

## **How to identify successful operations staff**

I have always admired operations people who have worked for me, as I consider them the bulwark upon which much of the event success depends, certainly onsite. While they go about delivering the event you can go about selling, developing and improving the quality of your overall product.

I was therefore really happy when Bailey Beeken of Nielsen recommended that I contact one of her staff who runs operations for the JA shows, Rhonda Bloom. I haven't been super close to the operations folks since I was at DCI, so I was looking forward to comparing notes with Rhonda to see what, if anything had changed.

One of things that I am really interested in is how to find and identify people that have the qualities to be successful in the future, in addition to speaking with people who already are successful. I have my own opinions on how to identify stars of the future(see past columns), but I was particularly interested in how Rhonda went about finding stars in operations.

Here's her checklist:

### **1) Be a born negotiator**

The first place an event director looks to make up a margin is on the cost side, so it's important that ops staff are able to get the prices when they have to, sometimes on the fly.

### **2) Have a customer service focus**

This comment was interesting mostly because of Rhonda's interest in knowing the customers business so they can not only serve but also anticipate issues that might come up. It is also interesting because in my experience ops people have an entirely an inward focus rather than an inward AND external focus.

### **3) Be willing/able to learn about market fast**

Rhonda's staff have to learn not only to be good at their jobs, but also have to learn about their market quickly as well, which gives them a context for their event and what is happening beyond the operations scope of the event. The applications for this are obvious, as this helps the operations team work much more closely with marketing, sales, program development and the executive team.

#### **4) Have a Sense of humor**

Has anyone who's seen an operations person in action known that if they don't have a sense of humor (like most jobs) that they are going to be miserable? I have learned to see the funny side of things anyway, but in the high-stress, real time life of an operations person, it's a requirement.

#### **5) Develop a thick skin**

Things that happen aren't (usually) personal, sometimes you have to take stress and customer abuse and get on with it, especially onsite. If you get upset by the hurly burly, operations is definitely not for you. But....if you can take it you are hugely valuable.

Identifying the type is easy, but finding the people (and keeping them) is certainly hard. In later columns, I will start to define how to keep key staff as you drive profit and growth, if you'd like to give me your two cents, please contact me.

Here's to a healthy, happy and profitable 2008!

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