

ACHIEVING ENTERTAINMENT SUCCESS

A man in a light-colored suit and patterned tie is smiling broadly and clapping his hands. He is in a social setting with other people in the background, some of whom are also in formal attire. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the man in the foreground.

****Including the 7 STEPS FOR
SUCCESSFUL ENTERTAINMENT
HIRING***

by Ray Lawrence, founder/CEO
Your Entertainment Partner



Ray is an entertainment strategist who has been serving corporate America for over 18 years.

His experience in placing entertainers and speakers into corporate events has provided him with a wealth of do's and don'ts for event planners.

Every event planner has to deal with budgets, time management and deadlines. These can become daunting, and many times the fun in the job is lost.

When the job of finding entertainment becomes a burden to you, due to budgets, timelines and other demands, you miss the greatness around you.

INTRODUCTION

Last year, I was having a conversation with a client who had hired us for a Christmas party. One of the logical questions I asked was “What events do you have coming up this summer”?

She replied, “Oh, nothing, no events.”

Since this was a big company she is an event planner for, I had to dig a little deeper. “No appreciation dinners, awards banquets, seminars, product launches?”

“Oh no”, she said. “We don’t call those events.”

Interesting. Now, I know that not everyone looks at this the same way. I have written this guide for those who have to coordinate any type of gathering.

There is something I feel is lacking in the education, as you will, for event planners. That is learning lessons from a performer’s viewpoint. Having an understanding of the psychology of where the great professionals are coming from. As part of this digest, I’ll be including short readings and examples of this as well.

A critical part of any gathering or event is to keep guests involved. From team building, to product launches, to holiday parties. Entertainment should have a place. The trick is finding that entertainment that not only fits, but helps the event flow. In many cases, this is the one line item in the budget that has the lowest budgeted dollars. We need to think about how much of an impact the food has versus the entertainment.

This entire book focuses on *Entertainment*. Why bring it in, what to look for, how to get the most from it, how to find it.

Let’s jump right in!

CATCH THE LAUGHTER

The other day, I'm looking through my FaceBook news feed, and this really silly video pops up from one of my friends. Curiosity got the better of me, I had to take a look. Maybe not my cup of tea, but I did find myself laughing.

What a difference that made in the rest of the day. What started as a dreary day I was dreading, became a day where I was smiling. That smile turned into motivation, feeling better, and wanting to share the silliness and laughs with others.

This made a difference in how I was dealing with people on the phone, and in my emails.

The Ojibway tribe recognized it. The Old Testament even references the healing properties of humor: "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

They knew intuitively that laughter was good for the body as well as the soul.

Existing research gives us hope that our old knock-knock jokes aren't just making people feel better; they actually are making them better.

The good news is that humor has a positive impact on intellectual and emotional functioning.

- Humor helps put life's trials and tribulations into healthy perspective by making them seem smaller.
- Humor aids us in overcoming fear.
- Humor allows us to take ourselves less seriously.
- Humor triggers our creativity.

Put laughter to use in your life. You will feel better for it, and so will everyone around you.

THE LESSON I LEARNED:

When I was grumpy Ray, I overlooked a lot of really great talent, and rushed my thought processes. Finding a way, even if forced, to make myself smile, created a contagious effect, and helped me put my ideas into better focus.

Want to see the video I referenced? Go to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yO7MWuJ7zLA>

Now, we may begin!

WHY ENTERTAINMENT?

We all understand why certain events have entertainment. It can create anticipation. It gives people reasons for attending. It breaks up the monotony. Entertainment provides involvement.

Before jumping in and starting the search for entertainment, ask yourself this question. "*Why are we holding this event?*"

Your answer should determine *what* you do for entertainment, or even if it is appropriate.

Anticipation: Providing a first class performance can cause a buzz among the guests before the event. You are telling your guests that they are special, and that you are showing your appreciation for them.

Breaking Up The Monotony: Adding something fun can keep people's attention. After the social hour, and dinner, then the speeches, your guests need an outlet to have fun.

Involvement: At many events, there will be a certain percentage of attendees who just sit back and try to blend in with the wall. Pursuing the correct entertainment will give these people a chance to feel like part of the group.

Whether it's just to give something fun, or to have another way to impart your message, entertainment has a place in nearly all situations. We just don't always call it entertainment.

EXPERT IN THE OFFICE

You are where you're at right now because of an expertise you have in a special field. You are good at what you do. You didn't achieve this position overnight. Perhaps you spent many years in college. Or, you have moved up the ranks, learning every day. This hasn't been an easy journey. What you have and where you are, you've earned. You have had a lot of sleepless nights, missed special occasions, overtime. Here you are!

The same is to be said to the successful entertainers. No matter how much easy viral video makes someone "famous", there's a difference between being famous, and being good.

Funny takes a LOT of work.

I take as many opportunities as I can to be in the audience. It is such a pleasure to watch someone who has put in the countless hours of practice performing. The timing. The grace. (Yes, even great comedians have a certain grace about them). When Richard looks into the audience and says "Who Has Cash", you know the laughs will be strong, because he's practiced when to deliver this line thousands of times. When Marty grabs all the juggling balls at the same time, then executes another juggling move at the precise moment the music changes, we "ahhhh" and laugh and applaud. This is something he has perfected, trial and error, practice practice practice.

It makes the difference between a great performance, and a truly memorable experience.

That's something we need to consider when we look for entertainment.

QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD BE ANSWERED

To make your job easier, you should be prepared to offer answers and information to a potential entertainer. The more information they have initially, the better they can serve you.

Here is a checklist of questions you should be asked, and information you should have available.

- What is the theme of the event?
- Why you want a [magician, speaker, comedian, band, etc]
- What venue will this be held at?
- What are the start and end times of the event?
- What time do YOU see the entertainment coming on?
- Who IS the audience? Age groups, demographics
- How many will be attending?
- Are there are special guests, guests of honor, VIP's?
- What is your budget?
- Is there travel involved?
- What are the performers technical requirements (Riders)

Entertainers and agents don't ask these questions to be a pain in the rear. They want to know so they can provide you with exactly what you want, and need.

SIX THINGS TO LOOK FOR FROM THE PERFORMER

1. THE FEES

While not one hundred percent foolproof, this is one place to start. The professionals charge more. There are a number of reasons for this, and these reasons are what make them professionals. They spend more time in rehearsal. They work with consultants in the business.

2. THE CALENDAR

How often do they perform? Are they busy? Are they available for an afternoon show? Many professional entertainers are working from 150 to 500 shows every year.

3. THE REFERENCES

Name the last 5 events where they have worked. Ask about repeat business. Many corporate clients will "latch onto" a performer, using them over and over.

4. INTEGRITY

Stay away from talent that will "cut someone out" to save a dollar. Most top professionals work through agencies or referral services. Reputable agencies will look out for your best interest, as well.

5. BIDDING WARS

You know the saying "you get what you pay for". This is especially true in the entertainment world. When you pay top dollar, you get top entertainment. If someone comes in and lowers their fees just to get the work, the show suffers.

6. WALKING AWAY

There are entertainers who will fit their show to any circumstance. The professionals will know what they do won't fit what you are looking for. You don't want surprises.

HOW THE CRUISE SHIP MAGICIAN MADE A DIFFERENCE

Yesterday, I was part of a lunch meeting with some event planners and regional salespeople. Since I represent magicians, the talk turned to magic. And magicians. One lady at the lunch shared a story with us.

She had recently been on a cruise with her family. On this cruise, there was a magician performing every night. On the first night, her son fell in love with the magic. They made it a point to see the magic show every night thereafter.

The magician made it a point to stop by their table before each show and talk with them for a few minutes. On the last day of the cruise, as they were departing the ship, the magician found them, looked at their son, and said "Let me show you one more magic trick".

What did the magician do for this family? He created a lasting memory. Not just memories of great magic, but a bonding, a feeling of caring about this one family. How nice he was to them. How he took time to get to know them. How he made them feel very special.

When you are considering a speaker or entertainment, this is what you want to strive for.

There are a lot of prim a-donnas out there so full of themselves. Or the ones who feel like they performed, they got their paycheck, and then leave.

The great corporate entertainers know that their job starts before the event, continues through the event, and most importantly continues after the event.

They make people feel important. Does that happen at your event?

THE PENNY TEST

Making Choices

When it comes to making that final choice on who to hire for your event entertainment, the choices can be overwhelming. You have to decide if they fit into your budget, or if you should spend a little bit more. The entertainment has to fit into your culture.

By now, you've been presented with a lot of options. Or at least a couple of options.

But you can't make the decision. What if? Should I? What about?

"You will lose the opportunity to hire great by continuing to wait."

Here's where the Penny Test can help.

- Take a penny from your pocket or purse.
- Write down all of your choices.
- Read through them one more time.
- Decide "heads for this", tails for that".
- Flip the coin in the air.

STOP RIGHT THERE.

At the moment you flipped the coin, and it was in the air, did you notice something?

You had that "a-ha" moment go through your mind, and you thought "I hope it lands for".

That is your gut instinct talking to you. Go ahead, just let the coin fall, don't look at it, and put it away.

You knew all along what your choice should be.

HOW TO RUIN YOUR EVENT

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There's lots of ways to ruin an event. Let's talk about ruining the entertainment portion, especially if you have gone with comedy.

With any type of live entertainment there is a relationship between the audience and the performer. And nowhere is this more pronounced than with comedy entertainment which, when performed at the highest level, is much more like a dialogue than a monologue. The audience might be able to chat amongst themselves and still enjoy a rock band, but not so with, say stand-up: to be successful the craft requires an audience that is totally engaged.

A professional, experienced and talented comedian knows when an audience isn't with her and will prattle, prod and engage an audience until she knows they are focused and only then will he get to the heart of her act and the business of making them laugh.

But how, you may ask, can I make a comedy entertainer's job as difficult as possible?

Let's say you're a professional event planner or someone who is otherwise responsible for planning an event for your company. You've done your homework and found a comedian who is accomplished, a pleasure to work with and perfectly suits your needs. Now the question is, what can you do to thwart his remarkable talents and years of experience and make everyone in attendance uncomfortable at the same time?

Here are a few simple things you can do to ensure that the delicate, essential bond between an audience and a comedian is tenuous at best or, better yet, never established in the first place.

Schedule The Entertainer Immediately After A Break

The room is pumped. The most-popular, hardest-working guy or gal in the company has just received his well-deserved award from the CEO and the energy in the room is at its peak. Whatever you do, don't harness the audience's energy by immediately introducing to the stage the entertainer you've budgeted a sizable sum to procure. Instead, have the CEO, emcee or whoever has the floor to announce a break "of about 15 minutes". That should be enough time for the room to deflate, the energy vanish and allow the stragglers to head back into the room and settle into their seats while chatting with their fellow employees about golf plans for the following weekend.

Seat The Audience At Round Banquet Tables

For the love of Pete, you're not going to ensure that all the seats in the audience are facing the stage, are you? No, no, no. When an entertainer walks on stage you want roughly half the audience *facing the back of the room*. That way more people will be able to tell when the line for the open bar is down to only a few people. You might also consider leaving the doors in the back of the room open, allowing those seated with their backs to the stage to "people watch" the smokers, stragglers and maybe even catch a glimpse of that woman from the coat check with the ineffable aura about her. Ideally, you want these people who face the back of the room to be completely unaware of what is going on the stage. Think *muzak*.

Serve Food During The Show

When a world-class comedy entertainer and a mediocre salad go head to head, the salad wins every time. Anything requiring utensils is best – after all, people are capable of enjoying a comedian with finger food like popcorn just as they are capable of enjoying a movie. Of course, it never hurts to have hard-working servers bustling from table to table pouring water, grinding pepper and sending that steak back to the kitchen until it's done right.

Arrange For A Large, Empty Space Between The Stage And The Front Row

Nothing is more conducive to an attentive, engaged audience like seating them as close to the stage as possible. There's an intimacy to this seating arrangement that mimics the openness and rapport of a private conversation. This is why you want a large empty space surrounding the stage. Many venues place a small stage against the wall of a large banquet hall and surround it with a large, empty dance floor: this is the ideal way to ensure your money and reputation go to waste. Nothing sends the audience the signal "You have nothing to do with this performance" quite like seating everyone no less than a metric mile of the edge of the stage. This way audience members can chat with each other throughout the show while feeling – wrongly – that it has no impact on the overall performance.

The above are just a few basic, feng-shui examples of how to ruin the entertainment portion of your event. The truth is, there are almost as many ways to ruin it as there are second-rate entertainers to ruin it for you.

THREE TYPES OF PERFORMERS

Do you know for sure who is getting in front of your valued clients, employees and friends? Having produced many shows, and having spent many years working with event planners and entertainers, I would like to share an observation.

There are three predominant stages in a performers life.

The first is what I call the "Look At Me" years. They want the spotlight. Theirs is a "showing off" performance. All of the attention is on themselves. They don't spend any time before or after the show with you or the audience. They are focusing on setting up, showing off, and leaving. They may working on new material, new tricks, new songs at your event. While they may sound good and make you laugh, it is a surface performance. No lasting memories here.

The second stage is the "Prima Donna". You have met one or two along the way. Their whole demeanor is "I am better than you". They have a great act. Audiences love to watch them and listen to them. The Prima Donna makes your life miserable when you bring them in. Demands. Nit Picking. Before, during and after their show they have that air about them of "don't touch me". And while everyone has a great time that night, there's still a bit of a hollow feeling afterwards.

Finally, there is the "Humble Professional". Over time, they have learned that there are real people in the audiences, and those people matter. Their show is at top performance. And they know it isn't about them, it's about the people watching them. They make you feel like a friend. They really care. They are approachable. They have learned that there is more to giving than receiving. This is the performer people will remember for years to come.

If you are given the choice, which one would you prefer at your next event?

I DON'T WANT TO WATCH A MAGICIAN

To fully understand what works, and doesn't work, when selecting entertainment for an event, you should get into the mindset of an entertainer.

There are two types of entertainment. One is *desired entertainment*, the other is *forced entertainment*. The performer who understands the deeper rooted psychology of getting in front of an audience that did not ask for him will be a better overall entertainer.

Desired entertainment is where we make the choice to observe, witness and absorb something that appeals to our innermost senses.

What we witness fills a void. A sadness that needs to be released. A joy inside that has to be expressed. The need to escape. The symphony that brings us to unshed tears. The comedian draws out laughter that has been missing. The movie that makes us feel. Something.

Desired Entertainment is a conscious choice WE make to be a part of. We arrange for the babysitter. We purchase the ticket. We go because it is something we want to be a part of.

Forced Entertainment is just the opposite. The audience is there because they have to be there. Some examples of gatherings where there is *forced entertainment* include awards banquets, trade shows and hospitality suites, networking events, and holiday parties.

Lest we make this sound worse than it really is, people DO want to be entertained. However, at many events where attendance is required, the audience has no choice in the matter on how they will be entertained. They just have to sit through it, and like it. (Or not.)

A company event planner has a lot of decisions to make to bring an event together. A small part of that is finding and hiring the entertainment. In a lot of cases, more thought goes into the food and decorations. Someone on the committee suggests a certain type of

entertainment. After bantering the thoughts and suggestions around, they come up with an idea, and one person is put in the role of "finding the entertainment".

In these scenarios, you aren't going to please everyone in attendance. Whatever the final choice is, that is what the audience will be *forced* to partake in.

If this sounds harsh, it really isn't. It is a fact of life in planning an event. You do the best you can. Trying to get feedback can take more time than you have. You have to go on instinct. You have to know your group.

Here is what makes all the difference in the world in the selection process. **You want an entertainer who knows what he/she is up against before they even take the stage.**

You will find a whole lot of entertainers who have tunnel vision with their acts. They steamroll through their 45 minutes no matter how the audience reacts. Their ego makes them more important than anything else around them.

A professional entertainer will turn *forced entertainment* into *desired entertainment*. This happens by mindset. It is knowing that there are going to be people in the audience who really have no desire to watch the magician, listen to the comedian, pay attention to the hypnotist.

The very first thing, before even going on to stage, is believing no matter who is out there, the performer is there to find that place in everyone's heart that will strike a chord. It is truly caring for the audience. Perhaps they have had to take time before showtime to stroll through the crowd, get to know people. They have to build relationships in a very short period of time. Those first few moments on stage are critical. An entertainer may be technically perfect, but deep down, has to have the true desire to show that they are there to have fun, make this fun for everyone.

Your entertainment should strive to make everyone feel included.

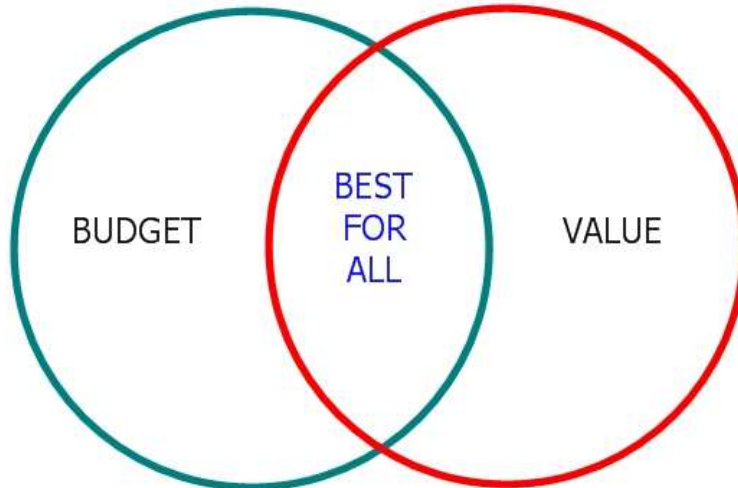
The only way an event planner is going to find these one of a kind pros is to do more than just look at a web page, view a video, and get a price quote. Take the time to let a performer get to know you, your event, your audience.

Allow the entertainment to assimilate into your event. Become a real part of it. Not just something thrown in at 8:45 for 30 minutes. How do you know you've found an entertainer who will captivate your group? They will want to be involved in the event. They will offer you real-life suggestions and proven ideas that will make everyone attending feel special. You'll know when you have found someone who cares.

Remember this. Everyone wants to be entertained. It's our job to make sure they are.

CAN YOU DO IT FOR \$100?

Making Value and Budget sit side by side



When it comes to planning an event, there are a lot (a WHOLE lot) of variables that have to be taken into consideration. You have the basics, like food, venue, entertainment, parking. When it is all said and done, each piece has to be paid for, and fit into the budget.

Let's face it. Putting on an event just isn't cheap any more. Even the simple company dinners. They take hours of our time to plan, emails until our eyes pop out, multiple phone calls, and the paperwork! It's no wonder we get cranky when we don't get a price for the entertainment when we ask for one. But then, we have to understand, much of what gets put into an event isn't run of the mill. A one dollar box of oatmeal isn't going to please the eggs benedict crowd.

So, before even asking for a price for entertainment, tell your vendor as much as you possibly can about the event. Exact hours needed, how many attending, who is attending.

Let's get down to price. Ask three important questions, and write the answers side by side.

1. How valuable is this group?
2. How much money do I have to spend for entertainment?
3. What are my expectations from the entertainment?

Have you set your expectations high enough for this group? What is acceptable? Do your choices show them that you care?

Budget to Expectations

<p>Commodity 5¢-10¢</p>	<p>Basic 10¢-25¢</p>	<p>Good 99¢-\$1.99</p>	<p>An Experience \$3.50-\$4.99</p>
			
<p>Amateur Expectation Level=None</p>	<p>Questionable Expectation Level=Low</p>	<p>Seasoned Pro Expectation Level=Acceptable</p>	<p>Wow Factor Expectation Level=HIGH Exceeds Expectations</p>

www.RaySmerlin.com

If you are quoted a high price right off the bat for the seasoned pro, you may immediately say "that's too expensive". If you are quoted a price for a basic performance, you may not know all the baggage that comes with that.

Not everyone can afford "the experience". But don't shortchange yourself, and end up a commodity.

You want to have the best your budget can afford. Making your guests feel comfortable, able to relax and have a great time is very important to having a successful event!

DON'T RUIN YOUR REPUTATION

There is a fine line between saving a few dollars, and trying to find the cheapest.

Professional performers who have spent time researching and learning their craft will cost you more. Professionals know who they work well with.

A lot of people will say "yes" to anything to get the work.

Your reputation is on the line. Find the right performer, you are a hero.

The wrong one and you may be looking for another job.

It's very competitive out there, and there are a lot of people trying to land the same gig.

Take the time to look closely at who comes to you. If they just want to shoot you a cheap price, you're better off walking away from them.

IF YOU ARE HAPPY THEY WILL BE HAPPY

You have a big event or party to plan. The whole burden is on you. You feel the pressure. The closer the date gets, the more harried you become.

Being under pressure can take its toll. The more details you have to take care of, the more the steam builds. This will lead to some unhappy moments in your relationships with those around you.

If you are walking around carrying this pressure and unhappiness, bad decisions are made. The end result of the event will not be what it should be, leaving the guests not totally enthusiastic.

How can you ease those causes of panic, pressure and unhappiness?

SIMPLIFY. If you simplify your life, you create more space in your day, making it possible to reflect on your life. Remove a task. One of the most successful ways of simplifying is delegation. Find one person or group that will handle a task for you.

PAUSE. During the day, we're completely absorbed by our senses, so we don't pay attention to our minds. Sit in a quiet place and simply anchor your mind on your breathing. When your mind wanders, bring it back to your breath. Through this process, you learn to observe what your mind is saying.

STAY HOPEFUL. There's no evidence that hope is hurtful, says David B. Feldman, PhD, assistant professor of counseling psychology at Santa Clara University in California. Instead, hope can greatly enhance happiness in people.

But genuine hope isn't a yellow smiley face or the denial of death at the bedside of a loved one in hospice, says Feldman, who's pursued research and clinical work addressing the question: "How do people maintain hope and meaning in the face of adversity?"

Three components are essential for hope to thrive, Feldman says. They are having goals, as well as a plan and the motivation to achieve them. "Those who succeed don't internalize the blame game, either internally or externally," he says, "They ask, 'what now?'"

If you have Simplified, Paused and Stayed Hopeful, then you will be happier. And when you are happier, the event turns out better. And when the event turns out better, your guests will be happier.

STEAK FOR DINNER – A COOKIE FOR DESSERT

THE MEAL IS THE STEAK -THE ENTERTAINMENT/SPEAKER IS THE COOKIE.



30 days from now, ask any guest from any event what they most remembered. Very few, if any, will rave about the food.

Your event should be all about the guests. What creates a passion during the event? Does the food have an amazing message it imparts? Does the entree' speak to their hearts?

You have many areas in which to spend your budget-

- Audio Visual
- Decorator/Labor
- Food/Beverage
- Marketing
- Staff Travel
- Speakers/Entertainment
- Space Rental
- Registration/Housing

After an intensely researched Meetings Market Survey by Convene Magazine in 2013, interesting percentages came out as to where the budgets were being spent.

They had some interesting takeaways:

1. Meetings that have high spend in F&B tend to deliver more value to the stomach than to the attendee networking and education experience. Often these meetings are under-spending in the line items for professional speakers, AV, and entertainment — and collectively, these make up the primary categories for the attendee value proposition. Meeting professionals with this dilemma literally need to trim the F&B fat and shift those dollars into education and experience elements.

2. Meetings that have low spend in food-and-beverage also tend to have low spend in the other major attendee experience areas. These meetings are usually spending way too much on marketing/promotion. This often points to an attendee-loyalty issue — marketing costs are high because retention is low. Some experts claim it costs six to seven times more to acquire a new customer or attendee than a repeat participant. Many of these meetings used to invest more in the areas attendees value, but have made cutbacks over time. Guess what? Your paying attendees do not value — at all — the expenses you incur in marketing.

The general conclusion:

Attendee/Guest value is in the speaker/AV/entertainment.

Give your speakers/entertainment/visuals more attention in the budget. Leaving you guests with a cookie in their pocket at the end does not give good value.

WHAT WOULD THEY DO TO MAKE A BUCK?

(Reprinted with permission from Richard Darshwood)

I'll Do Anything To Get A Gig

Yeah, I've said it. No, I'm not proud of it. But times were tough back then. I had no clients and minimal skills. I was desperate for work. I think there was a recession going on then too.

Entertainers rarely get the chance at an entry level position or an internship doing magic shows. We have to start somewhere and sometimes that means taking any gig that comes our way and doing whatever we can to make sure no one else gets that gig. Sometimes that meant taking little or even no money at all for the time and travel just to get out there and perform. But that meant that a stronger performer who could have provided a much more quality show did NOT get that gig.

Do I regret stealing those shows from some of those individuals I now call peers? Undoubtedly... YES!!!

There's much discussion amongst those in the private and corporate entertainment industry as to what is appropriate to charge a client. The general consensus is that there is no final verdict. We charge what we feel is the correct value for our performance and I'm sure this is very confusing for a lot of event planners reviewing multiple bids from multiple entertainers.

Why does one act charge only a few hundred dollars while another could cost several thousand? My only answer is that the rate you are quoted is the value that the performer holds to his service. In other words, the performer that charges the most is the one that considers his act to be of the highest quality. And the performer that asks for the least in return for his services is probably lacking confidence in his abilities to ensure your success and desperate to get your business as I shamefully was when I was first starting out. So, buyer, beware...

Every event is unique and each unique event deserves the highest quality entertainment that a budget can allow. So my best advice to planners on a tight budget is to proceed with caution when comparing prices. The act you bring into YOUR venue to perform for YOUR client (or perhaps even YOUR bosses) is YOUR responsibility. Would you really want to respond to an unhappy audience by saying... Well at least he was cheap?

THEY WANT TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED

I am here. I exist. I count for something.

This article is written in the context of performance. Each and every one of us wants to be acknowledged in one way or another.

During the entertainment portion of your event, the audience is wanting to be taken away from their daily thoughts, and brought in to another world, a fantasy world, so to speak.

An important part of that world is to make them feel that they are a part of what you are doing. In a small group, this is fairly easy. How does this apply to a large venue of 150, 300, 1000 people? How would the magician or comedian on stage connect with each and every one in the audience, and make them feel that they have been acknowledged?

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

Bill O'Hanlon (author "Do One Thing Different: Ten Simple Ways To Change your Life") said the following about the powerful effect of acknowledging: **"You really give them a sense that they've been heard; that their experiences have been acknowledged; that who they are has been valued and validated."**

A comedian tells stories that have a common thread between the storyteller and the audience. The goal is to have everyone laughing while saying to themselves "yep, that's [me, my friend, my wife, etc]."

A magician selects someone from the audience to come help on stage. His selection is not about the one person he chose. Rather, it's about selecting a volunteer that the majority in the audience identify with, someone who they can live the moment through.

You want a performance that gives your associates

- a really fun time
- a feeling of being cared for
- the feeling of being included

In performance, we must understand the importance of acknowledgement. It must be genuine. I can't tell you the number of performers I know, have seen, that put more importance on their show than they do the audience. If you have ever had one of these at your events, you know what I am talking about.

An entertainer who truly loves his audience, and cares about them, will add a thousandfold enjoyment value to your event.

You acknowledge those in the audience by valuing performance over price. Make sure your performer values your people as much as you do.

THOSE PESKY DOOR PRIZES & HANDING OUT GIFTS

Before I sign off, there is one area of the company party I'd like to address – door prizes and raffles.

Based on the hundreds of events we have attended and entertained at, here are some observations and thoughts to consider:

- Don't turn the holiday party into a team-building event with competition for prizes. This is the night the company says "thank you" to their employees and clients.
- If you have drawings for prizes, stretch them out throughout the evening. Stagger the drawings.
- If everyone gets a gift, have the gifts set aside on a table with one or two people in charge of handing them out. Wait until the festivities are over, everyone can pick up their gift as they head for their cars.
- Consider asking how much your entertainer for the evening would charge to MC the door prizes, raffles, etc.
- Be creative with your prizes. How about free lunch coupons, extra day off? Offering work-related perks as prizes can brighten anyone's party!

7 STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ENTERTAINMENT HIRING

Here are some basic guidelines to keep in the checklist.

1. EXPECT TO SPEND MORE TIME THAN YOU ORIGINALLY BLOCKED OUT.

Know how much time you have to put into the project. Searching for, and hiring entertainers can become time consuming. The more time you put into it, the better chance you have of finding good talent.

It is more than just a phone call and watching a video.

This is YOUR event. You have ideas on what you want to occur.

Be prepared to spend two times the amount of time than you have planned for.

2. START YOUR SEARCH EARLY.

The good entertainers may already be booked. The closer you get to your event date, the less chance you have of finding talent everyone will be happy with.

In a perfect world, you want to give yourself as much as nine to twelve months.

There are entertainers who have holidays and certain times of the year (weddings, spring galas, proms, etc) booked two to three years in advance.

If you call a week before an event, and a performer is available, there is a real good reason they ARE still available.

And that isn't a positive thing.

3. ASK QUESTIONS.

When presented choices, a reputable firm will give you the information you need.

They will provide *references* from past clients. They will have *video* for you to watch.

Ask questions like, how many times has this performer been in front of an audience just like ours?

Find out how many clients actually plan on re-hiring the same performer because they were pleased with them

4. DON'T RUIN YOUR REPUTATION

There is a fine line between saving a few dollars, and trying to find the cheapest.

Professional performers who have spent time researching and learning their craft will cost you more.

Professionals know who they work well with.

A lot of will say "yes" to anything to get the work. Your reputation is on the line. Find the right performer, you are a hero.

The wrong one and you may be looking for another job.

It's very competitive out there, and there are a lot of people trying to land the same gig.

5. UNDERSTAND THE TIME FRAME AND ALL OF THE PAPERWORK

To have the best chance of successfully hiring talent that is matched to your event, let the experts do most of your work for you.

There is more to hiring someone than saying “be there at 7:00”. There are details specific to each performer, and contracts to be signed.

The contracts will protect you, and detail exactly what has to happen to make the performance a success.

The best performers use contracts. There is always added time involved in getting these contracts read, approved and signed. It’s part of the process.

6. HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

We have heard stories from others, who call us at the last minute, telling us “the performer we hired just flaked out on us, can you help?”.

Your best plan of success includes working with a group who will always have a backup for you in case of illness, weather or other unforeseen events.

Don’t let a no-show happen to you.

7. BE PROFESSIONAL ABOUT THE PROCESS

Those who represent talent, and the performers themselves, work on a schedule. There is a saying in this business – “the date is not on the calendar until the contract is signed”.

Don’t make them wait. When you find the entertainer you want, secure them.

Every day a date is penciled in is a date that the performer may lose potential income if you don’t get the paperwork done.

CONCLUSION

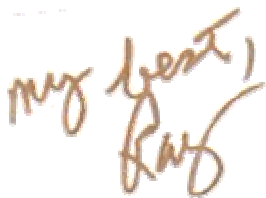
Planning the entertainment for your next event does not have to be a daunting task.

Budgets can be re-arranged. Always keep in mind what is important.

Give as much information to your prospective entertainment as possible, including the budget you have to work with.

Here's a secret I'll let you in on now. If you have found that perfect fit, the personality is just right, your group will love them, BUT, the price is above your budget, you may still be able to hire them. How? They may have a total package that can be trimmed down just for you. It's not always about simply dropping a price. Ask!

But keep in mind – the performers who will really be the highlight of the event are those who have been doing this, over and over, and know how to make everyone feel special.



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