



# War Stories

PLANNERS SHARE WHAT THEY LEARNED THE HARD WAY.

BY SHERI O'MEARA

**YOU RECALL THE EVENT:** You planned for every detail. You made lists, you had back-up plans. You were the poster child of organization, well-preparedness and professionalism. And still, something unforeseeable went wrong and you were thrown into the midst of an event crisis. So, what did you do? How did you deal with it? What did you learn? What do you do differently now because of it? We asked a few planners to share their war stories.

Here's what they told us:

## SHIPPING NIGHTMARE

**PLANNER:** Julie Ann Schmidt, CMP, senior event manager, Honeywell Meeting Solutions

**THE SCENARIO:** "I was doing a program in India and my big display (which fills a semi truck) was stuck in customs. I have shipped packages all over the world and thought that I had seen it all. I had to use all my negotiating and investigating powers to determine what was going on and what, if anything, we could do to get it where it needed to be. I worked with the local shipping contact, the person in my office in the U.S. that shipped it and the main shipper in the Netherlands. For two days I got very little sleep, and in the end it arrived after the program ended."

**LESSON LEARNED:** "I learned that shipping in India is different than in the rest of the world, and that once you get it out of customs, it still can get stopped at each and every state border. I have to double the shipping time when shipping to India—which I still do frequently."

## STROLLER TRAFFIC JAM

**PLANNER:** Cookie Coleman, executive director, Cookie Coleman Co.

**THE SCENARIO:** "The challenge—accommodating a series of smaller events culminating with a public festival (for Twin Cities Public Television's 50th anniversary). The facility and event plans required crowd flow on several levels, with only two elevators

and one staircase. We anticipated approximately 10,000 guests for the day-long festival, yet 20,000 people came with their children and strollers. Not just your average little stroller, but the double-wide, twin-set, Cadillac kind. In all our years of planning, never have I seen so many strollers. The weather was inclement, which drove many people into the facility. Suddenly, we had a traffic jam of strollers."

**LESSON LEARNED:** "When planning a public event, provide a stroller valet service—especially if the event is attractive to families with small children. The most important thing is to remain calm at all times and be ready to think on your feet. When dealing with large or small crowds, things always change, requiring last-minute decisions, program changes and crowd management."

## WHEN IT RAINS ...

**PLANNER:** Shawna Suckow, CMP, owner, COMPASS Events

**THE SCENARIO:** "We were setting up the general session room at a major hotel in Las Vegas the night prior to our convention kick-off and a house rigger tripped the sprinkler system and flooded a section of the ballroom. Thankfully, our general session didn't start until 2 p.m. the next day. It took the hotel all night with carpet cleaners on suction, plus several dryer fans to get it all cleaned up and remove the nasty sewage smell just 30 minutes before my 1,500 attendees showed up."

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