



LEARNING WITH LEISURE

HOW AN INNOVATIVE CRUISE-SHIP CONFERENCE INSPIRED ASSOCIATION DELEGATES

FOR ANY ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE, SUCCESSFULLY BALANCING WORK, LEARNING, AND LEISURE IS A DAILY CHALLENGE. FINDING THE TIME TO EMBRACE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IS ALMOST AS CHALLENGING AS BUILDING A SOLID JUSTIFICATION FOR HOLDING A MEETING IN A LOCATION REMOTELY SUGGESTING LEISURE. ONE VENUE WITH ENDLESS UNTAPPED POTENTIAL - THE CRUISE SHIP EXPERIENCE - PROVIDES THE IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES TO SHARE THEIR CHALLENGES, HOPES, AND FEARS, AND ENCOURAGES WHAT THEY'RE MOST OFTEN IN SEARCH OF: **A REASONABLE BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND LEISURE.**

A few years ago, the **Greater Washington Society of Association Executives** in partnership with **Leviathan Meeting Innovations** (a national program management company and cruise line liaison) took association executives and business partners on a relaxing and rewarding four-day excursion aboard the five-star Norwegian Majesty that included stops at the exotic island of Cozumel, Mexico, and historic Key West, Florida. Attendees enjoyed power-packed three- and four-hour sessions led by impassioned change guru Patrick Lynch, chairman of Scottsdale-based Potential Management Consultants, that even

included an aerobics break alternating with after-hours activities ranging from golf to yoga, breathtaking sightseeing, wine tasting, lounging topside, the comforts of networking at private receptions, and the pleasures of engaging conversation with fellow attendees in several evenings of fine dining.

Dealing with the exploding demands of what Lynch calls 'hyperchange' in this new century goes to the heart of his message for association executives and business partners. Understanding change begins with recognizing that there is a new set of rules for living.

It used to be about making a living - now it's about making a life, Lynch observes. In the new economy, basically you've got to grow or die. But how can you do two things simultaneously that seem so contradictory? Lynch hints: How fast you like to make change happen is directly tied to the speed at which you will make changes. *'If you're comfortable at these levels, welcome to the new 21st century, because you're going to be really successful,' Lynch predicts.* It's not about waiting until it hurts to change, or about hitting a wall and reacting, it's about anticipating change and implementing it while things are still going

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well. Lynch's message is the perfect complement to attendees who appear well on their way to embracing these new rules for living.

BALANCING LEARNING AND LEISURE

Few would argue that however intellectually enriched, participants feel anything but refreshed and rested at the close of a traditional land-based meeting. The cruise ship experience, in contrast, offers a myriad of round-the-clock activities, from bingo to art auctions, snorkeling and ice-carving demonstrations, Latin and line dancing classes, comedy clubs, karaoke, and musical shows. Coupled with the serenity of sunshine and fresh air and the camaraderie of the diverse

an association CEO at dinner as the sun sets in Key West? While the location may be secondary to the actual event, that it was on a cruise and in such a comfortable environment created an atmosphere that allowed the meeting content to really take hold and gave attendees time to escape and reflect. At an in-town seminar, it is too easy to be as tethered as if you'd never left the office.'

Carol Brunson Day, president and CEO of the Council for Professional Recognition, considered the balance between leisure and learning excellent. *'The full day break between sessions gave adequate time to reflect on the materials covered. And, for a three-day cruise, a group of 30 to 40 is optimal for a learning experience of this type.'*

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mix of professionals, the desire to participate in the learning experience is only enhanced. Unlike traditional seminars, attendees are even encouraged to invite spouses to participate, yet another attractive benefit of onboard learning.

Phillip Cavanaugh, director of corporate events for America Online notes, *'I would not have ever considered a cruise ship as a venue but the balance of three to four hours of intensive discussion in the workshop and 10 to 12 hours of relaxing, yet upbeat interactions was great. How often does one have the chance to discuss a topic with a world-class facilitator in the morning, hike through Mayan ruins the next afternoon, and sit with*

For many, justifying the time out of the office proved just as difficult as justifying the venue. Though a cruise is a great way for executives to disconnect from the office from e-mail, voicemail, and other distractions the plush environment cruise ships offer executives and meeting planners alike, however, make these technology must-haves conveniently available for those who can't seem to disconnect.

A VENUE IN ITS INFANCY

The cruise as a meeting venue is relatively new. But the cruise industry as a whole is the fastest-growing segment of the travel industry. It has achieved more than 1,000 percent

growth since 1970, when 500,000 were estimated to have taken cruises. As recently as 1998, that number has risen to 5.4 million, and was expected to reach six million by the end of 1999. The Cruise Lines International Association estimates that twelve million passengers took cruises worldwide in 2006.

And, with growth comes improvement. Cruise companies continue to expand itineraries to include more exotic ports of call and have introduced increasingly innovative onboard facilities, such as ice-skating rinks, cyber-cafes, multi-themed restaurants, and state-of-the-art meeting facilities.

MONEY MATTERS

For many association executives, budgeting for a meeting or learning experience that could be construed as frivolous or exotic is often difficult to justify to members or a board of directors. As executive director of the **Council for Chemical Research Janice Tabor (CAE)** cautions, the perception that a cruise is for entertainment only needs to be appropriately managed by any executive proposing the cruise as a venue.

In the end, it is the meeting content that should drive the decision to participate in a seminar at sea, says **Judy Gray**, president and CEO of the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce. *'I opened your material, saw the topic of the conference, and thought, this is exactly what I need. I decided I would go even if it were in a frequently visited venue, and once I figured out it wasn't, then I felt perfectly justified. The fact that it was on a ship or going to Mexico was inconsequential it was the focus on the growth opportunity that really drove me.'*

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