

breakout session: Jan Levine

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A 'Win-Win-Win' Strategy

As the meetings industry continues its journey through uncharted waters in 2021, its success depends on the continued innovation and creativity of its leading professionals.

I have spent my entire career of more than 25 years building and cultivating relationships that I am so grateful for. In the past year, these long-term industry partnerships and loyal client relationships have cultivated gratitude in my day-to-day business.

This gratitude practice is ultimately about creating a 'win-win-win' scenario in the service industry of meeting planning. What this means to me is balancing relationships to achieve the end goal for my clients, for the hotel and resort properties we collaborate with, my company, and everyone that attends the meeting or event.

Over the years, I think the 'win-win-win' strategy has been largely considered more of a sales aspect, but to me it's so much more than that—it's about people, relationships, and mutual respect in all aspects of planning meetings. Whether we're planning for a large group, a small meeting, or anything in between, I feel the same rules apply.

Here's a real-world example: We challenged a luxury hotel partner to come up with a particular activity around a cooking demonstration. The client wanted this activity as part of their meeting, so I presented my vision based on previous experiences, and he was onboard. The director of sales at the hotel got it and the client loved the idea, yet the chef at the hotel presented a challenge because he had not done anything like this before.

I persisted with the vision, offering suggestions on logistics, but I got pushback, and that was okay as far as I was concerned. After some back and forth, we came up with

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a workable concept, and ultimately it was received as one of the “best ever” activities for their conference. I never gave up on the expectation.

So, what have these relationships meant in the past 12 months? There is no 'new norm' as we adapt to these challenging times in the meetings industry. I think you must pick up the phone and have conversations that do not necessarily get sincerely conveyed by email. This is the only way you can achieve the balance needed during these times.

The balance is once again about the 'win-win-win' for all parties involved. This does not stop with

the negotiation of the hotel contract. Negotiating continues through all aspects of planning until the first guest checks in for the meeting.

Recently, I was having a conversation with a hotel partner in Florida, and we were discussing re-booking a meeting for a second time. We reviewed the possibilities of increasing the room rate, discussed penalties, and revisited the meeting and event space for the entire program. Ultimately, we came to an agreeable decision for both sides. The hotel was incredibly appreciative I was presenting their concerns to my client, and the client was grateful and patient about all the consideration given to the process.

I am grateful to be a part of the hospitality community that I serve and to the partners I have supported and that have supported me on behalf of my clients over the years. Finding balance in current times is challenging, but achievable, as long as you maintain a grateful mindset.

We all see the value in meeting in person. We will come back strong—with new rules and guidelines, and one mask at a time. ■

Jan Levine is known for infusing her energy, charisma, and creative vision into every project she manages or collaborates on with her clients. Whether she is customizing an elaborate theme for a client's event, coordinating a dozen international vendors for an annual corporate meeting, or planning an exclusive private dinner party for clients, she takes great personal and professional pride in her hands-on work, leaving no detail unturned.