

Client Seminars: How to Engage your Guests

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There are three distinct groups of guests coming to your next seminar: Learners, Vacationers and Hostages.

How can you distinguish each group? More importantly, how can you engage them?

Learners

This is the group that you wanted to come to your seminar. In fact you may have planned your seminar specifically for them. Of the three groups, they are the most enthusiastic; eager to hear what you have to say and willing to participate.

Learners are the most challenging group. They have done their homework; they expect everything on the agenda to be covered. Stimulate their curiosity with questions, options and problems. Make sure you “stick to the script,” and start and finish on time

Best of all, learners are most likely to reciprocate enthusiastically after a successful seminar by recommending your seminar and your firm.

Vacationers

This group of guests come out of curiosity – perhaps to do some networking or, less likely, because they have nothing better to do, and a free breakfast or lunch seemed like a good idea. Like the learners, vacationers include a number of potential clients.

Be careful of the vacationers; they can become disruptive if not acknowledged. Make sure that your presentations are as interactive as possible and make sure that each part of your presentation is sprinkled liberally with compelling questions and interesting problems – rather than just facts and data which only the learners may be willing to explore. If you continuously strive to engage them, you may convert a few vacationers to “learner” status.

Hostages

There are hostages at every presentation; people who were assigned – or “sent” – or came out of some sort of obligation. Hostages have better things to do than to attend your seminar. Because they do not feel that they need to be there, they may not feel any obligation to participate. Hostages may distract others by checking emails, chatting with fellow hostages – or worse, planning some sort of petty revenge by challenging the presenters.

How to handle hostages? You may be tempted to ignore them, but this is not advisable; distractions *will* increase.

Acknowledging hostages is something that every presenter should do, in one form or other. Through no fault of their own, these people are obliged to sit through your presentation while trying to resign themselves to the fact that they have lost several hours of a working day. In your opening remarks, I suggest that you acknowledge the fact that there are some people in the group that are there out of obligation of some sort. I like to mention how I personally hate being torn away from my personal agenda – and express my sympathy for their situation. It is remarkable how often this causes laughter and creates a much friendlier environment.

Assure the hostages that your presentation will be brief, acknowledge their expertise, and respectfully suggest that you may have some new information that may be of interest to them. Take every opportunity to address individual hostages personally – and include them if you are asking for opinions or experiences to be shared. Don't overdo this however; the learners don't appreciate time-wasting!

The ambiance in client seminars, held usually at your business "Home," should be warm, welcoming and stimulating. Focussing on the comfort of your guests, informally and personally – as you would in your own home – is the key to a successful client seminar.

This is the first of three articles on "Producing Successful Client Seminars." Forthcoming installments are, "Creating an Ideal Learning Environment" and "Advanced Preparation Methods."