

Careful Planning Can Help You Get More Out of Educational Meetings

Conferences, conventions, field days, seminars, workshops, annual meetings — regardless of what they are called, periodic gatherings with an educational purpose can result in new or refined knowledge, providing the attendee goes in with a plan.

Each year there are ample opportunities to attend meetings and glean additional information, from the local level, through state and regional, all the way tonational and international gatherings. In most instances, money for this type of gathering is limited, so care must be taken to see that the greatest value is received for the money expended. In order to achieve such a purpose, the following suggestions are made:

1. Familiarize Yourself With Schedules. Learn what is coming up, where it is going to be, who is going to be there and what they will be covering. Often times, magazines on the subject will include a listing of upcoming events and a review of these publications will give you a good start on the list of possibilities. Some meetings occur so regularly that personal knowledge can give you a general time frame for such meetings, or acquaintances may be able to recommend various meetings which they have found valuable.

Request Advance Materials. Most meetings are planned well in advance and as a result, considerable information is available to potential attendees. Receipt of this information will allow you a better opportunity to review the organization and contents of a future meeting.

Evaluate the Program. Once you have determined you will be attending a meeting and have the materials in hand, begin immediately to review and evaluate the program. Try to determine which of the offerings will be the greatest value to you personally. Doing this in advance of the meeting will permit you to better plan your time and as a result accomplish much, much more.

Register as Early as Possible. Advance registration will help you and the sponsoring organization. You will receive additional materials which can be extremely useful, and the organization can better determine the number of attendees and make necessary arrangements. In some cases, advance registrants can save money, but certainly they will be expected at the meeting, and materials will be prepared for them. In addition, there will be less of a delay upon your arrival at the meeting registration area.

If a pre-meeting registration is not available, plan to arrive early and register on-site as soon as possible. Turn-away attendance is unusual, but important materials may not be available in sufficient quantities for late registrants.

5. Follow Your Meeting Plan. At the meeting, there may be last minute changes that will draw you away from some planned activity, but try to avoid missing

those meetings which you pre-determined would be personally important. If you learn that some session is not going to be what you expected, change your plans accordingly, but don't lose time and information by procrastinating in the hallway.

6. Mingle and Meet Others. Answers to the questions you have may not be scheduled for the program, so the one method of acquiring answers is to meet fellow attendees. Meeting and talking with new people will heighten your opportunities to learn.

7. Ask Questions at Every Opportunity. There is no such thing as a

7. Ask Questions at Every Opportunity. There is no such thing as a "dumb question," and the only way you will receive specific information concerning your questions is to ask for it. Your problems may be so unique that your question has never arisen before, or it may be so common that everyone is suffering from it. In any event, seek answers to your questions during question and answer periods, or during casual meetings.

Seek Out the Experts. At every gathering you can safely assume that someone will be present to answer your questions or to provide you a source of information. If you are uncertain who you should go to, ask fellow attendees for suggestions.

9. Make Notes and Gather Materials. Regardless of how good you feel your memory is, take notes and pick up every possible handout. What appears to be insignificant at the time may be specifically what you need later. This will also facilitate easier follow-up if you need additional information in the future. While your memory may fail you, your notes and materials probably won't.

Attendance at meetings can be extremely valuable, or an extreme waste of time. Normally, the results will depend upon the "homework" completed prior to leaving home and the attitude of the attendee.

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