

THOUGHTS FROM MPI LEADERSHIP

The Most Important Question



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Not long before I entered MPI's Global Certification in Meetings Management (CMM) program in 2003, I was introduced to a simple game with a name that shouldn't be printed in a polite magazine such as *The Meeting Professional*.

Bullsh*t Bingo consists of a 25-square grid on a sheet of paper with the latest business jargon words written in each. Players bring the sheet into a business meeting and check off the words as they are spoken. The winner is the first player to fill a row or column with check marks. The game reportedly ends when someone shouts a word beginning with "B," and that word is not bingo.

In our true confessions department, I'll admit that Bullsh*t Bingo summed up the attitude I brought into the CMM program. As a writer and publications manager who has spent 20 years explaining and simplifying complex issues, the language of business struck me as needlessly complicated, often for its own sake.

But then...

The five-day CMM residency is one of the most intense, comprehensive experiences you can ask for. I came out of it transformed. Suddenly, I was seized by the precise differences between an organization's mission, vision and values. I promptly went home and asked my 13-year-old cat to succinctly state his value proposition. He's a Siamese, so his immediate, inevitable answer was "WoWWWWWWWW."

Not bad.

Everywhere I went, I enthused about the CMM program and the body of knowledge I'd acquired.

Then I realized that friends and clients were beginning to look at me a bit sideways. It dawned on me that I'd gone overboard and become the thing I'd never wanted to understand. I began looking for Bullsh*t Bingo cards in people's pockets.

Writing conference reports is often about translating knowledge—not necessarily from one language to another but from specialized

jargon to vernacular. And so it is with the task of articulating the business value of an event.

There are compelling reasons to express a meeting's impact in financial terms. But we also need language that will capture the value and the values behind a conference or the purpose served by a particular meeting support service for a wider audience.

In my work with present and future clients, I've found a way to link our conference publishing service with the objectives that bring them on site. I do it by asking them why they would want anyone to produce summary reports, newsletters or tabloid newspapers for their events.

It's a question that shifts the focus from a quick transaction to a deeper conversation about goals and objectives. And it's far more likely to lead to a final product that advances that original purpose.

It's essential to frame our arguments for senior decision-makers. But there are other important stakeholders, in the broader business world and within our own profession, whose eyes glaze over when they hear the language of value propositions, visioning exercises and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses. They need the expertise our profession has to offer. We need their understanding and support. But to build common ground, we need a common denominator.

Asking "why" is a starting point that everyone can understand and with which anyone should be able to identify.

And on good days, it leads to innovative conferences with enduring results that surpass anything our clients may ever have imagined.

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