

EIGHT STEPS TO ACHIEVE SANITY & SUCCESS

NO ONE

LOVES A CONTROL FREAK

I always cringe a bit when I hear a festival person describe them self as a "Control Freak." Some even wear it as a worrisome badge of courage. Bragging about the crazy number of hours they work. Bemoaning the last time they had a day off. Lamenting their perceived lack of support and resources. It appears the Control Freak's world is a lonely planet.

There is a huge chasm that lies between being a detail-oriented event professional who employs our industry's best practices and the image that likely pops into your mind when you think of a full-on Control Freak.

This article is the first installment of a series, "Control Freaks Anonymous: Eight Steps to Achieve Sanity & Success," in which I will offer specific strategies for exercising "control" over your event, without the cringe-worthy "freakiness" that makes you and those around you crazy.

The stakes are especially high in our business. There is no deadline extension, opening day is opening day. The happiness, well-being and safety of thousands is squarely upon us. It either works or it doesn't and it's possible that the world, or at least the portion of it we care about most, is watching. Being über detail-oriented makes perfect sense and leads to successful outcomes. But if we choose to become a Control Freak, our behaviors can (and usually will) undermine the very flawlessness we desire.

It's helpful to understand the issues that kick us into Control Freak mode. Perfectionism can be a trait that motivates us to want better. Or it can be an obsessive quest that never accepts the work of others as good enough. A lack of confidence or an abundance of hubris can both motivate controlling tendencies that cause dysfunction. We need the trust of others, but if we are unwilling to trust, meaningful relationships cannot take root.

When we identify these issues in ourselves and those around us, we also see more clearly their harmful effects. When we choose a more logic-based approach to event management, we will build an organization that is more efficient, transparent, sustainable, agile and communicative.

Strategy One: Managing vs. Leadership

What would it sound like, feel like and mean if you started introducing yourself as an Event Leader instead of an Event Manager? Let's explore the two.

Management is about making sure things get done the right way. Managers direct people and other resources to achieve defined outcomes. They work to mitigate risk, ensure compliance and deliv-

er consistent experiences. They are metrics-driven and measure success in quantitative terms. Managers strive to create repeatable processes, systems that can be incrementally improved.

Leadership is about doing the right thing. Leaders ask questions that may topple the apples in the manager's carefully stacked cart. Why apples? Who still uses a cart? Instead of directing people, leaders work to inspire and motivate others around a shared vision. Leaders intentionally disrupt processes, and even culture, with an eye toward making a quantum leap.

To be successful in our industry, we must wear the hat of both Event Manager and Event Leader. While our time as a manager is important, especially in matters of compliance, risk and safety, the time we spend in the realm of leadership is where growth, innovation and organizational depth is forged.

I once made the decision to do away with a 50-year old festival that my own father had played a role in creating. It's one of the hardest things I've ever decided with my heart and my mind in clear conflict with one another. The event was still profitable, but the financial risk-benefit ratio was far outside healthy parameters and the human capital could easily be channeled to achieve a higher yield. And, in 50 years, the landscape had changed. The event was no longer mission-centric, in competition with our membership base and one of a plethora of options instead of the "only game in town" it had once been.

My favorite definition of leadership comes from the late Warren Bennis, who described it as the capacity to translate vision into reality. I believe that is what our industry does, all around the globe, every single day. We form a vision around celebration and shape it into a deliverable product. But we can manage that product to death. A vision is only as good as its ability to maintain relevance. Leaders fearlessly ask the questions that lay bare the sacred cows of stagnancy and insular thinking. No one has ever "managed" their way to breakthrough innovation.

Intentionally choosing to lead not only keeps the Control Freak at bay, but helps all those around us to do the same.

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