

THE MPISCC NEWSLETTER

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DEC '25



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# WHAT WE LEARNED IN 2025: KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR EVENT PROFESSIONALS

2025 made one thing clear: **the events industry is no longer in recovery mode. It is in reinvention mode.** First, experience overtook scale. Attendees showed up for events that delivered relevance, intimacy, and clear value, not just big stages or packed schedules. Smaller, more intentional formats outperformed sprawling agendas, especially when content was tailored by role, industry, or career stage. Choice, flexibility, and pacing mattered more than ever.

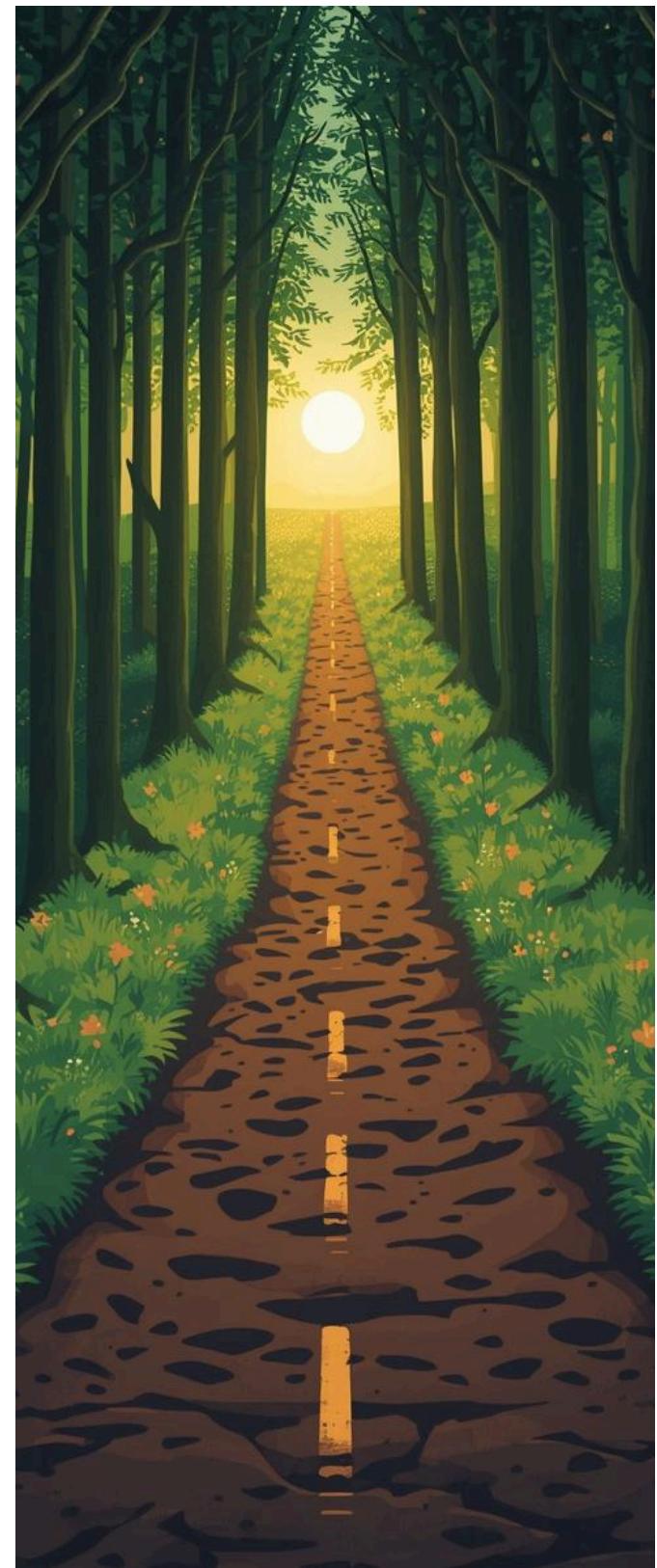
Second, **AI became operational, not theoretical.** The most successful teams moved past experimentation and began using AI for practical applications like RFP analysis, agenda modeling, content drafting, attendee segmentation, and post-event reporting. The takeaway was not speed alone, but better decision-making. At the same time, planners learned where AI stopped being helpful, particularly in moments requiring cultural nuance, crisis response, or stakeholder sensitivity.

Third, **audiences demanded clarity of purpose.** Events that clearly articulated why they existed, who they were for, and what attendees would walk away with saw stronger engagement and retention. “Something for everyone” agendas underperformed compared to programs with a clear point of view.

Fourth, **measurement matured.** Attendance alone stopped being a success metric. Organizers focused more on dwell time, session completion, meaningful connections, sponsor outcomes, and post-event behavior. This shift helped justify budgets and informed smarter design decisions.

Finally, **human connection reasserted its value.** Technology enhanced events, but it did not replace trust, empathy, or creativity. The strongest experiences were those where tech supported human moments rather than overshadowed them.

2025 reminded us that tools evolve quickly, but fundamentals still win: intention, relevance, and thoughtful design.



# BE AN MPI: MEETING PROFESSIONAL INFLUENCER SERIES

**Heather Mason**  
Founder and CEO, Caspian Agency



Heather discovered MPI at the very beginning of building her company nearly 20 years ago, looking for a way to deepen her education and better understand the business of event management. MPI became a trusted resource, helping her stay informed and connected as her career evolved. She believes leadership is about recognizing and valuing the strengths of those around you, then delegating in ways that create the most impact. MPI reinforced that mindset through its thoughtful approach to education and stewardship. A favorite MPI moment was its sponsorship of the San Diego State event management program, where Heather teaches. She was drawn to the sophistication of the program and the organization's clear respect for the value of education and resources. One word to describe MPI? Supportive. Her advice to newcomers: price your work wisely—flat fees over hourly. Fun fact: she's played soccer for more than 40 years. Outside of work, she's learning tennis and writing rom-com screenplays. Her career anthem is I Lived by OneRepublic.

## Ozzie Otero

Director of Sales, Santa Monica Travel & Tourism

Ozzie was introduced to MPI through the industry and quickly became involved after learning about the Southern California chapter. What started as sponsorship and annual membership grew into a meaningful part of his professional journey, rooted in connection and community. His advice to those entering the industry is simple: meet as many people as possible. Every interaction has value, and the relationships built along the way often become mentors who help you see the industry through new lenses. Ozzie defines leadership as the person people naturally gravitate toward—the one you aspire to become. A standout MPI moment was WECon 2022, his first time attending the conference and his first time speaking on a panel during the general assembly. If he had to describe the MPI community in one word, it would be eclectic. Fun fact: he's adopted, loves aquariums, and is terrified of the ocean. Outside of work, you'll find him in spin class, traveling, enjoying matcha lattes, or spending time with his two dogs. His career anthem? Hollaback Girl.



# How to Build Momentum for the New Year

***Momentum is created through clarity, consistency, and visible progress. It comes from aligning teams around a shared direction and reinforcing that direction through action early in the year.***

The first step is defining what truly matters. Organizations that build momentum identify a short list of priorities that directly support business goals. These priorities are specific, measurable, and understood across teams. When everything is labeled important, progress slows. Clear priorities create forward motion.

Momentum accelerates when strategy is translated into immediate action.

Annual goals gain traction when they are broken into near-term milestones with clear ownership. Thirty-, sixty-, and ninety-day targets help teams focus on what needs to happen now and create early indicators of progress. Early execution builds confidence and reinforces momentum.

Decision-making benefits from existing data and past performance insights. Teams that review what worked, what stalled, and where demand is shifting are better positioned to move quickly. Action follows insight. Adjustments happen in motion, not in planning cycles.

Sustaining momentum requires attention to people, not just plans. Teams perform best when expectations are clear, communication is consistent, and leadership trusts them to execute. Fewer distractions, purposeful meetings, and room for problem-solving keep energy directed forward.

Momentum in the new year is not driven by sweeping change. It is built through focused priorities, timely action, and steady reinforcement. When teams start early, stay aligned, and act with intention, progress becomes self-sustaining.

## **Tips to Build Momentum:**

- Define three to five priorities and make them visible across the organization
- Assign clear owners and decision authority to every priority
- Set 30-, 60-, and 90-day milestones with concrete outputs, not vague goals
- Track progress weekly using a small set of meaningful metrics
- Reduce meeting volume and protect focused execution time
- Share early wins to reinforce progress and maintain energy



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A large, bright pink rectangular sign with the words "WE WANT YOU!" written in large, white, stylized, hand-drawn letters. The sign is positioned in front of a white van, with a person's arm and hand visible on the left side, pointing towards the sign.

Interested in volunteering?

Email [vpleadershipdevelopment@mpiscc.org](mailto:vpleadershipdevelopment@mpiscc.org) for info!

# MONTEREY COUNTY: A PLACE WHERE EPIC LANDSCAPES AND CUTTING-EDGE VENUES COME TOGETHER.

In Monterey County, the venue is a source of inspiration. The Monterey Conference Center sets the stage with 85,000 square feet of cutting-edge, configurable space—ready to host everything from executive roundtables to multi-day conventions. Looking to change it up a bit? Take your meeting outside. Here, oceanfront terraces, nearby vineyards and nature-infused setups can host groups from 10 to 1,000, offering unforgettable backdrops.

Event experiences extend far beyond meeting spaces. In Carmel Valley, Carmel Valley Ranch blends vineyard charm with refined indoor-outdoor gathering spaces. Monterey Plaza Hotel and InterContinental The Clement Monterey both offer exceptional meeting spaces with oceanfront views in the heart of iconic Cannery Row. For a convenient central location, Portola Hotel & Spa and Monterey Marriott deliver coastal elegance right next to the Monterey Conference Center. With accommodation options for all styles and budgets, Monterey County offers a way to elevate every gathering well beyond every expectation.

Getting to Monterey County is as simple as settling in. The Monterey Regional Airport (MRY) connects the destination to 500+ direct flights for an effortless arrival. San Francisco and Silicon Valley are just a few hours' travel by car, while a drive from Los Angeles offers a scenic five-hour drive. However your group travels, Monterey County makes the journey easy—and the arrival unforgettable.

There are endless places to refuel and reconnect after your meeting in Monterey County. Step into the intimate, elevated charm of Stokes Adobe, built in a historic home and offering seasonal dishes crafted to delight. For a more vibrant dining experience—with room to gather your crew—book a table at Montrio Bistro in downtown Monterey or Seventh & Dolores Steakhouse in Carmel-by-the-Sea. If you're looking for late-night dining, you can find plenty of options along Alvarado Street. From casual to upscale, Monterey County has food and drink to fit every team's vibe.

For every night your group stays mid-week, you could earn \$20 back, up to \$20,000\*. In Monterey County, inspiration meets here when you need it. See full details at [MeetInMonterey.com](http://MeetInMonterey.com).





## ***Mindful Leadership: Supporting Your Team's Wellness***

In the high-pressure world of event planning, it's easy to focus on client satisfaction and flawless execution, but true leadership goes beyond logistics. Today's most effective event leaders are those who model mindful leadership: leading with awareness, empathy, and intention to foster a culture of wellness within their teams.

### **Why Wellness Starts with Leadership**

Team wellness doesn't happen by accident. It begins with leaders who recognize that productivity and well-being go hand in hand. When planners are constantly in "go mode," burnout and turnover follow. But when leaders prioritize mental health, balance, and open communication, teams become more engaged, creative, and resilient, especially during high-stress event cycles.

### **Lead by Example**

Wellness initiatives only work if leadership sets the tone. Take time to model the behaviors you want to see:

- Pause before reacting. Demonstrate mindfulness in meetings and onsite situations by taking a breath before responding to challenges.
- Respect boundaries. Avoid sending late-night messages unless it's urgent. Show that it's okay to unplug after hours.
- Normalize breaks. Encouraging your team to step away during long event days, even five minutes to stretch or hydrate makes a difference.

### **Create a Culture of Psychological Safety**

A mindful leader fosters an environment where people feel heard and valued. Make wellness a regular part of your check-ins: ask how your team is managing, not just what's on their to-do list. When individuals feel safe to express stress or ask for support, they're more likely to stay motivated and loyal.

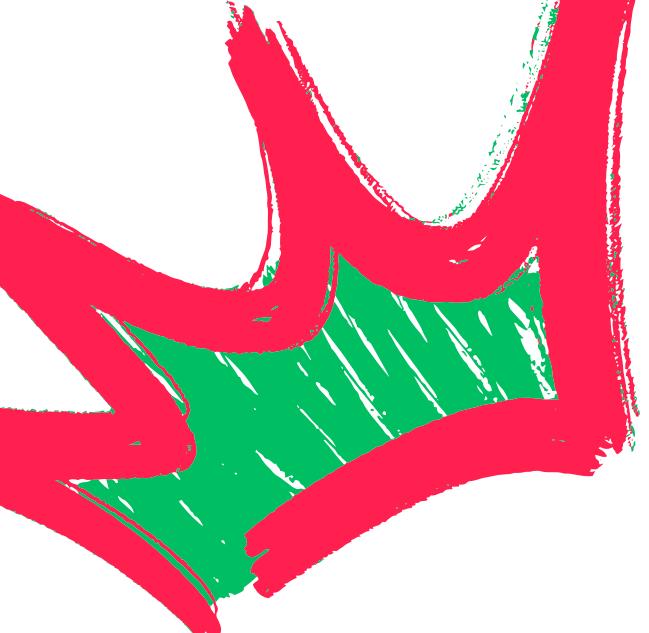
### **Integrate Wellness into Operations**

Wellness doesn't have to be an add-on – it can be woven into your workflow:

- Start meetings with a moment of gratitude or reflection.
- Rotate responsibilities to balance workloads.
- Offer mental health resources, such as access to wellness webinars or EAP programs.
- Celebrate milestones, not just event outcomes, to acknowledge effort and teamwork.

### **The Ripple Effect of Mindful Leadership**

When leaders prioritize wellness, it ripples outward. Teams that feel supported show up stronger for clients, produce higher-quality work, and build a more sustainable event culture. Mindful leadership isn't about being perfect, it's about being present, intentional, and human in how you lead.



# MPISCC VOLUNTEER IMPACT AWARD WINNERS

# Q3

## DEANNA ZERCHER, INDEPENDENT MEETING PROFESSIONAL

Deanna Zercher is the definition of a steady, reliable leader—someone who raises her hand, follows through, and consistently elevates the work around her. A true team player, Deanna brings a calm, thoughtful presence to everything she takes on for MPISCC. Most recently, she has been instrumental in launching and shaping the chapter's new Wellness section in *The Scoop*, helping expand the conversation around balance, well-being, and sustainability in our industry. In addition to her editorial contributions, Deanna is stepping into a larger leadership role as Incoming Director of Social Media, where her collaborative spirit and attention to detail will play a key role in strengthening how the chapter connects with and engages its members. Kind, dependable, and always willing to jump in where needed, Deanna is a valued asset to MPISCC and a volunteer who truly embodies the spirit of service.

# Q4

## MAUREEN SLOAN, MANAGER/GLOBAL ACCOUNTS, HELMSBRISCOE

Maureen Sloan is the embodiment of what it means to serve the MPISCC community. Always ready to step up, she is known for her responsiveness, reliability, and genuine willingness to support wherever help is needed. Maureen leads with relationships at the center—promoting connection, collaboration, and leadership through her actions rather than her title. Her consistent presence and ability to jump in without hesitation have made a meaningful impact across the chapter. It is this unwavering commitment and spirit of service that earned Maureen the distinction of **MPISCC's 2025 Volunteer of the Year**, a recognition that reflects both her dedication and the respect she has earned from her peers.

# CELEBRATING MEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Candice Burroughs | 40 years

Kay Boles | 30 years

Owen Kirschner | 20 years

Amber Voelker | 20 years

Jorge Lopez | 10 years

Margaret Launzel-Pennes | 5 years

and Celebrating 1 Year

Ashlyn Pike

Karen Hatcher

Jacqueline Kirby

Sepideh Eivazi

Rachel Ugay

Nija Vaughn

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Brian Boulden

Andrea Calderon

Christopher Dela Cruz

Lissa Dye

Hana Fakhoury

Vanessa Kim

Tigran Marabyan

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# 2026 PREDICTIONS: WHAT'S NEXT IN EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES

By 2026, the events industry will be less defined by production prowess and more by decision-making discipline. The true differentiator won't be who can execute at scale, but who can make smart, confident choices about what not to do and why.

One of the most visible shifts will be the continued decline of generic programming. Audiences are no longer willing to work for relevance by sifting through bloated agendas and interchangeable panels. In 2026, the strongest events will behave more like editorial brands, making clear points of view, curating fewer sessions, and designing content with intention rather than abundance. This will require organizers to take a stand, knowing that clarity often matters more than consensus.

Another change gaining momentum is the formal separation between attendance and engagement. Simply filling a room will no longer be enough. Sponsors, leadership teams, and boards are increasingly focused on attention, interaction, learning retention, and behavioral outcomes. By 2026, these expectations will be built into success metrics, sponsorship agreements, and post-event reporting, forcing teams to design engagement rather than hope for it.

Operationally, risk management will move upstream. Climate volatility, labor shortages, cost fluctuations, and geopolitical uncertainty are no longer exceptions; they're planning conditions. Leading organizations are already embedding contingency logic into budgets, contracts, and creative concepts, treating resilience as a core design principle instead of a backup plan.

Finally, the role of the event leader will continue to evolve. In 2026, the most valuable skill won't be flawless execution but systems thinking: the ability to connect content, experience, technology, and business outcomes into a cohesive strategy. Execution can be outsourced. Judgment cannot.

The opportunity ahead is clear. The future of events belongs to teams willing to be deliberate, defensible, and deeply intentional in how experiences are conceived, delivered, and measured.