

TIPS FROM A PRO »

## THE DEBRIEF

The most overlooked part of any type of event.

BY SUSAN DUNKELMAN

FOR MOST EVENT PLANNERS, the primary focus of a successful event is the preplanning. However, what can be easily overlooked and should be done is a two-part debrief soon after your event. One should be conducted internally and the other with your client.

A thorough debrief is important on many levels. It can provide valuable lessons on what to avoid or improve upon for future events, re-enforce vendor relations by providing valuable and most-appreciated feedback, and, most importantly, show your client that you value their business and provide a communication channel to potentially discuss opportunities for future work. If you ask your client to define their idea of success at the beginning of the planning, a debrief will allow you to demonstrate tangible results.

There are two key components to a successful debrief. The first is that it must be done in a timely manner while the event is still fresh on everyone's mind. The second is to involve all stakeholders, as everyone will bring a different vantage point to the overall discussion.

It's ideal to set up the expectation for a formal debrief when you are first hiring your vendors, instructing your staff and organizing the event. This way there aren't any surprises and everyone has up-front knowledge that they will be asked for feedback at the conclusion of the planned activities. You can even go as far as telling everyone how you will be gathering their thoughts, which

could include a conference call or written comments. Once your event is complete, it is important to follow up and make the time to not only gather input on what went right, but also what could be improved upon before you speak with your client. The other step is to formally document your findings so that you have them to refer to in the future.

Once you have conducted your internal debrief, you are then ready to schedule a time to speak with your client. During the official debrief, it is very important that you direct the conversation and listen closely to what your client has to say. For the best results, it should be a collaborative conversation which can start with asking for their general feedback. This also provides you with the opportunity to address any trouble areas that you know should be covered, while at the same time conveying that the matter has been addressed and would be handled differently in the future. The end result is that your clients will be pleased that you have not only taken the time to speak with them, but also that you value their business enough to provide this useful information. A full debrief conveys your desire to be a trusted and dedicated strategic partner.



AS MANAGING PARTNER OF THE CHARLES GROUP, INC. **SUSAN DUNKELMAN** CREATIVELY CONCEPTUALIZES MEETINGS AND EVENTS AND PLANS AND EXECUTES THEM TO PERFECTION; DELIVERING MEMORABLE EVENTS BOTH WITHIN THE US AND GLOBALLY. PRIOR TO FORMING THE CHARLES GROUP, INC. IN 1987, SUSAN SERVED AS DIRECTOR OF CONFERENCES FOR THE RISK AND INSURANCE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY (RIMS).



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BY MORGAN HALASKA

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