

Jürgen Tietz
Professional Speaker & Thought Leader



TEN MOST COMMON MISTAKES WHEN RUNNING A (SAFETY) EVENT

Many safety events end up in a fiasco and do more damage than good to the safety efforts, because of lack of planning. Delegates leave, sometimes early, with comments like “dis nag”, “a total waste of time”, “next time we won’t bother to come”, etc.

Below are the most common mistakes, in no particular order.

1. Lack of **planning** well in advance.
Why?
 - a. Planning takes time and effort, and getting clarity about the **purpose** and outcome of the event. *What is the take home message / call to action?*
 - b. The event is seen as an end in itself and not part of the overall safety journey. *How will you get value for money = ROI?*
 - c. In most of these cases the event is a DIY effort, without a proper budget and subject to cost cutting, and/or planned and run by people who have no expertise in event planning. *Invest time, effort and money to make sure people will pitch in future.*
2. The **Venue**.
 - a. The venue is too large for the number of delegates and you end up with the ‘church syndrome’ – all the front seats are empty. Rather have fewer chairs and once they are filled up, carry in extra chairs. *This significantly raises the energy of the audience.*
 - b. The venue is not suitable for presentations – no screen, podium and stage.
 - c. Is the venue itself safe? Adequate and clearly marked exits, fire extinguishers, cabling done safely / taped down (people don’t trip, fire hazard), are the stage and stairs to the stage safe and clearly marked?
3. **Sound** is critical at all events.
 - a. There is nothing worse than the audience not being able to hear what is being said. Sometimes, to save costs, a squawking and squelching “boeredag” sound system is used and this jeopardises the whole event.
 - b. *Testing the sound is vital. A competent technician should set up and be available throughout the event.* The cook, who backs up as a sound technician, will not do, as you need someone who can trouble shoot and make a plan if the sound fails.
4. Next to sound, the **Lighting** is key to a successful event.
 - a. Especially true when using slides.
 - b. Lighting refers to both the venue lights as well as the blinds or curtains in front of the windows. If this is not feasible, then LCD screens have to be used.
 - c. Part of lighting is the projector. Again, *a competent person should be available with suitable back up*, as the AV devices do give problems.
5. The **Logistics** play a significant role to the smooth running of an event.
 - a. i.e. how people get in and out of the venue, especially for breaks and when serving tea / coffee and lunch. If it is an award function, make sure the recipients are

- present and seated such that they can get to the stage quickly. How do you plan to dish out hand-outs?
- b. Who is doing the safety briefing at the start of the event and this includes location of toilets, smoking areas, etc.?
6. A poor **Program** and NOT sticking to the program.
 - a. An event is a forum for sharing information and engaging the audience, but it has to be entertaining at the same time. *A competent / professional MC will make a huge difference*, specifically in winning over and captivating the audience and setting the tone of the event.
 - b. The **hand-outs**, which will help to sustain the theme or message of the event, are part of this and should link into the post-event activities. *What do you want from the audience? What follow up is being planned?*
 7. Sometimes the event is opened by making an apology why the top dog / **CEO** is not present – has to attend to some important business. This undermines the credibility of the speakers and the event as a whole. If the VIP's cannot be present, the event should rather be re-scheduled to accommodate their availability. People are most perceptive about this issue. You invest a lot in time, money and effort and the *senior people should respect this fact and invest their time in the success of the event.*
 8. Too much **information**, or too little **time**.
 - a. Most events involve many people, their time and the direct costs of the venue and the event as a whole. This investment is often quite substantial. Therefore, plan this as carefully as any other investment of such magnitude – see item #10 below. Make sure you allow enough time for the event. Arrange a work-stoppage, so that the audience appreciates that you are **SERIOUS** about safety.
 - b. A crowded program is a recipe for failure. ***Less is MORE*** is a golden rule for most events.
 - c. Together with this go poor, boring slides. Too many words, bullet points and complicated graphs. Add colour and images.
 - d. Ideally you should *have a dry-run of the program and as a minimum review the presentations before the event – who does what, when and how?*
 9. The **presenters** are critical to a successful event.
 - a. A professional speaker will be able to make the best of a poor, venue, lights and sound. A common mistake though, is to use **poor presenters**. Don't use 'Joe' from accounting / marketing / safety to put the audience to sleep with graphs and tables and detail.
 - b. Presenters need to have the skills and require training before they should be allowed to take the stage. *Rather use a skilled presenter and have the knowledge expert available to field questions.*
 - c. If you are using non-professional speakers, then consider providing 'training' and have a look at these [smart tips by Douglas Kruger](#).
 10. There is no proper **communication** to the target audience as to what the purpose of the event is, what they can expect, why they should be attending, and how they will benefit from the information sharing and participation. Remember *it's ALL about the audience. They need to understand and hopefully accept the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW and WHY?* Most of the time there is no build up to the event - no poster or email teaser campaigns are run. To get bums on seats means *publicizing and communicating to the target audience not once, but a number of times.*