



THE MPISCC NEWSLETTER

Scoop.

AUG '26

This issue
of **Scoop** is
about *what*
moves things
forward.

Sometimes the most useful ideas are the ones that change how we think about what we already do every day.

In this issue of Scoop, we're looking at the choices, instincts, relationships, and moments that shape our work in ways that are not always obvious at first. That may mean staying calm when the plan changes, building a team where different strengths make everyone better, or recognizing how the right destination, culture, or relationship can influence a decision long before anyone signs on the dotted line.

We're also looking at the people who make this industry what it is: members who keep showing up, professionals willing to raise their hands, and one musician who decided not to wait for an invitation before introducing himself to our community.

And, of course, we're talking about AI. Not shortcuts or prompt tricks, but what happens when a powerful tool starts doing too much of the thinking for us, and why human judgment may matter more than ever.

There are lessons here about leadership, resilience, culture, opportunity, partnership, and judgment. And because Scoop should always leave you with something useful, we hope a few of these ideas follow you into your next meeting, your next conversation, or maybe even your next bold move.



SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA
CHAPTER



The Teams Behind the Moments

There is a particular kind of magic in an event that feels effortless. The doors open on time. The room feels right. The speaker is ready. The food arrives when it should. Someone spots the problem before it becomes a problem. Someone else has already solved the thing nobody knew needed solving. That ease is carefully made.

Behind it is a collection of people with different skills, instincts, personalities, and points of view, all contributing to the same experience. In an industry built around moments, the team creating them may be the most important ingredient of all.

The strongest teams understand something simple: everybody does not need to excel at the same things. One person sees the big picture. Another catches the detail everyone else missed. Someone can walk into a tense situation and immediately lower the temperature. Someone else knows when the idea needs another push. There is the person who can rally a room, the person who can quietly get ten things done while everyone else is talking, and the person who asks the uncomfortable question at exactly the right time.

Knowing those strengths changes the way a team works. Gallup's research on strengths-based teams has found that awareness of individual strengths is closely connected to engagement and performance. Its research across more than 11,000 teams also found that teams with high awareness of their strengths produced the strongest outcomes.

For event professionals, that has very practical implications. Assigning responsibility based purely on title or hierarchy can leave valuable talent sitting on the sidelines. A producer may be the best relationship builder in the room. A coordinator may have remarkable creative instincts. A senior leader may be most valuable when they stop directing every detail and give someone else room to own it. That requires trust.

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ordinator may have remarkable creative instincts. A senior leader may be most valuable when they stop directing every detail and give someone else room to own it. That requires trust.

Google's research into team effectiveness identified psychological safety as the most important dynamic among the teams it studied. People needed to feel comfortable asking questions, admitting mistakes, offering ideas, and raising concerns without fearing embarrassment or punishment. That kind of environment is particularly important in events, where circumstances change quickly and silence can be expensive. A team member who notices something wrong needs to speak. Someone with a better idea needs to offer it. A person who needs help needs to be able to ask for it before the problem grows.

For leaders, this may be one of the hardest parts of collaboration. Building a talented team only works if those people are actually allowed to contribute their talent. Giving someone responsibility while continuing to control every decision simply creates another layer of approval.

Effective teams know who owns what. They know when consultation is useful, when a decision needs to be made, and when someone should simply be trusted to run with it. McKinsey's research on team effectiveness points to trust, communication, context, and clear alignment as core drivers of healthy teams. There is also room for disagreement.

Event teams care deeply about the outcome, so strong opinions are inevitable. Good collaboration gives those opinions somewhere useful to go. Ideas get challenged, assumptions get tested, and plans get stronger.

Guests may never know who fixed the schedule, calmed the speaker, caught the allergy request, or solved the problem before it surfaced. They simply know the experience worked.

That is people power: individual strengths working together to create something none could deliver alone.

CONNECTING THE DOTS THE FALL ROADSHOW

Turning Conversation into Collaboration

FEATURED KEYNOTE

Pat Balder and Glen Everhart

At this year's Fall Roadshows, featured keynote presenters Pat Balder and Glen Everhart bring an engaging, music-infused session designed to show how stronger communication leads to stronger collaboration. Connecting the Dots explores the ways conversation, listening, trust, and participation can turn ideas into action and help teams work better together. Expect an experience that is energetic, memorable, and highly relevant to the way meeting professionals lead, connect, and create momentum.

Each Roadshow stop also includes a regional report, giving attendees a timely look at what is happening locally and across our MPI community. Together, the keynote and regional insights make each stop both inspiring and practical.

ROADSHOW STOPS

September 15: Santa Monica, Venue TBA

September 16 Palm Springs Surf Club, Palm Springs

September 17: Area15, Las Vegas

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Featured keynote session
- Regional report in each city
- Connection, conversation, and practical takeaways

Join your MPI Southern California Chapter community for an energizing Roadshow experience designed to inform, connect, and inspire.



SAVE YOUR SPOT!
CLICK HERE

Calm in the Chaos

by Deanna Zercher



Every meeting planner has a story. The keynote speaker misses a flight. The internet goes down five minutes before registration opens. A storm forces an outdoor event indoors. In the events industry, the unexpected isn't a matter of **if**, it's a matter of **when**.

It's all about expecting the unexpected. While you can't prevent every challenge, you can control how you respond. The ability to remain calm under pressure is one of the most valuable skills a meeting professional can develop. More than eliminating stress, you want to manage it in a way that protects both the event and your well-being. Experienced planners know that every event has a few surprises. Rather than hoping nothing goes wrong, it's best to prepare for the possibility that something will. The goal of contingency planning is about building confidence that you'll be ready when the unexpected eventually happens.

It's good to start out by asking yourself before every event, "what are our biggest risks", "do we have backup plans for critical functions", and, "who is responsible for making decisions if plans change?" When you have a roadmap for unexpected situations, you're less likely to feel overwhelmed when they occur.

During a crisis, your brain naturally shifts into "fight or flight" mode. Your heart races, your thoughts speed up, and every problem can feel urgent. Do yourself a favor, and before jumping into action, give yourself permission to pause, even if it's only for a few seconds.

Take a deep breath and then ask yourself, what is the immediate priority, what information do you know for certain, and what is the next best step? That brief pause can help you respond thoughtfully instead of reacting emotionally. And you'll do so in a cool, calm, and collected way. How you react when challenges arise is important too, as your team and stakeholders will look to you for reassurance. You don't need to have every answer immediately. What people need most is confidence that there is a plan. Communicate with honesty and clarity. Share the facts, not assumptions. Explain what is being done to resolve the issue. Keep updates consistent and timely. Rule of thumb? A calm leader helps create a calm team.

Another important aspect is that when something does go wrong, it's very tempting to immediately ask, "Who caused this?" You'll do better justice to your team dynamics if, instead of being tempted by the blame game, you shift the conversation to what needs to happen next, who can help solve this, and how do you minimize the impact on your attendees? There will be plenty of time for a post-event evaluation. During the event, your energy is best spent moving forward rather than looking backward. Often, once an event is over, it's easy to put it behind you and focus only on the quantitative results. But it's equally important to take time to reflect on the experience and give both your body and mind a chance to reset.

When you do your event recap, ask your team, what worked well during the crisis, what could the team improve next time, and what contingency plans should be updated? And use that exercise to determine how you can contribute to effecting a better outcome next time.



Every challenge is an opportunity to strengthen future events and the most successful planners are the ones who continuously learn from them. Part of that learning experience is celebrating what went well, acknowledging the effort you and your team invested, and giving yourself permission to decompress.

Whether it's taking a walk, spending time with family, getting a good night's sleep, or simply unplugging for an evening, recovery is an essential part of resilience. You can't pour from an empty cup, and you can't lead effectively if you're running on empty.



Meeting planners are known for their ability to solve problems under pressure. But true resilience is measured by how well you care for yourself while navigating them. Every unexpected challenge is a reminder that flexibility is one of your greatest strengths. The next time plans change, remember you don't have to be perfect. You just have to stay present, stay adaptable, and trust the skills that have brought you this far.

Calm is contagious, and great leadership often begins with a single deep breath.





Nobody *Really Finished* It

AI is everywhere right now, and so is the conversation around it. Some people are fascinated by it. Others are wary. Plenty are using it every day while still wondering whether they are using it well. And maybe that is the more interesting question.

By now, most of us have seen something that was clearly written by AI. Not because AI is incapable of producing good work, but because the work was never really finished. The first response became the final response. It was generated, copied, pasted, and sent out into the world before anyone added enough judgment, specificity, personality, or point of view to make it feel like it actually belonged to someone.

That is when we start to recognize the tells. Everything is elevated, transformed, unlocked, or reimaged. The language is polished but oddly generic. Sentences fall into tidy patterns. Conclusions wrap themselves up with an inspirational flourish. Nothing is technically wrong with it. It just does not sound like anyone in particular.

The irony is that AI becomes far more useful when we stop expecting it to do all the work.

That starts with what we give it. Asking AI to “write an article about attendee engagement” will certainly produce something, but it has very little chance of producing **your** something. If you want the result to reflect your thinking, then your thinking has to be part of the input. Give it the rough idea you have been kicking around. Share articles you have written, collateral from the event, research, presentations, transcripts, website URLs, or examples that capture the voice and perspective you are after. Explain who you are talking to and what they already know. Tell it what feels tired about the subject, where you disagree with conventional wisdom, what you want people to walk away thinking about, and even what you absolutely do not want it to sound like. The more meaningful the material you put in, the more interesting the conversation becomes. A blank prompt tends to produce a generic and blank personality.

Conversation really is the operative word. AI is most powerful when it is treated less like a vending machine and more like a collaborator. Ask it to challenge your idea. Tell it to find the holes in your recommendation. Have it argue the other side. Ask what your audience may question or what you may be overlooking. Then react to what comes back. That reaction matters.

If something feels obvious, say so. If it sounds too polished, too corporate, too safe, or nothing like you, tell it. Push it somewhere else. Reject entire passages. Ask for another angle. Bring in the story only you know, the experience you had, the observation that would never appear in a generic search result. That is where the human part starts to show up again.

The first draft from AI should almost never be treated as the work itself. It is raw material. Sometimes very good raw material, but still something that needs judgment, taste, instinct, and context before it becomes yours. And those are precisely the things AI cannot supply on its own. It has not stood backstage when a program went sideways. It has not watched an audience suddenly come alive. It does not know the history with a particular client, the politics inside your organization, or the tiny details that make one idea feel exactly right and another feel slightly off. **You** do.

So perhaps the goal is not to make AI sound more human. The goal is to make sure the human never disappears from the work in the first place. Use AI boldly. Give it more to work with. Ask harder questions. Let it challenge you, organize the mess, uncover patterns, and help you get somewhere faster.

Just do not stop when it stops generating.

That is usually where the real work begins.



SEE MONTEREY

Set your team up for success in Monterey County.

When you meet in Monterey County, your team is instantly connected to everything they need for a successful gathering. From the Monterey Conference Center to a wide range of indoor and outdoor venues—plus quality accommodations from the coast to the inland valleys—planning an epic event is easy.

Flexible spaces meet solid foundations.

In Monterey County, the right setting is never far. From the Monterey Conference Center's 85,000 square feet of state-of-the-art, flexible space—designed to host up to 2,000 attendees across two ballrooms and 14 breakout rooms—to outdoor venues for groups of 10 to 1,000, every venue offers its own unforgettable backdrop. Perfect for inspiring your team's next big idea.

Coming together meets leaving in sync.

Your hotel, meeting spaces and team-bonding opportunities are effortlessly connected. That means it's easy to host productive sessions by day, then refuel and reconnect over a MICHELIN starred dinner, creative cocktails or a more casual meal at a local favorite. Your team will also have no problem recharging at one of Monterey County's 220+ lodging options—including coastal resorts, inland retreats and two hotels adjoined to the Monterey Conference Center

Easy travel meets effortless arrivals.

Start your gathering stress-free with 500+ direct flights into Monterey Regional Airport (MRY). Prefer to drive? San Francisco and Silicon Valley are just a few hours away, or you can take the iconic five-hour scenic route up Highway 1 from Los Angeles.

Unforgettable events. Unbeatable savings.

Save big on your Monterey County event with this **incentive offer**. For every night your group stays mid-week, you earn \$20 back—up to \$20,000*. It's a win-win for the whole team.

What Gets a Destination ON THE Short List Now?

Every planner knows the destination conversation starts with the practicalities. Can the city accommodate the group? Are the rates workable? Is the airlift there? Does the meeting space fit the program? Those questions are still fundamental, and the 2026 Evidénz Meeting Planners Study confirms it. Among MPI planners, cost and financial value ranked as the top decision driver at 76%, followed closely by venue capacity and logistics at 71%, with accessibility and transportation at 54%.

None of that is especially surprising. What is more revealing is what happens after those boxes are checked.

The study makes a strong case that destination appeal becomes one of the most meaningful factors once a city has cleared the operational threshold. That appeal can come from food, culture, history, setting, entertainment or signature experiences, but the underlying question is the same: will people actually want to go?

That question has taken on more weight as planners work harder to protect attendance, justify travel and create experiences that feel worth the time and expense. A destination may have the right hotel package and the right meeting space, but if it does not give attendees a compelling reason to be there, that can become a problem.

Relationships also play a larger role than we sometimes acknowledge. The report found that strong destination proposals can materially influence consideration, with several cities seeing roughly nine out of ten planners say a proposal made them more likely to select that destination. In other words, outreach is not simply about staying visible. Done well, it can actually move a city up the list.

The same is true of the people behind the destination. Planners rated contacts on professionalism, knowledge, effort and responsiveness, and several cities scored exceptionally well. That matters because site selection is rarely a one-and-done transaction. It is a process, often a long one, and the quality of the partnership can shape how confident a planner feels about bringing an event to a particular place.

Ease of doing business reinforces that point. Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver led the study in this area, suggesting that responsiveness and partnership are not soft extras. They are part of the destination experience itself.

The report also reflects a reality planners are navigating more often: social and political issues can influence where events are held. Among respondents who had eliminated a destination, civil rights and discrimination policies were the most frequently cited political concern, followed by controversial state or local laws. LGBTQ+ climate, racial tension, public safety and other social issues were also named as factors in destination decisions.

For planners, these considerations can affect much more than perception. They can influence attendance, organizational comfort, client expectations and whether a destination remains viable at all.

Taken together, the findings paint a picture of destination selection that feels increasingly human. Yes, the economics have to work. Yes, the meeting has to fit. But beyond that, planners are weighing how a place feels, how easy it is to work with, how attendees may respond to it and whether it gives them a strong enough reason to say yes.

That may be the biggest lesson in the report. The short list is not built on logistics alone. It is built on confidence, relevance, appeal and the sense that a destination can help make the event more successful. And that is useful information no matter where the next meeting happens to be.

Source: 2026 Evidénz Meeting Planners Study, Executive Summary, prepared exclusively for MPI members.





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Meetings That Matter.**



The Opportunity You *Don't Wait* For

There is something to be said for knowing when to raise your hand.

Thatcher Horrocks wanted to break into the meetings and events industry, but he did not wait for someone to discover him. He found MPISCC on Instagram, reached out directly, introduced himself, and offered his talents for WE | CON.

That takes confidence. More importantly, it takes an understanding of how to make an approach feel relevant rather than random.

Thatcher is a Los Angeles-based singing guitarist whose work has included performances for major brands, luxury resorts, and television projects. But when he contacted MPISCC, the real opportunity was not simply to add another credit to his resume. It was to show what he could contribute to an event experience.

He joined the WE | CON reception and became part of what made the evening work. His performance added warmth and energy to the room without competing with the conversation around him. It was a reminder that the best entertainment is not always about commanding attention. Sometimes its greatest value is helping create the atmosphere in which connection happens.

There is a broader lesson here for anyone trying to build a career or enter a new market.

Do your homework. Know who you are approaching and why your skills might matter to them. Be clear about the value you can bring. Make it easy for someone to understand what saying yes could look like. And then, if you get the opportunity, deliver.

For planners and event leaders, there is another lesson too. Some of the most interesting ideas may come from outside the usual circle. Being open to a thoughtful approach, a new talent, or an unexpected possibility can add something genuinely fresh to an experience.

Thatcher took a chance by reaching out. MPISCC took a chance by saying yes.

Sometimes opportunity begins with being bold enough to ask.

The rest is about making sure you were worth the answer.

Want to connect with Thatcher?

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Thatcher Horrocks



Every event professional has one. The spreadsheet nobody is allowed to touch. The shared drive folder only three people can find. The approval process that somehow requires an email, a Teams message, and possibly a carrier pigeon. None of it was designed to become the operating system of the business. It just sort of happened.

That is how many organizations end up working. One tool handles registration. Another manages clients. Budgets live somewhere else. Approvals happen in email. Production schedules sit in spreadsheets. Files are stored in a shared drive, unless someone downloaded the latest version and forgot to put it back. Eventually, the team spends almost as much time managing the systems around the work as doing the work itself.

That is the problem AldenBlue is trying to solve. The company builds custom operations platforms, workflow and approval systems, and CRMs around the way an organization actually works. The idea is deceptively simple: instead of forcing your processes into software designed for everyone, build the system around the processes that make your business run. For event organizations, that idea should sound familiar.

Our work is complicated by nature. There are clients, venues, suppliers, attendees, budgets, contracts, timelines, approvals, changes, and more than a few moving targets. Technology is supposed to make that complexity easier to manage. But when people begin creating workarounds to compensate for what the technology cannot do, those workarounds eventually become part of the job. AldenBlue starts somewhere worth paying attention to: not with the software, but with the question, where does the work actually break down? Its process includes mapping the current workflow, identifying leverage points, and then building in phases so teams can respond to working software as it develops.

That approach offers a useful exercise even if custom software is nowhere on your shopping list. Look at how work moves through your organization. Where are people entering the same information twice? Which approvals routinely stall? What spreadsheet has become so important that everyone is slightly terrified of it? Which process requires three tools when one should do? And how many steps exist because they are actually necessary versus because the technology requires them? Those questions can reveal a surprising amount.

The answer is not necessarily another platform. Sometimes it is simplifying a process, eliminating a step, connecting tools you already have, or finally retiring something the team has outgrown. The important part is recognizing when the workaround is no longer temporary. AldenBlue's model also challenges the assumption that custom technology has to mean a massive enterprise implementation. Its platforms are built in phases, and clients can either own the resulting system outright or have AldenBlue continue to host and manage it. For an industry that talks constantly about designing better experiences, there may be a lesson here for the experiences we create for our own teams too.

Good systems should remove friction. They should make information easier to find, decisions easier to make, and work easier to move forward. And if your team has built an elaborate collection of spreadsheets, side systems, shared folders, and unwritten rules just to keep everything moving, it may be worth asking a very simple question: Is the workflow working for you, or are you working for the workflow? **Go to www.aldenblue.com to learn more!**



**WHEN
THE
WORKAROUND
BECOMES
THE
WORKFLOW**

Christine HARTMAN

A Meeting Professional Influencer

Christine joined MPI nearly 20 years ago after returning to Southern California and realizing that her contract work had grown into a business of its own. Looking for a professional community, she attended an MPI meeting, joined the chapter, and began volunteering with the monthly programs committee. That involvement eventually led to committee leadership and Board service, along with lifelong friendships, new skills, and an education she could never have found in one place.

Her advice to someone new to the industry is to get involved in a way that feels manageable. Start with the skills you already have, volunteer where you can contribute, and introduce yourself to the people you want to know. MPI also helped Christine grow as a leader by encouraging her to step into roles that were not always comfortable and reminding her that leadership is often about encouraging others, not having every answer.

She describes the MPI community in one word: generous. From sponsors and volunteers to members willing to welcome someone new, she believes the chapter reflects a simple idea: there is enough opportunity for everyone.

Fun fact: Christine founded a theater company in Chicago in the 1990s. Outside of work, she loves cooking, travel, spin classes, learning languages, and Scandinavian crime thrillers.

A
Be an **MPI**
SERIES
FEATURE



CELEBRATING MEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Christine Hartman | 20 years

Barbara Roth | 20 years

Carmen Saliba | 15 years

Chanel Sheragy | 10 years

Deanna Zercher | 10 years

Sonya Henry | 5 years

Rachel Panczenko | 5 years

Kathy Park | 5 years

and Celebrating 1 Year

Suzanne Aed

Kevin Kahn

Cheryl Anker

Mimi Lo

Shelly Brown

Shadi Malhas

Brooke Earley

Katie Paul

Darice Goodwin

Maya Riley

Leslie Ann Siy

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Laura Beckman

Luis Kast

Rachel Bradley

Robyn Kinard

Shae Chaves

Ali Krupnik

Erin Crawford

Marisol Mena

Helen Denning

Maura O'Brien

Michelle Dillard

Tiffany O'Connell

Heather Ford

Alexandra Paulos

Stacey Hayashi

Averianna Richardson

Kelsey Johnston

Stephanie Scarpantonio

Carly Kass

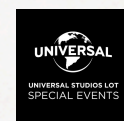
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Why Culture Is the *Ultimate* Competitive Advantage

Culture can sound like one of those things organizations talk about when everything else is already working. In reality, it may be one of the biggest reasons everything else works in the first place.

Culture shapes how people communicate, how decisions get made, how quickly teams recover when something goes wrong, and whether people feel comfortable contributing ideas before they are fully formed. It influences whether employees stay, whether clients feel the difference, and whether an organization can adapt when the environment around it changes. And unlike many competitive advantages, culture is surprisingly difficult to copy.

A competitor can match your pricing. They can hire similar talent, adopt the same technology, and replicate parts of your service model. What they cannot easily recreate is the way your people work together, the trust they have built, or the shared understanding of how things get done.

Events are built through collaboration. Planners rely on suppliers. Suppliers rely on venues. Venues rely on operating teams. Everyone is managing deadlines, changing information, client expectations, and the occasional surprise that was nowhere near the original plan. In that environment, culture becomes visible very quickly.

You see it in whether someone says, "That's not my job," or steps in to help. You see it when a team feels safe enough to flag a problem early rather than hoping no one notices. You see it in how people respond when a client changes direction, when a colleague makes a mistake, or when the pressure starts rising. Strong cultures give people a better way to navigate them.

The challenge is that culture cannot simply be written into a values statement and considered finished. It is built through hundreds of small decisions. Who gets recognized? What behavior gets rewarded? How are disagreements handled? Do leaders invite different perspectives or simply ask for agreement? Are people trusted to make decisions? Can someone admit they do not know something without worrying how it will be received? Those choices send a much louder message than anything hanging on an office wall.

There is also a business case for paying attention to them. When people understand what an organization stands for and how they are expected to work together, there is less friction. Decisions happen faster. Collaboration gets easier. People spend less energy navigating internal dynamics and more energy solving the problem in front of them. And clients notice.

They may never know exactly why one team feels easier to work with than another, but they recognize responsiveness, confidence, consistency, and genuine collaboration when they experience it. That is where culture moves beyond an internal conversation and becomes a competitive advantage. Because ultimately, culture is not what you tell people about your company. It is what they experience when they work with you.

