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You have already spent the money, now how can you make the investment worthwhile? Learn tips and tricks for getting the most out of your meetings.

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# How to Get the Most Out of the Meetings You Attend

By Lisa Lance

According to the U.S. Travel Association, meeting and event travel accounted for \$1.421 billion in travel spending in the state of Missouri in 2007, the most recent data available.

With an estimate of \$1,000 spent per traveler on each trip, employers would be right to demand a strong return on investment (ROI), expecting the employees they send to get the most out of the meetings they attend.

## SHARPEN THE FOCUS ON PRODUCTIVITY

Drew Stevens, Ph.D., is president of Stevens Consulting Group ([www.stevensconsultinggroup.com](http://www.stevensconsultinggroup.com)) and works with clients to improve the productivity of their sales teams. Stevens has been in business for 28 years as a consultant, instructor, author, keynote speaker and skills-based facilitator.

How have meetings changed in the last few years? “The biggest thing is, I’m seeing less opulence in these meetings,” he said, adding the events include less motivation, more content and a reduction in length—now a half day to one day versus two to three days for a meeting or conference.

Technology also has played a key role in the efficiency of meetings today, according to Stevens. “I’m seeing Webinars and teleconferences so they’re not taking people out of the field too long.”

Even as planners streamline these events to make them more efficient, employers can take steps to improve the productivity of their team members attending meetings as well. “I’m seeing an increase in communication to ensure standards, objectives



and results are being met,” said Stevens.

Better communication is a start, but what else can attendees do to get the most out of the meetings they attend?

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

A simple first step when planning to attend a conference is to visit the event’s Web site. At a minimum, the site should provide maps to navigate the convention center if it’s a tradeshow or large conference; lists of exhibitors and speakers; a schedule; and registration information.

Some Web sites also will include tips for maximizing the experience. For example, the American Library Association holds an annual conference, and the organization includes tips on its Web site for actions to take before, during and after the event.

The list includes suggestions for everything from mental preparation (think about why you are going to the conference and what you would like to get out of it) to practical advice (pack comfortable shoes and comfortable but professional clothing, and bring snacks) to reminders to follow up with colleagues or presenters after the event.

## CONSIDER YOUR MINDSET

Jonathan Bradshaw is a meeting performance consultant based in the U.K. and a regular columnist for ONE+, the membership magazine for Meeting Planners International. He first saw a need for a resource to get more out of meetings in 2007 when he attended a conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. He had been traveling a lot and, as he put it, “was not having the right balance of wellness and work.” He analyzed how much it actually cost for him to be at the event – travel,

lodging, time away from the office, meals – and estimated the total cost at about \$10,000. He asked himself, “Was I going to get the most out of the conference? How much more effective could it be if the group of delegates were prepared far better for the event itself?”

This was the idea behind Meetings Mindset ([www.meetingsmindset.com](http://www.meetingsmindset.com)), a program Bradshaw founded to help meeting participants get the most out of the events they attend.

For the past 15 years, Bradshaw has pushed himself in athletic pursuits, including climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Everest and a 3,400-mile bike ride across Europe. He combined his experience in mental and physical fitness training with studies in behavioral science and applied them to the meetings industry.

“In essence we are taking the best research from behavioral science and human performance, and have created a portfolio of online and onsite products and services to help meeting delegates prepare for, perform at and produce from the meetings and congresses they attend,” Bradshaw explained.

Meetings Mindset offers online options to help participants set meeting goals, develop skills and prepare mentally and physically prior to attending an event. Onsite services include motivational opening sessions, training sessions, physical warm-up sessions and nutritional consultancy. Post-event services include a post-meeting video to be sent to participants, a performance e-checklist and an online goal tracker. The Meetings Mindset online performance center will be launched in May 2011.



**STEPS TO SUCCESS**

Stevens said whether it's a meeting for future leaders or a seminar on customer service, there are three foundations for success: establishing key objectives, measuring the objectives against the goals that have been set, and accountability.

"Organizations today are truly looking for that ROI, because when workers go back they want to see productivity," he said.

These three foundations are important for all types of meeting attendees, Stevens said, whether they are "prisoners" who feel they don't have time to be there, "vacationers" who are just happy to be out of the office, or "students" who truly want to learn. "No matter what, each would like to have a reason for being there," he said.

For example, sales meetings can have several potential objectives, concerning areas such as leads in the pipeline, customer conversations or closing ratios. Goals can be set to increase each by a certain percentage. "All of that is certainly measurable," said Stevens.

Jason Selk, Ed.D., director of sports psychology for the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team and author of "10 Minute Toughness" (<http://enhancedperformanceinc.com/10mintough.htm>), also has a list of steps for maximizing a meeting experience, which he calls "The Power of Three for Getting Everything You Can Out of a Conference."

Step one is to know who the presenters are and why they are experts. Look over all handouts available prior to the session.

Step two is to show up to each session prepared to take notes.

Step three is to complete evaluations of each speaker within 60 minutes of hearing each presentation. If no evaluation form is supplied, create your own. Selk suggests creating an overall rating of 1-10; if the rating is not a 10, list one thing the presenter could do to improve, then list the top two or three takeaways from the session.

What is the biggest challenge for attendees? Bradshaw said the most important thing is the follow-up after the event. If you prepare well, you're more likely to perform well on site, he said,

but "following up, keeping relationships going and keeping the commitments you made...when the meeting finishes is when the work starts in terms of ROI."

Without follow up work after the meeting, he said, "All the things we promised

or the little chats we had get forgotten and the meeting is not as productive as it could be. But having said that, everyone will perform better if we prepare." *MM&E*

*(Lisa Lance is a contributor from Towson, Md.)*



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