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# Enhancing Creativity 'Creatively'

by CYNTHIA DIAL

What happens, however, when a meeting planner contracts the equivalent of writer's block to the journalist? What can a meeting planner do when he or she fears there will never be another original idea? How does one recharge one's creative batteries?

Meeting planner Greg Howell, president of GHA Travel, has a series of steps he likes to take. To start, he uses music, sketching, and word play. "I write down one-word theme ideas and concepts and the ideas just flow, ultimately coming together in a storyboard fashion," he explains. In situations where most of the components are in place but there are still missing pieces, Howell's solution is to assemble all the players in a roundtable brainstorming forum where any and every random idea is thrown on the table and bounced around. The end result is always a completed program. And when there's time, says Howell, weekend getaways have been known to really rejuvenate the creative juices.

"Return to the basics," suggests Christopher Lee, president of destination management company California Leisure Consultants [CEO, *ACCESS* Destination Services]. Creativity can be implemented into a corporate or incentive function in a variety of ways.

**"The creative person is both more primitive and more cultivated, more destructive and more constructive, a lot madder and a lot saner, than the average person."**

*Dr. Frank Barron,  
University of California  
Professor*

Invitation. "Starting with the most basic, the invitation can be highly inventive," begins Lee. One common "invitation play" is to include a puzzle piece with instructions to bring it to the event with a mission: to find its duplicate. This activity is popular as it requires group participation from the inception.

Promotion. "Creative marketing is key," states Lee, "especially with incentives." Successful incentive promotions have to be lengthy, enticing, and sometimes full of mystery to achieve their goal – full-blown participation. And many times, utilizing "teasers" in the promotional efforts is one of the most effective ways to maintain participants' interest and motivate them.

Unexpected creativity. "Incorporate creativity into areas where it is not the norm – like transportation," suggests Lee. Instead of using vans to deliver a group to the shore for a beach party, arrange a caravan of wood paneled station wagons (a la Beach Boys style).

Elaborate entrances and exits. A favorite of the California DMC is the creative entrance and exit. The dramatic launch of a Miramar Naval Air Station (locale of the Tom Cruise movie *Top Gun*) "Hangar Party" is an example. The gigantic

*“Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will,”*  
**George Bernard Shaw said**  
*of the critical process called creativity*

lifetime experience. Local “celebrities” like well-known athletes or politicians are also popular choices for motivational or keynote speakers.

The bottom line is simple notes Lee. “When most think of creativity in the corporate and incentive world, the focus is primarily on a creative theme. But real creativity goes far beyond the theme,” summates Lee. “Real creativity is thinking outside the dots.”

door of the airplane structure opens amid piped-in fog to the musical accompaniment of the 2001 theme, revealing the jet aircraft arrival of the company’s CEO... attired in full-flight regalia.

Costumes. The Oyster Destination & Incentive Management Company, Perth, Australia, sets the stage with the extensive use of costumes. By providing the dress, the overseas specialty company establishes the mood for a multi-day incentive. On the first night, the discovery in their wardrobe of a rally driving outfit (helmet, gloves and a pit suit with the delegate’s name emblazoned across the back) provides the atmosphere for the next day’s activity.

Following a pre-rally breakfast featuring a motivational speaker, delegates are taken to a professional driving track set amid Australia’s tall eucalyptuses. After a safety-driving training session with a champion rally driver, teams tackle the course.

Enhancing the event further with costuming, delegates return to the hotel to find cowboy and cowgirl outfits in their rooms for the night’s “Wild West” dinner. The evening features rousing country western music, Tex-Mex fare and jugs of frothy margaritas.

Lighting. One of the latest tricks available to today’s meeting planner is the creative use of lighting says Lee. Using this latest form of ingenuity, three-dimensional centerpieces can be created with holographic images. Taking advantage of this imagery, company logos can be uniquely displayed – it’s even possible for ghost-like images to appear as greeters at the door. The creative use of lighting is only limited by one’s imagi-

nation.

Entertainment. “Instead of the traditional band, think of using an a capella group. I’m not talking about a barber-shop quartet, I’m talking about a group like Manhattan Transfer,” explains Lee.

Take advantage of entertainers residing in the locale. Several markets like Las Vegas and Southern California have an abundance of top-name entertainers who are available to provide a once-in-a-

Vince Aspromonte, president of The Master’s Group, an incentive marketing specialist company, underscores the need for the out-of-ordinary. “For an incentive program to work, the key is not just to meet expectations. You have to exceed them. You’ve got to give them more than they’re anticipating. “Why? Because they’ve earned it,” says Aspromonte who practiced this philosophy with Miller Masters, an exclusive

### THEME DESIGN WORKSHEET

*Christopher Lee, president of California-based destination management company California Leisure Consultants/PGI, [CEO, ACCESS Destination Services] devised the following list to be used as a resourceful tool when developing a theme.*

**Pick one item from each category to create a meeting theme.**

- | <b>A.</b>         | <b>B.</b>         | <b>C.</b>          |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1) Creative       | 1) Customer       | 1) Strategy        |
| 2) Supporting     | 2) Oriented       | 2) Teams           |
| 3) Implementing   | 3) Organizational | 3) Vision          |
| 4) Managing       | 4) Procedural     | 4) Results         |
| 5) Instituting    | 5) Multiple       | 5) Leadership      |
| 6) Building       | 6) Successful     | 6) Skills          |
| 7) Strategic      | 7) Efficient      | 7) Motivation      |
| 8) Optimizing     | 8) Supervisory    | 8) Change          |
| 9) Basic          | 9) Peak           | 9) Empowerment     |
| 10) Linking       | 10) Employee      | 10) Communications |
| 11) Assessing     | 11) Self-Directed | 11) Decisions      |
| 12) Continuous    | 12) Workforce     | 12) Performance    |
| 13) Understanding | 13) Situational   | 13) Diversity      |
| 14) Powerful      | 14) Driven        | 14) Service        |
| 15) Challenging   | 15) Superior      | 15) Involvement    |
| 16) Developing    | 16) Group         | 16) Satisfaction   |
| 17) Maximizing    | 17) Effective     | 17) Meetings       |
| 18) Building      | 18) Personal      | 18) Behaviors      |
| 19) Improving     | 19) Global        | 19) Cultures       |
| 20) Quality       | 20) Quality       | 20) Quality        |

incentive group of Miller Brewing Company's major distributors. Because the Miller Masters group is comprised of well-traveled multi-millionaires, the incentive specialist's challenge was to devise a program the well-heeled associates could not do on their own.

For one such incentive program, Aspromonte arranged air transport via the Concorde to London. Their arrival was coordinated with Royal Ascot, Britain's renowned day of horse racing, where the select group viewed the event from a private box situated next to that of Queen Elizabeth II and the Royal Family.

In preparation of the grand day, gentlemen were provided morning coats and top hats and ladies were given a hat allowance to be used at posh London fashion institutions like Harrods and Fortnum and Masons. "We didn't want the responsibility of selecting the perfect hat for each woman," explains Aspromonte.

Rolls Royce limousines provided transportation to Royal Ascot. And in a jet-setting exit, the attendees were taken from the event by limousines to a nearby clearing in the woods for the final surprise – awaiting helicopters to return the hat-adorned group to the British capital.

"Arrange for first-time venues, venues not open to the public," Aspromonte suggests. Following his own advice, the Miller Masters were guests at Brockett Hall, the private residence of Lord Brockett, a member of Parliament. Upon arrival, Lord Brockett and his American-born wife personally greeted attendees prior to the hosted cocktail party and dinner where British government and politics were at the top of the conversation menu. Brockett Hall is situated in the English countryside alongside a storybook-inspired pond over which a brilliant fireworks display provided the event finale.

Shortly after the city of Peking, China became known as Beijing, Aspromonte coordinated a Hong Kong-Beijing incen-

tive, becoming the first incentive group (possibly the only incentive group) to host an event in China's capitol building, the Great Hall of the People. During the themed evening, English interpreters explained the significance of the various government chamber rooms and a variety of Chinese entertainment from gymnasts to an authentic dragon dance were

**"For me, the creative process, first of all, requires a good nine hours of sleep at night. Second, it must not be pushed by the need to produce practical applications."**

***William N. Lipscomb, Jr.,  
1976 Nobel laureate***

presented between each of the many dinner courses. To coordinate the intricacies of this extensive program, the incentive specialist worked closely with a premier DMC in Hong Kong.

In the creation of such an extraordinary evening, Aspromonte explains his course of action. "I told suppliers what I was aiming to accomplish...that we were trying to recreate something like the lifestyles of the rich and famous. I issued a challenge to come up with something totally unique and beyond reason," says Aspromonte. "And they did."

Closer to home, the former Palm Springs residence of Elizabeth Taylor is the venue for "A Night of Passion." The successful event begins the moment a Liz look-alike welcomes guests to the lavender-inspired - Liz's signature color) party décor with Taylor-endorsed perfumes given as mementos of the evening.

An evening in the footsteps of a celeb-

rity of a different sort, former President Richard M. Nixon, can be experienced during an authentically re-created White House State Dinner at the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace in Yorba Linda, California.

The transformation of Renaissance Esmerelda Resort's (soon to become a Marriott property) atrium lobby into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory hit a "10" on the creative theme party Richter scale. Appealing to the sweet tooth of 650 Motorola incentive guests, the property recreated Wonka's World (inspired by the film Charlie and the Chocolate Factory), a fantastical, edible universe where chocolate rivers flowed and flowers were made from sugar.

The Willy Wonka idea was that of the hotel chef who used the opportunity to splurge with imaginative, innovative dessert ideas. He produced a menu matching the creativity of the red, yellow, and blue themed event. Umbrella mushrooms were made from meringue and bushes were created from chow mein noodles. A Giant Reese's peanut butter cup and a Heath Bar crunch cake filled with cream cheese and sprinkled with Heath Bar pieces were only two of the innumerable desserts. Servers were dressed as Oompa Loompas (the little men who worked in the factory) and the setting appropriately included a chocolate fountain as well as a chocolate tree covered with chocolate leaves. Linda Ruiz, the resort's director of convention services, cites the "Wonka" experience as one of the property's most creatively ambitious undertakings to date.

"Creativity" is defined in Webster's as "the ability to create meaningful new forms, interpretations, etc., originality." While the creative process can seem daunting to some, to the meeting planner creativity is a basic ingredient in the recipe called "success."

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