

RECEPTIONS – IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

If you were to ask the average person, "What is the easiest event to plan?" many would say a reception. How hard can it be, right? But there are some pitfalls you need to know how to avoid. A couple of common ones have to do with timing.

Imagine this: You have planned a lavish reception with great food, open bar, the works. The first guest arrives, goes to the bar, and then leaves. When you meet him in the elevator a few minutes later, your board member (why is it always a board member?) mentions that the bartender wouldn't serve him because the bar didn't open until 6:00 p.m.-it is now 5:45 p.m.!

Were the hotel and bartender being unnecessarily rigid? Perhaps, but in some situations the client doesn't want the bar to open early.

How could this have been avoided? One option is to schedule the bar to be open 30 minutes before the actual start time of your reception. This way, if folks arrive early, there is no problem. Make it clear to the hotel and its staff that the start time of the event is 6:00 p.m. but that the bar should be ready to serve early arrivals at 5:30 p.m.

Different scenario: My event had a cash bar at the end of an all-day program. It was originally scheduled for 60 minutes, but folks were showing no sign of leaving. I noticed that the bartender was starting to pack up, so I told him to keep the bar open for another 30 minutes. He told me he was scheduled to work at another event that started in 30 minutes! Funny, since I had been charged for a four-hour minimum.

One way to avoid a situation like this, is to build in some flexibility by scheduling the reception end time for 30 minutes later than the published end time. Or let the hotel know that the event may be extended for up to one hour **with the authorization of the meeting planner**. It is important to know your group and take into consideration the overall flow of the event as you decide the best solution.

When you begin a conversation about having flexible starting and ending times with the catering manager, you may get some pushback. I like to address this by explaining what has happened to me before and making it clear that I need them to work with me to make sure it doesn't happen again. If they have another suggestion, that's great. But in the end, make sure the banquet event order (called "the BEO") clearly indicates what you need with regard to the timing of the event.

I hope these ideas will make planning your next reception a little easier.

Shelley E. Griffin, CMM, the president of Boston-based Griffin Conference Group, is a respected industry leader with over twenty years experience. For more helpful tips, please visit our web site at www.griffinconferencegroup.com.

