Ten Tips for Convention Hosts

by Robbie Samuels, Professional Speaker | Podcast Host | Coach

The responsibility of hosting extends beyond the event team. Share these tips with board members, exhibitors, speakers, and long-time participants. Encourage them to have a host mentality and help co-create an exceptional experience for all participants.

1) Make EVERYONE Feel Welcomed

If the effort to welcome was as great as the effort to invite, then retention would become less of an issue. Reach out to the folks standing off by themselves. Introduce yourself to participants while standing in line at the buffet. And, if first timers and solo participants are easy to identify, go out of your way to say hello.

2) Arrive Early

First timers tend to arrive early and since they don't know anyone they stand around awkwardly. By arriving early on the first day of the convention, you can be by the coffee to say hello. Or stand at an empty cocktail table and wave over folks that seem to be looking for a place to stand with their coffee and muffin. You will have time later in the day to catch up with old friends. For the first 30 minutes, be a host; focus on greeting participants you don't already know.

3) Look for Wallflowers

Another part of having a host mentality is to notice that some people seem to not be mingling – they are standing off to the side of the room. As a host, you know many people in the room. So you have the ability to go speak to these physical outliers and then introduce them to someone else in the room. This will bring these folks into the space and help them feel connected.

4) Open Body Language (Croissants vs. Bagels)

Avoid standing in a closed and difficult to break into huddle (aka bagel) unless you absolutely don't want anyone to interrupt your conversation. Even if you are standing with just one other person you can create a croissant, an opening for others to join you. Being approachable will make it easy for you to invite anyone passing by to join your conversation (and it's easier to leave a conversation when in a group).

This is not a wide stance. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, one leg back a bit, with weight on your back leg, torso

turned slightly toward whichever foot is in back – either towards two o'clock or ten o'clock.

5) Avoid Curious Questions

Before uttering the first thought that comes into your head when meeting someone, check first to be sure you're not asking merely out of curiosity. That usually means you've noticed something different about the person in front of you and you're about to hone in on that difference by asking about it. Since that likely happens to this person all day, every day, they'll give you a pat answer that likely won't lead to further discussion. You won't make a great or long-lasting impression and you'll miss the opportunity to really engage with them. A true compliment is about something they chose (jewelry, scarf, tie), not who they are (skin color, hair texture, height).

6) Be Intentional About Connections

You will want to set personal goals for how many people you want to meet and how many you want to reconnect with. Some people are more introverted, so having goals helps them keep mingling even though they find being around lots of people physically draining. I've actually found that shy people and introverts appreciate having a "host" role as it gives them a purpose in the room and helps them be more present and engaged. People who are usually wallflowers know all too well what it feels like to be on the outside looking in and when given the role of welcoming others really rise to the challenge.

7) Draft Follow-up Email Ahead of Time

There is a difference between collecting business cards and building relationships. One tip to get you focused on the business possibilities at an event is to write a draft of your follow-up email ahead of time. Doing this will help you get clear on who you'd ideally meet, what you'd want to them to know about you, and how you'd like to stay in touch.

8) Set Host Goals

As you begin to take on the identity of a host, you may have some goals specifically around being a host at this year's convention. You may decide to make an effort to arrive early the first day and meet 3 new people during breakfast or start an empty table at lunch and wave over people you don't know who are looking for a place to sit.

9) Encourage Leadership

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Invite others to take on leadership, by asking them to welcome those that sit near them in the room. It's a funny thing, but when I tell someone they are now the host of their corner of the room and give them something specific to say to the folks who sit near them, they take to that role with a sense of purpose.

You can encourage this type of leadership by arriving early to breakout sessions and making this an explicit request as people come into the room and gravitate to a space away from everyone else that arrived early.

10) Foster an Inclusive Convention Culture

Weave the ethos of inclusive and effective connections into all aspects of the convention. Remind everyone that the power and value of conventions is that they convene people. Encourage participants to take advantage of the possibilities of being in a room with so many like-minded colleagues.

Event Ethos:
Here with colleagues? Go mingle.
Here alone? Don't stay that way.

BONUS 11) Don't Forget Your Business Cards!

Robbie Samuels has been recognized as a "networking expert" by *Inc.* and *Lifehacker*, and is the author of the best-selling business book *Croissants vs. Bagels: Strategic, Effective, and Inclusive Networking at Conferences*. A professional member of the National Speakers Association, he has been speaking on the topic of inclusive and engaging connections for over a decade. As a consultant, coach, author, and speaker he shares how to shift your mindset around relationship building, so you discover new connections and business opportunities in the world around you – and know how to act on them. Listen to his On the Schmooze podcast for more tips from Robbie on how to create great experiences and interviews with talented leaders: www.OntheSchmooze.com. Learn more about Robbie and his work at www.RobbieSamuels.com.

Want content you can share with participants? Download "Ten Tips for Conference Connections" at www.RobbieSamuels.com/MPI.

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