

## Making Your Event The Event

Event planning is the fastest growing part of Public Relations (PR) today. Whether the interest is in large events or specializing in weddings, many people are looking for a way to get their foot in the door. Laura Lohman, a guest speaker at this year's Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) Conference, gave her session priceless tips on hosting better events.

Lohman is now the event coordinator for Potomac Point Vineyard and Winery in Stafford Virginia. Graduating from Syracuse University with a bachelor's degree in communication and rhetorical studies, she started working in the meeting and event planning industry. Lohman spent two years as a meeting and event planner, while assisting brides with their weddings on the side, before becoming the event coordinator for the Potomac Point Vineyard and Winery.

Know your basics. This was the first and last tip Lohman gave us and it couldn't be stressed enough. Many people learned the 5 W's when they were little: who, what, when, where, and why, but those have been easily forgotten. However, when it comes to planning a special event they are the back bone to success. Who is your client? Do your research, get to know your client, and who they want to attend their event. What is the reason for the event, the main point or theme to achieve? Is timing a big factor or will the client be flexible? Timing is the when of the event. Where could be anywhere, you need to find out if your client has a special place in mind or if there is a location that would add to

the effect of the event. Why is one of the first questions you have to ask yourself. Not only why is your client having this event, but also why have they hired you to do the event. Finally, the exception to the rule, how. How are you going hold and execute the event. Lohman reinforced, “Always go back to the basics. People who take the time to look at the basics before jumping to the details will be more successful.”

After covering all your basics, the next three items on the agenda should be budget, strategy, and location. No one wants to confront their client asking for more money, because they misspent money or didn't budget all the expenses right. Make sure you know what is most important to the client and what they would prefer the bulk of the money to be spent on. Once you have done that, being as specific as possible when budgeting for different areas will lessen the chance of over spending. Along with budgeting you must have a strategy. It's important to understand the how of income. Make a list and prioritize all event details and invoice assumptions. Negotiate, but also be flexible when it comes to strategizing. Know what your location has to offer for you. Are they going to have the tables, do they provide water? This cuts down spending for you, allowing you to stretch your money as far as possible. Finally, location has everything to do with an event. Sometimes the location can make or break the theme of the event you're planning. Lohman says, “ Use your resources. The Conventions Visitor Bureau and the Destination Marketing Corporation are two great resources that are available.” Both these resources are free, providing hotels, dining, and the ins and outs of venues in your town. “ Use your

resources and always expect the unexpected, have a plan B for everything,” was a very important fact from Lohman.

One of the last tips of information Lohman had us take away from her session was, “Success is in the details.” In order to gain success you have to pay attention to your details, beginning with marketing and publicizing. Know who your audience is, and what your goal is for attendance to this event? Question whether using celebrities, speakers, or special products would help make the event bigger or better in any way. Make sure you are using your theme to your advantage. Once you have chosen a theme stick to it. The event will look the most put together if you don’t try to alter the theme because you find something you think would work better. Pick a theme, stick to it and execute.

Execute all these ideas out to the fullest in order to have the most successful event. Be prepared for whatever may happen, and have a plan B. Make sure everything you do is quality. Don’t cut corners for any reason, everything should be to the best of quality allowed for that event. Stay alert and attentive, keep in contact with your clients and stay aware of any changes they feel need to be made or ideas they come up with along the way. With that, communicate effectively with your clients, the vendors you are working with, and anyone within your department or on your team that you need to communicate with. The final way to follow through with execution is to problem solve. It’s not what the problem is, it’s how you handle it and the solution you create to fix it.