

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF EVENT PROFESSIONALS



I am so excited about serving as the IFEA Foundation Board chair this year. I have been involved with the IFEA for decades and served as a member of the original Foundation Board many years ago. I have been in the festival and event industry since I was a sophomore in college, and literally don't know how to do anything else! Until recently, I was an Associate Professor of Event Management at Temple University in Philadelphia and have had the honor of helping to train the next generation of event professionals. This training and education is essential. University programs in Event Management did not exist when I was learning the business. Likewise, there were no programs like our CFEE Certification or the Event Management School that we run in conjunction with the National Recreation and Parks Association and Oglebay National Training Center. It is critically important that we continue to support these educational opportunities and that is my goal for the next year; to build on the success of the past and drive us forward into the future in a financially stable way.

If we look at the many challenges facing our industry in the post-pandemic era, one that I hear across the industry is the challenge of getting new people interested in the field of festivals and events. If we look around the table (literally and figuratively) at our organizational meetings, we often see an aging leadership. This, in and of itself, is not the problem. The problem arises when we don't have adequate training and education, which honestly teaches people the positive and negative aspects of this business. I use the word "honesty" deliberately. There is an illusion that this industry is all about the glamour - meeting the talent, entertaining the audience, getting the praise and recognition of our communities, our friends and our colleagues. As anyone who has spent more than fifteen minutes in this business knows, this is not reality. The reality is hard work, anxiety, stress, long hours, heartaches, disappointments, etc. We face tremendous challenges of low pay and long days and the challenge of finding life/work balance. Not exactly a game plan for finding new talent!

So, what role can we as industry professionals play in finding the next great event professionals? Here are three key elements, which will help form the platform for my tenure as Foundation Chair:

1. **Find and mentor new talent.** This played a critical part in my own professional path. I started out to be a high school English teacher and in college I discovered this thing called a concert committee. I was hooked but did not know how to build a career from this passion. Fortunately, my college's Director of Student Activities saw qualities in me that I did not even know I had, and he mentored me throughout my undergraduate years and helped me find my start in the business

as an Assistant Director of Student Activities. Without his mentorship, I would not be where I am today.

2. **Develop concrete succession plans for all the key leadership roles in our organizations, both staff and volunteers.** This plays a critical role in enabling young people to grow within our organizations. People starting out in this industry need to see a path forward and not a dead end with people in leadership who have been there for decades doing the same thing in the same way.
3. **Believe in and support professional development.** The IFEA plays a critical role in this area, and by design, the IFEA Foundation supports these efforts. According to the IFEA website, "The IFEA Foundation helps to support the mission and vision of the IFEA by providing financial support that allows the organization to fulfill its educational goals; goals which further ensure the quality of both the events and the professionals who make up our unique industry."

The IFEA Foundation's goals cannot be accomplished without your active financial support. As a membership based nonprofit organization, we depend exclusively on contributions from members and friends. There are many ways to show this financial support in both large and small ways. My ask to you this year is very simple. If the IFEA has ever, in any way contributed to your personal and/or professional development, find a way to support us. If you have ever learned anything at an IFEA Affinity Group or a Webinar, or if you ever reached out to an IFEA member with a question or for advice, give something.

Your contributions enable us to fulfill our mission, enhance our community impact, sustain and grow our industry, enhance our educational resources and continue to engage with our membership in a meaningful manner.

I take on this task with a deep commitment to the IFEA. Without this organization, I would not be where I am today. I grew up a blue-collar kid in an urban environment and am a first-generation college graduate. When I discovered the IFEA many, many years ago, I found my kindred spirits. People who understood the challenges that our industry faces. People who understood that we are not alone in what we do. People who understood the vital role that festivals and events play in our society and in our communities. I have literally traveled to places as part of the IFEA that I could never have imagined; from South Africa to China to Iceland to the Netherlands and to almost every state in the United States. I now have friends around the world

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