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Donald Cooper is respected by clients in over 40 industries as both a “thought leader” and a passionate visionary in the areas of marketing, service and business excellence.

Drawing from his real life experience as a world-class manufacturer, award-winning retailer and business speaker, he has helped thousands of businesses throughout the world to add more real value to their customers' lives...and more dollars to their bottom lines.

To subscribe to Donald's thought-provoking, free, monthly Management E-Newsletter, email us at newsletter@donaldcooper.com. His website, www.donaldcooper.com also offers free articles and business tools.

Getting the most out of your next business meeting or conference:

I've spoken at over 1500 business conferences in the past 18 years and many of them were a complete waste of money. For example, it always amazes me how often arranging the golf tournament gets more attention than determining the bottom-line outcomes required and then selecting the best presenters to deliver those outcomes.

To deliver lasting bottom-line value, conference planners must first be absolutely clear about the real 'purpose' of their event. And, for the record, *"Because we've always had one."* is not a 'purpose'. For every meeting and conference, visualize, document and commit to specific and extraordinary outcomes for your attendees and for your organization. If you can't think of any, then maybe you shouldn't be having a conference!

As we search for 'purpose', a good place to start would be by understanding why business people attend conferences. **Experience tells me that business people are looking for five things.**

- 1) First, to **learn**...new ideas, new techniques, or new ways of applying what they already know that will give them a competitive advantage, grow their bottom line or improve their skills.
- 2) To **network**...to create leads or contacts and to feel connected, or reconnected, in this increasingly disconnected world.
- 3) To **re-energize**...to laugh, to believe and to be uplifted and inspired in these demanding and stressful times.
- 4) To **celebrate** their accomplishments, to recommit to their continued success...and to have fun!
- 5) To be **heard** and to contribute.

So, if this is what our 'customers' want, clearly these are the five most important 'purposes' for any business conference.

Why is ongoing learning so important? Back in the 1970s the sum total of knowledge on this planet was doubling about every seven years. The people who study such things for a living tell us that by the year 2010, knowledge on this planet could double every 11 hours. So, for now...and for the rest of our lives, if we're not learning every day, we're falling behind every day.

Those of us who organize and create business conferences are responsible for delivering much of the life-long learning, inspiration, refocusing and re-energizing that are so necessary for personal and organizational growth in this fast-changing world. Together, we are in the business of helping people create extraordinary businesses and extraordinary lives!

None of this happens without effective communication:

In both business and in life, the process of learning is not just about developing ideas, techniques or processes. It's about **effectively communicating** them with the clarity, energy, authority and humor that creates retention and facilitates implementation.

Ideas that have the power to transform, along with the inspiration and laughter that smooth life's journey, can only be delivered effectively by people with superb communication skills. It's not enough to inform...we must also energize and inspire!

This brings us to an important question, *"Why pay money for professional speakers, trainers or facilitators? Why not just have someone from our industry get up and say a few words?"* The short answer is, *"For the same reason that you'd choose a 'professional' for any critical task...like, for example, brain surgery!"*

Experts who speak professionally are committed to their specific area of expertise, to skillfully delivering presentations that 'grab' people's minds and hearts and to delivering the specific outcomes that clients choose. Professionals raise critical questions, deliver new insights, challenge old thinking and excite their audiences about new possibilities.

To those of us who have been in the business of speaking, training or coaching business audiences for some time, there seem to be two 'myths' that need to be addressed...

Myth #1: *"That amateurs are as good as professionals...and they're free."* This is a tempting thought, but it's almost never true.

Myth #2: *"We can always get a speaker or trainer at the last minute, so there's no need to plan ahead."* The truth here is that hundreds of clients are disappointed every year when they find out that the best presenters are already booked. Secondly, the 'best' will need time to research and prepare in order to effectively address your specific outcomes...that's why they're the best.

The same holds true for selecting entertainers for your conference. Everyone loves to be entertained by true professionals. Choosing the right entertainment is as important and as challenging as selecting the right content speakers. I've seen way too many drunken and inappropriate entertainers ruin an event to ever take this one for granted.

So, if you're seriously committed to creating an extraordinary business conference or event that delivers extraordinary and lasting bottom-line value, first be clear about the specific outcomes that you're committed to and then move the selection of the best presenters, facilitators and entertainers way up your list of priorities.

For more information on how Donald Cooper can help you rethink, refocus and reinvent your business to create compelling customer value and long-term profitability, call us in Toronto, Canada at 1-(416) 252-3704 or email us at sharen@donaldcooper.com.