

# Ten Questions, Ten Minutes, One Event Planner

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Adapted from an article written by Sherri Cruz for *Agenda California* 2008 Fall Preview Edition.

### What prompted you to become a planner?

Early on, when I was in high school, we had an executive director at our Temple who planned meetings and events. I would help her and be the coat checker. I watched her in action. I learned how to turn a room when I was 15 years old. After college, I went to a convention in Boston and found out about a conference for meeting planners that was happening there. I went. From there, I joined Meeting Professionals International. I began planning meetings for a major consumer-electronics company that I was working for. The more I was exposed to it, the more I really liked what the industry had to offer.

### What's your educational background?

I have a degree from California State University, Long Beach in home economics and radio and television. I've been in this industry since 1976. There were no schools back then for meeting planning, other than hotel schools. You truly had to learn by doing.

### What are your main responsibilities at work?

As one of the owners my responsibilities now are mostly managerial. But when I started out, my experience included both program management and sales.

### How large is your department/staff?

We have four offices company-wide and over 50 full-time employees.

### What personal and work skills do you think are most valuable in doing your job?

Being organized, detailed and a good communicator. Personal communication skills are so important. Sometimes in this Internet age, we forget how to write and spell and we especially forget how to pick up the phone and talk to each other. We are in the hospitality business, which is built on relationships and these need to be developed and nourished carefully.

### What are some of your regular day-to-day challenges?

The challenging meetings are the ones where the client wants something that is out of reach, so we have to come up with a twist on the original thought or idea. I also have managerial challenges, such as finding and keeping quality workers and motivating different generations of workers. I try to create the best work environment possible.

### What is the most challenging event you've ever planned?

I once had a client who wanted to recreate the Long Beach Grand Prix and actually do a race on the streets. We checked into it and found out it would be prohibitive on a number of levels. But I knew that part of the race course was run on the parking lot of the Long Beach Convention Center. So we recreated our own Grand Prix at this site using

professional go-karts, along with other race-related activities. We even had the "voice" of the Grand Prix as our official announcer. It was wildly successful.

### What do you consider your most outstanding accomplishment in the field?

Helping form ADME, the Association of Destination Management Executives. The challenge is always to educate the industry – both clients and vendor partners – about the values of a destination management company. I've been a part of that movement and I am proud of the accomplishments ADME has made, especially in the areas of individual certifications and company accreditation.

### What do you like best about the industry?

Every day is different and I get to experience new things. I get invited to events and get exposed to so many exciting opportunities. That's definitely a perk. The people within the hospitality industry are wonderful. It's a very people-friendly industry.

### What advice would you offer someone entering the industry?

When I teach – I teach special events management at Cal State Long Beach – I get asked: 'How can I get a job in this industry?' I tell them: 'Open up your net to opportunities that might include the vendor side of the business, not just the meeting planning side. If you are just getting started in this industry, be willing to take an administrative position within a catering department or within a hotel and learn the ropes.' Usually companies like to hire from within, so working as a support person can often lead to more opportunities. ■

Since 1970, **ACCESS Destination Services** has provided the highest caliber of full-service, professional destination management and event production services in the West, including the Anaheim/Orange County, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Palm Springs and San Diego areas.