



## AND THE GOLD PINNACLE AWARD FOR **BEST COVID SPONSOR CANCELLATION GOES TO...**

### Dear Readers:

These continue to be remarkable times for all of us in the festivals and events sector. Our worlds have been turned upside down leaving us with more professional uncertainty than ever before. Who could have ever predicted so many beloved events, large and small, would be cancelled?

As we pass through the various stages of grief and work to salvage our events, our organizations, and our life work, what is there to hold onto? I found this quote from former president Jimmy Carter which rang true to me.

*"We must adjust to changing times and still hold onto unchanging principals."*

*-Jimmy Carter*

As I have tried to maneuver through the wreckage of so many cancelled events, managing the angst and expectations of sponsors, I have found that the key to surviving this event industry apocalypse, has been not so much what I know, but how I respond. At a time like this, what I say, do, and convey will have more to do with our recovery than anything else.

Here are a few of the principals I am trying to live by:

1. **Have an "Attitude of Gratitude."** I want my sponsors to know how thankful I am for them. I want them to know I genuinely care about their wellbeing and that of their family and associates. I strive to treat them kindly and with a spirit of grace. Even, if they are delivering bad news (e.g. we need our sponsor payments back,) I want to convey grace and understanding.
2. **Demonstrate Your Empathy.** We are all in the same boat! To some degree, we are all grieving these conditions. (Some of my sponsor contacts are being furloughed as there are no events to activate.) You don't need to explain how uncertain these times are. They know! Appreciate their circumstances as much as they should understand yours.
3. **Provide Regular and Transparent Communications.** Expedient and ongoing communications whether by phone or email are essential right now. If you don't fill the "information vacuum" with facts as you know them, they will speculate or listen to rumors. Be sure that your sponsors hear important notices and news about your event first, before any public announcements. And remember, if you don't know the answer to their question, it is okay so say so.
4. **Rely on the Spirit of Partnership and Friendship.** Hopefully, you have developed a good relationship over the course of doing business with your sponsor. This is not the time to get legalistic, or demand they follow the letter of the

agreement. Rather, this is the time to focus on the *spirit* of your partnership. Keep your eye on the long-range, not just the immediate.

5. **Anything and Everything is Possible.** Be open to any and all options. "Pivot" is the new axiom for the new normal. Stay flexible. Get creative. Embrace innovation. Be solutions-oriented. Those who don't, won't find many friends after the all-clear is sounded.
6. **Stay True.** It is in these situations where we really discover if you really care about another as a person, not just a business account.
7. **Remain Upbeat, Positive, Hopeful.** Resilience is an essential attribute right now and it needs to be wrapped in hopefulness.

Well, my fellow wounded warriors, I hope these principals are helpful in your recovery process. Just as I experienced in 2008 during the Great Recession, these are the times that test our metal. Let's demonstrate just what we are made out of.

### The Sponsor Doc

With more than three decades in sponsorship sales and consultation, *Bruce L. Erley* is the President and CEO of the Creative Strategies Group, a full-service sponsorship and event marketing agency based in Denver, Colorado he founded in 1995. Accredited in Public Relations (APR) by the Public Relations Society of America and a Certified Festival & Events Executive (CFEE) by the International Festivals and Events Association, Erley is a highly-regarded speaker on event marketing and sponsorship having spoken on the topic around the world in such places as Dubai, Vienna, Beijing, Toronto and New York.

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