How to Avoid

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Little things mean everything

During my decades as a professional speaker, I've been a keynote presenter at hundreds of events and spoken to more than one hundred thousand people around the world.

I've discovered that little things event planners do (or forget to do) can have a HUGE impact on the success (or failure) of their event.

This short book offers you the most common mistakes I've seen event planners make and how you can avoid them so your events will be well-attended, successful, and generate strong positive buzz throughout your organization.

A benevolent manipulation of energy

Decades ago when I was in ministerial school, we were taught that a good church service is a "benevolent manipulation of energy" and the same is true for ANY live event.

Let's break that down: Benevolent is defined as "good purposes" and the definition of manipulate is "control."

So, all truly great live events "Control the energy of those in attendance for good purposes."

These good purposes might be to improve the person's life, increase their contribution to the organization, enhance their ability to collaborate with others, and dozens of other important reasons.

First and foremost, put on a good show

So, how do you positively control people's energy?

Think about a great live show you have seen—perhaps a Broadway show or a concert.

Great productions all have certain key elements that make the show seem not just good but spectacular! And that's what you're going for.

With a truly great production, audience members don't just sit passively watching; they get swept up into a unified, transformative, and memorable experience!

Scattered Energy

Years ago I was fortunate enough to meet the great comedian and movie star Yakov Smirnoff and we became good friends.

Yakov invited me and my family to come to Branson, MO to see his live variety show. and when we arrived Yakov handed us tickets for the best seats in the house — front row, center!

I thanked him for the front row seats and Yakov said, “Honestly, it’s just because you’re here first. We always distribute tickets starting in the very front middle and then spread out from there”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you have to concentrate the energy.” Yakov said. “I’ve got a 2,500 seat theater. And, if we have a light turnout of, say, 600 people, I don’t want to be trying to entertain scattered energy. An audience is a living thing and when you divide up the audience, you divide the energy. And divided energy is MUCH harder to engage and entertain.”

Allowing an audience to sit wherever they wish in a large space scatters the energy. People feel less connected, makes it harder for the speaker to harness and maximize their energy, decreases engagement, and is a **BIG MISTAKE!**

Don’t Spread the Energy

Start with the back half of the seats roped off

Following Yakov’s example is actually pretty easy. For stadium seats, buy a couple of ropes and drape them from the back of the room over the first seat in each row. If your event has chairs around a table, block off sections by leaning the chairs against the table. As the front portion begins to fill, move the ropes or chairs to open up new sections.

Quiet as a Tomb

Think of the last time you went to a live event and had a really good time — ANY live event

It could have been a concert, sporting event, live play, seminar, even a church service — ANY live event of ANY kind.

ALL successful live events have one thing in common: MUSIC is played right up until the beginning (and often during) the event.

Music sets the energy of your attendees.

No music = no energy.

Upbeat music = upbeat energy.

The music you play should be upbeat, widely acceptable, and, ideally, be songs people know very well.

Hearing songs we know with people who also know the same songs unifies our energy and makes us feel connected.

Don’t Forget to Set the Mood

This is probably one of the most important **BIG MISTAKES** to avoid — and, it’s one of the easiest to fix.

Shuffle a playlist of songs as people enter. Suggestions:

- *I Love Me* - Meghan Trainor
- *Firework* - Katie Perry
- *Hall of Fame* - The Skrypt
- *The Future’s So Bright* - Timbuk 3
- *Eye of the Tiger* - Survivor
- *Happy* - Pharrell Williams
- *I’m a Believer* - Smashmouth
- *Centerfield* - John Fogerty
- *Geronimo* - Sheppard
- We Are the Champions - Queen

Where's Wildo?

Several years ago I was hired by a large software company to keynote their annual dealer group meeting.

This was this company's most important event of the year and they spared no expense in trying to make everything look big-time!

Well..almost.

They spent a ton of money on the stage including elaborate shimmering curtains that seemed to be alive and a half-dozen video monitors poking out through interesting shapes cut into the backdrop.

But, they cheaped-out on the lighting!

Although the stage was spectacular, they had chosen to not have any spotlights or stage-lighting.

As a result, whoever was on stage just blended into the background.

Again, think of ANY live event and you'll realize that the performers are lit brighter than the audience.

Why?

Don't Leave the Stage in Darkness

Because people associate light with importance — think of the paintings of ancient kings with halos over their heads. Light symbolizes importance and if the people on stage are not lit so they stand out, the audience dismisses them off as not important.

Don't Cheap-Out on Lighting

Next to good quality audio, lighting is THE most important element.

People on stage must POP and only good lighting can do this. Most venues rent lights at a nominal cost. You don't even need a light technician, just aim it at the middle of the stage.

Chill out

Let me tell you the WORST case scenario for a professional speaker.

Everyone has just finished a heavy lunch, the room is warm, and you're supposed to engage and entertain everyone for an hour or more.

Meanwhile, the blood is moving from the audience's brains to their digestive systems. They begin to feel sluggish and when people become sluggish, you've lost them!

You've probably been to a seminar or conference and thought, "Gosh, it's cold in here!"

That's intentional.

When people are chilly, they're more alert.

The ideal temperature for an audience to stay awake but not feel uncomfortable is 68 degrees Fahrenheit.

Yes, this is too cold for some people but it's better to have a couple of people be a little uncomfortable than to have everyone fall asleep!

Don't Sweat It!

Keep Your Cool

Set the thermostat at 68 degrees and leave it there.

One very successful event planner told me "If no one is complaining that it's too cold, it's probably not cold enough."

Leave it to the Pros

I was once hired by a big auto company to do a keynote speech for hundreds of their top employees.

The event began at 6 PM and, after a few opening remarks, I was supposed to hit the stage at 6:15.

Prior to my speech, a Senior VP rose to speak about the company's economic status (bad) and future prospects (bleak) and he droned on for more than an hour!

At about 7:20 PM, I was finally introduced but by then it was too late — the audience was dead.

Upbeat music — upbeat energy.

If you hire a speaker to begin your conference get them on stage as quickly as possible and let them work their magic.

And, if you hire a speaker to close your event, DON'T do a bunch of stuff after their speech. This is not the time for closing remarks, a pitch for next year's conference or to draw raffle tickets.

Let your speaker end on a high note. Then, thank everyone for attending and say "good bye."

Don't Kill Your Audience

Start Big, Finnish Bigger!

The opening of a conference sets the tone. The closing of a conference creates a memory.

Let a professional open and/or close your event to create a lasting, positive impression.

Stick to the Script

Every truly professional speaker will provide you with an introduction to bring him or her on stage.

A speaker's introduction:

1. Excites the audience to hear the speaker's message
2. Gives a concise summary of the speaker's qualifications and celebrity status so they don't have to include a long bio in their speech

Believe it or not, you can totally set a speaker up to fail if you mess around with their introduction.

Not long ago I was hired by a large national non-profit to keynote their leaders' conference.

The woman who introduced me is a big fan and had read my books, watched my videos, and seen my movie.

In her enthusiasm, she told several of my best, signature jokes AND shared several of my key points as part of my introduction.

This could have really messed up a less savvy speaker.

Don't Set Your Speaker Up to Fail

Just remember, when it comes to a speaker's intro, stick to the script.

Don't Get Cute with the Intro

An introduction is not a time to be funny, make personal comments, or emphasize a point.

An introduction is the first step to an enjoyable and successful experience for everyone.

Ants Don’t Inspire

I once delivered a mid-conference motivational speech for 1,100 people.

The event space was a large, narrow, and long hotel ballroom. This meant that the people in the back were several hundred yards away from me.

I was so far away from the folks in the back that they looked like ants to me.

Worse, I looked like an ant on stage to them!

The single biggest change to live events in the last 20 years has been the explosion of Jumbotrons — huge screens that show you the action up close and personal.

Having the action on screen makes the audience feel engaged and connected to what’s happening.

EVERY major concert, sporting event, conference, seminar use big screens to show the person presenting.

Why?

Don’t Waste 90% of Your Presentation

90% of communication comes from body language and movement and only 10% from voice. Because they couldn’t see, the people in the back received only 10% of what I presented!

The bigger the audience the bigger the screen

If your audience is larger than 200, project what’s happening on stage onto a screen. Most conference centers and hotels can rent you the equipment or you can search online for “Conference Video Equipment.” Bite the bullet and do this once — you’ll never go back!

Whatever, Whenever

Here's a tale of two events. The first was when I spoke to the Million Dollar Roundtable.

I was supposed to start speaking at 9:10 AM so we gathered at 7:45 AM for a sound check. Their tech person had already downloaded and tested my PowerPoint. We checked the microphone, did a run-through of my intro, and at PRECISELY 9:10 AM, I was introduced.

The second event was a national educational professionals conference.

As usual, I arrived 90 minutes early to do a sound check but ended up waited alone for over an hour.

The AV person arrived just 10 minutes before I was to go onstage and it took him all 10 minutes to hook up everything.

It was now time for me to begin speaking but he had not even downloaded my PowerPoint! For more than 30 minutes, the audience sat waiting for us to start.

Don't Make Them Count Your Faults

There is an old French proverb, "We count the flaws of people who make us wait."

By the time they got around to introducing me, the audience was irritated and disengaged.

Not starting on time is a Big Mistake because you lose your audience.

Start on time. End on time. Period!

I use an iPhone app called BIG CLOCK when I speak so I can see the time without breaking eye contact with the audience. BIG RED CLOCK is a similar app for desktop computers. Try them both.. Make sure that everyone on your event team knows the time and that you always start and end on time.

“We’ll be right back”

Several times, clients have asked me to break up my presentation.

They’ll say something like, “We want you to speak for an hour and then we’ll take a break for refreshments (or go visit the vendor’s booths, or take a bathroom break, or whatever) and then we’ll come back and you can end with a big finish.”

‘Terrible idea! And here’s why…

I recently saw Bruce Springsteen and anyone who has seen *The Boss* live knows that he’s a MASTER showman.

Springsteen’s concert had all the elements we’ve discussed:

- Music warmed up the audience
- Great lighting
- The action was on a big screen

Bruce worked the audience up into a fever that built slowly over time. Everything was leading up to a HUGE finish.

Now, what if Bruce and the rest of the E-Street Band walked off stage for a half hour break just fifteen minutes before the finale?

Crazy, right?

Don’t Stop the Show

Half the audience would have left and the ones who remained would have totally lost their passion for the show. Bruce’s big finish would have been a big flop!

Remember that breaking momentum, kills momentum

Don’t break apart any element that’s less than 90 minutes in length.

Let momentum build and people will stay engaged and will enjoy everything a LOT more.

Missed Opportunity

The #1 **Big Mistake** some event planners make is…they don't hire me.

"It ain't bragging, if you can do it," said Baseball great Dizzy Dean.

So, this isn't about bragging.

It's simply a fact that not hiring me to speak at your event is a missed opportunity.

Why?

Because during my 20+ years as a professional speaker, my average audience rating is 4.9 out of 5 stars!

My most common reviews are "Amazing!" "Engaging!" "Funny!" "Motivating!" and "Awesome!"

I've trained more than 100,000 top executives in more than a dozen countries and I always rock the house!

It's been said that "A symphony conductor doesn't play an instrument, he plays the entire orchestra."

Don't Miss This Opportunity

Similarly, a great speaker plays the audience.

A great speaker knows how to take all of the elements of an event and turn something ordinary into something extraordinary for everyone who attends.

Let me do that for you.

Visit www.WillBowen.com

Watch videos of me in action as well as reviews from top corporate and association executives.

Email info@WillBowen.com for fees and availability.