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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, idea-generating, **FREE** monthly electronic **Newsletter**, email us at newsletter@donaldcooper.com.

His website, www.donaldcooper.com also offers free articles and business tools.

Here are a few simple things that you need to know about room set-up for your next conference:

Last week I spoke at three conferences at expensive, first-rate hotels and in each case the room was set up so badly that we had to redo it in order to rescue the situation. It’s so much easier to get it right the first time. Here are a few simple rules...

1. First off, by far the best kind of seating is “classroom” style which gives everyone a writing surface and more space to lean, change positions and keep comfortable. There’s always water available and often candies or jelly beans. If you want to spoil your audience buy them Werther’s caramels or M&M’s and have the hotel put two dishes of them on each table.

Next best, after classroom seating, is “half rounds”. The tables themselves are “full rounds” but you can only put people at the back side of each table so that everyone’s more or less facing the stage. “Half rounds” work best if you’re going to have discussion groups as part of the program but they do require a much bigger room to fit everyone in. With round tables, of course, there’s lots of room to write and for water and treats.

The least effective seating arrangement by far is “theatre style” where chairs are crammed in, there’s nowhere to take notes except your lap and there’s no water or treats. Especially for any presentation longer than 40 minutes, unless the presentation is primarily entertainment, avoid “theatre style” like the plague.

Before you book a hotel, find out if they have conference rooms big enough to accommodate a seating plan that works for your audience. If they tell you that you have to go to theatre style seating to fit everyone in ...find another hotel with the room size you need to do it right.

Not only does “classroom style” function better for people than theatre style, psychologically, they’re more prepared to learn when entering a “classroom” setting. We go to a classroom to learn...we go to the theatre to be entertained.

2. Whatever seating style you choose, the first row of seating must never be more than 6 feet from the stage, unless it’s a huge room with a very high stage, in which case the first row of seats should not be more than 12 feet from the stage. When there’s 20 or more feet between the stage and the people, as so often happens, there’s a huge disconnect between the speaker and the audience. And it’s made even worse when no one sits in the first three rows.

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A few simple things that you need to know about room set-up (Cont'd):

3. Never create a center isle that lines up with the center of the stage. This creates a situation where the speaker, standing in the middle of the stage, is speaking right up an empty isle. Two isles, set off center, left and right, are the way to go.
4. Using masking tape, tape off the back few rows or tables to encourage people to sit up front. This creates more energy in the room and leaves back seats available for latecomers without disturbing everyone else.
5. One last thing. If you're projecting PowerPoint or other images on a screen, the screen needs to be in darkness, but the stage needs to be well lit and the whole room needs to be bright enough for people to stay awake, read handouts and take notes. Work with the hotel and the AV Company well ahead of time to ensure that this will all be done. It might involve spending a few extra dollars for free-standing stage lighting. Also, make sure that the screen is big enough. The bigger, the better.

Keep these five simple rules in mind when planning your next meeting or conference and you'll be amazed at the difference that it will make.

For more information on how Donald Cooper can help you redefine and reinvent your business to create, deliver and communicate compelling, customer-owning Value, visit our website at www.donaldcooper.com , email us at info@donaldcooper.com or contact us by telephone in Toronto, Canada at 1-(416) 252-3704.