have brought a couple of spare microphones and patch cords.

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- Are you nervous about speaking before a live audience?
- Do you feel over-faced and inadequate?
- Is a particular guest speaker or team member making your life miserable?
- Is there an unpleasant task you don't want to face?

Sometimes knowing the source helps us head it off at the pass. Meanwhile, your best defense against procrastination lies in:

- **Starting all preparation and planning** much earlier than you think necessary
- **Delegating tasks** you feel unqualified for to qualified professionals – an experienced member of your staff, an outsource contractor who specializes in that task – or even an experienced volunteer
- **Using checklists** to make sure all tasks are properly completed
- **Being prepared.** Knowing you've practiced your speech until you can recite it in your sleep or having positive experiences in lining up guest speakers can fill you with confidence – and the confidence of knowing you have done something properly and well is your best defense against last-minute nerves or procrastination

Finally, realize that event planning does get easier. Having done it successfully once will make it much easier for you to do it again. And next time you'll confidently know how to avoid all those common rookie mistakes – without even being told.