

FOUNDATION



I'M NOT TOO OLD FOR THIS (No matter what the people in my office say!)

OK. I'm 37 years old. So the fact that I've been asked to moderate the Under 40 Young Professionals affinity group for the last three years at the annual IFEA Convention is well within the margin of error! I'll frankly maintain that sentiment for at least the next three years, then proudly proclaim that I'm still that young at heart for at least the next sixty!

I make the statement above because of all the experiences and opportunities I enjoy at the IFEA Convention each year, the Under 40 session ranks right at the top. Here's why: Where else are you going to have the chance to pick the brains and learn about the future of our industry straight from the mouths of fifty young professionals (who are actually engaged in the conversation and not looking at their iPhones)?

Here's a breakdown of the crowd:

- College students from Chico State and other colleges who are IFEA Legacy Scholarship recipients
- Recent college grads looking for a job or a productive internship
- Entry level employees who are networking and trying to learn their way in this industry
- The over 30 crowd of IFEA professionals with over 5 years' experience. These folks are trying to figure out their "next step."

As the moderator of the session, I make it a special point to emphasize that I'm merely there to ask the next question and keep the conversation flowing. I start the discussion, however, with providing a few stories of my experience in the industry and how to avoid some of the pitfalls I faced early in my career. We also tackle some pretty sensitive topics. How can the younger generation help bridge the gap between maintaining the tradition of events,

while at the same time sprinkling those events with modern and innovative touches? How can young professionals respectively and effectively communicate with their bosses and their event's stalwart volunteers? As events have become more financially viable to sponsors, their leadership has evolved from volunteers to professional staffs. What can young professionals do to better prepare themselves for the business expectations of our industry? We also discuss some practical tips for "climbing the ladder," like being patient and keeping your focus on directly what's in front of you and not on the horizon.

The work of the IFEA Foundation is focused squarely on helping to build an exceedingly qualified talent pool of individuals who will soon become the leaders of our industry. As noted above, the festivals and events we work for are businesses with high expectations set by boards of directors whose members understand what makes a well-run business tick. Our crop of industry leaders rising through the ranks are better educated, better trained, and better equipped than at any other time for the myriad of crazy and unexpected challenges that must be faced. These challenges include navigating the complex political landscape of governmental leaders and city/state agencies. Learning the necessary tools for a non-profit organization to comply with the myriad of requirements in Sarbanes/Oxley. Understanding the human dynamics of the people serving on their board of directors. Creating a long-term strategic plan to provide a road map for future success. And finally, having the necessary contacts to be able to pick up the phone and find the answer to any situation they face. All of these challenges and more

are discussed, debated, and dissected at the IFEA Annual Convention each year. What a great learning opportunity! Through the *IFEA Legacy Scholarships*, young professionals are afforded the opportunity to learn at the ground level from the people currently navigating these tricky waters. They spend 4 days in sessions and in conversation with the very best in the event industry. The knowledge gained is simply invaluable. These future leaders will one day walk into a board room and provide detailed financial reports or lead a discussion on a sensitive sponsorship issue. All while using the knowledge they have gained through the IFEA.

Now, rather than ending this letter by providing you an address where a check can be sent while making a plea for cash, I'll just say this: Throughout the course of this year I'll be writing a letter in each issue of "ie" magazine, explaining some of the bits and pieces of what the IFEA Foundation does. This issue I've discussed the Legacy Scholarships and how they are fueling the continued growth of our industry. All I ask is that when it comes time to write your name down on a silent auction item, or raise your hand to bid on one of our exclusive packages at next year's auction, you remember just a little piece of what I've written here!

JEFF ENGLISH, CFEA
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