

## “Think Big - Go Big - Win Big!”

### *How Some Meeting Planners Are Winning Via Their Approach*

Art Mollenhauer, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan, Chicago shared what he thought was a unique challenge. The marketplace in the Chicago area is saturated with Gala and Speaker events yet his Board and Donor network had lined up potentially 150 C-Suite Executives if the right speaker could be selected to draw that VIP crowd. Mollenhauer shared “A key ingredient for success is the selection of the right Speakers Bureau who will invest the time and innovation to make this work.” The behind-the-scenes logistics to make an event successful are always too numerous to list – but some of the key success drivers were selecting the right venue and speakers for achieving the organization’s goals. For this event, the Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management in downtown Chicago was chosen, to provide easy access and an intimate setting for networking. A high-profile speaker known for speaking selectively was targeted to create implicit value – and Henry Paulson was featured for this year’s event. The result was a huge draw of a C-Suite audience, a very successful event, and an extremely high return for all participants.

So what are the important lessons and how are some meeting planners “winning big” through their strategy and approach?

First, consider that some of these events are the equivalent of the “Super Bowl” for these organizations. They are gambling a tremendous amount of time, energy and resources towards making that event a smash success. Often, that means huge fundraising, awareness and/or membership opportunities. The important message when a lot is at stake is to not fail at what you’re trying to achieve.

4 Keys to Success:

- Think Big to Win Big
- The Right Strategy
- A Great, Strategic Partner
- Perfect Execution

It sounds simple yet there are hundreds of small details that can often derail an event. We often say “Get the ‘Big Picture’ items right and the small details will more easily fall in-line.” That means getting the strategy, venue, date and speaker right are a solid beginning. But here’s something we’re hearing increasingly more often...

It is often the “non-traditional sessions” which generate the most return on investment.

A prime example is a large, global financial group shared that the speaker we selected was perfect and yielded huge returns through the traditional audience event they did. But they shared the private (ten top customers) roundtable discussion we orchestrated was worth 3-5x what they paid for the speech. A top-notch agency is going to know how to create a “win-win” situation that keeps yielding results year-round. A group booking hundreds of worldwide events each year will just intuitively see opportunities

as they naturally arise. A strategic or results-focused facilitator may ask “What if we considered ‘this’...or added an event for the top customers that would pay huge dividends?”

The nature of events are changing quickly and so is what makes them successful.

Sometimes a big-name speaker, entertainer or celebrity can fuel marketing and fundraising year-round. The right speaker can also lift the brand and its awareness by associating that great speaker to your great organization, institution or cause. There are many paths to consider when creating a successful event and no one path is the absolute best way.

Tony Burchard, CEO of Inova Health Foundation, has worked with high net-worth audiences for thirty years. With an upcoming event at the very sophisticated Salamander Resort in Middleburg, VA featuring CNN Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta and evening entertainment by Gladys Knight, Tony offered, *“Organizations....whether non-profits, corporations, associations, universities, etc...have some fundamental principles which are alike. Specifically, each caters to a certain constituency of people who are critical to the success of the enterprise. Identifying these people and working hard to drive value for them via highly intimate and provocative experiences can have a profound return on investment.”*

For large events and big-speaker opportunities, the risks and rewards are magnified exponentially. Knowing that, it’s interesting to see, firsthand, how “thinking big” and “going big” can lead to “winning big,” as well. Winning...whether this means exposure, new customers, donations, etc...requires a commitment to treating VIP attendees with a highly personalized program, in an intimate setting, and with world-class speakers and entertainers. If the right strategy is executed perfectly, the return on investment could be nothing short of revolutionary.

- Dan Sims, Principal of Worldwide Speakers Group



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