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COVER YOUR BASES

One of the cornerstones to a successful event is clear communication. As the event planner, your interactions with your staff and vendors are likely to take many forms.

You may meet with your directors in person on Monday, speak to them over the phone on Wednesday, receive an email from them on Thursday, and fax over a budget on Friday. If you set up a system to track communication, you will ensure that you have documentation of your directors requests and of the promises you make.

Create a tracking system

Setting up a tracking system can be as simple as buying several spiral-bound notebooks and assigning one to each event you are planning.

Divide the notebook into at least three sections.

The first section will document interactions with your staff and directors. The second will track your dealings with the event venue. The third will note transactions with other vendors.

If you have several major vendors, you may want to divide the notebook into additional sections.

Of course, the notebook system is but one way to track your communication. You may prefer to set up your log using a spreadsheet, a word processing document, or software for your handheld device.

Whichever vehicle you use, it's important that it be accessible to you at all times. For a communication log to be useful, you must commit to using it faithfully. This means jotting down the date and time of each interaction, as well as a summary highlighting the main points.

Entries can be as simple as 'Faxed back agreement to event agenda' or 'Conference services manager promised use of table stanchions at no charge'. If you make a promise to a client, be sure to note that in your log as well.

When you are initiating a phone meeting or conference call, use your log to list the questions you wish to ask or the information you need to convey. As the phone call progresses, you can check off the items as they're covered and make notes about the

responses you receive to your questions.

Insurance

Apart from the usual insurances needed. Keeping a log of interactions with directors and vendors helps you to stay organized - but it also serves as an insurance policy. When a client insists that you promised there would be purple ribbons adorning the registration table, you can refer to your communication log and sweetly point out that, on a certain date and time, she told you that she wanted the ribbons on the registration table to be blue.

Likewise, when you receive the bill from the hotel and see that you were charged £25 for the table stanchions, your communication log gives you the documentation that you need to dispute the charge.

A communication log is an event planner's best friend. Don't leave the office without it!

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