

# PERFECT PRESENTATIONS

10 THINGS TO KNOW FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT



**FRED BECKER**

# INTRODUCTION

*When it comes to staging an event with entertainment, early decisions and planning can have a lot to do with your ultimate success or failure. Event planning can be quite complex, without a roadmap it is easy to get lost or sidetracked. Even experienced planners can overlook some details.*

*This booklet will help you focus on those troublesome areas and offer insight and solutions. It will help you organize the ten most important things that must happen to have a successful event with entertainment. If this is your first time as an event coordinator this should really open your eyes. If you have been arranging events for years this booklet will help keep you on track and perhaps see a new slant on problem areas. You will find checklists that you may copy and use for your own purposes.*





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CHAPTER 1

**EVERYONE** HAS TO HAVE A CLEAR  
LINE OF VISIBILITY



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## **1. Everyone Must Have a Clear Line of Visibility**

For any program to be affective it must first be seen. When you look at different sites, think about the layout of the room.

- What is the shape of the room? (square, rectangular, L-shaped?) The layout of the room is important when deciding where to place the stage.
- Do all people in the room have a clear view?
- Are there any obstructions, (e.g., Columns) that will make it difficult for people to see?
- Distractions? E.G., Mirrored walls or picture windows directly behind the performer can be a distraction. Also, if there is an independent lighting system or spotlight the light will reflect off the glass/mirror back into the audience's eyes. This is highly undesirable and should be fixed by either covering the reflective surface with drapery or relocating the stage elsewhere.
- Depending on the size of your group, will you need staging and if not will everyone have a clear view?



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CHAPTER 2

**CONSIDER** THE JUDICIOUS USE  
OF STAGE



## **2. Consider the Judicious use of Staging**

How many people in attendance warrant the use of a stage? Generally, if your group is 50 people or less, a stage may not be necessary. More than fifty people in attendance will require a seating configuration in rows. Without elevation, each row back from the front row will see progressively less of the speaker or performer. This will result in a less effective presentation, through no fault of the presenter.

The first two rules in show business are: "You must be seen" and "you must be heard." That is why theatres are built the way they are, to communicate as effectively as possible to the audience. The seating is tiered and the performance area is an elevated stage to give everyone a clear and unobstructed view.

So what can you do? You can have a stage or stages assembled at the event site. The staging for your event may need to be simple or elaborate, depending on the program and presenter you have chosen or will choose. However, during site inspection you should be able to get answers to the following questions:

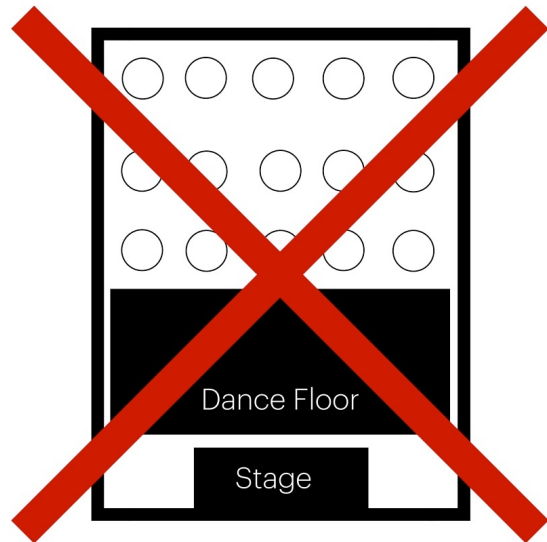
- Is there a logical focal point to the room? (see diagrams of rooms w/stage placement below.)
- Does the site have risers available to construct a stage?
- What are the sizes of the risers and configurations available?
- How many electrical outlets are near the stage? Are those outlets on separate circuits?
- If the entertainment does not supply a backdrop to help dress the stage, are there curtains or pipe and draping available? It is this author's opinion that a stage needs "dressing." Environmental factors can add much to your event. It seems a shame to hire professional entertainment, build a stage and then have a blank wall behind them. Simple pipe and draping can go a long way in creating a more "theatrical" look.

It makes sense that different types of presentations will require different types of stage layouts. Many details can only be considered after you have chosen a specific act or speaker.

Nevertheless, when looking at the layout of the room, consider the following rules of thumb; Music is best played to the length of the room, while speakers and variety play better "wide." That is to say, place a speaker or variety artist in the midst of your group,



along the long wall. The closer proximity the speaker has the more intimate and personal the presentation will be. The absolute worst thing that you can do is placing a speaker on a stage with dance floor between him and the audience. He won't have a fighting chance.

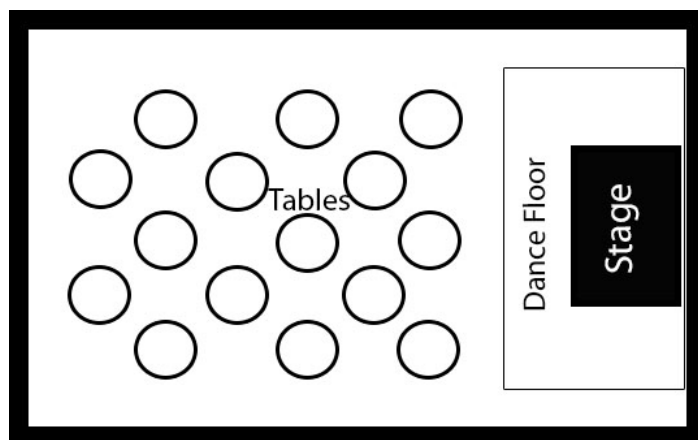


<-very difficult for a speaker to make an impact from the stage seen here

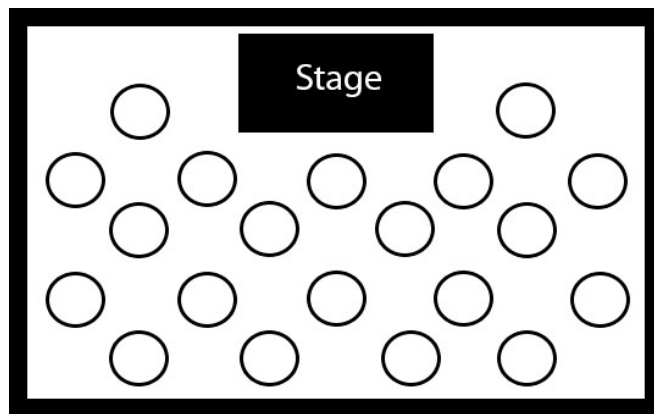
Bands and dance music, on the other hand, should be placed on the short wall behind a dance floor. The band's music should beckon people up to dance and there should be enough room for this to take place. In this case the site should supply wooden dance floors. These come in square sections and can be configured to meet your needs according to the number of people attending.

On the following pages are diagrams of typical and not so typical floor layouts.

### Typical Room Shapes



**Best for Music & Dancing:** Place the stage on the "Short Wall" behind a dance floor. This gives plenty of room for dancing and still allows a place (the opposite side) for non-dancers to have conversations.

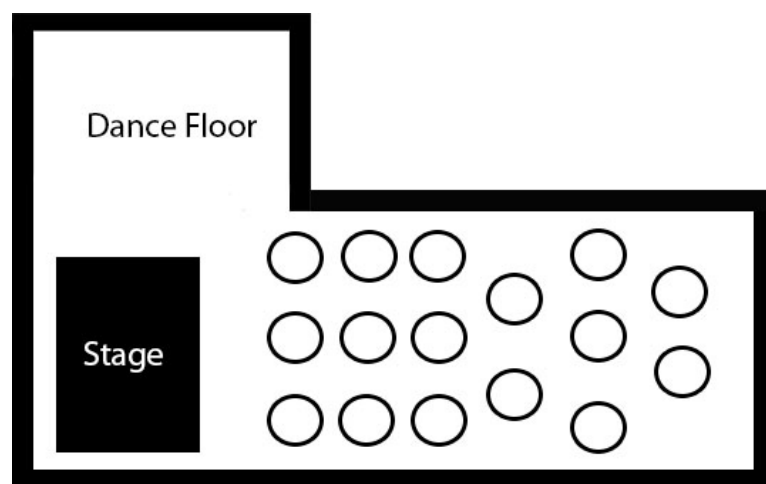


### **Best for Variety & Speakers**

This stage is placed on the "Long Wall" with tables starting very close to the edge of the stage, but not to the extreme sides and back. This allows an intimate encounter with the presentation, letting all become involved.

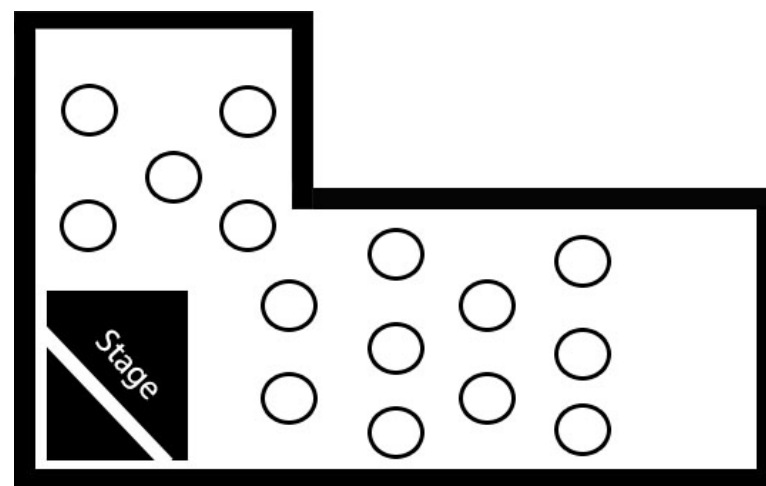
## **Unusual Room Shapes**

### **L-Shapes**



Occasionally you will encounter this shape in a room. For music and dancing it is suggested to make a dinning room in one area and a "dance club" in the smaller adjacent area.

### **L-Shape Part 2**

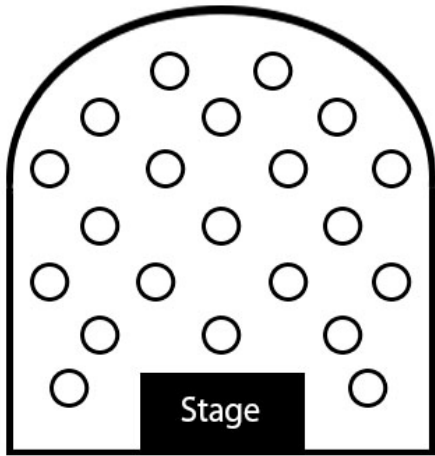


For Speakers or Variety Artists make the performance area "V-out" from the corner as shown. This will retain as much close contact as possible.



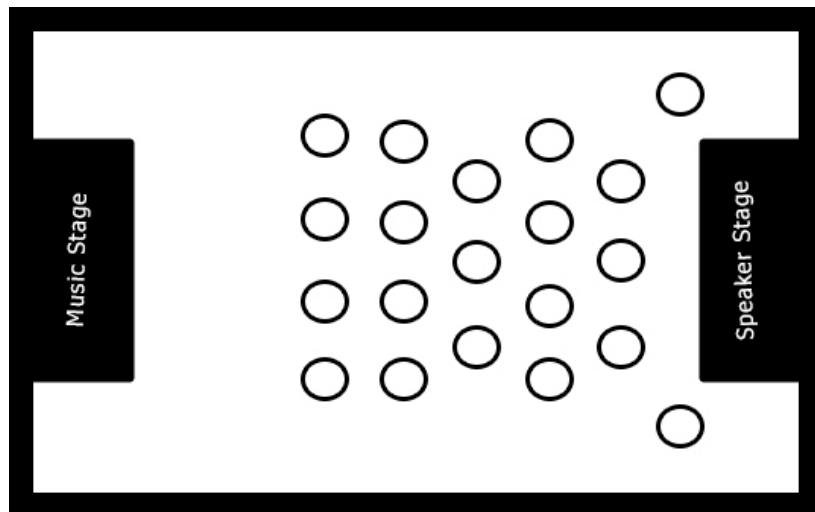
## Circular Rooms

In a circular room, take advantage of the natural amphitheatre by placing the stage as seen in this figure.



## Music and Speakers?

Many times you may wish to have both a variety performance/speaker followed by dance music. As we have seen they often have different and conflicting needs for staging. I suggest you give consideration to having two stages available. This will allow both to provide their most effective presentation, plus give a faster transition. As the speaker finishes, the band will be all set and ready to take over.





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## CHAPTER 3

**MAKE** SURE EVERYONE WILL  
HEAR WITHOUT STRAINING





### **3. Make sure Everyone will be able to Hear Without Straining**

Obviously any public speaker, performer or musician needs sound amplification. Musicians often bring their own sound system, variety performers sometimes will, speakers never do. Here we will address a number of concerns about working with audio.

#### **Appropriate Decibels**

Sound is critical. Too little amplification and your audience will strain to hear, and eventually give up. Your people will either start to talk among themselves or leave. Likewise, too much volume will have people holding their fingers in their ears and will also give up and leave. Therefore it is wise to have some understanding of how much amplification you will need. It comes in all varieties and I will give you some easy guidelines.

Many facilities you visit may boast of an in house PA. Be leery. These systems are heavily used and may not deliver the quality of sound they once did. For a speaker who tends to stay in one location, the sound may be passable. However, entertainers usually make use of all their stage area and many times travel into the audience. An in house system can be disastrous.

Indeed, most in house systems have speakers mounted in the ceiling. When you put your presenter on risers with a microphone under ceiling mounted speakers, you have a perfect recipe for "Feedback." Feedback is a terribly unpleasant high-pitched electronic squeal, resulting from a microphone picking up its own signal (from the speaker) and rebroadcasting it over and over again. This is to be avoided at all costs.

To ensure clear and undistorted sound, consider an independent sound system. With an independent system, the speakers are pointed from the stage, directed to the audience. There is often more "atmosphere" created with this method of directed sound than you get from the ceiling speakers. Often a technician must be hired to run the system.

Should the "in house" system be a necessity, insist on a demonstration. Make sure you get the sound quality you deserve. Nothing is more distracting to the listener than a bad PA system. If you decide to use an independent sound system, check with your site coordinator.

They may have a contract with an outside sound company. However, there is a charge for this and in some cases it is more than you need to pay.

Shopping around can save your budget some stress. Most cities have companies that supply sound equipment and personnel for events just like yours. On the Internet, search for "Sound Systems & Equipment-Renting" or "Theatrical Equipment & Supplies" (also the less common listing "Convention Services"). It is fair to tell the sound company that you are looking for bids on your job. You will find that the price can vary.

One word of warning: If your site is a union house you may have problems bringing in independent companies for lights and sound. The union may have a "Preferred Vendor." Although the union can't prevent you from hiring another (often less expensive) vendor, they can add a lot of service charges and generally make things difficult for you and your vendor. Should you be holding your event in a large convention or expo center or anywhere large trucks must be unloaded for events, you must be aware of the potential union requirements.

#### **Speaking Presentations**

(Minimum importance on music)

2,000 to 4,000 Watts System

8 to 16 Channel Mixing Board

2 to 4 Speakers

Appropriate amplifiers for the system. Name brand equipment most commonly used, Electra Voice, JBL, EAL, or comparable

Accommodates up to 500 people (depending on room size.)

#### **Musical Programs**

(Instrument and Vocals)

3,000 to 5,000 Watt System

16 to 24 Channel Mixing Board

4 to 6 Speakers

Appropriate Amplifier

Will accommodate a full sized band

(8 to 10 members)

Accommodate audience up to 500 people  
If it is a larger sized band a monitor system  
will be required so that the band can hear  
themselves on stage

If the audience size increases it may be necessary to add more speakers.

The next sized system is unnecessary to detail here because that accommodates recording artists and national touring acts. They have equipment riders that specify in detail their requirements.

Since sound is very important to the success of your event, it is a good idea to understand some rules of thumb in judging how much sound amplification you need. A sound system's output is measured in WATTS



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**CHAPTER 4**  
**SPOTLIGHT YOUR PRESENTATION  
WITH LIGHTING**



## 4. Spotlight your Presentation with Lighting

Again we might look to live theatre as a model. Think of how the audience sits in relative darkness and the actors are brightly lit. This is not an accident. For hundreds of years theatre producers have known that the darkness quiets the crowd, getting them ready to pay attention. With the stage as the only brightly-lit area, it focuses the audience's attention firmly where it should be, on the actors.

So far on your site inspection you have looked at the most logical place to stage your presentation according to visibility (that all people will have a clear view). Now consider how well you can control the lighting in that space.

- Are the lights on "dimmers" or are they strictly on/off?
- Can you keep the lights on over the presentation area while the rest of the room is dark?
- What kind of bulbs are in place? (Fluorescent lighting tends to make people look harsh and washed-out.)
- Is it likely that you will need additional lighting than the fixtures present?

The site may offer lighting supplements. Many facilities will offer a spotlight and operator for a nominal charge. They may have a basic lighting package available for rent. Also, outside companies can supply you with all manner of lighting and staging, limited only to the size of venue and your budget. Again you can consult

the Internet for "Theatrical Equipment & Stage Lighting and Convention Services in the area of your event



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**CHAPTER 5**

**MAKE SURE YOU HAVE  
ENOUGH ELECTRICITY**



## **5. Make sure you have Enough Electricity**

Many lighting rigs and large PA systems will run on a higher voltage than normal household power. Your site inspection is the right time to find out what is available to you.

- Make a note of the power available in amperage in the room and how many separate circuits.
- Make sure that there are outlets near where the staging will be set.
- If you will need additional electrical power (for independent sound and lighting) how much can the site provide and what will the cost be?



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**CHAPTER 6**

**GIVE** TIME TO SET ALL THIS UP



## 6. Give Time to Set all This Up

All the staging we've discussed will require setup time prior to the arrival of your guests. Popular sites may stage many events in one day in the same room. Often things get behind schedule. One meeting lasts too long, the next is delayed... soon the whole day is thrown hours off. Therefore it is important for you to secure setup times with a buffer, just incase something is delayed.

Many things go on behind the scenes to get ready for an event. Lets look at some concerns;

- Will there be time for equipment (sound, lights, props, etc.) to load in?
- What is the load in/out procedure?
- What door should be used to take in equipment?
- Is there a security gate or special access that must be obtained?
- Is there a union to deal with?
- Are there union charges to pay?

For example, let us assume that you have a six-piece band booked. On the day of the event the band must arrive at site, and find a loading entrance. Often they must be registered with security in order to enter the building. Once in, a union

loading foreman may meet them. In this case, the local workers must handle all the equipment. There could be a delay before the equipment is loaded into the site.

Once in, the band can only start to setup once the staging is in place, secured and draped. (Which only happens after the room is cleared and cleaned from the previous event.)

If the band needs additional power for lighting and sound, an electrician should be scheduled. Only then can they set their volume levels and test their instruments. If you have outside lighting brought in; this process is repeated for them as well.

After all that, the band must have a place to store their cases and then have a place to change into their show clothes. This should all happen before your first guest arrives at the event. If you haven't secured enough setup time you could be heading for a train wreck.

### **Doing It Right.**

Before signing contracts with a facility, secure setup time prior to the start of the evening. The first order of business is to get the staging in place. Without the stage, nothing else can proceed. So have them commit to a time. Plus, have them spell out any extra charges that may be incurred for loading in entertainment/presentation equipment.



Since it may be a considerable amount of time between your site inspections and the finalization of your event plans, make use of the following handy Checklist. Later, when working on the details or discussing the facility with the talent you've selected, you'll have all the details neatly at your fingertips!

## Facility Checklist

- What is the shape of the room? (Square, rectangular L-shaped?)

\_\_\_\_\_

- Is there a logical focal point for a presentation?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Do all people in the room have a clear view?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Are there any obstructions, (e.g., Columns) that will make it difficult for people to see? \_\_\_\_\_

- Are there distractions?

\_\_\_\_\_

- If you will not use staging will everyone have a clear view?

\_\_\_\_\_

- How much staging is available from the facility? (Length, Width & Height) \_\_\_\_\_

- Will they supply Curtaining or Draping?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Will they provide a wooden dance floor if needed?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Do they supply you with Public Address options?

\_\_\_\_\_

- If so describe them

\_\_\_\_\_

- Can you darken the "audience" section of the room and still light the "stage" area? \_\_\_\_\_ On dimmers?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Are there extra lighting options available on site?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Is electrical power readily available near the presentation area?

\_\_\_\_\_

- What is the maximum amperage that can be accommodated?

\_\_\_\_\_

- How much setup time will be available?

\_\_\_\_\_

- What is the load in/out procedure? \_\_\_\_\_

- What door to use?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Is there a security gate/special access?

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- Is there a union to deal with? \_\_\_\_\_

- Are there union charges to pay?

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- Are there dressing room facilities for the presenter?

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**CHAPTER 7**

**MAKE IT FUN AND MEMORABLE**





## 7. Make it Fun and Memorable

After you have contracted with your event facility, you now have firm dates with which to plan around. Your choice of presentation and entertainment is an important one. A week after the event, attendees will probably not remember what they ate for dinner, but they will remember the great entertainment. (Or bad entertainment, but that's another matter.)

An audience that enjoys an entertaining show or program has a shared experience. This synergistic encounter will be talked about for a long time. The cheers are for you. Your audience will give you credit for providing them with this special memory.

The selection is not an easy one. Consider variety. If you have the same program every year, the event loses some of its "specialness." If each time, your group is surprised by the program, they will begin to look forward to these events. However, you must also consider people's tastes, so the surprise shouldn't be of a shocking nature!

In the early stages you may wish to pick a theme. A theme might possibly help narrow the scope of your search. Your theme may be about your goals for the coming year or perhaps something more outrageous. As an entertainer, I've worked events with the following themes; The Magic of (your name here), Beach Bashes, Cruise Liners, Night in the Jungle, Wild West, Looking to the Future, Black and White Ball, Decade Parties ('40s, 50s, etc.), Carnivals, Las Vegas, Hollywood, Mardi Gras Madness, and any number of others.

It is my advice to take on one of these extravagant themes only if you have the budget to do it properly. An evening with a strong show or speaker will be more appreciated than a half-hearted attempt at a theme. However, a well-executed theme and a dynamic presentation will be long remembered and hard to top!

### How Long?

The length of program you desire may influence your choice as well. Asking an audience to listen to the same speaker for more than an hour is to flirt with disaster. If you do desire such a long format, make sure the presenter can offer a variety of moods and themes. Indeed, some groups prefer variety shows, with two or more entertainers "on the bill." If this appeals to you, I suggest you have a very experienced person to coordinate all the details. There needs to be a proper opening to this kind of show, and a closer, as well as an emcee to link it all together. These shows are more difficult to put together, but the results are sometimes extraordinary.

Along these lines, it is your author's opinion that some audience participation is effective and desirable. This interaction makes the presentation more "alive" for your group and more personal to your occasion. I believe a live show or exhibition without some participation might as well be a recording shown on videotape. The interplay between presenter and audience is one of the most contributing factors to memorability.

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## CHAPTER 8 **SELECTING** A PROGRAM





## **8. Selecting a Program.**

There are many ways to find presenters and entertainers. You may hear about programs from others in your position, from advertising, agencies or happen to see them yourself at another event.

In fact, you should always "see" a performer or speaker before booking them, at least on videotape. Anyone worth his or her salt will be able to produce a demonstration tape. Often these are highlights of the program edited to a short format. This is to give you the flavor of the presentation. Do not expect to see the entire program. No one would "giveaway" the whole show on tape, otherwise you might show the tape instead of have them in person!

Watching these demonstration tapes should be done with a discerning eye. Frankly, it is possible to make a weak or inexperienced performer look very good through slick television production. Read between the lines, are there any audience reactions? Do the scenes look staged? Do you get a feel for the real performer(s) or is there more flash than substance?

If the video demonstration is inconclusive, you have three recourses; Arrange to see a live performance (admittedly that may not be possible). Ask for references of recent engagements and call them. Or go with your gut instinct, intuition is hard to argue with.

Once you've created your program wish list, look at the practical considerations. Ask for each candidate's technical requirements. Every presenter should be able to produce a list that spells out what staging, lighting, draping, sound and special considerations they request to do the best job for you. In the business this list is known as a "Rider" (sometimes called Contract Rider or Technical Rider). Some of the items on a rider will be your responsibility or should be planned for in your budget. Some of the aspects of the rider will be negotiable or open to compromise. Depending on the program you chose the rider may be extensive or very simple.

Beware of any presenter that doesn't know what a rider is or cannot produce some kind of guidelines for their technical requirements. It would be my opinion that they are not as experienced as they have lead you to believe.

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**CHAPTER 9**

**MAKE A REALISTIC SCHEDULE  
OF EVENTS**





## 9. Make a Realistic Schedule of Events

The evening's festivities will go smoothly if you've made a realistic schedule to follow.

Indeed this will have some affect on how well the presenter will do his or her job.

Anyone can understand the anticipation a person goes through while waiting to go before an audience of people. Should a performer or speaker expect to go on stage at 8:30, they start to get themselves psyched up for the job, at 8:15. Now, imagine they are informed there is a delay of thirty minutes. The performer must release all that nervous energy. At 8:45 the performer again tries to get "up" for the performance. If at 9:00 there is another delay, causing the performer to cool their heels again, it will be very difficult to rebound a third time. The performer will probably not be able to give 100% at this point. Half of their energy will be used up, before ever reaching the stage.

To avoid any such problem, you can make a schedule with a realistic show time. Let us assume you are having a program after dinner. You need to account for all the activities that will occur such as; cocktail hour, food service, speeches/awards, and show time.

It is best to adequately time it all out. Dinner service usually takes longer than expected and speakers need to be limited to a very specific length or there is a danger of some to ramble (it happens). If you have a fairly large group it just takes time for

everyone to settle and for food service to care for everyone's needs. Generally, the larger the group the longer the process will take.

One note; it is never a good idea to have a presentation at the same time as food service. I have made it a personal policy to steadfastly refuse to start my program during dessert or the clearing of dishes. Here is why, the opening of a presentation sets the pace of the entire program. The first moments are crucial. The group subconsciously makes a judgement about the presenter and whether it will pay attention. If their attention is divided (while eating a dessert) or distracted (by clanging plates and servers walking in front of their view) these consequential moments are squandered.

Furthermore, it is wise to start with a prepared introduction, so that all attention is focused and ready for the program to begin.

At any event, whether it involves food service or not, consider your group's attention span. If you have two or more hours of speeches or awards before your professional program, you may have doomed him or her to failure. Your group may just be used up at that point. It may be wiser to let at least some of your "business portion" ride the wave of a rousing presentation executed by a professional.



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**CHAPTER 10**

**AFTERWARD** GET FEEDBACK



## **10. Afterward get Feedback**

After the event should be the best part for you. This is the time you get to hear how much your guests have enjoyed the event. This is certainly pleasant, and it can also be constructive.

It is easy to get immediate feedback, people will most likely seek you out to give it. This is a good time to ask if there is anything that could be done differently for next time. If you get suggestions make a note of them. Be sure to write them down. There is a strong chance that you may not remember when it is time to start organizing the next event.

The next step is to wait about a week or so. Then interview some of the guests at the event. Find out what stands out to them. What do they remember about the event once the afterglow has faded?

In my years working for luxury cruise lines, all made use of "comment cards." This is a sort of report card that each guest fills out rating the services they received on a scale of 1 to 10. Therefore, I was not a bit surprised when I found out that one of my clients, "The Florida Bankers Association," made use of the very same idea. They made use of a "Conference Evaluation" questionnaire, where attendees rated the event site, the food service, the seminar speakers, the overall conference and indeed, the entertainment (me).

I think this is a marvelous idea and encourage you to get all the feedback that you need to keep providing your group with "Perfect Presentations!"



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INTRODUCING FRED AND BOBBIE BECKER



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