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Event Chairperson

...Success Toolbox™

1.1 Oh My...What Have I Done!

Well, they have done it to you again...you are now responsible for the production of this year's fundraising event. We know that all sorts of demented thoughts are running through your mind, ranging from "Where am I going to find the time?" to "What if the event is a failure?" RELAX...VenueTech is here to help. It really doesn't have to be an awful task. In fact, we think you will have fun!

1.2 What's in the Toolbox?

As the event chairperson, your role is different than the other committee members. Your role is to guide the efforts of the Planning Committee, define the goals of the project and accept responsibility for the production of a successful event. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, your job will include the motivation of key volunteers and committee members. Without their help, the event will not be successful. To accomplish these important tasks, you will need every tool available. We have filled your toolbox to the top with the following:

- 1) Key Roles and Responsibilities of the Event Chair
- 2) Tools to Motivate Volunteers
- 3) Tips for Developing Future Leaders
- 4) The Initial Meeting - Ideas and Agenda
- 5) Final Meeting - Ideas and Agenda

Note: for additional assistance, see other Success Toolbox™ downloads from VenueTech Management Group, LLC including, event Planning Check List, Committee Job Descriptions, Event Evaluation Form and others.

1.3 *Your Role as Chairperson*

As mentioned, the chairperson plays a variety of essential roles (not the least of which is pulling your hair out silently while telling everyone else not to worry!) The following list is provided as a guideline. Feel free to add a few items, but go easy, as the goal of this “toolbox” is to reduce your work load.

Specific Roles and Responsibilities

- 1) Oversee the entire event and planning process.
- 2) Appoint and/or encourage volunteers to chair the various committees.

TIP: *When determining the best choice for committee chairs, it is helpful to contact people individually rather than asking for volunteers at a large meeting. This will help you avoid the problems associated with an individual volunteering for a role they are not well suited for. When the wrong person volunteers for a key committee and they can not perform, the strength of the group will suffer and back biting will almost always result.*

- 3) Provide weekly motivation for committee chairs, ensuring that work is progressing and enthusiasm is high.
- 4) Coordinate on-going committee meetings and foster an environment that encourages creativity and the development of new and exciting ideas.

TIP: *The best events typically evolve from weekly planning meetings where the committee chairpeople understand that they are responsible for weekly progress updates.*

- 5) Establish fundraising goals. (The goal of raising funds is important to your group and provides a great sense of pride in the success of the event!)
- 6) Request a written budget from each committee (or have the Finance and Underwriting Committee complete this with input from all committees).
- 7) Establish appropriate ticket prices.
- 8) Work with the Finance and Underwriting Committee to establish realistic sponsorship goals.
- 9) Work with the Event Production Committee in developing the event concept and scope.

- 10) Work with the Promotion and Ticket Sales Committee in developing the promotion and publicity strategy.
- 11) Develop leaders from within the Planning Committee who may be enlisted to chair the event in future years (this can get you off the hook).

1.4 Motivating Volunteers

We can not state this any stronger: **Motivating volunteers is the most important role you will play!** Let's face it...without the productive help of the other members of your committee; you will have to do all the work yourself. Three underlying principles make up the foundation for all strategies for motivating people.

Principle 1: You must communicate effectively and often.

Principle 2: People must feel that their input is both valuable and appreciated.

Principle 3: You must give them meaningful work...if you do all the work, they will almost always let you!

Always remember these three important principles and place them at the center of your key decisions and efforts. With this in mind, let us suggest a variety of ideas for motivating your key volunteers and committee members:

- 1) First and foremost, you must listen to their ideas and encourage the entire group to be creative. It is no fun to serve on a committee if someone else handles all the creative and fun jobs while all you do is request money from potential sponsors or clean-up the kitchen!
- 2) Most of your committee members are extremely busy people, just like you. Tell them up front what is expected of them and don't pile on extra work or expectations. (If you promise this up front, you may find it easier to get the best people to say yes to working on your committee!)
- 3) Make meetings productive and short. Everyone hates to attend meetings that are a waste of time (except the one loud mouth who always has a better idea or feels that nothing will work!).

TIP: *To ensure productive committee meetings, have a printed agenda and stick to it. Ask the group to commit to starting on time and ending on time. Inform them that you will sometimes have to "cut them off" if time is running short. (Don't cut off the discussion if good ideas are being developed...only when time is being wasted!)*

- 4) If you have time, send out a recap of each meeting (the group memory) and include such items as key decisions, next steps, key action items, commitments made by each member and the date, time and location of the next meeting.
- 5) If you have time, call each member the day or evening before the meeting to confirm their attendance. (Perhaps someone at your office or another committee volunteer can handle this task for you.) It is incredibly frustrating to show up to a meeting and find out you are the only member who made the effort.
- 6) Thank people sincerely. This will almost always result in increased creativity, confidence and commitment.
- 7) When making public presentations regarding your event, give proper credit to the entire committee.
- 8) If a printed program is an element of your event, list all committee members. In addition, if you place a “thank you” advertisement in the local newspaper, thank the committee for their hard work.
- 9) If you make a presentation during the event, include the key volunteers in your statement. If time permits, ask them to stand and be recognized by the group.

***TIP:** When making a presentation at your event, keep it short and to the point. Remember, people didn't pay to come hear you talk!*

- 10) In addition to “thank you” letters after the event, it is extremely rewarding to receive a personal telephone call, or handwritten note, from the chairperson. A short call the morning after the event will be unexpected and greatly appreciated.

***TIP:** After past successful events, we have sometimes paid the local florist to deliver a single rose in a bud vase to key sponsors and volunteers. This is a real touch of class! (This is the 21st century, when real men do eat quiche and appreciate roses.)*

- 11) It is extremely easy to send updates and motivational notes to the entire committee using simple technology. Sending a fax or an e-mail allows you to send the same message to many people simultaneously.
- 12) Have each member of your committee identify themselves at your organization's meetings by wearing event promotion buttons.

1.5 Developing Future Leaders

As mentioned earlier, one of your most important roles is developing future leaders who can assume the responsibilities of the event chairperson next year. (We suggest this with

a smile on our face, since we know that occasionally we run into a martyr who is willing to face the task year after year.)

Since we know that all of our clients are not the same, in the name of fairness, we make this suggestion. If you are the individual who would rather go to the dentist for a root canal than chair the event for one more year...read on. However, if life would end as you know it if you were not in charge for another 365 days, skip to the next section.

The process of developing future leaders is a careful blending of four important concepts.

- ◆ Assign the individual important and meaningful tasks that let them explore the leadership role (without the stress of the Chairperson title!)
- ◆ Mentor the individual by offering advice and opportunity.
- ◆ Encourage, support and reward the individual so they remain motivated and enthusiastic.
- ◆ Ask for an early commitment to next year's event and make the decision public knowledge. (It is extremely hard to back out if the entire group knows you have already said yes!)

Do not force this issue if the individual does not display a flair for the role and a good deal of self confidence. Events are rarely successful if the person in the leadership role is easily intimidated.

Let us offer a short word about the concept of the co-chairperson. This idea is used often, however it sometimes leads to problems. The concept can be very effective if early on tasks are clearly defined and responsibilities are agreed upon by both individuals. In contrast however, if two people assume responsibility for the same list of tasks, it is not uncommon to see a large number of action items go uncompleted. In most cases, the time honored conventional wisdom is true...*if two people are in charge...no one is in charge.*

1.6 The Initial Meeting - Ideas and Agenda

The initial meeting will kick off the efforts of your committee. Obviously, it is important to get off to a good start. We would like to make the following suggestions for facilitating a productive meeting and follow up with a recommended agenda.

Suggestions for a Productive Initial Meeting

- 1) Make the initial meeting special. This may be as simple as providing coffee and cookies or perhaps a glass of wine with cheese. While you don't need to do this for every committee meeting, the initial meeting requires that the group bond

- together and accept the role that they find themselves in. (Feel free to be creative ... serving Christmas cookies at your initial planning meeting in July will seem odd, but will get your committee members in the spirit of a December event!)
- 2) If possible, hold the initial meeting at a committee member's home (yours, if possible) so that the atmosphere is friendly and inviting.

***TIP:** If you have small children, a baby or needy animals, another location would be better. Meetings are rarely productive with constant disruptions. (Also, if Rover's new love interest happens to be a committee member's right leg, the productivity at your meeting will likely reach an all time low!)*
 - 3) If the group does not know each other well, it is helpful to provide name tags. It is often embarrassing if you are supposed to know someone but you just can't remember their name. (To better understand our point, just remember your last high school reunion!)
 - 4) Early in the meeting, establish the "housekeeping" rules for all meetings. This typically includes: setting dates, times and locations for regularly scheduled meetings, a commitment from the group to arrive on time and end on time and a description of your role as chairperson. This includes your commitment to productively move the agenda forward.
 - 5) Hand out a list of all committee assignments and discuss the role of each committee.
 - 6) During the initial meeting, you should have a brainstorming session to explore options and ideas for your event.

Suggested Agenda

- ◆ Welcome and introductions
- ◆ Thank people for volunteering
- ◆ Discuss future meetings and other "housekeeping" items
- ◆ Review the event concept
- ◆ Hand out a list of committee assignments (hopefully committees have already been assigned)
- ◆ Discuss the goals of the event (fundraising, social, etc.)
- ◆ Brainstorm event specifics

- ◆ Refreshments
- ◆ Adjourn

1.7 The Final Meeting - Ideas and Agenda

It may seem a bit early to be discussing the final committee meeting; however, we felt it was important to tell you how critical this step is. Frankly, most groups forget to hold this meeting and then regret it when next year's event rolls around and they can't remember what went right and what went wrong last year.

The primary goals of this meeting will be to evaluate the event, celebrate your success, build camaraderie and make notes for next year's committee. In every event there is a "black hole" that no one in the group ever considered. Believe us, you will feel pretty silly if you fall into it two years in a row!

Suggestions for a Productive Final Meeting

- 1) Enjoy your success and celebrate early in the meeting. After all the hard work of the committee, it is inappropriate to begin the meeting by discussing how the event could have been improved (you will get to that later).
- 2) Let each committee member have the floor for a short period of time. Everyone will want to share their thoughts (it feels good to be heard!)
- 3) When evaluating the event, have each committee make a presentation listing their successes and ideas for the future.
- 4) Make sure someone takes meticulous notes.
- 5) Have a detailed evaluation form for the group to fill out so no areas are left unexplored.
- 6) As the chairperson, this meeting is your opportunity to express your sincere thanks to each member.
- 7) At this meeting, you should attempt to have the final financial figures, so the group may celebrate both the fundraising results as well as the excitement of the event.
- 8) The meeting should include a discussion of the *Post Event Issues* such as "thank you" letters, financial reports, return of rented or borrowed equipment, and next year's event committee.

Suggested Agenda

- ◆ Event accolades - each person may share their favorite memory from the event
- ◆ Financial report
- ◆ Committee reports
- ◆ Event evaluation - commonly known as “the good, the bad and the ugly”
- ◆ Post event action items
- ◆ Special recognition
- ◆ Next year’s committee

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VenueTech Management Group, LLC is a full service consulting and management firm involved in the business planning, capital development and direct management of community-based organizations and public assembly facilities. A significant portion of the firm’s business is focused on the use of entertainment, cultural arts and public venues as a catalyst for economic development. The firm also specializes in building private-public partnerships, managing performing arts venues and the restoration of historic structures.

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