

# EVENT PLANNING

## SEMINARS, CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS AND RETREATS FOR CHURCHES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Thanks for contacting us about speaking at your event. To help you in your planning, I have put together some of the ideas that are most often considered by event planners. Planning a successful seminar or conference is not always as easy as it seems. I hope that the ideas listed will help you focus on your purposes to ensure a successful event.

### 1. Determine what you want.

- a. A seminar (3-5 presentations). A seminar is usually a Friday evening to Saturday event offered in a local hotel, church or other conference room. One or more speakers present topics and the focus is primarily educational. We often do seminars on parenting, marriage, family life generally as well as on burnout in organizations, and the like.
- b. A conference (several presenters on several topics). A conference is often a daylong series of seminars on various topics with a number of speakers from varying perspectives. It is primarily educational as are seminars.
- c. A workshop is more interactive and participative. The workshop can be day long or longer. We often do workshops on our marital mentoring where we train couples to mentor other couples. It is highly interactive and empowering of others to accomplish a task.
- d. A retreat (5-8 presentations). A retreat is normally from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon or evening at a retreat location (e.g. hotel, retreat centre, resort). There is usually one presenter or a couple may present. The retreat is for encouragement and relationship-building. We often do retreats on marriage enrichment.

### 2. Decide who you wish to attend.

- a. You have to determine your focus. Are you aiming primarily towards people you already know (e.g. within your church community) or are you focusing on people that you would like to know? Both can be done in one seminar but it needs to be well thought through.
  - b. Decide on your numbers as well. If you want 25 people to come, work at it. If you are unhappy with anything under 400 then work at it.
- 3. Decide on the ethos.**
- a. Do you want a lecture or a sermon? Do you want comedy or accurate exegesis? Figure out what you want the event to feel like at the end.
  - b. Atmosphere has a lot to do with who will attend. I taught a parenting class sponsored by a church in a community centre and a gay couple attended as well as several academics who were wondering how parenting psychology could be taught by a pastor/psychologist. They became big fans. They would never have entered a musty church basement.
  - c. If you have singing and prayer, you will probably not get the community to attend. It is not their ethos – they feel uncomfortable.
  - d. Coffee is an ethos issue. If you serve “church coffee” you lose. If you serve lattes and Starbucks you win on ethos!
- 4. Determine who you want for the presenter.**
- a. Do you want a professional person to present?
  - b. Do you want more of a testimonial or devotional presentation?
  - c. Do you want a couple or a group to make presentations?
- 5. Administration and organization (plan at least 6-9 months in advance of the event).**
- a. First, establish the support and cooperation from your primary leadership that you will need for the long haul. How will they participate and show their support? Be clear what you expect from leadership other than attending.
  - b. Second, organize an administrative committee. This task force could be broken down into subcommittees for speaker, budget, facilities, promotion and advertising, hospitality, books, materials and handouts, tape and literature distribution / copying, evaluation, cleanup and setup, communication. One person cannot do all the tasks.

- c. Third, write a clear and brief purpose statement for the event. Out of this purpose, build your program. Begin at this stage to budget for your costs.
- d. Fourth, contact your speaker(s) or workshop leader. This is probably best done by email. If a speaker wishes information you may email this (including purpose statement, speaker's fee, location, etc.). If a speaker wishes to take time to consider the request, continue the pursuit of other speakers. If a speaker declines, ask him or her for a recommendation of other speakers.
- e. Fifth, if you have determined your speaker, locate your facility. Find a facility that is both cost effective (e.g. a community centre) and facilitates (a hotel conference room might be preferred). If you wish this event to be an outreach for your church or community group, then your own facilities may be preferable. If you wish a marriage enrichment weekend, then a hotel is preferable to a camp facility.
- f. Sixth, complete your budget. Make sure that the speaker knows the honorarium or payment you will pay (this saves embarrassment later). All the speaker's costs (e.g. travel, hotel, car rental, food expenses, etc.) are the responsibility of the event hosts.
- g. Seventh, prepare your evaluation format for the event prior to the event. Carry out the evaluation and use this for subsequent events. Offer to provide your speaker with this evaluation.
- h. Eighth, run your event and determine to have a great experience. Come early and stay late. Make sure that your ethos continues throughout the entire experience.
- i. Ninth, thank your workers and support teams. Have a party!
- j. Tenth, report your evaluations to the leadership of the sponsoring or community group. Begin to plan for your next event.

## 6. Common planning problems.

- a. The leader wants to do the event (e.g. a seminar on "chronic conflict in organizations") but has no real support from the other leadership (they are not interested).
- b. Fee for the event is beyond the resources of the constituency. For example, we recommend in our events that the hosts cover the costs for single parents to attend (including their babysitting).
- c. The leader has insufficiently networked within the organization and within the broader community. ("I was sure that this would be a great hit.")
- d. The event attempts to do too much and is unfocused.

- e. Advertising and promotion is incomplete, late and unattractive.
  - f. Inaccessible or inconvenient response channels. Make sure that people can register online, via telephone, at meetings and everywhere else that you can reach your people.
  - g. Not inviting people personally. Invite personally 3-6 months prior to the event.
- 7. Advantages / disadvantages of a seminar or conference (e.g. parenting).**
- a. It is often a local event without the necessity of the attendees paying for overnight accommodation, travel, babysitting and, therefore, the costs are considerably less.
  - b. The payment for speaker(s) costs (if local) are less since they are not committed for a longer period of time (e.g. a full weekend).
  - c. Presentations are focused on information with little private conversation between the attendees and, therefore, there is less probability of having substantial relationship empowerment.
  - d. Seminars and conferences can be co-sponsored with another community group or organization to reduce the costs and increase the subscription.
  - e. The temptation in seminars that are close to home and work is that the attendees may lose the focus of the presentation with the needs of business, children, and other tasks so close at hand.
  - f. Seminars usually require less workers / volunteers than do weekends.
- 8. Advantages / disadvantages to a retreats (e.g. marriage or family enrichment weekends).**
- a. Costs are substantially higher. Therefore, without subsidy resources, only the relatively affluent can participate.
  - b. Costs for the speaker(s) are higher since they are required to invest a weekend or week rather than a day or part of a day.
  - c. Weekends are more of a holiday than seminars or conferences and they include the privileges of holidaying.
- 9. For marriage events, the sponsoring agency needs to consider the following.**
- a. Will you refer mostly conflictual couples? Will you refer mostly growing couples?

- b. Are common-law couples welcomed to attend?
- c. In a weekend enrichment setting, do you welcome pre-married couples? Are there dormitory rooms for men and for women?
- d. Is the event to attract or to be sensitive to other faiths or people from the broader community?
- e. What will you do about child-care?
- f. What about sponsorship for those without the required funds to attend?
- g. What place does worship, prayer and spiritual disciplines have for your seminar or weekend?
- h. Do you have a concern about alcohol consumption on a weekend?
- i. Do you have names of capable marriage or family counsellors following an event?
- j. Are the speaker(s) expected to counsel couples / individuals in “down” time?

**10. Theological / psychological issues to consider in your event.**

- a. Do you want a biblical seminar primarily? (e.g. teaching from Ephesians 5 when focusing on marriage.)
- b. Do you want a psychological seminar primarily? (e.g. teaching on communication or conflict styles.)
- c. What is your view of male-female roles in marriage? (This relates especially to the biblical issue of headship and submission.)
- d. Do you want the seminar to be primarily information focused (teacher to the couple) or primarily relationship focused (person to person) or primarily group focused (clusters)?

**11. Speaker(s) and other costs.**

- a. We encourage 3rd party sponsorship of events. For example, invite 3 business leaders in the community to support the event for \$500 or \$1000 in exchange for an income tax receipt from the church and advertisement in the printed material.
- b. We also suggest that the church supplies the initial deposit for the speaker(s), e.g. \$750.
- c. The speaker costs for a weekend are more than costs for a weekday for many professionals. Weekends and evenings are considered family / rest time and a weekend or seminar is often added onto the back of a full workweek.

- d. One person speaking is less in cost. However, to have a couple (husband and wife in marriage or parenting conferences) allows for greater variety of presentations and greater identification with various needs.
- e. For us, costs increase depending on the distance from the Vancouver area, number of speaking times required, other meeting expectations (e.g. pre-meetings for planning or follow up meetings for evaluation), counselling expectations for the speaker(s), etc.
- f. Contact us for our current costs ([Life@TheDucklows.ca](mailto:Life@TheDucklows.ca)).

## 12. Printed and other material.

- a. Advertising and promotional costs are the responsibility of the seminar hosts. The speaker(s) may be able to provide models of brochures, posters and radio advertising.
- b. If you wish a seminar packet or notebook, invite the speaker(s) to provide a paper copy or disk copy for distribution. One copy per couple may be sufficient.
- c. Taped or video copies of the seminar are the property of the seminar host. Ask the speaker(s) to sign a waiver of rights.

I hope that this is more helpful than discouraging. If you wish any additional information, please email me at [Life@TheDucklows.ca](mailto:Life@TheDucklows.ca). God speed to you!