

## **The Art of Being Virtually Prepared – February 2021**

### **By Lauren Schaal, CMP**

As an event planner, you're (probably) used to planning in-person events – and everything that comes along with that from sleeping rooms and meeting space to food and beverage, transportation and activities. You're also (probably) used to the long days and short nights onsite, working long hours before the program operates to ensure everything is covered and prepared to expect the unexpected.

I say probably because before 2020, my guess is most of you only worked on in-person meetings – I know I did. With the onset of COVID, our industry has had to pivot hard and fast to ensure meetings and events continue in a virtual setting. While we've all become Zoom/Teams/insert-virtual-platform-here experts in a matter of months, we've also learned that virtual meeting exhaustion is real. Here are a few tips from our friends at Successful Meetings on how to avoid burnout when planning a virtual meeting.

#### **Accept Things Will Go Wrong**

Planners in general are very detail-oriented; some might say “type A” personalities. With that means our default setting is to micromanage and put pressure on ourselves to run the perfect event. When you're hosting meetings of any scale, especially in today's virtual world, there are some things that are out of your control. From tech issues on other people's devices to speakers showing up late, you can't be everywhere at once to solve these problems.

From the beginning, promote a mindset that allows for flexibility and adaptability. Once you embrace the fact that things will go wrong, you'll be empowered to go with the flow, and fix what you can and accept what you can't. The event will still be a success, without the impact on your emotional wellbeing.

#### **Run Through the Meeting as an Attendee**

If you're just looking at the meeting from the host's perspective, you might miss something. Doing a dry run as a participant is important for two reasons. First, it can amplify any problems your attendees might run into — things you might have missed when building the event. Second, most importantly for combating burnout, it gives you a chance to explore the virtual world you've built. This switch in perspectives can be refreshing and help re-energize the planning process.

#### **Take Scheduling Seriously**

Back in the good old days of in-person events, being onsite in different locations helped you to change tasks quickly and efficient. Whether it was stuffing welcome bags in your office or setting up flipcharts in your meeting space, you were able to switch focus to whichever task was next. In the virtual world while working from home, you need to find a way to replicate these markers without the help of physical boundaries.

This is where scheduling comes in. Build a schedule and stick to it – include time for lunch, breaks and meetings throughout the day. This way, your brain can focus on important tasks of the moment and help alleviate fatigue.

#### **Set Boundaries**

Burnout is becoming increasingly common as we blur the lines between work and life – especially with everyone working, playing and schooling from home. Again, as planners, we're conditioned to “make it work”, regardless of how it happens. This often means giving out cell phone numbers or answering emails 24/7. These behaviors aren't going to change overnight, but if you set a small boundary, for instance, only answering emails during business hours or shutting off your phone after work, you'll be less stressed at the end of the day.

#### **Delegate, Delegate, DELEGATE!**

No matter how much we want to resist it, we all could use a little help sometimes. To be an effective leader, you have to know how and when to delegate. It's not easy. I know you want to do it all – I do too, but with a team, you can get more done in a shorter period of time and your emotional well-being will still be intact.

Have a meeting early on in the planning process to figure out who on your team is best suited to tackle different parts. Learn to let go so your workload is more manageable and more enjoyable. And with the added help of a team, you'll get more ideas and creativity to create the best virtual event you can.