



## DON'T DISTANCE **YOURSELF**

I'm sure most of you read the headline twice. No, it's not a typo. It reads "Don't Distance Yourself." Oh, I agree with the Centers for Disease Control - we should wash our hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, cover our nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze, avoid close contact with people who are unwell, and stay at home and self-isolate from others. And, I think we have all found out how difficult it is not to touch our faces.

Thanks to the Coronavirus or COVID-19, all of us in the festival and event industry are experiencing difficult times. It's like nothing we have ever experienced before. We are not alone. Our friends in the hospitality industry have seen their business come to a screeching halt. Others such as airlines, automotive, and real estate - not to mention small businesses - are struggling too.

So, what did I mean by "Don't Distance Yourself?" Quite simply, now is not the time to distance yourself from the International Festivals and Events Association. At the top of the IFEA website it proudly states, and rightfully so, "The Premier Association Supporting and Enabling Festival and Event Professionals Worldwide."

So, while we are social distancing ourselves, now is the time to be in close contact with IFEA. In case you haven't noticed, the association has been living up to its mission and then some. The IFEA staff, led by President & CEO Steve Schmader, CFEE, have been at the forefront in trying to assist not only the association's members, but the festival and events industry as a whole.

Every Wednesday, IFEA hosts a FREE Webinar on COVID-19 and the various aspects of producing a festival or event. Topics have included scheduling, sponsorship and vendor relations to name a few.

Steve and his staff have also been in constant touch with Homeland Security, the United States Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Administration and of course, the Centers for Disease Control. There has been a myriad of updates from these government agencies in IFEA e-newsletters.

Maybe one of the most important e-newsletter articles was on the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). IFEA was one of the first to share that the PPP is a temporary program established under the recently signed CARES Act that allocated \$349 billion to provide small businesses and non-profits with funds for up to

eight weeks of payroll costs - including benefits- as well as to pay interest on mortgages, rent or leases, and utility bills. The best part: there is a provision for the loans to be forgiven.

Besides the various programs established and information disseminated by IFEA, there is another way for us to stay connected with IFEA. Hopefully, you have taken advantage of your membership to meet other festival and event professionals. Now is the perfect time to put those contacts to use. Let's face it, no one has all the right answers. No one has faced anything like this pandemic before. Reach out to fellow industry leaders. Besides checking on their well-being, ask questions and share information and best practices.

We often talk about the value of IFEA. Just like a lot of things in life, maybe we take too many things for granted when everything goes as planned. The weather is perfect. Events are sold out. Sponsor sales are at a record pace. Volunteer participation is high. Media coverage is positive. Event set-up runs smoothly. It's when everything doesn't go as planned that we realize the true value of the items, elements, people and associations we took for granted during the prosperous times.

I think if we were honest with ourselves, IFEA would fit into this category. IFEA has done a tremendous job of being the industry leader of this unforeseen crisis that has crippled the festival and event industry.

Remember this when it's time to renew your IFEA membership dues; or you're asked to attend the Annual Convention & Expo; or contribute to Fund for the Future; or join the monthly IFEA Webinars; utilize an IFEA Professional Product and Service; solicited to purchase a raffle ticket or bid on an auction item.

It's true, we are all in this together. It's equally true that we can lean on IFEA and its leadership team. So, let's not distance ourselves.

**Kevin Grothe**

IFEA Foundation Board Chair  
Vice President of Sponsorships  
Memphis in May International Festival  
Memphis, TN