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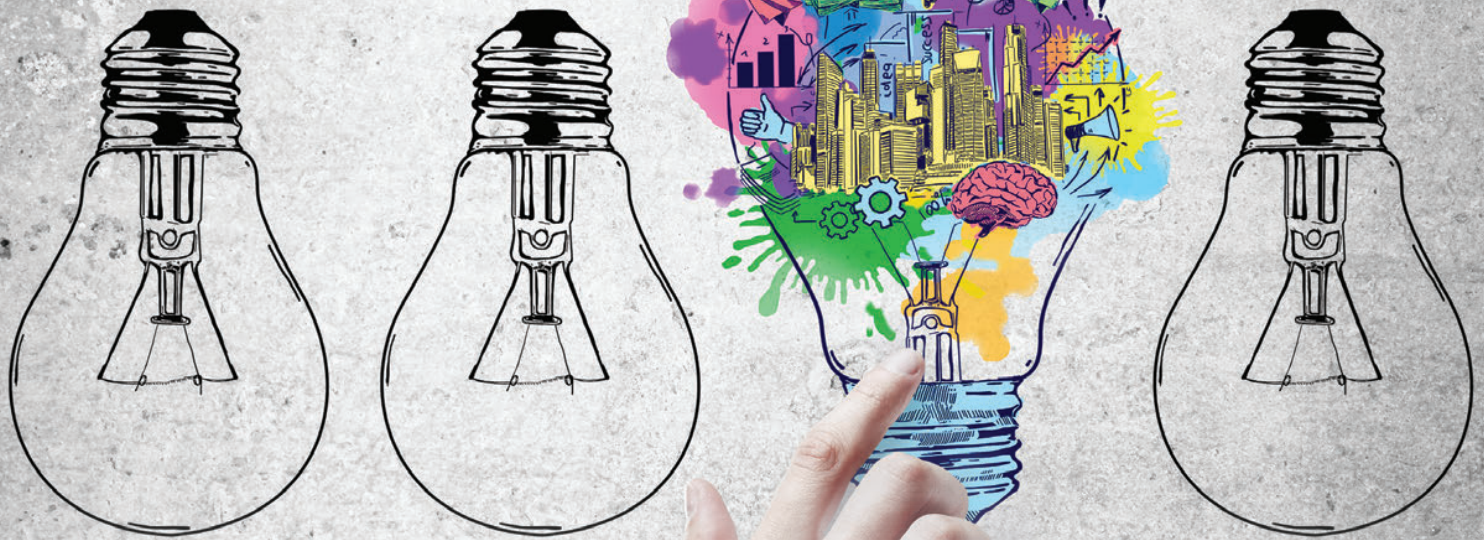
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Innovation is no longer the exception; it's the expectation.

Meeting and event pros discuss what's trending with audiences, how it's actionable and their plan for success in the new year.

BY BLAIR POTTER

Tell us about a meeting and event trend you expect to have a big impact in 2025.



One of the trends that's going to take off the most in 2025 is trying to find additional ways to ensure that the people at events are as actualized, engaged, happy, healthy and present as possible. We're going to see a lot more wellness, but without wellness washing—a lot more intentional, purposeful ways to ensure that people are at their best at events. That's going to impact event schedules and formats. Keynotes are going to get shorter, rooms are going to be set differently.

Devon Montgomery Pasha, CMP, CED
Chief Experience Officer
DMP Creative
MPI Texas Hill Country Chapter



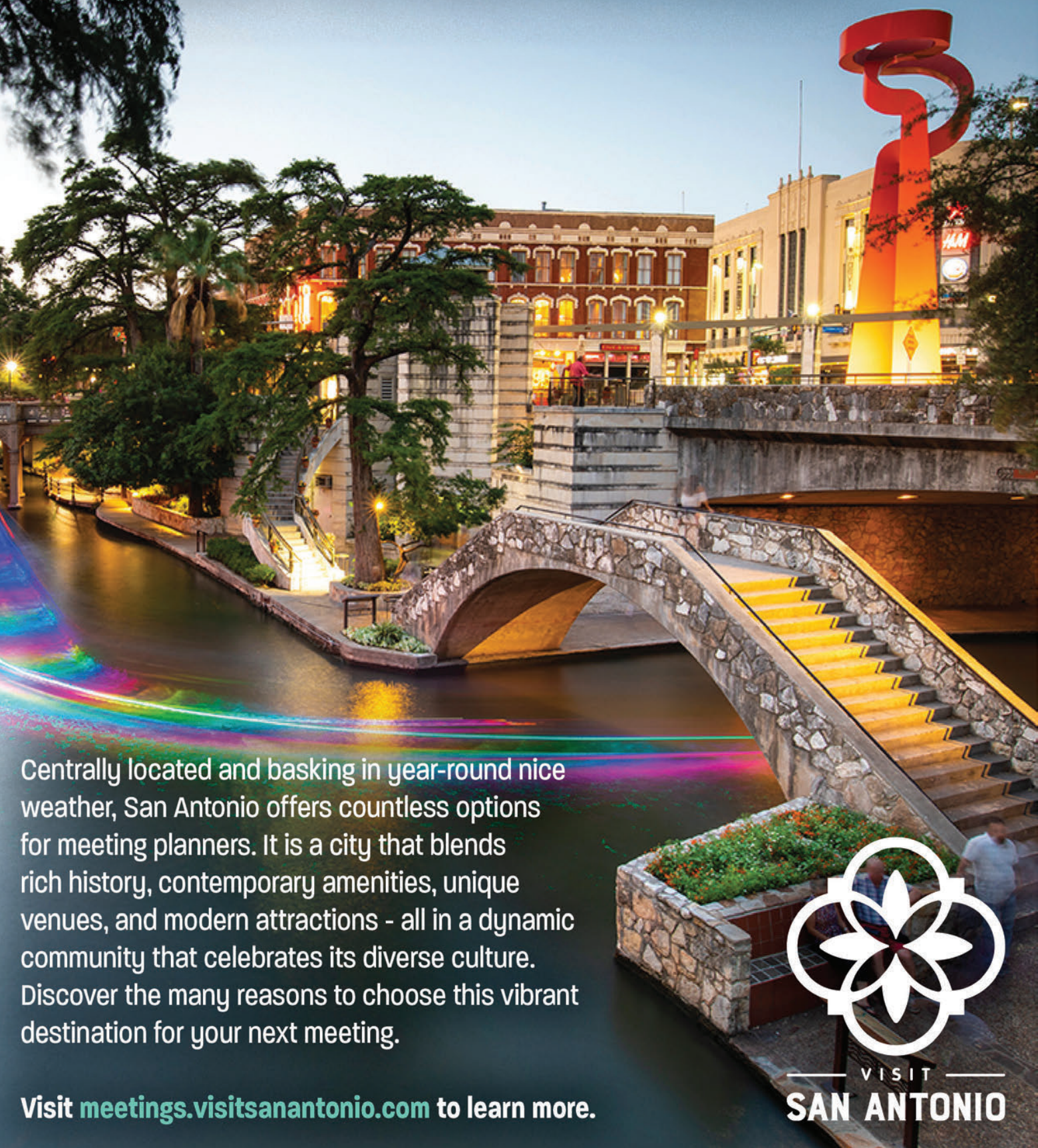
The meeting and event industry is increasingly prioritizing targeted, meaningful experiences, and in 2025, I believe the concept of menopause wellness retreats is set to make traction. Tailored specifically for professional women navigating menopause, these retreats offer an opportunity to address an underserved but crucial wellness need. Women experiencing menopause are seeking more than medical advice—they're also looking for wellness practices that align with their lifestyles.

Corrine Statia Thomas, CMP
Meetings & Events Strategist & Business Advisor
Absolute Events By Corrine LLC
MPI New Jersey Chapter

During MPI's [Event Wellness Design certificate course](#), we discuss the primary components of holistic attendee wellness and how you can apply event marketing and design principles to create a sense of safety, belonging and mental peace for your attendees.

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Continued from page 7

Premiumization/personalization is a major trend poised to shape meetings and events in 2025. This will be for the overall event itself, but I think it can have a significant impact on food and beverage experiences. From dietary needs to cultural preferences, attendees increasingly expect menus that reflect their individuality and values. This means more events will offer diverse, inclusive and sustainable F&B options that cater to a variety of tastes and requirements without sacrificing quality or creativity.



Tracy Stuckrath, CSEP, CMM, CHC

thrive! meetings & events
Eating at a Meeting podcast
MPI Carolinas Chapter

In a world that's more connected than ever—yet, at the same time, feels more disconnected than it has ever been—my mission for 2025 is to create opportunities for leaders to connect with one another through new experiential keynotes and human-centered workshops. My focus is on empowering people to deepen their relationships by developing the skills, knowledge and courage needed to share stories rooted in vulnerability and authenticity. By humanizing the people we work with through raw storytelling and deeper connections, we can transform how we interact and thrive together.



Courtney Stanley

Keynote Speaker & Leadership Coach
Host of the women-inspired podcast, #DareToInterrupt
MPI Michigan Chapter

In 2025, I see a growing trend toward events that prioritize immersive, multi-faceted experiences, where unique venues play a pivotal role. Our theaters are increasingly hosting events that seamlessly combine daytime corporate programs with live performances, reflecting a shift toward more immersive and meaningful experiences in distinctive spaces.



Robbert Weddepohl

Group Director Venues
Stage Entertainment B.V.
MPI International Board of Directors

I'm thrilled to say we are seeing higher budgets! This allows us to better meet the needs and goals of our clients and their constituents.



Tara Liaschenko, CMM, QAS

Creative Executive Officer
The Link Event Professionals
MPI Tampa Bay Area Chapter

On the December episode of MPI's EVEN-Talks podcast, Courtney Stanley and Amani Roberts discuss recent innovations in the event world and the developments and trends they're most looking out for in 2025.

We live in an increasingly competitive and technological world where innovation is no longer the exception but the norm. That said, our future events must really have something extra to offer a memorable experience for all stakeholders.



As event organizers we must strive to create experiences that are innovative but also inclusive and driven by sustainability practices. Cutting-edge technologies and above all artificial intelligence will help us personalize even more our events and create engagement throughout the entire life cycle of the event: pre-, during and post-event. Most companies have sustainability goals, as strategic consultants we will be able to spread their message right from the start.

The new trend for 2025 in my opinion will be to follow new paths: we will suggest a different destination, not just the big city because it is very well connected. We will choose a new location. We will discover how many unusual venues implement sustainability practices and offer innovative technologies. We will propose new catering choices, discovering local food resources and managing quantities and leftovers even better.

Luisa Blanco

Bid Office Manager
AIM Group Italy
MPI Italia Chapter

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What do you hope to accomplish through your events/projects in 2025?

My biggest hope for 2025 is that our events build real, true and authentic relationships. Whether it be the political environment, social divisions or even the focus on personal wellness, we are inundated with messages encouraging us to turn our focus inward. Even when these messages are well-intended, the results we observe are loneliness and isolation. Meetings and events are uniquely positioned to fulfill the fundamental, human need to be connected to and in relationship with others. My hope is that our 2025 events can focus on interpersonal health and wellness, offering opportunities to build strong communities that sustain us (and our world) for this year and many to come!



Molly C. Marsh, CMP

Director of Education and Events
AMR Management Services
MPI Kentucky Bluegrass Chapter

“MPI is a heart thing.” Understand the passion driving volunteer MPI chapter leadership with icons Steven G. Foster and Tara Liaschenko in The Meeting Professional magazine.

Provide engagement opportunities to change lives and build community through intentional “team-giving” activations by connecting good people with great causes to make a real difference where we live, work and meet. Bottom-line, the “juice” (outcome) is worth the “squeeze” (effort), and giving back makes good business sense.



Steven G. Foster, CMP

Managing Partner
Foster+Fathom LLC
MPI Dallas/Fort Worth Chapter

I’m doing a lot of work expanding my own understanding of how human beings engage, how we connect and how someone like me who’s a little bit more public facing, who does a little bit more speaking, can still connect with multiple people on that level to increase that sense of belonging. So a little bit more work into neuroscience, creativity and emotional psychology. The more we understand how people function, the better we’re able to design experiences that meet them where they are and elevate them to a transformed level.

Devon Montgomery Pasha, CMP, CED

Chief Experience Officer
DMP Creative
MPI Texas Hill Country Chapter

How are you personally preparing for your 2025 events/projects?

Now that in-person functions are in full swing again, we are going to see the return of greater inclusion of sustainability, CSR and DEI components with events. We will be staying on top of technology and AI as they are more thoroughly integrated in gatherings.

Tara Liaschenko, CMM, QAS

Creative Executive Officer
The Link Event Professionals
MPI Tampa Bay Area Chapter

I’m personally preparing for 2025 events and projects by reflecting intentionally on my capacity to support them first *before* I place them all on my annual calendar. By doing so, I can see where they all fall in the year. That is where it starts. Like every year, quality time with family and my personal self-care is a priority for me, so ensuring that I’m also accounting personal priorities is very important and will provide me with more balance as I work towards my professional goals.



Naomi Tucker, CMP

Event Consultant & High-Performance Coach
Planners on Purpose
MPI Wisconsin Chapter

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Now is absolutely the peak time for 2025 preparation. I'd say one method of preparation has been to stay on top of the trends through attending industry events, reading hospitality and event articles and connecting with customers in order to go into the new year informed and ready to react. Another really important aspect of preparation that I think we often forget about (and I'm a huge culprit of this) is taking time to rest and recharge. I'm carving out some time at the end of this year to do this so I can approach my events and projects as my best self, with a fresh mind.



Sarah Wexler, CMP

Director, Managed Americas Hotels & Resorts
Catering & Events
Hilton
MPI Gulf States Chapter

The increasingly common practice of incorporating the local destination into an experience's ethos accelerates into 2025 as meeting professionals give their spaces and places "main character energy" in the best of ways. Look for immersive experiences that draw on a destination's authenticity, culture, neighborhoods, diversity and history that feed participants' curiosity and craving for professional and personal development and build posteriori knowledge, which can only come from perceptual experience, peer learning and memories.



Jessie States, CMP, CMM

Vice President, MPI Academy
Meeting Professionals International

We host two flagship events here in Canada, GO WEST and the Western Sponsorship Congress.



Looking ahead to 2025, our primary focus is on promoting and enhancing connection. Our goals are:

- **Reinvigorate networking:** We aim to reignite the passion for networking by emphasizing the benefits of expanding one's professional circle. We are introducing sessions designed to facilitate meaningful interactions, encouraging attendees to step out of their comfort zones.
- **Create impactful experiences:** Our events will feature targeted networking opportunities, from speed net-

working sessions to themed discussion groups, their professional network.

- **Educate on the value of diverse connections:** Through keynote speeches, panel discussions and interactive sessions, we will highlight how a diverse network leads to innovation, resilience in business and access to new markets or ideas.
- **Leverage technology for enhanced engagement:** We recognize the role of technology and plan to integrate tech solutions that make networking more accessible and less intimidating.

By focusing on these areas, we intend not only to increase attendance but to enrich the quality of interactions at our events. We want participants to leave with not just new contacts but with a renewed appreciation for the power of networking in today's dynamic business landscape.

Brent Taylor, CMP, CMM

President
Timewise Event
MPI Greater Edmonton Chapter

Our event strategy is closely aligned with our corporate strategy and sets a clear direction for creating meaningful impact through our events—not only for the participants, but also for the planet and our organization at large. We want our events to contribute to more than just the bottom line; they should enhance our brand and public image as well.



A key goal is to foster an event culture within our organization. We want to ensure that our events are seen as a collective responsibility, not just the domain of the marketing or events teams.

When we have events, it's not just something that "the people in the events department" do (those who actually design and deliver the experience)—it's something all of our employees do. We are all hosts of the events our organization produces, and we have to act as such.

Through this approach, we hope to create a lasting impact both internally and externally, with every event reinforcing our mission and values.

Anne Dalgaard (EventAnne)

Manager, Strategic Events
The Danish Society of Engineers
MPI Scandinavia Chapter



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Reflections on the FUTURE OF MEETINGS

Let's embrace the changes before us with creativity, courage and a renewed commitment to the transformative power of meetings. Because when we meet, we truly can change the world.

BY ROBERT WEDDEPOHL

The world feels different now. The ripples of the pandemic still linger, wars rage on and polarizing debates dominate our news feeds. As I sit with these realities, I find myself reflecting on the role of meetings in this turbulent era. In my years in the meeting and event industry, I've always believed in the power of human connection, but today, that belief feels sharper, more urgent.

Meeting face-to-face, whether to resolve conflict, spark innovation or simply share a moment of understanding, is a fundamental human need. And yet, how we meet—where, when and why—has shifted dramatically. The challenges we face as an industry are profound, but they also present incredible opportunities to redefine what meetings can achieve.

THE NEW REALITY OF MEETINGS

Let's start with the obvious: the world has changed. COVID-19 reshaped our lives in ways we are still untangling, but it wasn't the only event to leave a mark. The ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have brought geopolitical instability to the forefront. Globalization, once a uniting force, now often feels like a battleground of ideologies.

These shifts are reflected in how we gather. According to the American Express Global Meetings and Events Forecast

2024, safety, sustainability and purpose are now central to event planning. These aren't just buzzwords—they're imperatives. Attendees expect planners to navigate these complexities, creating environments that are both secure and meaningful.

SAFETY: A GROWING CONCERN

Safety is no longer limited to fire drills and medical kits. The risks today are multifaceted. Physical security concerns have grown, particularly for international events. In a 2023 survey by Allianz Partners, over 72% of respondents cited safety and security as top concerns for corporate travel and events. Political tensions, cyber threats and even climate change have added layers of complexity to risk management.

Learn to plan for meeting and event risks with MPI's **Emergency Preparedness for Events** certificate course.

For meeting professionals, this means thinking holistically. It's not just about hiring security personnel; it's about ensuring cybersecurity for hybrid events, planning for evacuation scenarios and addressing attendee anxiety through transparent communication and visible measures.

THE SHIFT TOWARD HYBRID AND PURPOSEFUL GATHERINGS

One of the most profound changes has been the rise of hybrid and online meetings. Initially born out of necessity during the pandemic, these formats have become invaluable

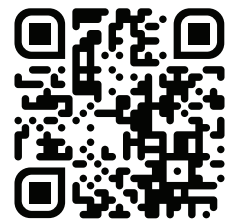


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able tools for smaller, agenda-focused gatherings. Yet, something curious has happened: when people do gather in person, the stakes are higher and the experiences are richer.

Data from Cvent's 2023 Event Trends Report reveals that 79% of event planners report increasing demand for immersive, multi-day events that include networking dinners, cultural experiences and wellness components. The trend is clear: when we meet in person, we want the experience to be transformative.

For example, at Stage Entertainment, our theaters and venues—designed to host world-class performances—have increasingly become sought-after spaces for corporate events. These venues offer more than just functionality; they provide inspiring environments where attendees can connect, celebrate and create lasting memories. The focus is no longer just on what happens in the meeting room but on the relationships and experiences cultivated beyond it.

POLARIZATION AND THE POWER OF CONNECTION

The world today feels more divided than ever. Social and political polarization has infiltrated workplaces, communities and even the meeting room. Research by Pew Research Center shows that polarization has deepened in almost every global region over the past decade. This is where the meeting industry has a unique role to play.

When people meet face-to-face, something profound happens: they begin to see each other as human first. It's hard to sustain animosity when you're sitting across from someone at a dinner table, sharing a laugh or working toward a common goal. Meetings provide a rare opportunity to foster empathy and understanding—a need that feels more urgent than ever.

At MPI, we often say, "Everything starts with a meeting." It's not just a slogan; it's a guiding principle. Whether negotiating peace, launching a groundbreaking innovation or simply connecting with a colleague, the act of meeting is where transformation begins.

SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSIVITY: THE NEXT FRONTIERS

As we redefine the purpose of meetings, sustainability and inclusivity must take center stage. The 2023 Sustainable Event Trends Report highlights that over 68% of attendees now expect events to prioritize eco-friendly practices, from

reducing waste to minimizing travel footprints. Inclusivity, too, is more than a moral imperative—it's a business necessity. Research from McKinsey & Company shows that diverse teams are 35% more likely to outperform their peers. The events we design must reflect the world we aspire to: inclusive, equitable and representative of all voices.

MPI: LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

As a member of MPI's International Board of Directors, I have seen firsthand how this community rises to meet the challenges of our time. MPI offers more than just resources; it provides a space for meeting professionals to collaborate, share knowledge and innovate.

The MPI Academy, for instance, has been instrumental in equipping professionals with the tools to navigate hybrid events, implement cutting-edge safety measures and design programs that resonate with modern audiences. The organization's global network fosters collaboration that transcends borders—exactly what the world needs now.

Get skilled on the important issues of sustainability and inclusivity with a selection of MPI certificate courses, including **Sustainable Event Strategist**, **Event Welfare Champion**: Neurodiversity & Experience **Design and Inclusive Event Strategist**.

LOOKING AHEAD: A CALL TO ACTION

As we step into this new era, we must rethink not just the mechanics of meetings but their purpose. How can we use meetings to heal divisions, inspire action and drive progress?

This is a challenge, yes, but also an incredible opportunity. When we meet, we don't just exchange business cards or close deals—we connect as human beings. And in a world that often feels fractured, those moments of connection are more important than ever.

At Stage Entertainment, we have seen firsthand how spaces designed for storytelling and emotion can elevate these connections. Whether it's a corporate gathering or an industry-wide conference, the environment matters. Spaces with soul create moments with impact.

Robbert Weddepohl is group venue director for Stage Entertainment B.V., a member of the MPI International Board of Directors and board liaison for MPI's Sustainability Advisory Council.

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BURNOUT BUSTERS

Remember, just like the airplane oxygen mask rule, you need to take care of yourself first. If you're exhausted, your performance suffers.

BY AMANDA GORE

Who's the most valuable but under-recognized person at an event?

That's right—it's you! The meeting planner who's worked tirelessly for a year to ensure everything is perfect for the organization, attendees and leadership. While things go smoothly, you remain invisible. But when there's a tiny glitch, you become the target for blame.

As a keynote speaker for 35 years, I've seen this often. Calm, organized professionals deal with odd questions, difficult people and last-minute crises with grace. Oh, and no sleep for a week or two. The perfect recipe for burnout!

Here's the 6B Burnout Buster List. These quick, powerful tips can help.

1. **Be present.** Bringing past fears or future worries into the present invites stress. By taking two deep breaths, you reset your nervous system and ground yourself in the moment. It sounds simple, but it works—and no one will even notice!
2. **Be aware of your needs.** Recognize when you need

a break and give yourself permission to take it. Step away, grab a healthy drink or find a quiet space to breathe. Short, regular breaks can improve your productivity and energy, helping you avoid exhaustion by the event's end.

3. **Be kind to yourself.** If something goes wrong, like AV issues you can't control, remember to be kind. Don't take on responsibility for problems caused by others. Keep breath-ing and remind

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and event wellness
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yourself that you are doing everything possible.

4. **Be grateful on purpose.** Gratitude resets your body and can shift your perspective. Expressing thanks to others can improve the event's working culture. Before bed, write down three things you're grateful for—it really works. This prac-

tice helps calm your mind and prevents anxiety from spiraling.

5. **Be in your heart.** The heart is a powerful organ that generates a magnetic field, influencing those around you. Focusing on love and joy calms both you and others, making interactions smoother and more positive. Your energy affects everyone, so center yourself in the loving energy of your heart.
6. **Be a good finder.** If you're dreading interaction with a difficult person, try to find one good thing about them. Your non-verbal communication has a huge impact—focusing on something positive can shift the energy between you. It's amazing how relationships can change with this simple shift in perspective.

Practice the 6Bs and give yourself permission to prioritize your well-being. Let me know how they work for you!

Amanda Gore is an award-winning hall of fame speaker who creates experiences that change events, cultures and people. She can be reached at amanda@amandagore.com or www.amandagore.com.



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Essential AI Skills FOR MEETING PROS

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

Earlier this year, MPI's EVENTalks podcast welcomed three event professionals who are big proponents of artificial intelligence (AI) and how the technology can benefit the industry and their peers. To hear the entire conversation, subscribe to EVENTalks on your podcast platform of choice or visit www.mpi.org/eventalks. The following is an excerpt from that AI conversation.

What's holding event professionals back from utilizing tools and how can they get started?

Sam Stanton, founder/creator, RED-BUTTON.AI:

It's just a start and try, that's the hardest thing. And that's the thing that AI does so much of. It takes that first step for you and gets you 90% of the way. But the stumbling or the hesitancy is [the thought that], "I don't have 30 minutes...to learn about all this AI stuff." It's really hard to get people to just stomp down and do it. You have to just play with the stuff—will it write an email? Will it make an agenda? Will it write a description? It may not [help you] and it may, but you don't know until you try.



Paul Klopfer, VP of sales, Reposite, and an instructor of MPI's AI-Enhanced Event Professional certificate course:

I recommend just having tabs up [for AI tools]. Instead of you taking the first step to dive in and do what you'd normally do, just pop open [one of those tabs], see if you like what it gives you with one or two prompts—you'll only spend like four minutes—and, if it didn't work out, go back to how you were going to do it, but at least see if it'll help save a bunch of time and get you closer to where you want to be.



Stanton: This [panel] is a good group of people. You hear so many people talk about being experts in AI; there are no experts in AI—it's only been out for a few years, so shut up. But to Paul's point, for the first couple of weeks, you just need to think, "Huh, I normally do something this way, but what if I do it [with AI]?" A pro tip: Copy your prompts into a [document] so you don't have to reinvent the wheel every time [and can learn which prompts work best to get the output you're seeking].

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Erin Leonard, founder and CEO, Erin Leonard Events:

I find another stumbling block, a really common one, is people not liking the first answer AI gives them, so they walk away. It's like, that's the muscle, that's the skill. [The skill is] not the first prompt, it's the refinement of the prompt. It harkens back to project management and communications best practices: Who is the audience? What's the goal? What's the context? You have to feed [AI] that information in order to get what you're looking for. And give it feedback; tell it, "That's not what I'm looking for, try it again or try it differently, here's how."



Stanton: You've got to get people to take off the Google glasses. You have to encourage people to [understand that your first prompt] is the start of a conversation with someone who won't get upset if you ask it to try again, make it easier for you to understand or to put it in business terms [to, for instance, share with your boss]. That's key: It is a conversation and [more people need] to start talking to the AI—you can talk faster than you can type.

"I find another stumbling block, a really common one, is people not liking the first answer AI gives them, so they walk away."

Michael Pinchera, MPI managing editor and host of EVENTalks:

You all explained exactly what I experienced when I first tried AI. My initial response was, "This is garbage." But playing around with AI image-creation tool Midjourney really taught me how you have to drill down. You input the prompt and it gives you a variety of images. That's only the starting point because you then need to select one of those first-draft images and give it further guidance to refine—make it more like this, increase resolution, etc.—and get the result you want. Midjourney was more impactful for my brain to realize there are multiple steps if you're looking for a more-finished product.

What about prime use cases? What ways can AI help meeting and event professionals right now?

Leonard: So many ways! With writing, I find that if I want it to write for me, it's going to sound a little robotic, not great. But if I provide it with something I've written and share more about what I'm looking for, it can make something better than what I've written. I'm finding it very useful with survey results and data analysis. I recently fed it information about registrations and said, "Based on our past registration data and current registrations, how many people can we expect to be at this event?" because I needed to plan how many seats to have at breakouts. I've asked [AI] what kind of topics it thinks [the audience] would be interested in, based on their job titles and organizations—of course [for privacy reasons,] I removed their names and email addresses. With what I got back, I was able to go to a client meet-

ing and say, "We're projecting to have record high registration, and I think we need bigger rooms." I'm using it in so many ways: Session descriptions, bios, consistency.

Klopfer: One big way we use it internally is for a lot of marketing applications. Creating logos or themes for internal events—DALL-E does a great job for logo creation if you're not a graphic designer. It's also helpful for social media posts pre- and post-event. We don't always use exactly what it comes up with, but as Sam said earlier, it gets you 90% of the way there. It puts together photo collages for us and helps with creating registration landing pages, as well. Even with email copy for the event invites that go out, it helps write those.

Stanton: Everyone thinks of generative AI as it's generating content, but, like Erin said, the analysis and summary and insight it does is amazing. It can help understand your audience using design thinking, what the presentations should be... It does all the stuff that you always wanted to do and intended to do but never had the time or the resources to do.

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Trip/Life Balance

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

Meeting pros are traveling more, trips are longer and satisfaction isn't what it used to be.

Change isn't new to the travel landscape. Technological innovation, generational preferences, governmental regulations or myriad other causes constantly keep travelers and travel workers alike on their toes.

However, the industry has been challenged with extremes in the past few years as both leisure and business travelers bounced back from pandemic-induced wanderlust, seemingly pushing the capacity of air travel to its limits—and challenging event professionals' already-pressed work-life balance.

But to what extent have travel habits and preferences changed within the meeting professional community since 2019? MPI's Q3 2024 Meetings Outlook survey had some interesting responses.

APPETITE IS UP; SATISFACTION IS DOWN

Most significantly, 45% of respondents have more of a desire to travel now than five years ago, while only 13% of respondents have less of a desire to travel.

Seemingly, meeting and event professionals are fulfilling that desire to travel as nearly half (46%) of respondents report traveling more than they were immediately prior to the pandemic. Not surprisingly, 42% of respondents are spending more days “on the road” than in 2019.

Notably, 42% of respondents are embracing the “bleisure” trend by adding leisure time before or after their business responsibilities. Only 13% of respondents cite less pairing of business and leisure travel.

Subjectively, the worst-performing categories included

in the survey were satisfaction with the overall travel experience and the availability of direct flights or routes. While approximately half of respondents noted no change for those two aspects of travel, they were twice as likely to report being less satisfied than more satisfied with the modern travel experience. That ratio was similar for availability of direct flights, with nearly twice as many respondents noting less availability, compared to those encountering greater direct flight options.

For many of these aspects of business travel, habit changes are fairly consistent between planners and suppliers. For instance, 46% of planners and 47% of suppliers are taking more business trips now, compared to 2019. There are, however, a few exceptions where the shifts are notably different between planners and suppliers.

- Planners are 400% more likely to report an increase, rather than a decrease, in the average distance they travel. Suppliers, on the other hand, are only 37% more likely to report an increase, rather than a decrease, in the average distance they travel.
- A greater percentage of planners report an increase in bringing along a spouse or family member during business trips. Responding planners are 25% more likely than suppliers to frequently have family along for the ride.
- While the percentage of planners and suppliers reporting a greater satisfaction with the overall travel experience is minimal (16% and 17%, respectively), suppliers are more likely to cite an increased desire to



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How is business travel different for you today compared to 2019?

	MORE	LESS	NO CHANGE
NUMBER OF TRIPS	46%	27%	26%
DESIRE TO TRAVEL	45%	13%	42%
ADDING LEISURE TIME BEFORE OR AFTER BUSINESS DUTIES	42%	13%	45%
NUMBER OF DAYS ON THE ROAD ANNUALLY	42%	30%	28%
AVG. DISTANCE TRAVELED	37%	16%	47%
ACCOMPANIED BY SPOUSE OR FAMILY	28%	13%	58%
AVG. DURATION OF EACH TRIP	22%	19%	59%
AVAILABILITY OF DIRECT FLIGHTS OR ROUTES	18%	32%	49%
SATISFACTION WITH THE OVERALL TRAVEL EXPERIENCE	16%	33%	51%

travel (52%, compared to 40% with planners).

Respondents who reported taking more business trips commonly explained the reasoning as due to more or different business that simply requires that travel. But what of those event professionals traveling less?

Lindsay Grosz, CMP, president of Lindsay Grosz Events, reported taking fewer business trips with an average shorter duration and a shorter distance than five years ago. The changed travel habits of some of her clients are a significant cause for the shift in her own travel habits.

"I do notice more conservative approaches from many of my clients regarding the 'need' to travel," Grosz says. "As I mainly work within the incentive industry, I've found that multiple clubs have been consolidated into one, therefore not having as many trips compared to 2019."

But her own personal goals play an important role in how her travel habits have changed.

"I'm trying to find a healthy balance between work/family life," she says. "I can't help but experience 'mom guilt' when I'm on a work trip and am away from my son and husband for longer periods of time. So, I'll do anything

to shorten the travel and cram in more meetings within a day, take a red eye, etc., so I can get back home."

One way in which she's been able to spend quality time with family within the context of her business travel schedule has been by adding leisure time before or after business duties while afar.

"Personally, I think 'bleisure' is a way meeting planners find balance," she says. "I like having my family see the destinations I get to experience and creating new memories with them while also encouraging their love to travel. However, this has always been important to me—that mentality hasn't changed much since 2019."

She's also seeing more incentive and conference attendees leverage this opportunity, whether that's bringing family along for the programmed dates or extending their time for some true leisure while they're already at a new destination.

"Professionally, I love seeing attendees experience the destinations I've selected for their trips and extending their time to explore further," she says. "When they look back at their time in the destination, they are considering the trip as a whole and not just the business portion, which, in turn, leads to a stronger ROI for my clients."

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Quality and Intentionality

Food and beverage experts from Hilton and Hyatt discuss the aspects of F&B that you absolutely must get right.

BY BLAIR POTTER



In the ever-evolving world of hotel dining, there's a keyword emerging: specificity. Diners often want locally produced food, and also want to know exactly what they're eating. In response, hotels are providing a lot of detail in the interest of transparency and ensuring the best decisions can be made.

One example: the previously humble turkey sandwich. Sarah Wexler, CMP, director, catering and events, Managed Americas Hotels and Resorts for Hilton, says diners are now being told, for example, that their turkey sandwich is on multigrain bread with garlic herb aioli butter; lettuce and an heirloom tomato.

"We're being very intentional with our menus and everything that we're listing," she says. "We're also talking about if something is locally sourced, where available, and including dietary labeling. People are really rethinking how they are putting together menus, and making sure that dietary restrictions, allergies and lifestyle are being taken into account with every meal. We've seen a much bigger interest in plant-based menus, which have come so far in the past few years, or protein-forward breaks when plant-based isn't at play."

PLANNER-FRIENDLY INNOVATIONS

Staying abreast of the latest F&B is critically important for hotels.

For the past 20 years, Steve Enselein has created an annual training video that showcases emerging food, beverage and décor trends for all Hyatt event managers, featuring extensive research and input from food suppliers, restaurateurs and Hyatt's chefs and culinary teams from across the globe.

"We also have an events intranet called Eventbzz," says Enselein, senior vice president of events for Hyatt. "Our events managers, chefs and banquet team post pictures of great events as inspiration to others. People can also ask for help and crowdsource answers from all of our hotels."

Hilton has updated the way it labels dishes in order to ensure dietary needs are met.

"We encourage our teams to say, 'Does not contain gluten' instead of saying 'gluten free,' because 'gluten free' could indicate that it was created in a gluten-free environment versus it just doesn't contain gluten in the dish," Wexler says. "So, if you truly can't come into contact with an ingredient, we're not saying that it's completely free of that ingredient."

INCLUSIVITY, BETTER ATTENDEE EXPERIENCES

When the Hilton San Francisco Union Square hosted the President's Dinner during MPI's 2022 World Education Congress in San Francisco, the entire menu was plant based, incorporating elements of nature into the aesthetics and ingredients of the meal, as well as the décor.



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“The President’s Dinner may have been ahead of the trend, but it was an early insight into how you can make something that used to be seen as unexciting into a gorgeous culinary display,” Wexler says.

Enselein says quality over quantity is the order of the day with hotel F&B.

“Chefs and planners are trying to make sure the experience is good for the attendees and are focused on delivering the highest quality possible,” he says, noting that buffets offer fewer items but increased quality.

“Instead of three proteins on a buffet, we have moved to two proteins and increased vegetarian offerings,” Enselein says. “We have reduced the number of bread products in the morning. Instead of four to five dessert offerings, there are two or three really good ones.”

Part of the F&B wellness trend involves diners who are “sober-curious,” according to Wexler.

“As we see the percentages rise in the number of people choosing not to drink alcohol, or lessen their alcohol consumption, we’ve seen a much bigger focus on creating experiential beverage offerings that don’t necessarily involve liquor,” she says. “This can range from coffee setups—exploring different coffee services from around the world—to unique tea service. I’m seeing more receptions have mocktail bars as the default, with ideal alcohol pairings offered. Setting it up this way helps attendees who are abstaining from alcohol feel included and less awkward about having to ask for an alcohol-free alternative—while still getting the full mixology experience.”

Wexler says the company sends surveys to different groups of planners in order to elicit feedback, and also utilizes representatives on the MPI International Board of Directors, Global Board of Trustees and chapter boards of directors who “make sure we are attending different industry events and learning from our partners at MPI.”

“We also ensure we host several customer events

throughout the year where we can talk to planners and guests from all different market segments from across the globe to hear directly from them on what they are looking for,” she says.

MANAGING FOOD WASTE

Enselein says employing a “menu-of-the-day” strategy helps Hyatt more effectively manage food waste.

“Instead of each group picking its own buffet for breakfast and lunch, our chefs have created a menu of the day that consists of breakfasts, breaks and lunch,” he says.

“These menus have been crafted to have the right blend

of food items that will make sure attendees are well cared for and have options and cover the main dietary requirements. With all the groups enjoying the same menu items, chefs can put less product out because they know they have back-up product they can bring out if any items run low for one of the groups.”

Hyatt’s overall food philosophy is called “Food. Thoughtfully Sourced. Carefully Served.”

“It is built on three key pillars: healthy people, healthy planet and healthy communities,” Enselein

says. “Our chefs are educated and encouraged to consider sustainability and food waste as part of this.”

Hilton’s commitment to sustainability is filtered through its Travel with Purpose strategy (which includes Meet with Purpose), helping to address environmental, social and governance (ESG) efforts.

“We have sustainability experts that hold regular trainings and office hours to ensure our team members are educated on how they can create sustainable events,” Wexler says. “Last year, we launched a meeting planner checklist that provides our planners with a full array of ideas on how they can weave sustainability throughout the whole meeting, with a section dedicated to F&B. Some of the things we implement are sourcing from local vendors, putting forth efforts to reduce food waste and partnering with local food donation agencies when there is a surplus, along with composting where available.”

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The Epic Cost of Event Registration

Event registration costs are on the rise, demanding attendees' wallets open wider—sometimes preventing them from opening at all.

BY ELAINE POFELDT AND MICHAEL PINCHERA

According to the results of MPI's Q3 2024 Meetings Outlook survey, 71% of respondents increased registration costs for their in-person events during the past two years. At the same time, 78% of respondents have either reduced or left unchanged registration fees for virtual events.

The result? Price sensitivity with some attendees increasingly shying away from paying premium ticket prices.

"People do not have the money to spend \$1,200 on a conference ticket," said Sarah Hatter, founder of ElevateCX, a community for customer-experience leaders, and community manager for Rebuy Haven, a personalization engine for Shopify stores, which hosts many smaller events. "I think the sweet spot is between \$350 and \$600. [For] anything over that number, people are going to hesitate. They'll want to know what is included, what the schedule is, what the

program is. If it's priced more moderately—in the \$400 range—organizers can get away with not announcing speakers until a month ahead of time."

One relevant factor is that employers are being more circumspect with the budgets they use to pay for attendance at conferences and events for their teams, according to Hatter.

"Companies are a little more cautious with their budgets," she said. "If employees are attending in a workplace capacity, their bosses want to know what they're spending the money on, who will be there, how they will make money from this and whom they will meet."

Numerous Meetings Outlook respondents around the world also cited the growing cost to attend an event as a point of contention within their attendee base.

Jennifer Lucio Vargas, CMP, president and CEO of 305 Communications and

"If employees are attending in a workplace capacity, their bosses want to know what they're spending the money on."



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Events, explained how some of her clients are adjusting.

“More than ever, [they’re] looking to cut costs and save money on their side while increasing registration costs,” she said, indicating a minimal increase of 5% or less.

That cost cutting can, however, make it more difficult—especially in the current landscape—to find and book venues that fit her clients’ budgets, she added.

A Canadian planner who requested anonymity and has increased registration fees “a small percentage”—less than 5%—noted that, in addition, they’re increasing sponsorships in order to try and mitigate the impact of “costs that have been trending [up] for a while.”

Accra, Ghana-based Luc Bodea, CMP, coordinator of the permanent secretariat of the Society for AIDS in Africa and director of the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa, stated in his survey comments, “Most of [our] participants complain about the cost of attending an event,” when identifying the most significant trends impacting his events. Yet rather than increase regis-

tration fees, his team is developing new marketing tools with the intended goal of expanding their scope as well as their target audience.

One U.S.-based planner who requested anonymity said they’ve decided not to pass the buck. Despite rising hotel, F&B and AV costs, they said, “We are keeping our registration the same and eating the difference.”

Ultimately, while events are about human connection, they’re also about business—and the organizers who can demonstrate a positive ROI in a challenging marketplace will be the winners.

More holistically and with the big picture in mind, one U.S.-based planner who requested anonymity explained, “Everything is more expensive at every step, [so] we’ve redeveloped our strategy to be more laser focused on our goals and priorities so that our ROI is commensurate with costs.”

While the methods being undertaken by event professionals may vary, a strategic mindset with a flexible team is your best bet to be set up for success throughout current and future economic challenges.

“Everything is more expensive at every step, [so] we’ve redeveloped our strategy to be more laser focused on our goals and priorities.”

How, if at all, have registration fees for your in-person events changed in the past two years?

11% Increased more than 15%

32% Increased 6%-15%

28% Increased 5% or less

20% No change

3% Decreased

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ARE YOU READY

Preparing for the unexpected: 7 steps

With all the uncertainties in today's world, it's not a matter of "if" but "when" the next crisis will occur.

BY ERIC ROZENBERG

As an event business owner, how can you prepare yourself, your team and your clients for the unexpected? Here are my seven recommended steps.

1. List potential risks and responses

Start by brainstorming "everything that could go wrong." Outline your responses, identify the people who need to be involved and consider all possible options. Don't hold back—even "paranoid" ideas are worth exploring.

2. Partner with your venue and security experts

Most hotels and venues have a dedicated security team. Partner with them to tour the site, understand entry and exit points, review protocols and learn about their resources. If necessary, hire additional private security and ensure clear communication about roles and responsibilities.

3. Establish a crisis response and communication team

Planning must happen before a crisis.

Define in advance your team's response roles, actions and communication pathways. Have a communication team in place to control the flow of information, decide who needs to be informed, authorize messaging and act as the voice of the response.

4. Implement health and safety protocols

You want to make sure that you have people on staff that know how to administer CPR or how to stop bleeding and apply a tourniquet. Ideally, you should also have performed "active shooter/knife attack training." Also make sure the venue has undergone the safety and security training provided by the International Association of Venue Managers (IAVM).

5. Review legal responsibilities and secure insurance

While priority No. 1 should be the safety and security of your teams and attendees, as an event business owner, you need to secure in advance the appropriate insurances and be very aware and clear about your legal responsibilities.

6. Stay calm

Whatever happens, don't panic. Clients rely on your expertise, including your ability to think clearly under pressure. Remember, your attitude will influence their response as well as that of their team and attendees.

7. Debrief: What worked, what didn't and lessons learned

In 20 years of organizing corporate events across 50+ countries, no project has ever gone exactly as planned. After each event, it's essential to sit down with the team to review what worked, what didn't and lessons learned.

Stay safe and carpe diem!

Eric Rozenberg, CMM, CMP, is an entrepreneur, author and host of The Business of Meetings podcast. His purpose is to inspire people with integrity and honesty, help them take action, get results and develop their business and their life.

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