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## Green Event Planning

When thinking of event planning, one may think of huge extravagant events at luxury hotels and venues; yet we all wonder, what is everything that goes into an event? How can these extravagant events possibly help the environment, is there even a way? Of course there is, and it is very easy to do. In an effort to change the impact of events on the environment, there are simple but helpful things one can do. A green event does not just happen in the production part of an event; it all starts in the planning process. Creating a green event can be mapped out for each part of an event, creating a simple, easy-to-follow layout of what to take into consideration when planning. A green event's basic layout takes into consideration the event's impact on the environment. Simple changes that can help turn an event into a green event are clearly labeled and visible composting areas, recycling bins, and "black" waste bins to reduce the amount of trash that goes into a landfill.

When planning a green event, there are many points of concentration for the event planners. Concentrations in green event planning include catering and food, decorations, waste reduction, lighting, venue, and most of all, budget. Questions arise within these areas on how to make events green. Where does a caterer or chef find organic or sustainable foods? How can decorations be turned to be green and environmentally friendly? Is it possible to create waste reduction sites allowing it easily to identify to guests where their trash goes? There may be many more questions floating around an event planners head when planning an environmentally friendly event; nevertheless, its easier than they may think.

When walking into an event, the first thing most notice are the decorations. Extravagant decorations catch our attention, yet how can these possibly be turned to be green? Most decorations used at an event are reusable for future events you might plan. For instance, table cloths can come in plastic material that will get thrown away after one use, yet fabric table cloths can easily get washed and reused for a future event or gathering. Every part of decorations has a way to turn it green. While visiting the Moscone Center here in San Francisco, one of the event planners shared with my hospitality class that even balloons can be turned green by simply donating them to a place where they can be reused at the end of an event. This is done by donating them to a children's hospital that would enjoy the simple gift.

In the area of food and beverage, it is easy to provide green and sustainability to the event. When supplying food to a green event, consider local organic farms for suppliers to caterers, reducing the worry about unhealthy food that has been sprayed with pesticides. Simple trips to a local farmer's market, such as the one here in San Francisco at the Ferry Building will open ones eyes to the many local organic and sustainable farms. These farms include Cowgirl Creamery, Petaluma Egg Farm, Hog Island Oysters, Marin Sun Farms, and many more. Local farmers markets are a way to bring local organic and sustainable food into an urban area such as San Francisco.

When taking the step into green and sustainable food and catering, one may be faced with difficulties that are easy to get past. At many grocery stores, such as Safeway, the shelves are packed with many varieties of non-organic as well as organic foods. Yet how do you know if the food labeled "Organic" in the market is truly organic? Many people may be shocked to see the sudden high prices on many of these organic foods, pushing them away from that step to buy all their food products at such prices. Due to this increase of cost of this food, many people

have been set off from buying organic foods. Although many people in society do not take the step towards buying organic foods, when thinking of events, a caterer for an event may see the importance of buying expensive organic ingredients for the food at an event. For a caterer to go towards organic food for events, the first step is finding their local organic farm.

Finding a local organic farm for a caterer in the Bay Area is easier than one may think. The search for finding a local organic farm begins with a simple study of the area around you. As well, the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farming (WWOOF) is an excellent way to not only find, but as well help at your local organic farm. WWOOF is an easy way to find a complete list of all the organic farms available to you in the area in which you live in, available to you on their website("Wwoof- world wide," 1998-201). Overall, the searching for these organic farms would pay off in many ways. The menu at the event would only contain in season locally grown food, avoiding pollution caused by shipping the food from different countries. All in all, creating sustainable and organic foods available to caterers for events is easier than it seems.

Limitations on green events may also come in the form of waste reduction. The main question surrounding this topic is how to get all the attendees of the event to understand and follow the waste separation. Here in San Francisco, we have created a separated garbage system well put into its place in many offices and homes. On the other hand, how does one put that separated garbage system into effect at an event? San Francisco is an example of a city that can be copied by other cities that strive to meet the waste reduction San Francisco is at.

Some of the strategies for other towns to meet San Francisco's waste reduction example is to start off by getting the word out of the new goal. By the whole town or city knowing about the new plan of waste reduction, they will be more willing to take part in the change. A second

step in waste reduction for a city is to enforce recycling by outlawing plastic bags and Styrofoam containers from businesses throughout the city. A strong third step would be to provide the town with recycling and composting bins for easy access to the waste of common items. These strategies are only stepping stones lining the path to a greater achievement of waste diversion.

At the Moscone Center in San Francisco, they have put the separated garbage system into effect. They supply the three garbage bin systems placed around an event to reduce the amount of garbage of every event to go into a landfill. Each bin is clearly marked, green for compost (food scraps), blue for recyclables (plastic that holds its shape, recyclables, etc.), and black for landfill garbage (soft plastics). With clear pictured labels on each bin, it creates a simple, easy to identify system that can be taken into effect at any event. The Moscone center is not the only convention center in the nation taking the step towards green. Other convention centers or arenas include the Turner Field in Atlanta, Miller Park in Wisconsin, and Safeco Field in Seattle, Washington("Recycle together: arenas," ).

Another thing to consider in producing green events is lighting. In a green setting, every venue is equipped with windows providing natural sunlight for every event held, creating less of a necessity to have any other lights at the event. The main way to create all the lighting at an event 100% environmentally friendly is to have an event outdoors where there is complete access to sunlight, creating natural lighting for any event, whether it be a wedding or an outdoor small gathering. If an event space is not equip with an outdoor space, skylights help create a natural light effect. Skylights are designed to capture the sun's energy and bring it into the room without the burden of expensive bills common with the installation of solar panels or wind turbines(Lee) . For the many hotels in big cities, such as here in San Francisco, that have to have their main convention and event space underground, direct sun is clearly not an option. Ways to convert the

light usage at these underground ballrooms is to equip the hotel or building with solar panels or wind turbines to capture energy from renewable energy sources, the wind or the sun.

All throughout many homes and buildings, the increase in solar panels has been a growing trend. This trend creates a logical way to provide reusable energy for lighting at an event. It may turn out to save money instead of spending money on lighting costs. When a building has solar panels, it creates from a never-ending energy source, the sun. This energy source can allow for natural sunlight to power all the lighting and energy-using appliances at an event.

The W Hotel in San Francisco is a great example of the possible use of wind turbines for energy supply. The W Hotel will be the first commercial building in San Francisco to have wind turbines, putting the hotel a step ahead of other hotels("Green lodging news:," 2010). Wind turbines allow wind to be passed through the turbine to create energy to power a building. This is a mind-blowing step for many hotels and buildings with convention and event spaces because it provides the entire area with efficient energy to provide hotels with underground meeting spaces an opportunity to still have an environmental energy source. These wind turbines are a look into the future of energy on the many new ways our society will come up with to get our energy from a more direct, reusable, natural, and never-ending supply.

Two businesses in the Bay Area that have different focuses, but are both very much connected to green event management and green event planning, are Organic Catering and Green Event Planning in San Francisco, and Green Girl Events in West Marin. Green Girl Events is located in Point Reyes Station, planning green events for Marin County and beyond. Green Girl Events looks at each part of the event they plan with their suppliers to ensure that a fully green and sustainable event is brought to the guests, from the location, through the decorations, and

including the caterers ("Green girl events," 2008). On the other side of event planning is Organic Catering and Green Event Planning in San Francisco. This company focuses not only on the planning portion of an event as Green Girl Events does but on organic catering as well ("Organic chef catering;," ). Both event planning companies focus on events for guests that ensure low impact on the environment.

Taking into consideration the three R's (reduce, reuse, and recycle) Green Girl Events has put into each one of their events helps create an overall green environment in everything they plan. In many towns, these three Rs are essential, yet what do they mean in the industry of executing an event? In an event, each R has a slightly different meaning. Reduce refers to reducing the amount of food that is non-organic and may be sprayed with pesticides. Reuse refers to the reuse of common decorations or food left over at an event, creating less overall waste. Recycling refers to donating decorations you will not use again to another cause, such as a school in need of decorations for a future event. Overall, these three Rs in use at Green Girl Events can be taken into each event planning company to create a green environment at any event they may be planning ("Green girl events," 2008).

Another successful green planning business is Clementine Eco Events. It is run by Kelin Backman and Vanessa Hauswald. This green event planning company has been around for years, taking into consideration environmental and economic aspects into each event that the two women plan. I was lucky enough to speak with Kelin Backman about what she does, how she got to where she is, and how someone pursuing her job can get to her position.

Kelin Backman is not only an event planner, but also teaches the event planning pathway to juniors and seniors at Casa Grande High School in Petaluma, California. Her event planning class is focused on teaching her students the main elements of planning an event, leaving them

with completely hands-on projects. They take part in planning school dances and events, such as their homecoming.

When asked why she decided to get into event planning, she responded that she had previous experience in the food and beverage and catering departments but wanted to experience handling all elements of an event. She is completely committed to what she does. She got into green event planning due to seeing all the garbage at the end of an event when working in food and beverage. She found that all this garbage was unnecessary and that “people were not looking at the comprehensive view.”

Backman began looking at events from the end product first, thinking of how much garbage would be produced by the different containers and utensils used in the event. She estimated that a 500 guest event should use two bags of garbage. This perspective gives her the edge to being able to plan large scale events and festivals in the community that are completely green.

Backman openly shared her views on how a person can get to where she is now at the end of our interview. In her perspective, a great way to start off to get to the position in which she is in begins by learning about the environment and how we as people can effect it in a positive way. An easy way to take that step into learning about our effects on the environment is to take an environmental science class that is offered now at many school.

By taking an environmental science class, it not only opens some one's eyes to the many harmful effects we as a society have put into our environment, yet also shows us how to take the steps to change our ways. Personally, I believe that by taking an environmental science class, it gives a person the insight on our environment and how there are many ways we as a community and society can help it. Every person, no matter their job, from green event planners to people

just trying to get an insight to our environment can benefit from this class. Through personal experience of taking an environmental science class my school has offered, it has opened my eyes to the many effects we as a society have done to our environment.

Event planners that have learned about how their practices create less of an impact on our environment, either through an environmental science class or knowledge picked up in their daily life, must go through a process before they can officially call themselves a green company. Green certification means that a business maintains green practices that not only have a low impact on the environment, but as well are healthy for those attending the events.

A company that focuses on certifying green event planners is the Green Meeting Industry Council (GMIC). This worldwide council was founded in 1972 and has reached over 22,000 members to this day all over the globe. The GMIC concentrates on teaching their members how to become motivated to fulfill sustainability in their company through using green practices. The council brings its members together for networking sessions as well as to provide workshops and resources to help expand the green knowledge of their members("Us EPA: green," 2009). For example, the GMIC is having their annual conference in February where they are holding a variety of meetings on sustainable destinations and venues, waste diversion, menu planning, how to set sustainability objectives and goals, and many more("Gmic 2011 conference program," ). These workshops are an exceptional way to maintain the sustainability and green aspects withing these companies, providing models for future event planners to follow.

The GMIC has four different certification levels, Platinum Partner, Gold Partner, Silver Partner and Bronze Partner. Each lever of partnership contains different benefits, building up from the Bronze Partnership meant for small businesses with under ten employees, up to the Platinum Partner with anywhere over ten employees. Every membership is a one



year partnership period, and costs \$185 per person on staff or preferred clients. The Bronze Partnership contains the least amount of benefits only supplying the company with a listing in the GMIC public directory, a logo on the GMIC website, as well as a feature article only. The Platinum Partnership, without a doubt, has the most rewarding membership containing a complimentary exhibit at the GMIC conference, press release opportunities, and many more("Gmic business member," ). Yet, every one of these partnerships comes with the most valuable incentive of all, the ability to be green certified and known to the public for being a green certified event planning company.

Not only do green certification companies date as far back to the 1970's, but a new green meeting association and certificate was launched in 2008 called the Association for Green Meetings and Events. This company is based in Atlanta and is a nonprofit association, founded by two women named Loriann White, CMM, and Hedley Laughlin. Both women have experience in the event planning industry, giving them an insight to the necessities needed for the many event planners they certify through their new company. The women's association concentrates on helping event planners move towards green meetings by providing case studies and support through the process. Although this green meeting certification company is not as well known as the GMIC, it provides the initial help many event planners may need to stick their foot through the door leading them to a new world with many opportunities in green event planning(Bair, 2008).

Green event planning pulls apart the essential elements necessary to plan an event, putting a twist to each part that will not cause harm to the environment. By helping to plan green events it puts us as a society a step closer to helping our planet conserve its natural resources. Event planning truly does start in the planning process, thinking of the end product you see

for your event. This end product may be the extravagant decorations and venue or the final garbage produced. No matter what people see as their personal end product at an event, there are resources and tools available to everyone to help them create their event using sustainable and green practices.

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