The POWER of PARTICIPATION

CREATING CONFERENCES THAT DELIVER LEARNING, CONNECTION, ENGAGEMENT, AND ACTION

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Conferences That Work
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About the Author

Adrian Segar is a meeting architect and event facilitator with over thirty years experience, and an energetic champion for participation-rich and participant-led meetings that uncover and satisfy attendee needs for relevant learning, connection, engagement, and community. He is the author of *Conferences That Work: Creating Events That People Love* (2009).

Adrian has been named one of the most innovative people in events by BizBash Magazine, one of MeetingNet's most influential online personalities in meetings and travel, and has been quoted on the front page of the Wall Street Journal. He has presented and facilitated at just about every meetings industry conference, including Meeting Professionals International's World Education Congress; Professional Convention Management Association's Education Conference and Convening Leaders; EIBTM; MPI's Chapter Business Summit; MPI Chapter meetings; HSMAI's MEET, FRESH, GMIC, and NESAE annual conferences; and many association conferences. Adrian writes regularly on event design and related issues on his blog *www.conferencesthatwork.com*. He is the community manager of the Google Plus #eventprofs community, and tweets frequently *@ASegar* on all manner of topics.

Adrian was an independent information technology consultant for 23 years, taught college computer science for 10 years, and co-owned and managed a solar domestic hot water heating systems manufacturing company before that. He has an ancient Ph.D. in experimental high-energy particle physics, lives in Marlboro, Vermont, and Boston, Massachusetts, and loves to sing and dance.

Acknowledgments

I thought writing a second book would be easier than the first.

I was wrong.

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Since *Conferences That Work* was published in 2009, I've presented hundreds of sessions and workshops in North America and Europe, and consulted with innumerable clients on improving their conference designs. I continue to learn from every experience I'm offered. Thank you everyone who asked me to share what I do, who shared back, and who touched my life in the process.

Small portions of this book are derived from my first book *Conferences That Work: Creating Events That People Love*, and some sections were previously published on my blog *www.conferencesthatwork.com*. Sometimes you say it right the first time.

Foreword

> "If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings.' " *—Dave Barry*

My first book, *Conferences That Work: Creating Events That People Love*, covered the why and how of participant-driven events: conferences and professional meetings that become what the participants want and need them to be. For more than 30 years I've facilitated, presented at, and experienced hundreds of conferences. I've become fascinated by the amazing things that can happen when conference-goers are gently led to step outside the limited traditional conference sessions that we all know so well.

My fascination reflects a wider interest in what happens (and often, sadly, doesn't happen) when people come together at meetings. Meetings are rapidly evolving from what they have been for hundreds of years—places where the few teach the many—toward places where people connect and engage about what they need and want to learn. In addition, we are discovering (some would say rediscovering) how to build genuine grassroots community at our events, a community that can change participants' worlds and, ultimately, the world we all inhabit.

During a quarter of a century as an independent information technology consultant, I worked with hundreds of companies. As my consulting experience grew, I realized that just about all of the client-labeled "technical problems" I was hired to solve were fundamentally people problems. I found myself drawn to learning more about the rich complexity of organizational culture and the function and dysfunction it engenders. This experience has informed my work on conference design—not too surprising when you consider that both organizations and meetings are human-created structures for bringing people together, albeit for different purposes.

Once *Conferences That Work: Creating Events That People Love* was published, I thought I had finished writing books. Yet, as word of the book spread and increasing numbers of clients asked me to consult on event design, it became clear that there was a need for a book that concentrated on a finer level of detail: the meeting session itself. Over and over again, clients wanted to know how to improve their sessions—and by extension their events—as measured ultimately by increased attendee satisfaction and retention.

Yes, the *Conferences That Work* meeting format improves conferences immensely by providing structure and support for powerful participant connection and learning. But it does not directly address the design of individual conference sessions: the heart of any conference, whether traditional or participant-driven. Unfortunately, we have all spent far too much time sitting through boring and ineffective sessions listening to uninteresting and poorly presented content.

However, this is not a book about effective public speaking. (For that, I recommend Scott Berkun's book *Confessions of a Public Speaker*.)[1] Rather, this book explains and shows how to improve meeting and session effectiveness by turning passive *attendees* into active *participants*. The techniques I describe can be incorporated by any event organizer, presenter, or session facilitator who wants to maximize the learning, connection, engagement, community building, and consequential action that takes place at her sessions and meetings.

Creating active participants is not hard. But the useful techniques are scattered among a range of practitioners, unfamiliar to most people, and consequently rarely used. This book covers what you need to know in one place.

One final note: This is a mere book; *reading* it is a passive activity, the very antithesis of the book's thesis. If what you read in these pages stays in your head, it will benefit no one. Get on your feet and *do* what you read here when you meet. You and the people you'll meet will reap significant rewards!