



ON SITE

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Passion and Dedication

Makiko Yamamoto is honored with the 2016 Chair's Award by Fiona Pelham during the Opening General Session. Read more on Page 6.



FEATURE

BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE WITH CLIENTS

BY MICHAEL PINCHERA

IT WAS DUE TO PASSION AND FRUSTRATION that Ciara Feely, creator of The Conference Converter System, endeavored to educate meeting and

event industry suppliers about optimizing their relationships with planners. Now this specific supplier learning opportunity is available throughout WEC with a dedicated session each day as well as 20-minute-long, one-on-one meetings that suppliers can enjoy with Feely (schedule yours at <http://tinyurl.com/FeelyWEC16>).

"Supplier meetups are all about getting closer to the community and giving hotels and venues the opportunity to win more business," Feely says. "So it's sharing best practices, the ideas that are out there in the marketplace, and what I spe-

cialize in—and will specialize in with the Venue Sales Certificate program—is bringing the planner's perspective to the table."

Feely, an ex-hotelier (and a hotelier at heart), saw the planner's perspective—the way they do business and what's important to them—when, 10 years ago, she became an independent planner focused on helping clients find venues. It was then that she realized in all of her sales training, she'd

CONT. ON PAGE 6

SCHEDULE: PAGES 3-4

the MPI RISE AWARDS

Best and Brightest

Recognizing outstanding achievements in our community during today's RISE Awards luncheon.

INSIDE



p10

Have It Your Way

Flash Point presenter Susan Cain discusses how to thrive as an introvert.

p12



Embracing the Shake

How Flash Point presenter Phil Hansen found liberation through limitation.



p20

Dancing the Night Away

An unforgettable Rendezvous networking event featuring the band Train awaits.



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A FEELING MONEY CANNOT BUY

BY BLAIR POTTER

GENEROSITY, PASSION, DEDICATION—a global example of who we are as a community. Those are the words used by MPI Chair Fiona Pelham to describe Makiko Yamamoto, the MPI Japan Chapter president who was honored with the 2016 Chair's Award during yesterday's Opening General Session.

"Although the majority of our chapters are in North America, we are a global association. And for over 20 years we have had a chapter in Japan," Pelham said. "It's traditional in Japan for older men to chair associations. [Yamamoto] is the first female chapter leader in Japan. And at MPI we are very proud of our strong female leaders, as our ongoing initiative with Starwood around education shows."

Pelham also mentioned Yamamoto's involvement in an initiative led by the Japanese prime minister to raise the profile of successful working women.

"It's such an amazing honor to receive this award and very unexpected with the number of chapters," said Yamamoto, senior vice president and head of Japan event marketing for Bank of America Merrill Lynch. "It was hard balancing my full-time job and the volunteer position, but I've really been enjoying the opportunity. It's been hard work, but really rewarding. I could not have done it without the MPI Japan board members and their commitment to support me. I want to tell them 'thank you.' I also want to thank Paul [Van Deventer] and Fiona for their support."

She said the most memorable part of her career was the move from the hotel industry to the financial industry.

"Basically, the corporate meeting planner's job was very similar to what I had done at the hotel," Yamamoto said. "However, the most difficult part of working in the financial industry was to truly understand

the needs of each line of business within the company. I was actually working with the clients from the financial industry at the hotel, but it became apparent to me that to have successful events in this industry, understanding the particular needs of each line of business in Bank of America Merrill Lynch was essential. Meeting the challenges that this position has presented me with over the years has been extremely rewarding and satisfying."

She says her future plans involve the Asian expansion of MPI, and she advises those considering volunteering to take advantage of the opportunity.

"Volunteering is not just for others, but for myself," Yamamoto

says. "I feel so good; I feel I did good things and people appreciate it. That is really rewarding. Money cannot buy this feeling."

"People ask what [MPI] can do for them, but they might not be clear what they want. If they don't take action, nothing happens. We need to think out of the box, step out and move forward. The result will come later. We don't know what will happen if we don't move."

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BUILDING TRUST

CONTINUED FROM COVER

never really received education about the planner's perspective.

"The industry has changed so much in the last five years that planners have changed the way that they buy—and technology has changed the game for the whole industry—so hotels can't be selling the same way...they have to change the way that they sell to match the way that the clients are buying," she says.

With suppliers looking to stand out, this education is a welcome addition to WEC and MPI's professional development offerings.

"When you're a supplier, the whole conversation [tends to be] about rates, and it's a race to the bottom," Feely says. "We have brilliant sales people in the industry and you're not getting paid to just quote rates—and as salespeople, we don't want that, we hate that RFPs are reducing a lot of the industry to just quoting rates. So this is

UPCOMING SUPPLIER MEETUPS

"What Venues do that Drive Planners Mad"

Monday, June 13, 11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.

"The Life of a Lead"

Tuesday, June 14, 10:45 a.m.-12 p.m.

really about getting under the skin of the client, being their best strategic alliance—for them to be able to say, 'I need this salesperson because they're going to help me run a better event.'"

That's what she's teaching during the supplier meetups and will be doing with the Venue Sales Certificate program (learn more about the program at www.mpiweb.org/MPI-Academy/vsc).

"But we have to start getting the basics done brilliantly, because how you stand out to the planner and the whole conversation you have with the planner and the strategic questions you ask the planner—that's really going to make them say, 'Hold on a minute, I'm really liking this conversation—this person really gets me and my challenges,'" Feely says.

And for the suppliers, the result of such an intelligent shift in selling will help them score much-coveted repeat business—a salesperson's dream.

"We work on all the stuff that comes before the site inspection, helping suppliers to really build trust and confidence—and that's really key," she says. "From a distance, you have to be building that with the planner and proving to them why you are worth having a conversation with and getting through that first filter that they have with the RFP."