



Hi All,

WOW, am I late with these diaries. How about I make a deal? This will be 1st & 2nd quarter diaries, and I will do a special edition from the Olympics in Beijing.

I have a fair amount of new subscribers this go around and to those people I say "thank you" and welcome to my diaries.

I need to give everyone a fair warning ~ as I have a lot to bitch about in this issue. Everyone needs to know this type of crabbing isn't my idea of a good time. I feel there is so much "slippage or cheating" going on that it needs to be addressed. If I am experiencing it on my level, I would hate to see what is happening to a meeting planner that is fairly green.

TTAAKKKIIINNNGGG it from the top ~ things I have learned the first five months of this year.

Front and center of this is GUARANTEES. First question: exactly whose responsibility is it to get the guarantee from the customer? Sure, hotels have on the contract that guarantees are due three business days prior. In the old days it was the hotel's responsibility to contact the customer and leave a vmail or email to confirm. That is called INTEGRITY as a catering manager. Customers respect catering managers and DMCs who take responsibility to be proactive and ask the question. I have gotten burned this first five months with catering, and more importantly, DMCs knowing our numbers have gone down but kept their head in the sand out of greediness. Do know that while we may be using your services now, it doesn't mean we will again.

Just warming up....what has also never ceased to amaze me is how UGLY presentations of coffee breaks and buffets have gotten. You don't mind charging \$75.00 - \$100.00++ for a buffet, but G-d forbid you would use some décor or accent cloth. F & B FOLKS ~ Walmart has an amazing array of goodies for buffets, dirt cheap. GET UP OFF THE WALLET. While working in Tucson this March, I was so irked that this pricy hotel put out the nastiest looking coffee break I have ever seen in my life. I called the F & B director to come look as he had yet to visit one function. They had white on white linens ~ all wrinkled; tables were shoved together to make one long break for 250 people as opposed to stations. Then, the kitchen took containers filled with popcorn and stacked them full of popcorn one inside the other. How sanitary is that? The irony of all of this ~ no one "got it." To all of them it was totally acceptable. Hotels, read this ditty to your banqueting department as this could have been you. Take pride in what you are doing, and we as customers will appreciate the effort.

Think I am done yet?? Not even close. Many of you have read this, and I am going to keep writing about it until I am blue in the face. Chefs, taste your food!! The same place in Tucson made such a bad soup that prior to lunch one day after I tasted it (and almost choked), I then had several of the banquet staff dip a spoon in the pot to taste as well. This was an important exercise because I don't want to be known as bitchy customer (just a bitchy writer), and I want them to taste what I tasted. These servers immediately agreed that it wasn't worthy and ran it back to the kitchen for a quick soup surgery. It came back just as the group was breaking for lunch; it tasted better, and I will leave it at that.

Rounding the bend...faxing or emailing me BEOs. I just had a convention center email me 100 pages of BEOs that I was expected to print, sign, and fax back! Are you kidding me?? If you want these signed BEOs back, YOU print them, YOU overnight them with a pre-addressed envelope, and I will be happy to comply.

Still going... I am finding top line hotels using banqueting platters made of plastic. I promptly made two hotels trade these platters for glassware. Folks, if you are charging me the food rates that are top dollar, then I insist that you serve the food appropriately on glassware. I am not at your family reunion picnic, and I don't appreciate your cheating "our" customers with your low rent plastic platters.

I am not done yet—let's talk gratuities and bad manners all in the same sentence. I am blessed with having customers who still leave gratuities for staff who go above and beyond. What never ceases to amaze me and my colleagues are the very bad manners of people who received these grat's. Do you know, so far this year, almost all my clients have left grat's and only three people have written an acknowledgement or approached the client to say thank you? Be forewarned all my clients have all commented that if this ditty isn't appreciated, then why bother.

Winding down. This note is to all F & B directors and hotel general managers. **GET UP OFF YOUR ASSES** and look at the events taking place at your property. How about this for a concept: thank the client for their business. **SERIOUSLY!** It is a rarity that I see an F & B director checking a function and G-d forbid a GM thanking a customer. My clients always walk away dumbfounded by this. Sometimes GM's send their resident managers to do the deed. **NOT GOOD ENOUGH!** I can honestly say with 70% of my time on the road this year, only about three GMs made a point of coming to say hello more than once. The main exception was the GM from Hotel Contessa in San Antonio Final 4. This GM was all over the place making sure he and his staff were doing whatever was needed to give Coke the best service possible. There are two additional exceptions to this comment.

First being Denise Flanders of the Four Seasons Atlanta, who is now going to Chicago. Chicago you are so blessed to have her. Second, Tom Donavon, who is currently at the Ritz in Hawaii and formerly at Bachelor's Gulch. These three GMs totally get it. How? Their hotel employees respect them, and as a result, their employees want to do their best. On a higher plateau, these GMs are readily available for their guests and always personally let you know how much your business means to them.

Fun idea: meeting planners, start carrying \$1.00 lottery tickets to give to hotel staff when you catch them doing something right. For example, too many banquet captains walk around setting up functions without BEOs. If you are working a function for our client, I expect you to be carrying your paperwork. This would be worthy of a \$1.00 lottery ticket.

Ok, I lied. I am going to keep bitching ~ hotels...**IRON YOUR LINEN.** I can't begin to tell you how amazed I am the dirty skirting and impossibly wrinkled linen that banquets put out as acceptable. Banquets, **OPEN** your eyes and take a look at what you are putting on the tables.

This next ditty was from my F & B Morel of the May issue of Plan Your Meetings magazine. I feel so strongly about it I am going to repeat myself by reprinting.

Here is a situation that a lot of us have the power to do something about but don't: service charges on F&B.

Are they negotiable? Ask the hotels, and they will tell you "no." Usually, that is correct. But with service fees inching their way up to 23 percent (which I personally think is ludicrous), I see some clients are starting to

negotiate the fees. They basically say, “You want this rooms contract? You want the F&B that goes with it? Then lower service fees to a much more reasonable 21 percent.” End of story.

Also, don't be shy about negotiating service charges on a per function level. I was doing a VIP event last week at the new Gaylord National, where the level of service wasn't even close to the billed 22 percent. I went to the GM the next day to voice my frustrations with the service, among other things, and he promptly removed the entire service charge.

The bottom line here, folks, is you do have more flexibility than you think. So don't be scared to use it.

While working at a 5 Star resort in Cancun, the chef had the word “traditional” written all over the banqueting menu as a description. Traditional pumpkin salad? I don't even know what a regular pumpkin salad is, let alone a traditional one. I politely explained that traditional isn't really a description. It isn't describing the flavor of the food as opposed to “mint” or “ginger glazed.” If you are using words to describe your food, make sure that you are using verbiage that will help the reader follow the flavors of the dish.

At the same resort in Cancun, they put the salt and pepper shakers in a food warmer to keep the moisture out. This works much better than rice.

One Tequila, Two Tequila, Three Tequila – FLOOR!

This is what I learned on May 5 in San Diego ~ thankfully, not the hard way.

While working an event earlier in the year, I did a buffet of “comfort foods.” What we noticed is that people put more food on their plates when comfort foods were involved as opposed to unfamiliar food.

Things I am tired of—but people still like—are sliders. Get creative and do a shrimp po boy slider; use different shapes and flavor of rolls. Recently, I did a honey glazed, smoked salmon with peppered bacon and micro greens. Slide your mind to a more creative place when creating sliders.

I recently did an event at The World Famous San Diego Zoo, and this is what I learned.

- Monkeys have tails; apes do not.
- Hyenas let out a yelp. Hence, they get their name because they are scared.
- If you are doing a site inspection prior to opening, don't be surprised if a trainer and her leopard coming walking by you on their early morning stroll.
- Giraffes are the tallest land animals. Their necks alone weighs 600 lbs.
- Over the course of 24 hours, lions have short bursts of intense activity, followed by long periods of sleep.

Several years ago, I hired two Falcon cheerleaders to promote an up and coming Super Bowl function. I had them in their skimpy field uniforms as the audience was primarily male. I thought the cheerleaders would be wildly popular, but they weren't. Why not? Ok, stick with me as we fast forward to this past spring. I am in DC doing an event at the Redskins Owners Club. I try this cheerleader thing again, and I hired two for the evening for a primarily male group. This time these girls were very popular; everyone wanted to talk and have their pictures taken with them. What was the difference between the two events? It was their uniforms. This go-round I put them in their “winter” uniform, which is a tight-fitting sweat suit that curved in the right places. By covering them, it made these girls much more comfortable with talking to the guys, and the gentleman were

more comfortable talking to them. I asked the girls about this, and they thanked me profusely for putting them in “winter uniform.” They said they love their field uniform, but for the field only as they are separated from the people. When they have their uniform on in intimate situations, they are uneasy as that tiny uniform is too close for comfort.

Still on the subject of the Redskin cheerleaders—Melanie who manages them was so great that I asked if she could recommend a booth babe for this same client. She said “of course!” and hooked me up with Katie. Anyone who hires booth babes pay attention as this is important. Katie worked out great, and I must give credit where it is due. Thank you, Melanie. 99% of the models that I hire tend to be focused on flirting with the men; hence, not being equally as friendly to women. This wasn’t the case with Katie. I commented to Katie and Melanie about this and how much I appreciated this type of professionalism. They both said that with their public exposure representing the Redskins that it is important that everyone gets treated equally. If you need a booth babe in a city that has an NFL team, contact their cheerleader rep and see if you can hire a cheerleader. My experience with Katie could not have been better.

Since I did so much crabbing on the front side, I want to wrap the diaries with a story worthy of a smile. When working in Houston, I had a client who rented out Johnson Space Center. Part of the deal at Space Center Houston is that you can apply for an astronaut appearance at no charge. How this works is, they put the request on the astronaut corkboard. Then you have to cross your fingers and hope one steps up to the plate to make an appearance at your event. Barbara told me astronauts usually don’t commit till about 10 days prior because of schedule changes. Ok, I said, and I circled my calendar for 10 days in. The 10 days mark arrived and I received no word. I am a bit miffed by this because I explained thoroughly that the attendees were all ex-military and in aviation. I felt for sure this combination would guarantee me an astronaut. I talked to my catering manager and asked her how come on no astronaut. It wasn’t as if my attendees were a bunch of accountants. These guys could really talk to them. Yet, I hadn’t gotten one offer on this. I go on and on to her pleading my case when she very firmly and politely tells me, “They are getting ready to launch a shuttle into space, therefore no one is even thinking about working an event, let alone yours.” I am just going to have to wait patiently till the shuttle goes to outer space, and maybe then I can get an astronaut. I started laughing at the enormity of this, and tell her I will be patient. I went about my business and the days ticked away. So, I say to my catering manager as we get closer, “I still don’t have an astronaut. What’s up with that?” She said now the actual event day is colliding with the shuttle landing, and chances are I am not going to have an astronaut. She was right; two days after the event I received an astronaut appearance rejection letter. Nice to know the government is on top of things.

Everyone have a great remainder of the summer. I will pen my next diaries from Beijing. Let the games begin.

With Appreciation,

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