

Title:

Is Structuring An Event Like Building With Jelly?

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665

Summary:

Designing the timetable for a workshop, conference, roadshow or seminar when you have never done such a thing before may seem like juggling jelly but you can take some tips from the professionals and make your event a real success.

There is nothing too technical about designing a timetable for a half-day or one-day event. All you really need to do is look at it through the eyes of the delegates.

For example a breakfast workshop might provide the following experience:

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Article Body:

Designing the timetable for a workshop, conference, roadshow or seminar when you have never done such a thing before may seem like juggling jelly but you can take some tips from the professionals and make your event a real success.

There is nothing too technical about designing a timetable for a half-day or one-day event. All you really need to do is look at it through the eyes of the delegates.

For example a breakfast workshop might provide the following experience:

8:03 I rush in, a little late for the breakfast workshop but find a smiling administrator who gives me a name-badge, a data pack and briefs me on what is going to happen. She tells me there is still plenty of time to grab a coffee and relax a little before the start. I introduce myself to one or two of my fellow delegates and we chat about our reasons for coming.

8:15 We take our places in the training room and the trainer welcomes us, goes through the usual introductory chat and launches into presenting Session1.

8.40 The trainer breaks us into smaller groups to discuss and practice the skills that she has been presenting. We have a really fun scenario to work through and there's lots of laughter in the room.

9:00 Back together as a big group, we give feedback about the difficulties we found and the trainer gives us some hints and tips to use in the future.

9:15 The trainer presents Session 2, the second half of the material and uses some interactive exercises to demonstrate the main points.

9:35 We have an opportunity to mix in different groups to discuss the new skills and information and to practice again.

9:55 Back in the big group, we give the trainer some feedback and she adds some more practical advice before closing the session.

10:15 Before we all return to our various businesses, we relax with coffee and a danish provided by the training company and fill out their evaluation form. It's an opportunity to do a bit of networking and to exchange contact details with people.

An example full-day timetable goes something like this:

9.30 Arrival - Time for coffee and networking

10.00 Session 1 - Information giving

11.15 Coffee Break

11.30 Icebreaker - break the tedium

12.00 Session 2 - more information giving

1.00 Lunch

2.00 Icebreaker - cure for the "graveyard" slot

2.20 Session 3 - even more information giving

3.30 Coffee Break

3.45 Session 4 - the final information giving slot

4.45 Review and call to action

5.00 Evaluation and close

When you think about your own threshold of boredom; the amount of time you can sit and concentrate on one subject before you need a break, you'll know it's between 45 minutes and an hour. This means that a typical one-day workshop or seminar will have only around 5 hours or less of formal information-giving time, usually divided into four chunks.

There is a temptation to try and achieve too much in this five hour period, however it is always easier to cut material down from a surplus than it is to invent material when there is a shortfall.

If you are organizing a seminar with guest speakers each giving a 30 minute presentation you should schedule 9 speakers into set time slots throughout the day. Their talks should fill four and a half hours but you will have a half-hour contingency to absorb any over-run that may occur. If you find that everyone runs to time, it will pay to ensure that the seminar facilitator has a wind-up talk that can take 5 minutes or 35 minutes depending on the size of the excess.

Of course it looks easy on paper and although a really talented facilitator can either speed up or slow down the activities to get the learning points across, the important point for the timetable designer is that they meet the needs of the participants within the requirements of the providers. If your audience does not get enough information to chew on they will be just as dissatisfied as they would be if they get too much with no time to ask questions. Juggling jelly is a real skill.