

Title:

Event Planning Tips The Pros Use

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Summary:

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Article Body:

Putting together a big event is no small accomplishment. That's why many organizations call on a professional event planner. Sometimes, however, you may have to organize a big event by yourself.

Kara Mickelson, a corporate planner for Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A., Inc., has planned everything from intimate dinners to corporate meetings to citywide events for 20,000 people. Here are some tips that she has found to be helpful:

• Get everyone on the same page. According to Mickelson, the first step is to sit down with everyone involved in the planning and set the objectives for the function. She also suggests that this can be an excellent time to assess what funds or resources will be available for the event. Mickelson believes one of the biggest mistakes planners make is improper budgeting. One way many pros save money is by printing their own meeting materials, including tent cards, signs, badges and more, with a company such as Avery Dennison.

• Think backwards. When should you start planning? "The best way to start is by backing everything out from the event day," Mickelson advises. It's critical not to plan too much until the event date is set.

• Build in extra time. What makes it hard for novice planners is they have no benchmark for how long it will take to research a hotel, negotiate a contract or find a band. "Give yourself more time than you think you need," she recommends.

Some find it helpful to use a tool, such as those available on the Avery

Meetings and Events Solution Center Web site ([www.avery.com/meetings](http://www.avery.com/meetings)). It provides templates, tips and tools to make it easier to plan meetings and events.

&#8226; Write it down. Mickelson suggests using a notebook to write down all the basics. Do you need invitations, meeting materials, flower arrangements? The details will help you create a timeline for your event. She contends that once it's written down, the time-line will start to reveal itself.

&#8226; Play pretend. How do you avoid forgetting an important task? "Do a mental walk-through," advises Mickelson. "Pretend you're actually at the event. Go through the process of driving your car there. Where is parking? At the venue, do you need signs? Badges? Table tents for seating? Visually, if you can walk yourself through the entire event, it becomes clearer."

What is her foremost bit of advice? She suggests to plan for the worst, and hope for the best.