



by MICHELE C. WIERZGAC

Building Business Acumen

Meeting and event planners need more than logistical know-how

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THROUGHOUT THE YEARS, HUNDREDS OF PROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE MEETINGS and events industry have dedicated countless hours in brainstorming sessions to justify their existence within their organizations. Even more hours have been spent on trying to market planners' value to the business community.

The opening question at these meetings remains the same: "How do planners demonstrate value to senior management?" As a result,

planners have begun to use statistics, lists of best practices, standardized job descriptions and skill sets, salary surveys, assessments, college courses, minimal research, textbooks, strategic meeting management systems, and basic return on investment (ROI) practices.

This is all great stuff, but what *really* matters to senior management? The boss dreams of every employee having business acumen.

Some say business acumen is knowing the difference between strategic and logistical decisions, while others profess it is a compilation of all of our education, skills and experience that transforms us into strategic partners within an organization.

Quite simply, building one's business acumen is having the intuition and understanding of how your company makes money. Without acuity, and organizations unable—or unwilling—to provide job security, planners are in danger of becoming irrelevant.

What Drives Profitability?

Typically, management is completely focused on results and performance.

In a manager's mind, planners execute the skills required for producing a meeting or special event, which is delivering a product or service to a particular market. Many times, management believes that these skills are not directly related to results and performance, and therefore can easily be outsourced.

Planners must focus their attention on linking their logistical know-how to profitability. Understanding the overall goals of the organization, the annual report and the financials are the first steps in knowing where the organization has been and where it is going. What are the priorities of the CEO and the shareholders? What are the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)? What is the brand statement? What are the most profitable products and/or services the organization produces? What is the current economy?

Do you know how to conduct a financial analysis? In preparing a budget for your department you will be measured against revenue, profit and loss, costs, fixed and variable expenses, net worth, and cash flow. How does your

department's budget fit into the overall vision of the organization? Do you know what other areas or individuals within the organization are involved in your portion of the budget? How much does your department contribute to the bottom line?

A thorough understanding of what drives profitability and the expectations of senior management will enable you to garner respect within the organization.

From Operational to Strategic

The difference between operational decisions and strategic decisions is to study meeting and event logic versus what drives results and performance for the organization.

The operational manager is a logistician, thinking about the checklist of things to complete in order to have a successful event. A strategic thinker asks the following questions: How does this event support the vision, mission and strategy for the organization? Does the event budget contribute to profitability? Does this particular event support a strategy within the business plan? Can this expenditure

be justified to the CEO and shareholders? What results does this particular event deliver to the organization?

Strategic thinkers have an orientation to the whole business picture, rather than focusing on just one part. Do you know how to map out the future of your department? Are you able to focus on building the future?

Contribute to the Marketing Plan

Management is keenly focused on the marketing plan. Marketing quite simply is the communication process for connecting customers to a product or service. Since organizations cannot effectively deliver to all markets, management spends countless hours in establishing strategies for positioning its product within the marketplace.

Answering the question “where are we now” is a situational analysis. Do you know what the current environment, geography, competitors, market potential, service differentiation, and SWOT analysis says for your organization? What are the market segments, target markets, market mixes, positioning approaches, and market objectives for your organization? Do you know how the organization plans to get there? Have you reviewed the marketing plan and activities? Are meetings and events listed as a major marketing activity to promote the products and services of the organization?

Strategic Communication Skills

Strategic communication is the art and

science of managing very focused messages and achieving goals, while simultaneously respecting the complexities of interacting with different audiences. The point of communicating strategically is turning situations into action. Strategic communication is about getting into the heads of your audience.

CEOs think about new ideas as how they relate to the current objectives of the organization. Does your idea support profitability and performance? Will the idea be supported by investors, board members and other executives within the organization? What value does your idea deliver to the organization? How quickly can it be implemented with little or no cost?

Does your idea address a current business issue? Does your idea support the customers? Is your idea impactful?

CEOs do not have enough time. They run from one meeting to the next, so if you can't describe your idea in 30 seconds or less, the CEO's eyes become glazed over, he or she becomes disinterested, and then almost always says “no.”

Being concise is a fundamental skill in getting your idea heard. 🌟

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