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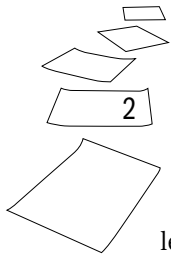
MEETINGS, MAYHEM AND MARGARITAVILLE

Em finds herself in a distressing real-life situation that tests her ability to walk the fine event planning line of giving her clients what they want and keeping their guests safe, as they spiral out of control on an all-male incentive getaway reward for top sales that would turn into an event planner's worst nightmare of "guests gone wild."

DECEMBER 13

What a day it's been! Started out the same as most arrival days, with "they're herrrrrrrrr"—à la *Poltergeist*—echoing through my mind as soon as I learned the plane had touched down. I knew I was minutes away from experiencing another round of "some things have to be seen to be believed." I know the actual phrase is "some things have to be believed to be seen" but in my case I *know* the opposite is true. What takes place under the premise of business is entertaining to say the least, guaranteed to raise an eyebrow or two and sometimes my blood pressure, and today did exactly that.

It began with my airport arrival team calling to let me know that all 50 men were present and accounted for but . . . and I have



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learned to hold my breath when I hear the “but” and today was no different . . . they are in very high spirits and already spinning out of control. It was a huge mistake to have them all fly down together on the same plane. It’s something we never recommend, because should disaster strike a whole company’s top executives and their top performers could be wiped out in an instant. Since 9/11, many corporations have put travel policies in effect for this very reason. But, it was what their company wanted—their whole top sales force partying in the aisles, celebrating their recent successes on their way down to the company meeting. And a young, all-male sales force, traveling with no spouses or significant others to rein them in, with a free open bar and lots of corporate encouragement, knows how to “get their crunk on and wile out,” as this group likes to say. Trying to outdo one another will be a given. The very nature of their business is competition and a sales force is high energy at the best of times. I know we are going to have our hands full 24/7. So much for chilling out in Margaritaville.

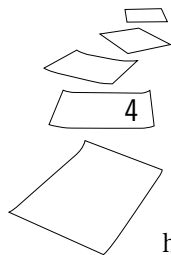
As soon as I heard that the party had begun, I gave the hotel manager a mayhem alert. I knew that the hotel’s poor guests would have no idea what was going to hit them about 15 minutes after I sounded the alert. I knew that their tranquility bubble was about to burst.

Pop! Sheer horror is the best way to describe the expressions on both hotel staff and guest faces alike when our rowdy crowd of men spilled out of the motor coaches and into the lobby, dancing and singing on their way to their private check-in. The company chose this hotel because it was self-contained, out of the way and removed from the temptations of downtown. They wanted to keep their meeting attendees from straying too far, having taken over half of the guestrooms in the hotel and pretty much all of the function space for private meetings and parties. The hotel’s guests, on the other hand, had selected this vacation spot for an idyllic week away from noisy intrusion. They began craning their necks to see

what all the noise was about as soon as the motor coach arrived. I could see that they were hoping against hope that this was merely a pit stop for the group and they would soon be on their way to town to stay at another hotel. The hotel staff, however, knew better.

I hated to shatter the hotel guests' momentary glimmer of hope but it was time for lights, camera and action, and with a discreet motion I had my program directing team move in for the official meet and greet. Having been forewarned as to the group's general condition, we had already advised the bartenders, standing at the ready with the welcome margaritas and beer, to go light on the alcohol and not be too quick at filling requests for beer. Dee Dee, lead event director extraordinaire, was already circulating and encouraging "the guys" to sample some of the food—high in protein and carbs to sop up the alcohol, and with little salt (no nuts, pretzels or chips) as we didn't want to encourage further drinking—that had been laid out to buffer the effects of what for many obviously had been a liquid lunch.

I have traveled the world with Dee Dee and there is no one else I would rather have beside me on-site when doing a program. I have watched her work the room using her magic, getting others to do her bidding with her gentle, coaxing way. Little did people know that under that outer layer of genteelness lay five feet two inches of pure determination and what Dee Dee referred to as her "spicy Latina temper," which caused her dark eyes to go from warm and welcoming to flashing warning signals in an instant if anyone or anything came up on program that would challenge our ability to deliver a flawless event while under her expert direction. Those who had encountered her displeasure with their actions knew to tread carefully in future encounters. I always knew that whatever had to be done would be done, right and on time, if assigned to Dee Dee. She had no patience for people who gave less than their personal and professional best. Dee Dee often says, "don't ask me



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how but it will get done” and it always is—sometimes by temporarily ruffling feathers in her quest for the best.

When you are running a live production, which is what a special event is, you don’t get a second chance to make things right or even do a dress rehearsal. It’s live, baby, live. My company and staff’s reputation, my client’s reputation and corporate or social image, thousands of dollars—sometimes hundreds of thousands to millions of client dollars—are all on the line. Messing up the part we play in putting all the pieces together from design to on-site orchestration is not an option. Unfortunately, that doesn’t apply in reverse. Cleaning up the messes my clients and their guests have been known to make when they are permitted to run amok (translated to guests, company execs and their employees gone wild) with and without my client’s blessing is an entirely different matter and an expected part of the job. From the looks of it, we’re going to have a lively time this week keeping ahead of this crew, including the corporate executives.

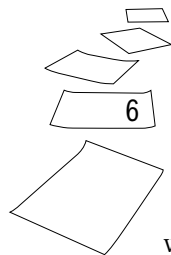
The company heads *loved* all the testosterone let loose in the room, actively encouraging their sales staff’s hijinks and setting the tone for their stay. They want them revved up, ready to hit the sales floor running when they get back to the office, anxious to achieve sales goals so they can be a part of the next company getaway. It’s one of their main objectives this week. And they want the ones who didn’t meet their targets and were left behind to wish they had been a part of the fun and festivities, and double their efforts so they can be part of this elite group (within their company) next time a round. Envy can be a powerful motivator.

Making sure that those who qualified to come have an unforgettable time is what we do. We are also responsible, in part, for making sure the guests return home in one piece, with no injuries, arrests or other incidents to mar their time away, but those in my industry know that’s not always possible. Some attendees, as well as those responsible for hosting their events, have ended up being

fired on the spot, involved in fist fights, thrown into jail, packed up and moved out of the hotel they were staying in, escorted to the airport to be put on the plane home, ended up divorced, become the talk of their industry and sometimes, as we have seen lately, making headlines that have been flashed around the world via the media and the Internet. Being wined and dined to the nth degree, in a staged air of casual camaraderie, can sometimes make it possible for invited guests to forget they are attending a business function or social event put on by a company who at the end of the day has an image to uphold. It's easy for personal and professional lines to get blurred when unlimited alcohol is involved and you are far away from home traveling on business in an exotic locale, staying in five-, six- and seven-star resorts and not necessarily with your spouse or significant other along. Anything and everything you can imagine does take place. It's our job to remain on high alert, diffuse any potentially dangerous situations and turn down the dial on excess frolicking before it gets out of control, doing it all with the utmost of discretion.

I was aware from the very beginning that we may need to revise some plans to avoid things going awry. I called a quick huddle with company execs to suggest a change but always, always away from guests and hotel staff. Being masters of discretion is part of our *modus operandi*.

The original plans called for the corporate hospitality suite to be open for drinks, mixing and mingling during the afternoon, but after a quick conference with company heads I was able to convince them that it would be better for all to slow down the pace as we still had the evening ahead. Tomorrow they have a full day of meetings to attend and it would not be in anyone's best interest to find their participants not fit to take part, having shown up wasted or hungover. Time to rein in the fun for the moment. The guests had no idea that an open hospitality suite had been planned so they didn't miss it. It was time for them to relax, settle in, swim,



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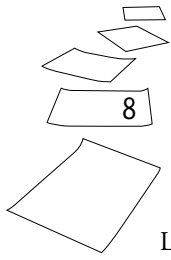
work out or take a nap so that they could be refreshed for the evening ahead. It also gave my staff time to grab something to eat and a chance to regroup, and for those of us who had come down several days ahead of the group, to meet with the hotel and other suppliers and prep the group arrival, and to be filled in on what took place on the flight down and on the transfer to the hotel.

It's no joke that it's important going into any program to be able to identify whom we'll need to pay special attention. Someone will end up wearing the title of Head Instigator and Chief Mischief Maker. There's always at least one on every program, no matter what profession or industry the guests are from. Lawyers, stockbrokers, auto manufacturers and car dealership owners, pharmaceutical, retail, real estate, manufacturing, entertainment—they all have “the one” you know you are going to have your hands full managing. And sometimes it's the company president, CEO, company executives or their staff. Who'll it be this time? I don't know yet, but it's only a matter of time.

Then there's Mr. or Ms. Amorous to contend with, who thinks sleeping with the event planning staff is part of the package. Thank heavens I learned early who to watch out for . . . and for the buddy system we have in place. None of us is ever left alone with any kind of creep—placed in a compromising situation or fending off an unwanted advance. Any such situation is easily circumvented once you know who to watch out for. The case where a well-known athlete had a young female hotel staff member step inside his room and then closed the door behind her should serve as a warning as to why you should never step into someone's bedroom suite alone or without the door left wide open, but some people learn the hard way. In that case, the hotel employee said she had been raped. Her hotel had a policy of making sure that the hotel door was left open when stepping into a guest's room for that very reason. It protects both the hotel staff member and the hotel guest from accusations and applies equally to other guests visiting other

guests' rooms, Your personal and professional reputation can be irreparably ruined in a matter of minutes by one lapse of judgment, and in this business it can become easily clouded by being starstruck, having too much to drink or simply a desire to please, or being too trusting and totally forgetting the situation you could find yourself in. Knowing who to be on guard around is imperative in this job in order to be proactive in finessing and sidestepping tricky ethical and even legal situations.

And we can't forget Mr. or Ms. Entitlement, who believes their every whim should be catered to. Not that they're any kind of VIP or anything, but they sure think they are. Those "you don't know who you're talking to" types. The kind who demand to be upgraded on the sly to the hotel's presidential suite. Umm, don't think so. The room assignments are not done by chance but rather are the express choice of the company head hosting their event. The truth is that if Mr. or Ms. Entitlement do not think they are being accommodated in a room that reflects their social or company stature, neither we nor the hotel staff are the ones who allocated that room to them but of course you can't say or even allude to that fact. One of the instructions the rooms manager receives is that the hotel or resort cannot change the room assignment without consulting us first. There is a pecking order. If through overbooking we must make upgrades, they aren't done based on a whim or on a guest's wishes. In some cases, the client may prefer to have any upgrades assigned to Mr. and Mrs. Joe Public rather than have their guests in different room categories. Every group is different, but what needs to be done in these kinds of situations is worked out months in advance. Mr. and Ms. Entitlement are easily recognized from calls they have made to the office beforehand with their various requests, but closet Mr. and Ms. Entitlements do show up on-site. They're usually the first ones back at the hospitality desk after they have been up to see their room and completed their mission to compare it to what others in the group have been checked into.



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Last week we made a fun wager on who we believe will be first back to the desk.

Mr. Macho and Ms. Thong (sometimes Mr. Thong) are also among the other personalities that often show up on-site. Oh goody.

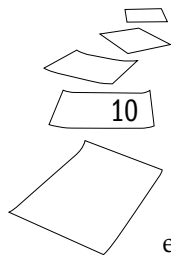
The majority of guests are sweethearts, but it only takes one out-of-control guest to ruin it for the rest. And it's our job to stop that from happening. Savvy and skilled program directors use the ABC principles of event planning (A=Anticipation, B=Backup Plan, C=Code of Conduct), which varies from client to client, guest to guest, to handle situations that crop up so that they don't have to kick into crisis management mode. Being able to read people and their personality types makes it easier to deal with situations as they come up. As an experienced program director I'm usually doing back-to-back business, social and celebrity events around the world for every type of client under the sun, and there's very little I haven't seen, done or handled.

I watched as, room keycards in hand, the guys started to head into the hotel in search of their guestroom. To help tone things down, they have not been given private rooms but are sharing a room with one of their colleagues. This didn't apply to the company heads, though. The pairing—who was sharing with whom—was strategically planned so that certain individuals would get to spend quality time one on one with someone the company hoped they would bond with, share sales techniques with and discuss common challenges with over the course of their stay—and keep tabs on them. Fifty men came down and we must have all of them present and accounted for at the end of their stay. And the general consensus from the get-go was that there would be less room for inhibitions to run free if they were paired with a roommate. But then again, if the company heads have made the wrong match, we could end up with double the trouble on our hands. The dynamics of every group are different; however, I'm used to getting a mix of

people from different social spheres, education backgrounds, and life and business experiences.

But, back to my recap of today. From all the hooting, whooo hooing and laughter coming from the balconies, it was no secret that the top sales staff had discovered the 80-gallon Jacuzzi in their two- and three-bedroom suites and were busy discussing in-room party possibilities. Everyone had tried to earn the Jacuzzi suites, which would no doubt soon be “party central.” We’d assigned all the guestrooms to the same general area to try to keep the noise contained, but with this crowd? Doubt that’s possible. They’re here for a good time and will be going full blast. In minutes they were back down, hanging out at the tiki bar, roughhousing in the junior Olympic-size heated swimming pool, taking note of the tropical garden setting and checking out the fitness center, while sending some of the others on a quest to find the nearest place to stock up on beer and snacks for their rooms. And yes, just like clockwork, this group’s Mr. Entitlement has already shown up at the hospitality desk, wanting to be assigned to a room with a Jacuzzi as well. It didn’t seem to matter to him that he didn’t qualify to be in one. Sighhhh. I left him in Dee Dee’s capable hands and headed out to advance dinner preparations. Sorry, Dee Dee!

Tonight was just what I was hoping for—very low-key. Everyone had a long travel day with an early morning flight and a connection through Miami. With the drinking and being out in the sun, after coming from winter weather, they were toasted in more ways than one and ready to retire early tonight. A simple welcome reception and dinner is the general rule of thumb for planning first-night activities. No use spending major dollars when guests, no matter how much they want to let loose, will be headed to bed early. Some didn’t even make it down to dinner tonight! They have a full day of meetings tomorrow and dinner off-property in the evening. By then they will have gotten their second wind, feeding off



each other's energy and gathering in groups to create mischief—Day Two is what we're bracing for.

Didn't really need to open the corporate hospitality suite this evening. Those who did show up were starting to fade by the time the Key Lime Pie was being served. Most were missing in action, fast asleep, their roommates told us. A parting announcement by company heads was made letting their guys know that early morning wake-up calls had been scheduled on their behalf to make sure everyone was present for the group breakfast, and that while they wanted everyone to have a great time, being late for their meeting was not an option.

Finally, it was time for us to turn in and call it a night as well.

DECEMBER 14

My 4:00 a.m. wake-up call came in on schedule. We were off to a good start. First things first. I called down to the front desk to see if anything went amiss last night. Everything was *fairly*—there was emphasis on the *fairly*—quiet last night. Good. That means shenanigans may have gone on but nothing to be overly concerned with as yet.

Our day always starts well in advance of the group. We had the hospitality desk to set up, notices to post, breakfast preparations to oversee, meeting room setup to approve, audiovisual equipment to test out and a hundred other items to cross off our function sheets, the bible for on-site program directors and event planning suppliers and venues. Everything that has to be done and the manner in which it is to be performed is laid out on those sheets. Each event element is scripted, carefully laid out minute by minute so that everyone involved with the program is operating with the same information and all know exactly what is expected from them. We ensure our function sheets are crafted with military

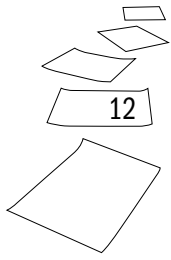
precision and timing. Movie and stage directors have it easy; they can do endless rehearsals or say cut and shoot the scene over again. For me, there's no safety net. My function sheets have to be perfect, and for an intricate program that might mean a hundred pages of perfection. They are sent out in advance to all involved, who review and rework them before going out on the "pre-con"—the pre-event walk-through of the function sheets with staff, venue and suppliers before the event takes place. Function sheets get everyone on the same page, even if the person who's orchestrating the event on-site isn't the one I began the planning process with. Let's face it . . . I don't have time to deal with people who aren't up to speed, and there's little room for error. Holding a pre-con to review the function sheets makes sure those who will be on-site have read them and there are no misconceptions as to what is and is not included and how it is to be done.

I usually like to get up early enough to take a few moments for myself by the ocean whenever I am staying at a beachfront location. To me, watching the sunrise, taking a dip or doing yoga by the water is one of my favorite perks of the job. After that, I was off to shower, change into "work" clothes and get ready to meet Dee Dee for coffee before we started our rounds. I wouldn't dream of running around in a bathing suit or yoga wear once clients or even hotel staff are up and about. If trip directors have scheduled time off during the day, arrangements are made for them to use another's hotel's beach and pool facilities. It's just better to maintain a polished, professional look around guests and hotel employees at all times. Lounging around the hotel pool or on the beach in a bikini or even a more conservative bathing suit sends the wrong message even if it is on my off time.

Breakfast ready to go. Check.

Meeting room set up as requested. Check.

Audiovisual working. Check.



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Dee Dee is overseeing breakfast and the other program directors are at the hospitality desk ready to answer any questions the corporate heads or their guests may have. They will also call—should it be necessary—the rooms of any missing attendees who don't get up for breakfast to make sure they're on their way. I hope everyone answers their phone so we don't have to send hotel staff to check on them.

Today will actually be pretty light. The guys will have breakfast and be in meetings most of the day. They'll break for mid-morning refreshments and a barbecue lunch, but each time they'll immediately head back into the meeting room. Only sweet tea, lemonade and sodas will be served with lunch. Against my reservations, the corporate hospitality suite will open once the meeting is finished and then it's off for a night on the town as a group. This is party night and the corporate execs want them wound up from the moment the meeting lets out. I am certain it is going to be a very long and very late night.



The guys are starting to surface and many of them look a little worse for wear. Too much sun, too much drinking and too little sleep will do it every time. They are very subdued right now—nothing like the group that arrived. But experience has taught us they will bounce back and often with a vengeance. I've asked Dee Dee to monitor the meeting room to make sure that it doesn't get too warm. Better to have it a touch on the cooler side so no one drifts off to sleep during the session and their attention will not be as likely to wander. The hospitality desk has been positioned in a way that attendees will not be tempted to slip out and ditch staying for the full meeting once it has started. It happens. One client, at their tropical getaway, had one of their staff assigned to beach duty to make sure they redirected any lost souls from their group that "mistook" the beach or the pool

as the meeting venue, and the golf course was instructed not to accept any requests for tee-off times from any of their attendees when meetings were taking place. As with most out-of-town and out-of-country meetings that are both business and pleasure, there are tax implications, and companies work hard to make sure that all rules and regulations are met. Records are kept to make sure all is adhered to—and truth be known, some are real and others are fictional.

Some of the stories you hear about the goings-on in this industry never fail to surprise you. One company booked meeting rooms, equipment, breaks and lunches and paid for them, but they were only meetings scheduled for the “books,” not for real. Unfortunately for them, they also scheduled a golf tournament and private events to take place at the same time as the supposed meetings, leaving a paper trail that could not be denied. Not a smart move. And asking the hotel and others involved to look the other way placed suppliers in a difficult position and crossed ethical boundaries big time. This is the time I’d lay all my cards on the table and walk away. I’d much rather a client who assigns beach patrol duty. They mean business and not monkey business. But while they work hard when they are away, they also party hard. I’m pretty sure this is what this group will turn out to be like. My team and I are prepared for anything to happen. These guys, while they are dragging their tails right now, are high spirited because of the nature of their work and the type of personality that sales attracts, and they will be flying high by the end of their stay.



Coffee breaks and lunch went without incident. And the corporate execs met me halfway regarding the afternoon hospitality suite—bartenders were brought in to maintain some semblance of liquor control. I knew there’d be a lot of drinking going on tonight and I

wanted them in relatively good shape before we set out. The extra local staff we have on-site tonight are all men that look like they can handle themselves and anything else that may be thrown at them. They'll be there until the very last guest returns to the hotel, to lend a hand if anyone has more alcohol than they can manage.

And then we were off. Or at least they're off. Dee Dee and I were one step ahead of them, advancing tonight's progressive dinner and drinks party and in constant touch with the rest of our crew via cell phones, PDAs and walkie-talkies. Open-air trains and "go cups" with their choice of alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverage were waiting for the group at the front of the hotel, setting the energy vibe for the evening ahead. The first stop on the route was "sunset celebrations and libations" at a pier made popular for its spectacular sunsets. Private vendors were set up just for the group, with finger food appetizers and drinks for the guys to enjoy while they watched the nightly salute to the sun take place amid musicians, jugglers and street performers. Then it was back on board to the next stop, which was a great seafood and steak restaurant right on the water that's known for its cuisine and fun atmosphere. Tonight the restaurant belonged to the group. As part of the restaurant's seafood display offerings, a live mermaid was sitting among the seafood specialties. I saw that as a potential red flag and assigned Dee Dee to keep a close eye on Ms. Mermaid, even though the owner assured us that no one before had ever made improper advances or given her a difficult time.

You could hear the guys coming before you even saw the open-air train rounding the corner. The early afternoon drinks followed by the "go cups" and sunset drinks had kicked in. Everyone was in great spirits but they'd settled in nicely. Some were placing their food and drink orders and some were helping themselves to the seafood buffet, when uh-oh—they finally discovered the live mermaid and just as I thought, they decided to have some fun. Mr. Instigator decided that it was their duty to set her free and

release her back to the ocean and rallied his buddies to come help, which they quickly did. You could see that Ms. Mermaid was getting a little anxious and so was the owner—he finally saw what we had been saying. The distance between where Ms. Mermaid was draped along the table and the drop into the ocean was only a few feet, and with her heavy mermaid tail she would've quickly sunk, not swam away. Dee Dee, some of the male staff members and I were positioned to react quickly and make sure no actual physical harm came to her. We diffused the situation before it escalated to the next level. The advance team then headed off to make sure that everything was ready and waiting at the next progressive stop for local dessert specialties and coffee.

After dessert it was time to hit the bars, including Sloppy Joe's, which has long been associated with Ernest Hemingway, and the Green Parrot, an internationally known bar and a local landmark since 1890. We used this opportunity to introduce the group to a couple of bars they would enjoy if they returned to town on their own or again as a group of 50 guys. We are in a very liberal destination with a live-and-let-live social society and you'll find a mixture of gay and non-gay bars, so we'd researched the best of both during our advance preparations. We'd prepared a list with recommendations for distribution among the guys. Of course, the places where women have been known to leave their inhibitions behind along with their bras and where regulars dance with abandon on tabletops may have been "accidentally" left off the list. We hadn't lost sight of the temptation to smuggle some newfound friends back to the hotel to enjoy the in-room Jacuzzis!

Suddenly—oh my—Mr. Instigator picked up Dee Dee from behind and spun her around over his head, just narrowly missing the ceiling fan. The corporate execs standing nearby laughed at his antics but quickly ordered him to put her down before we moved in.

A conch train stood by to head back to the hotel with anyone wanting to return early. Not surprisingly the conch train sat empty;

no one was ready to call it a night or no one wanted to be seen as the first one to head back to the hotel. The private conch shuttles were scheduled to operate until the bars closed. The group was now on their own with the exception of the local staff, two members of our team and Dee Dee, who would stay till the end. After this point there was no way of really keeping track of who was coming and going. Some will catch a cab on their own and head back when they are ready or take off for parts unknown, returning to the hotel just in time for breakfast. Hopefully, they won't do too much damage to themselves or the town. The rest of the team and I headed back in case anything at the hotel required our attention. For us the night was still very young as much as we might long for bed. The evening so far had been a success. Both the corporate execs and guys were pleased. They got to drink in the sights while drinking in public, take part in a famous sunset ritual and sample local cuisine and the bars. Good times.



It's 1:00 a.m. Some of the group are starting to roll in. A few are not too steady on their feet but they seem to be taking care of one another. One was very embarrassed and belligerent but his buddies were calming him down. Apparently, Mr. Instigator thought it would be fun not to let him into the men's room at the bar and he had an accident times two. Dee Dee had let us know what had taken place so we knew what to expect. He had been threatening bodily harm to all that took part in the "prank." One of the men on our staff discreetly offered to have his pants taken away and cleaned with no one the wiser. In expressing his gratitude he burst into tears. He didn't want to bring them home in that condition and have to explain what happened to his family, he said as he flipped open his wallet to show us pictures of his wife and kids. He had been feeling diminished in front of his colleagues and worried that

he would become the joke of the office. Thankfully, the friends he had made on the trip had not abandoned him and were not making him feel worse than he already did. Chances are by the end of this week this particular incident will be long forgotten.



It's 2:00 a.m. now. Dee Dee and the rest of the team are back but not all of the guys have returned. Dee Dee caught me up on the goings-on after I left and we discussed the number of women that had ended up hanging around and physically off the men. They had to stop more than a few of them from climbing aboard the conch train and returning back to the hotel with the guys who wanted to party, roommate or not, married or not. Then I updated her on Mr. Pranked. We decided that there was not much more we could do right now with regard to those who hadn't come back yet, so it was time for us to head to our beds to catch some sleep if we could.



3:05 a.m. Rinngggggggggg. It was the night manager suggesting I come down to handle some situations. I asked if I needed reinforcements and he suggested that it would be a good thing. I called Dee Dee's room and then quickly dressed to scope out what had taken place.

Pool party!!! Ah yes. And with a number of the girls that the guys had picked up at the bars. The guys had broken into the corporate hospitality suite and grabbed some drinks. Bottles were everywhere, as were articles of clothing. Naked pool party!!! Dee Dee happened upon Mr. Instigator about to pour bubble bath into the pool and quickly confiscated it. Hotel security had been summoned as well and were successfully getting both guests and non-guests out of the

pool and into their clothes. The visitors had been “smuggled” onto the property with the hotel staff none the wiser—or looking the other way (in the manner of “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas”)—until the impromptu pool party broke out and something had to be done as other hotel guests were getting annoyed. Chastened and expressing fake remorse, the guys took off to their rooms and cabs were called for the rest, but not before telephone numbers and the like were exchanged.

With the hotel staff capably dealing with the pool cleanup, restoring order to the corporate hospitality suite—it would be restocked tomorrow—and calculating the extra charges to be added to the master account, Dee Dee and I said our thank-yous and headed for bed again to grab another hour or so of sleep. For the moment, all seems quiet but we aren’t about to let down our guard. I am sure we both fell asleep with one ear open, waiting for the telephone to summon us again.

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This morning, the corporate execs laughed at the antics of “their boys.” We didn’t discuss the specifics of what took place with Mr. Pranked. He didn’t want to be shamed in front of his company heads and had asked us not to make his name known and tell them exactly what transpired unless it was absolutely necessary. If we did, we assured him, it would be done with the utmost of discretion and he was not to worry.

The company heads knew there were other incidents that had transpired but at the moment all was under control and they said they preferred to be on a “need to know” basis. If they did not have to bail someone out of jail or take someone to the hospital, they really wanted the guys to have a good time without being reported on or knowing exactly what took place. We did need to make them aware of the happenings at the pool and the hospitality suite

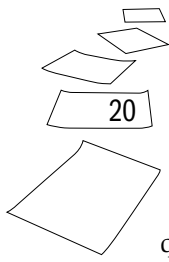
break-in—without naming names, as per their request—because extra charges were going to be showing up on the final reconciliation. How, or if, they choose to address this with their staff is entirely up to them. But what they did want was everyone present and accounted for at their meeting, regardless of how rough they felt or how late they got in last night. Dee Dee said it would be her pleasure to personally call those who were missing and make sure they were on time, with a sweet “don’t ask me how but I can assure you they will be there.” Of that I had no doubt. I felt that she would have a special wake-up call—with my blessing—arranged for Mr. Instigator, who had still not shown up.



By 9:00 a.m., everyone was present and thankfully accounted for. Missing luggage you can deal with; missing people is an entirely different matter. There was one guy who made it just in the nick of time, his ride pulling up in front at 8:55. He had no choice but to go into the morning meeting wearing the same clothes he had on last night and smelling pretty raunchy. He got a much-deserved ribbing from his peers. It doesn’t hurt for them to get a reminder from their colleagues that this is a business event and not a pleasure trip, even if their own behavior has not been exemplary.

Today is basically a repeat of yesterday: a full day of meetings, coffee breaks, lunch and then off to the hospitality suite for a few drinks before heading out for the night. Dinner tonight will be their awards presentation, which is being held off-property in an upscale setting. Traditionally, their awards dinner has been held on the last night but they have something special planned for tomorrow as a surprise, and the corporate execs wanted to have their stay end with fun not formality this time around.

Tonight’s restaurant had been chosen before the corporate execs knew that it would be an all-male group that would



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qualify. The company heads loved the setting and didn't want to change it when the group demographics were known. Their private room was in a courtyard built around a gorgeous swimming pool and everything was pink on pink. The entire area was filled with tropical plants and flowers, with a white baby grand off in one corner. The atmosphere was pretty, pink and feminine enough to extinguish a cigar. After the first night, with the guys wanting to reunite the mermaid with the ocean, and last night's swimming pool escapades, the thought of this group around more water was not calming. Visions of waiters or participants themselves taking a dip in the pool are running through our heads.

After cocktails, dinner, drinks, dessert and awards the guys will be free to return to the resort or stay in town and catch one of the private shuttles and return at their leisure. It's a safe good bet that after a day of sitting in meetings and through dinner and speeches, these guys will be staying to play.



Dinner and the awards went without a hitch. There was good-natured back-and-forth between the guys but that was pretty much it. Either they were still tired from last night or saving their energy for something good tonight. With all the whispering going on I suspected we would be in for quite a night. This good behavior was just for show, of that we were pretty certain, having been there and experienced the like many times before.

Once again, no one chose to return home early and after their event was over, we bid them goodnight. It was time for us to grab dinner. I had made reservations for us at a new restaurant on their upstairs patio. We would be out of sight but still close by if any of the staff assigned to wait with the return shuttles needed us.

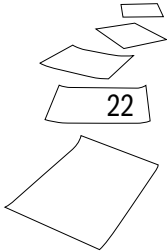
It was the first time since the group arrived that we were able to sit together and relax for the moment. This was also the perfect opportunity for us to review what still needed to be done before tomorrow. In order to keep the element of surprise, setup can't begin until early morning and everyone has a part to play in its success.

But alas, so much for out of sight. Apparently from down below we were visible. The guys en route to another bar, obviously after a couple more drinks, had spotted Dee Dee and gathered in the street loudly chanting her name, wanting her to come down and play with them. Laughingly she shook her head no and said she would see them in the morning. They finally moved on and we finished our dinner and headed back to the hotel to see what awaited us.

Nothing out of the ordinary upon our return. It was still early but we all decided it would be a good idea to retire in case we were called out again in the middle of the night. Everything that could be done for tomorrow was in place and we would be ready to roll first thing in the morning.



It's 2:00 a.m. and I'm wide awake. I just called down to the front manager to see how things have been going. Only a few guests had returned; the rest should be along shortly, he imagined. Call me if you need me, I advised him. Trust me, I will, he replied dryly. He and the rest of the night staff weren't too impressed with the naked pool party that had happened on their watch. Oh well, I did my part way back when, when I issued a mayhem alert. Something was up for either tonight or tomorrow. There was a definite undercurrent tonight of something being planned that wasn't on our agenda.



2:30 a.m. They're back. And I didn't need a call from the front desk to let me know. I was dressed, out the door and in the lobby in less than two minutes. I knew Dee Dee and the rest would soon be on my heels. Along with the other half of the hotel, too, complaining about the noise.

The guys arrived carrying bags of party supplies and other items we couldn't quite make out. Seeing us waiting for them, they tried to quiet down and maintain some sense of decorum. All they wanted, they said, was to take a late night swim and have a couple more drinks, and promised to keep the noise down. The night manager, against his better judgment, gave his OK but said that security would be overseeing their get-together and at the first noise or behavior infraction the pool would be closed.

Doing a quick headcount, I noted that Mr. Instigator and his closest allies were missing. Could the boisterous arrival have been a planned distraction maneuver? We'd have to wait and see. There was no way we could go back to bed. The guys headed to their rooms with their purchases to change into their swimsuits and—short of asking to check packages—we had no idea what was in them. Somehow souvenir shopping didn't seem likely. We soon found out.

The night manager came racing out from the back room. One of the nearby bars thought they should give the hotel a heads-up that inquiries were being made by some of the guys as to where they could rent chain saws. Apparently there were plans afoot to do some landscaping at the hotel. The guys were ticked off—actually, stronger words were used—that their party last night was cut short. The informer had no idea whether or not they were successful in their quest.

With this new information, who knew what could be in the bags and packages carried in. Shovels. Pruning shears. Gardening tools. Undaunted, unable to rent chain saws to cut the trees down around

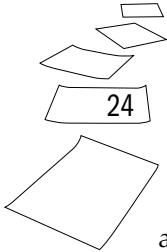
the pool that they thought afforded too much shade, they decided to transplant some of the flowering bushes around the property to give it a new look. Shovels and pruning shears, they also had reasoned, were quieter than chain saws. And they'd purchased tons of bubble bath for the pool and the Jacuzzis. After the last occurrence, we had asked that the maids prudently remove the bottles of bubble bath that had been placed in each guestroom so it would not be easily accessible on a drunken whim. So much for that plan.

Out by the pool Mr. Instigator and his buddies had shown up. Also present were several of the same ladies from last night. No idea how long they have been on the property—or if they even left last night. They could have doubled back somehow. Note to self: Check room service and other room charge bills. Dee Dee was in her element and I let her be.

The night manager warned about charges being laid if anything was damaged and he informed them that their actions could have serious consequences. They were lucky that someone had called to let the hotel know what was about to take place before any actual destruction had taken place. If they all immediately left the area, they were told, and went to their rooms, the authorities and corporate execs would not be called down to deal with this matter. With a show of false blustering bravo, Mr. Instigator told the guys to go to their rooms—this place wasn't worth wasting their landscaping talents on. The guys quickly dispersed and headed to their rooms while we escorted their female friends to the front door of the hotel. Now we're finally back in our rooms, trying to get some sleep before our early start.

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When we met up at the hospitality desk in what seemed like minutes later, Dee Dee grouched that if we handle this client again, instead of a bowl of candy on the hospitality desk we should have



a container filled with condoms done in the theme logo. On her way down for early setup she had seen a couple of women slipping out of rooms that she knew belonged to our guys and caught another attendee literally with his pants down, doing the deed with his “friend” in what they assumed was a secluded spot. Unfortunately, his shiny bare bottom had been made very visible by the light coming off of the decorative lamps set at ground level along the pathways. Hearing Dee Dee—she had deliberately made a sound to let them know she was there—they quickly stopped their clandestine activity, scrambled back into their clothes and said their good-byes, all the while receiving the full impact of Dee Dee’s disapproving stare. But better her stare than that of the company execs, who would soon be headed down this same path.

Catching a married man carrying on in this manner, literally out in the open, without imposing consequences or at least a serious reprimand could carry company repercussions. I’m sure there’s no need to remind the corporate execs of that. They know that if the man’s wife were to find out what had transpired during a business meeting under their professional direction and sued for divorce, they could get tangled up in unpleasant court proceedings if it came out they had encouraged their employees to act out and provided the means to overindulge. This has happened before but not to their company, and they undoubtedly want to keep it that way. Their company image is built around family values and the media would have a field day if something like this got out. The company execs can close their eyes to the goings-on as long as they don’t see it take place right in front of them, which is why they’re retiring early each night. They want their guys to have fun, but as they had very clearly and often told us, they wanted to be able to claim plausible deniability.

The corporate execs want to be seen as guys embracing geyness up to the point where it will affect their company’s bottom line and their jobs. They know that their company’s growth isn’t

built by a sales force that embodies metrosexual sensibilities and embraces grande lattes, no-carb beer, facials, pedicures, chest waxing, fake-and-bake tans and designer wear. That's not who they—or their customer base—are. Their sales team likes to get down and party, drink beer, make crude jokes and sexual innuendoes, compete with one another to lead the way in bad-boy antics and one-up one another while they're away with their peers. And the corporate execs have been happy to design a program that enables said behavior if it translates into higher sales when the group returns back to the office. The couple Dee Dee's path crossed probably had assumed that no one would be up and about that early except the hotel security guard making his rounds and they could pay him no mind. No doubt there have been more trysts going on around the property, being justified as "innocent fun" while out of town. It's generally a given on these types of trips.

As Dee Dee and I chatted, other indiscretions were brought to our attention. This morning's planned activity meant that the program directors, hotel bellmen and local staff were all up and about much earlier than the guys had anticipated. Room service made surprise early morning room deliveries of continental breakfast trays with lots of hot steaming coffee in large thermos containers, fresh Florida orange juice, baskets of warm breakfast rolls and pastries, curls of creamy butter and assorted pots of peanut butter and jam to our guestrooms. Attendees were advised when they received their wake-up call that morning coffee was waiting for them outside their door. We figured that after a night of revelry it would be advisable to have food and coffee available first thing. A few bellmen received their own surprises as they encountered several amorous couples making out in the hallways with their assigned bodyguards—oops! I meant roommates—either mumble-grumble-mumble occupied, or likewise inside the room or hopefully sound asleep—and alone—unaware of what was taking place outside their guest room doors.

Guess we hadn't successfully dispatched all of the female party attendees, or they made their way back on property somehow, avoiding the now very watchful eye of the hotel night staff.

This morning everyone moved full-out to get everything in place before the guys headed down to the meeting room. More coffee, juice and muffins were set up outside the room to tide them over until breakfast was served. The meeting room was the launch point for today's event, which was a car rally created to restore their competitive juices before they headed back into the office. Teams had been carefully selected and theme polo shirts placed in their survival kits, which had been tagged with each individual's name. Until the survival kits were distributed and their shirts were put on, no one knew what team they were on. I love the element of surprise! Breakfast tables of four were set up so team members could strategize over breakfast and those who wanted to drive could fill out the appropriate car rental and insurance details and sign company waivers (as well as agree not to speed or drink and drive). We didn't want to give the guys too much time to plot together, or give away what was happening today, which is why the survival bags were not delivered to their guestrooms the night before. We also didn't want them to have the opportunity to switch team colors. They were on a specific team for a reason and we wanted to make sure that it stayed that way.

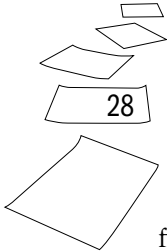
Inside their survival bags, we had packed their team shirt, matching theme logo hat, a digital camera for each of them and Polaroid's instant printer (both with the theme logo), sunscreen lotion, prepaid calling card in case of emergency, hotel telephone number, detailed road map, bottled water and various other items they would need for a fun day in the sun. The bags themselves were great. They were stitched with their company's President Club for Top Sales logo and the year, and could double as a sports bag. These would definitely be used again and again, and would serve not only as free corporate advertising but also a reminder

that they had all been inducted into the prestigious President's Club last night at the awards presentation.

We had set up checkpoints with refreshments along the way so that we could track when someone went missing or if anyone ran into car trouble. Beverages and snacks would be available at some, lunch would be held at a specific restaurant and ice cream and other frozen treats would be served at other spots. The rally was based on creativity and taking photographs of specific items on their list that would guide them around our designated route. We made it very clear that speed was not a determining factor in winning the rally, warning them that points would be taken away if they checked in back at the hotel too early and detailing the penalties if they were ticketed by the law.

The meeting room exploded with enthusiasm when the guys found out that they were scheduled for a play day designed to enjoy their location to the fullest and would not be spending the day locked up in a meeting room. Talk about a burst of energy. We went over the details of the rally, and told them that a clock-in party would be happening at the hotel at 4:00 p.m. followed by volleyball, a great high-energy band for listening—not dancing to—and a beach barbecue. Found it funny that no one even mentioned the mode of transportation. Seems they thought they would be going by minivans and we sure didn't tell them otherwise. They were in for another surprise.

The local staff had been hard at work since early morning, ferrying very expensive luxury convertibles to the hotel parking lot. They had been brought down from Miami yesterday and kept out of sight so as not to give anything away. It was important that the convertibles be of the same make and year and in pristine condition. They gleamed. They were all lined up in perfect formation—great for a group photo—with the exception of one old, beat up, dirty convertible parked right in their midst, which spoiled the whole effect. That, of course, would never do! We



finally determined, through the rental car agency, that the convertible belonged to a hotel guest. We woke him up to get his keys so the convertible could be moved away from ours. Guess he thought this was the place to park convertibles, never mind all the other empty spots, and judging from his parking job he too must have been out partying last night. The gentleman was not at all pleased about being woken up by the hotel staff but grudgingly allowed them to come to his room for the car keys to move it for him. I sent a continental breakfast tray up to his room as a thank-you. It was much easier than having his car physically towed out of the way as Dee Dee had proposed. If he hadn't agreed, though, that would've been our next course of action. I knew, as we all did, that this photograph would be the "money shot" that would help to get those left behind excited about attending next year and we were not about to let one beat-up convertible spoil that image.

I couldn't wait to see the looks on their faces when they walked outside and saw the convertibles gleaming in the sunshine. The company execs advised them that they would not be taking part in the day's activities as they would be having their own meeting today, but said they'd meet them back at the hospitality suite for the clock-in party and drinks. Another cheer.

After they finished all the paperwork and breakfast came to an end, we gave them ten minutes to go back to their room, drop off any pens and notepads and meet us in the lobby where we'd give them each a different route with the same checkpoints in a different order. We wanted to make sure we had everyone present before we took them outside. They were sooo excited to see what would happen next. The photographer we'd hired to take candid shots and then a group photograph was ready and waiting.

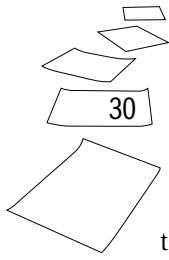
This group of macho men dissolved into little boys in a candy store when they rounded the corner and saw the top-of-the-line convertibles waiting for them. The morning had barely started and they were well on their way to having a great day.

I felt pretty certain that we'd have the rally under control. I had ensured that the hospitality desk would be staffed all day in case any calls came in for assistance. The checkpoints were in place and local staff was overseeing them. Dee Dee and I set out in our own convertible to do the advance on the restaurant for lunch to make sure all was in order when the guys started to arrive. Local staff would be meeting us there to take over and we would head back to the hotel to make sure that all was in place for the check-in party and beach barbecue party.

Dee Dee likes to drive so she slipped into the driver's seat with glee. It was such a beautiful day to be out driving around with the top down. I had, however, forgotten about Dee Dee's heavy foot on the pedal. We were lucky on the drive out to avoid a speed trap and a second one that they had positioned just down from the first in the hopes that drivers who had counted themselves lucky to have escaped the first might get caught in the second. It was a good ploy and I think the only thing that saved us was that they were both busy with other cars they had pulled over!

The scenery was great. The guys are sure to have good memories to take away from today. The checkpoints that we stopped by said that everyone was having a good time and seemed on their best behavior, which could be interpreted as "we didn't see any beer in the cars." We headed over to the restaurant and they were ready and waiting for the group to arrive, carload by carload. We had a fair amount of time to ourselves so we were able to relax, have a late breakfast and review tomorrow's departure procedures. The staff at the hospitality desk was working on bag pull lists and departure notices that would be delivered and waiting in each guestroom when the guys got back.

Heading back to the hotel, Dee Dee's heavy foot ended up in getting us pulled over. I won't be letting her live that one down any time soon. There we sat in the morning sun getting ticketed as some of our guys in the convertibles drove by on the other side of



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the road. Sure enough, they spotted us. They waved and called out to Dee Dee, who laughingly told them she was just showing them what would happen if they sped. I wasn't laughing.



3:30 p.m. Everything is in place for the guys' arrival back. Just like last night I'm sure we'll hear them before we see them. I am certain that the "no drinking in the car or having drinks en route" rule was violated long ago.

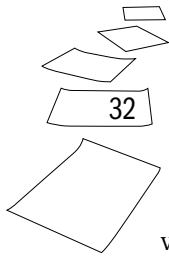
Huge corkboards have been set up to post each group's photos for judging. Since they're earning extra points for creativity, I'm confident that we'll be seeing some unusual photos. As far as I know everything's been going okay. We've received no calls for help or calls from the sheriff's office, which is a good sign after the attempt to rent chain saws last night, and I'm still a little on edge. I've encountered many things on-site but renting chain saws and going so far as to buy shovels and the like to rearrange the landscaping at the hotel is a first. The bubble bath and soap to put in the fountains or swimming pool . . . well, that's a "been there, handled that one before" item on the list of what to be prepared for. As for the chain saws, I had to give it to the guys. That was a new one to be added to the list.



Just as predicted the convertible car rally stimulated the guys' creative juices and the spirit of competition. One team, intent on bringing in the best photo of a specific bird's nest found in the Keys, actually rented a four-seater plane to go up in and take an aerial shot of the nest. I was amazed at the length they went to and their ingenuity. They stood alone on delivering a creative shot of that requirement. No one else topped renting a plane just to take

one photograph. However, when it came to certain other required photographs, the theory that great minds think alike was proven (these are all top company performers, after all). I can't imagine what the poor girl who worked in a coin-operated laundry was telling her family about her day at work this evening. Apparently, all 50 men stopped by this one coin-operated laundry and posed nude, save a small box of soap held strategically in place. Some actually posed nude inside or half-inside the dryer, sitting on washing machines or in some other very interesting pose. And yet, we had not one complaint from the storeowner or employee and neither did the local staff manning the checkpoints. Fifty men bringing in their trousers for laundering is one thing. Fifty men dropping their trousers and running around posing in the nude is another. Man, I hope she had been forewarned. She either played along, thought it was a hoot or is still sitting there in shock. The photos escalated from there. And yes, there had been drinking involved but the drivers swore that they had not partaken. Of course, they were more than ready to make up for it now.

The rest of the night was a blast. The guys partied hard but stayed on property as far as we could tell. Night volleyball on the beach was a hit. They were out to have a good time and to win. They devoured mounds of fresh lobster, shrimp and steaks. The band was terrific and revved them up. The night staff jokingly said that they forgave all past misbehavior, but I noticed that security on the resort was more than doubled tonight. And Mr. Instigator even had his arm around the head of security before the end of the evening. They were now best buddies. The guys tore up the night but in a good way. They're finally starting to get mellow in Margaritaville and it's time to leave. Tomorrow they might be hurting and hungover, but tonight was boys' night and a time to celebrate. The corporate execs have loved every minute of it, and while they raised their eyebrows at the naked soapsuds pictures—ah yes, the guys did finally find a way to have fun with foam—I think they're



very happy with the bond and the competitive camaraderie that's developed among their top sales members. They pulled me aside tonight and asked what we can do to top this next year. Right now I don't even want to think about that.

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We're standing in Miami Airport now and the scene is not pretty. Fifty grown men just realized that they are moments away from boarding their final plane home and not one of them has bought a gift for their wife or children waiting to greet them at the airport. One man, Mr. Pranked, had tears in his eyes when the thought first hit him. He was the one that actually set them all off in panic mode. Fortunately for them, Miami Airport has shopping for all age groups available, but the minutes are ticking. I see that some of the guys are returning now with arms laden, but many of the goods have "Miami" printed on them, not "Key West." Should be interesting to hear their explanations.

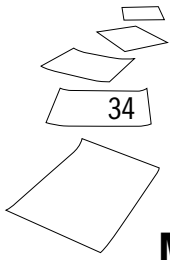


Unfortunately, I did end up in a position to hear the explanations. Dee Dee, the rest of the program directors and I had picked up our bags, cleared customs and were waiting outside to make sure that no one had lost their luggage. We were standing in the middle of the guys and being introduced to their family members who had come to the airport to pick them up. Tall tales were being told about day and night meetings and particularly hard to hear was how much one man had missed his wife—this was the same "gentleman" who had been having sex openly on the hotel grounds. Sadly, this was the sentiment I was hearing all around me, but I know full well that it was only hours before that they were scrambling madly around the airport in search of a gift, just remembering their loved

ones for the first time in days. We were laughingly scolded by the wives and lovers for working their men too hard . . . just look at how exhausted they all seem.

That's when this job is hardest. Standing still, saying nothing, but knowing the truth. Being a master of discretion is what it is all about. But it didn't stop Dee Dee from reaching over and pretending to wipe something off of Mr. Instigator's cheek and remarking on how it looks like he left some soap behind—long pause—when he was shaving. I have to admit the startled look on his face was priceless. He looked like a kid caught with his hand in a cookie jar. Our job for this program is done. Ah yes, it is a glamorous life we lead, or so it is perceived. Well, maybe it is sometimes, but this wasn't one of the times. This was more like running a summer weekend camp where boys are encouraged to be boys. I am beat.

I'm enjoying my quiet flight home. After being away doing the pre-con and then being with a group for a number of days it will be so nice to come back home and just veg out. I crave silence—at least a couple of hours of it. I travel more than I am home and I'll admit that I still haven't gotten used to there being no turn-down service, chocolate on my pillow or room service to call when I arrive back at my place for what I call my stopover. This time I'll have just enough days between trips to check in at the office, catch up on things that need my attention and pack for my next destination. Sunny Caribbean, here I come! White sandy beaches, turquoise oceans and palm trees swaying gently . . . just another day at the office. It's the commute that's the killer. Oh well. Someone has to do it.



MEETINGS, MAYHEM AND MARGARITAVILLE: Q&A

Group Arrival

Q: Beyond having the group fly down in smaller numbers, what steps could be taken to bring a celebrating, high-energy group under control when they're traveling to the event?

A: It is always important to have staff fly down with the group as opposed to merely being on hand to check them in at the departure airport and then having advance staff meet them upon arrival. Staff can work with the flight crew to monitor the group. On one such flight, the pilot turned on the “return to your seat and fasten your seatbelt” sign for the duration of the trip because of “anticipated turbulence” when some individuals began opening and passing around bottles of duty-free liquor and giving the flight crew a difficult time. Things quieted down quickly and many participants, already the worse for wear with excess drinking, fell asleep to the relief of those sitting around them.

Another way would be to separate them upon arrival by not having one main motor coach pick them up and transfer them to the hotel. Having them split up into several motor coaches or using smaller minicoaches or vans gives event planning staff the opportunity to separate the main mayhem instigators from the rest of the group or from each other and stop their quest to outdo one another. With an all-male sales group, event planners can anticipate high energy and hijinks fueled by alcohol and competitive spirits. And if one individual is creating most of the disturbance, a staff member can quietly engage them by creating a reason that they need their assistance (such as with room assignment, etc.) and in that matter have them break away from the group.

Assignment

How did the Starr Productions event planning staff handle the flight, airport arrival and hotel transfer, and what further steps, if any, could have been or should have been taken for more control over group behavior? (Special note: In-depth information on airport transfers and guest arrivals is covered in *Event Planning: The Ultimate Guide*.)

Welcome Reception and Dinner

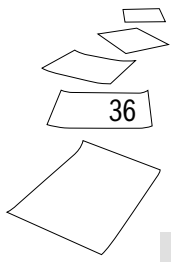
Q: What kind of an event works best for a welcome reception and dinner?

A: On arrival days, especially when air travel and time changes are involved, it is best to plan a light beginning to the group's stay. The dollars spent doing a full-out theme event would be wasted, as the participants will be travel weary. What is strategically best is to have them go to bed early and get rested and ready for their stay. Dollars spent will have the most impact and event value on the second night.

Assignment

Discuss welcome reception and dinner event elements and design a welcome food and beverage menu, room layout, serving/presentation style, and entertainment and decor options that will work strategically to meet the event's objective of getting guests mixing and mingling. Explain the reasons why your chosen design will work (e.g., a sit-down dinner with food stations to get people standing in line and talking to one another, or ice-breaking food stations such as a custom sushi bar, both of which have an educational and entertainment value to stimulate conversation). (Special note: In-depth information

continued



on strategic event design and strategic room layout is covered in *The Business of Event Planning*.)

Welcome Reception Refreshments

Q: What type of food and beverage should be served at welcome receptions?

A: As with any reception involving alcohol, it is always advisable to choose foods that are high in protein, such as meat and cheese, and to avoid offering too many dry snacks that are heavy on the salt as that only encourages more drinking. You want guests to have a great time but not to be rendered incapacitated for the rest of the day and evening. You can limit the welcome reception to an hour if you have a group arrival (or close it down and have the food and beverage refreshed to meet staggered group arrivals throughout the day) while private check-in is going on, and then leave the guests at leisure for the balance of the afternoon to relax, unpack, settle in and explore their new surroundings or simply take a nap.

You do not want to spend too much of your budget on an event element that is simply meant to be a warm and welcoming touch. If the restaurant has stopped serving at time of arrival, ensure the group has had the opportunity to get some food en route, especially if the group already has been drinking. Remember that the purpose is to make group check-in relaxing and enjoyable but not a main event.

Assignment

Plan a sample welcome reception food and beverage menu that is appealing after a long travel day, features local cuisine

and beverages from the selected destination, is well balanced and designed to serve as a replacement meal and to act as an alcohol buffer, and is easy to eat standing up in a private check-in area. Focus on avoiding cutlery, messy sauces and large pieces of food. If possible, obtain a hotel's food and beverage menu as well as a local restaurant's to use as reference guides, remembering that it is possible to create custom menus. For example, a hotel in Tucson created cactus cookies for a dessert option at one welcome reception. (Special note: In-depth information on food and beverage is covered in *Event Planning: The Ultimate Guide*.)

Guestroom Assignment

Q: How is guestroom assignment best done?

A: When you are booking group space at a resort you will be given the opportunity to block and negotiate rates in several different categories. Traditionally, the less expensive way is to block run-of-the-house rooms, but for an incentive group that is not advisable as there will be a visible difference between rooms that could be allocated to you (e.g., some members of the group may end up with their desired ocean-, mountain- or city-view rooms, while the rest of the group ends up overlooking the parking lot; the room amenities can vary greatly as well with regard to room size and room inclusions). For an incentive program, it is imperative that all rooms be equal unless specific upgrades are requested for top performers who have earned a suite, etc. through their sales efforts. Participants will check out other guestrooms and compare what they were assigned to what others received, and if there is a great disparity, you can expect a flood of room request changes to start coming in.

For non-incentive groups, the recommended course of action is to block one room category for all, with the request for room category upgrades contractually negotiated as well as any suites for top VIPs, staff room rates, comp rooms, etc. In the contract and in your function sheets it must clearly state that the hotel cannot upgrade any rooms at their discretion without the approval of the event planner and their client. If for unforeseen reasons an upgrade has to take place at check-in, it is better to choose who the upgraded room is to go to as opposed to leaving it to chance. With one incentive group, the client made the decision to keep all of their rooms the same and give the upgraded room to an event planning staff member rather than run the risk of having any of their employees' sales egos out of alignment.

With event planning staff rooms, budget permitting, it is always better to assign single rooms so that staff can be properly rested and not be woken up with early morning preparations by a roommate who may be working the pre-breakfast shift or coming home in the early morning hours after working the evening's event. Having a single room also gives event planning staff the opportunity to escape being in a group setting and get some much needed quiet time during their off-duty hours to nap, work out in their room or just simply relax and enjoy a room service meal without people from the group around so that they can return to the job refreshed and ready to go.

Assignment

Investigate a sampling of the different types of room categories available at hotels and resorts and note the differences in room location, room size and room amenities. Discuss the advantages of each. Remember that rates shown are not group rates, which are negotiated based on group size, room

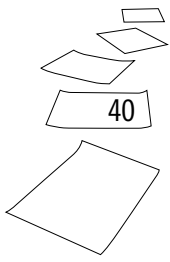
count, food and beverage and space requirements, but will serve as a starting point for comparison. Pull up a selected hotel or resort on-line (the actual hotel or resort website—not the master chain reservation website) or obtain a hotel's full presentation kit. (Special note: In-depth information on accommodation is covered in *Event Planning: The Ultimate Guide*.)

Group Breakfast

Q: What is the best way to handle group breakfasts?

A: Group breakfasts can be handled several ways and you can either use one way for the duration of the stay or mix them up as a fit for the day's event. You want to create movement and energy in all of your event elements. For example, if you have a group holding intensive meetings in a ballroom, you may want to consider arranging through the hotel or facility to have participants dine in the facility's restaurant and have the charges for breakfast posted to the master account for the group. This way the attendees would have breathing room from feeling herded as a group from breakfast to a meeting room, to lunch, to an afternoon meeting and then to dinner as a group on- or off-property. If guests spend most of their day in a function room setting, they'll be left feeling as though they experienced too much group bonding time.

Group breakfasts can be held in a private setting both on-property and off-property (e.g., a cookout desert breakfast on a ranch in Texas, for example). They can take place in a private function room such as a ballroom, a garden courtyard closed exclusively for the group or other outdoor location that provides a touch more ambiance than a ballroom or a restaurant



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that may be closed to the public during the day (offering only dinner service), etc.

You can also arrange for breakfast to be enjoyed at their leisure by making preparations to have the participants eat breakfast in one of the hotel's restaurants, with open or private seating arranged for the group. You can either order off the menu or take part in the hotel's buffet (if applicable), and have all charges go to the group's master account. Or, you could allow room service breakfast to be included and posted to the master account.

With breakfast, there is more flexibility and you can give the group a bit more freedom. You can accommodate the early risers and those who like to work out before having breakfast. With group lunches and dinners you need more time control; consequently, those meals work better in a private setting, unless you are doing a group meal as an evening dine-around program or privately taking over a section in an off-property restaurant or venue for the group.

There are other factors to consider when looking at how to stage meal functions and what style of seating would work best where and when. Table seating can be strategically and creatively arranged to help companies meet both internal and external company objectives. Remember that the corporate client may wish to have specific people spending quality time together for a variety of reasons.

Assignment

Using a selected hotel or resort's function space, hotel blueprint and facilities (found in hotel group presentation kits or on-line under groups and meetings), discuss various breakfast options for different size groups and which would work best when and why.

Fictitious Meeting Space Request

Q: What is the best procedure to follow if a client asks you to book a fictitious meeting for tax purposes?

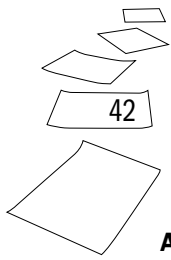
A: That is a matter that needs to be discussed with company owners and your company's legal department. The hotel or venue will do as they are requested and paid for, as they will not know in advance that no meeting will take place, but if the event planning company is a knowing party to deception they put themselves and their company professionally and personally at legal risk. Event planning companies have been called in to testify when company heads have been taken to court for mishandling or misusing company funds.

Assignment

Read on-line newspaper accounts and allegations tied to Tyco ex-CEO Dennis Kozlowski and to Conrad Black and Livent (who are being charged with having duplicate sets of financial books and asking suppliers to submit invoices that would allow them to move expenses from one year to another to enhance the bottom line, with company principals maintaining that they were not informed of such practices). Discuss possible company policies, procedures and protocol in handling unethical event planning requests—financial, moral and otherwise. (Special note: Examples of other unethical event planning requests and how to handle them can be found in *Event Planning Ethics and Etiquette*.)

Social Host Legal Responsibility

Q: What can be done when guests go wild, or how can you stop them before anything disreputable happens?



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A: As with any event, you do what you can to ensure guest security and safety. There are times when you will be required to step in and protect guests personally, physically and professionally from hurting more than their own reputation, but you need to know from a legal standpoint where, when and how to do it without compromising yourself and your company and your client and their company.

It is imperative to remember the role that you are paid to play. You are not there to baby-sit them, to police them or to be their newest BFF (best friend forever), as was the case where one event planning sales rep decided to join his client's participants in a rowdy naked pool party instead of trying to get the situation—with the help of hotel security—under control. The sales rep lost future business with that client for letting himself become a part of the group instead of being the professional paid to run the group event and be responsible for ensuring that everything possible was being done to show social host responsibility and ensure that no guests came to harm. You can discreetly bring in bartenders to manage a hospitality suite so it doesn't become a free-for-all. This legal safeguard retains control of how heavily drinks are being poured and makes sure that no one becomes too intoxicated.

It is important to know where to draw the line in order to adhere to your company's legal requirements and to discuss with your client in advance what measures, from their company's legal perspective, they will need on-site event planning staff to take. For example, your client may request that a senior staff member of their company be notified immediately of any unlawful incidents, destruction of property, or injury.

Assignment

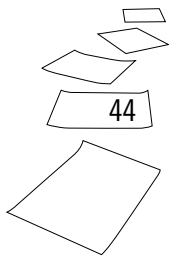
Throughout the chapter there are instances of guest behavior gone wild that could have had legal, safety and security ramifications for the individual, their company, the event planning

company and even their suppliers (e.g., if drinking had been permitted at the convertible car rally lunch stop instead of being scheduled for the clock-in party back at the resort). Discuss the various event planning ABC measures that were put into place, what was done, what worked and what didn't, as well as other preventive solutions that in event hindsight (usually identified in a post-event debriefing) might have been more successful. For example, perhaps a resort that was not as isolated, or a different high-energy destination such as Las Vegas, would have been a better location choice for an all-male sales group. There, they could have blown off steam in a more contained environment at night with more activities—gaming, entertainment and sports—to burn up their energy. (Special note: *The Special Events Advisor: A Business and Legal Guide for Event Professionals* [Wiley] by David Sorin JD, CSEP, an attorney and consultant to companies in the special events industry, has a chapter on event planning legal issues.)

Awards Dinners

Q: What would be a reason for moving an awards dinner from the final night to the middle of the event program?

A: For out-of-state, -province and -country events, the final day is usually spent packing, trying to fit in last-minute shopping and doing final event wrap-up preparation. Return transfers can start quite early, depending on airline and security check-in procedures, and you will find that some guests tend to leave the final event early in order to finish their personal packing and retire to bed in order to be well rested for the travel day ahead. If an awards evening has so many components that it will take hours to get through and go on quite late, it is better to schedule this event mid-program, and then do a fun or formal farewell that will



leave the group on a high note—repped up and motivated for their return to the office and already anticipating what they need to do to take part in next year’s company event—but still end at a reasonable time and allow guests to slip out after dinner, entertainment and final words at a time that suits them. If the farewell reception and dinner is not taking place at the hotel they are staying in, arrange shuttle return transportation.

Assignment

Compare and contrast the event design elements and event timing of an awards reception and dinner with those of a fun or formal farewell in order to gain a sense of event timing and logistical requirements as well as event/show flow.

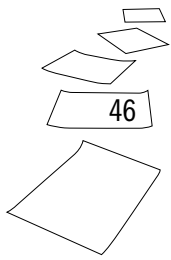
Car Rallies

Q: When designing a car rally, what are some the important areas that must be covered?

A: As with any event element you are designing, it is important to walk through the event in your mind from beginning till end to visualize event timing and logistics and the strategic design employed to evoke a specific emotion in order to meet an event objective—as well as all that must be put in place from a legal standpoint. You need to have that vision clearly in your mind before you start to design your road rally with your destination management company (DMC). It is vitally important that it be stressed to the DMC, your client and their participants that creativity (through rally design, picture captures, items gathered, questions answered, etc.) not speed is how the winner will be determined, and that points will be deducted for speeding and for drinking prior to the clock-in party.

You must take into consideration these elements:

- How many people will there be per car, minivan, minicoach, etc.?
- How many cars will be required for participants and for staff for advance and chase cars?
- What type of cars or vehicles will be required for the rally?
- What costs are involved (gas; insurance; air conditioning; car detailing; car cleaning post rally; rally inclusions such as maps, GPS system, rally kits, team shirts, cameras, etc.)?
- How will the cars be ferried to the departure point and what costs are involved?
- What is parking access like at the rally's departure point, checkpoints and clock-in destination?
- How will you select designated drivers and what documentation will they need to provide (e.g., valid driver's license, insurance, etc.) if the rally is self-drive?
- Do you have backup drivers in case there are not enough self-drive volunteers?
- How will you determine teams?
- Will any special driver's licenses or permits be required?
- What legal documents will the drivers be required to sign?
- What legal waivers will all the participants be required to sign?
- How many checkpoints do you envision and where?
- What type of refreshments do you want available at each checkpoint?
- Where will lunch be held—en route or at the final clock-in checkpoint?
- Will group transportation be required to take participants back to their hotel if the final clock-in checkpoint is not on-property?
- What type of clock-in party do you envision that is the best fit for the event and the theme?



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- How will the cars be ferried to the departure point and what costs are involved?
- Will the rally involve questions tied to the client's company and serve as an educational meeting component?
- How much time will be required to calculate the winning team?
- When will the rally awards ceremony take place?
- What will be the winning categories and prizes?

Assignment

Design a road rally to take place in your area. What would be the theme and the route? Where would you have the participants stop for breaks? There has to be something of value—education, enlightenment or entertainment—tied in to the checkpoint stops, the rally questions, the theme or the destination. For example, for a road rally in the Caribbean, participants checked in at one of the most scenic stops on the island. It was a great photo opportunity to create a lasting memory. An ice cream sundae bar featuring local flavors was set up there, putting forth a playful competitive energy. In another destination, a specific plant used in one pharmaceutical company's newest product had to be found and photographed at one checkpoint. For a clock-in party, what type of clock-in event would you create and where would you hold it?

Money Shots

Q: What are “money shots”?

A: A money shot, in event planning, is the photograph or shot in a video that captures a meaningful, memorable or magical group memory or moment. It is the shot that will be passed around the office, set up on desks, used as a company internal and

external marketing tool, posted on websites and even appear in local newspapers or industry publications. Money shots are carefully crafted and created but can take place naturally as well. It is important to always have a camera in case such a moment appears and there is no official photographer or videographer around.

Money shots are used to create desire (to be a part of next year's event), or to celebrate group achievement. One company who has a year-round well-being theme that has given them a \$2 million return on their \$400,000-a-year event investment by reducing health and insurance costs to the company takes the top winners to a repeat destination where they climb a mountain together to celebrate their individual and group success. A shot of the group and individuals at the top would be a prime example of a money shot that could be posted on the company wall of wellness as inspiration and motivation to others to aspire to be there next year and take their place proudly in the photograph.

Assignment

Go back through the chapter and assess which group functions, budget permitting, should have an official photographer and/or videographer to capture the event elements and which should not and why.

