

THE VIP FACTOR

As an event planner, it's your job to make sure every guest feels special. The reality is, though, that some attendees are more special than others. Your client, of course, ranks at the top of the list, but you need to be aware of the other VIPs who are part of your function. Perhaps it's the guest of honour, the bride and groom, or the members of the organization's board of directors.

Identifying the VIPs and communicating this information to your staff will ensure that key people are treated well. Impressing VIPs will burnish your reputation and has the potential for repeat bookings with the client.

Here are some ideas for singling out VIPs for special treatment

If you're planning a conference, use name badges to your advantage. Print the VIP's title on their name badge, right under their name. Always make sure names are spelt correctly, this is very important. Use pre-printed ribbons that attach to name badges to designate titles, such as 'Chairman' or 'Speaker', or honours, such as 'Invited Guest' or 'Award Nominee'. You'd be surprised at how special a six-inch ribbon can make an attendee feel.

If you negotiated complimentary sleeping rooms as part of your hotel contract, allocate them wisely. Offer VIPs complimentary accommodations for one night, or offer to upgrade their room to a mini-suite.

Provide your VIPs with amenities. In a hotel, this can be as simple as turndown service and a newspaper or as elaborate as a wine and cheese tray. Ask the hotel to include a handwritten note from you with the amenity.

When appropriate, seat VIPs together at some meal functions. Put their table on a riser or simply put a 'Reserved' sign on the table. Or, to avoid the perception of elitism, ask each VIP to 'host' a table at one meal function.

Find a way to introduce the VIPs in a public setting. Public acknowledgement is key to making these guests feel special.

Provide your staff and your contact at the venue with a list of VIP names and (if available) photos. Armed with this information, they can easily identify special guests and single them out for special courtesies.

By according the special guests at your event the attention they deserve, you will ensure that they view you and your work in a favourable light. And that's a **V**ery **I**mportant **P**erception!