



One last scene that needs playing:

It's the one that so many planners skip as they rush into critiquing the just-concluded event or launching the next one. When the last badge holder is packed and the chairs stacked, stand in the empty ballroom and take a breath. Relive and memorize the great moments that were created at your hand. Now take a bow!



These tips should be used for informational purposes and should not be considered legal advice.

► **Juliet Funt** is a professional speaker, the daughter of "Candid Camera" creator Allen Funt, and the owner of Talking on Purpose Inc. Her comedic presentations on the problem of having "too much to do with too little time" may just be the most fun thing about your next meeting. Contact her at juliet@julietfunt.com.

► **The National Speakers Association (NSA)** is the leading educational organization for professional speakers. NSA's 3,500 members include experts in a variety of industries and disciplines, who reach audiences as trainers, educators, humorists, motivators, consultants, authors, and more. As a service to meeting professionals, NSA provides resources and information on finding and working with speakers. Visit NSA's Web site at www.nsaspeaker.org.

All the Meeting's a Stage

Not all speakers describe themselves as performers. But regardless of their individual content-to-entertainment ratio, all good speakers perform. It's up to you to set the stage for them to provide powerful experiences for your attendees.

From the time of the ancient Greeks, theatrical producers have studied and perfected the conditions under which artists and spectators come together for an ideal experience. Here's how meeting planners can take a page from their lesson book:

► **Face, not feet** — Pay close attention the next time you go to a play, and you'll see how lighting facilitates the performers' emotional link with their audience. **For you:** Make sure that anywhere your speakers could possibly go, they are well lit. And since lighting instruments and their beams are

angled toward the stage, remember when checking your setup that you cannot find light with your feet (by stepping into the pool of light), but rather must find it with your face (by walking around onstage until it feels like the sun is shining on you).

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► **Don't skip the rustics** — In every Shakespearean drama, comic characters called "rustics" make an appearance to lighten the mood before the plot returns to war, infidelity, and death. **For you:** Refrain from planning a program filled with nothing but serious industry content. When attendees are given levity and distraction as part of a meeting day, it refreshes their learning-weary brains, and allows them to absorb more deeply all that follows.

► **Unwrap the lozenges** — Prior to curtain time on Broadway, you'll hear, "Ladies and gentlemen, please turn off your cell phones and unwrap any candies you may need before we begin." This request seems silly until you've been onstage during the emotional second act of "Who's Afraid of Vir-

ginia Woolf?" while 72 people unwrap their Riccolas. **For you:** Silent anticipation before a presentation is a great gift to all. Make sure everyone is finished eating, coffee is poured, servers are off the floor, and attendee chairs are turned around and settled before the introductions begin. It's in the critical first two minutes of their keynote that speakers must connect with the audience.

► **Bring them together** — Theater designers know that gaps in the audience suck out energy and focus. **For you:** Don't use a middle aisle. Put a large block of seats right in front of the speaker with two side aisles and the sides chevroned in. Fill in dance floors, band areas, or other gaps that separate your speaker from the audience — otherwise, it's like trying to kiss across a canyon. Lastly, tape off the back one-third of your room and let the front two-thirds fill up first. By encouraging your attendees to get cozy, you prime the pump for speaker success.

► **Green room vs. mixed greens** — Many speakers will not admit it, but most prefer not to be dining before they speak. While always delighted to spend time with you, a good presenter knows the final moments before a speech are a precious phase in a home-run presentation. **For you:** Provide a backstage green-room area for presenters. Pros will use this opportunity to do vocal/physical warm-ups, meditate, visualize, or, most importantly, practice the material they prepared just for you. And you'll prize the jump in evaluation scores more than the pre-speech conversation over the arugula. ■

► **ON THE WEB:** Sign up for Juliet Funt's *Sweet Talk* e-newsletter, where she "takes a break from slaving over a hot microphone to give you a few laughs and a few tools to lighten your load": www.julietfunt.com.



If the planner who last booked your speakers provided them with detailed feedback, it likely improved their session at your meeting. Don't just say, "Everybody loved it!" This doesn't advance a speaker on the road to excellence. Share specific moments where the program worked or didn't. In a similar vein, give your attendees two silent minutes to complete evaluations thoughtfully without distractions.



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All the Meeting's a Stage, Act Two

Welcome back from intermission. Here are more lessons from the theater that will make your general session a hit.

"Teasers" and "tormentors" are narrow black curtains or flats on either side of a stage, so named because they hide myriad backstage secrets. Let's sneak behind them and continue our learning.

► **It's not bowling** — The theater balcony serves an important purpose. By stacking audience sections instead of putting them behind one another on the same level, the distance to the furthest spectator is reduced by half, allowing prime viewing for everyone. **For you:** Unless your budget includes building a balcony or you possess powers of large-group levitation, never place a stage at the end of a long

art apprentice for years to learn subtle skills that turn productions like "Wicked" and "Spamalot" into visual treats. **For you:** Guard against distracting scenic elements. Never set the bottom of your center IMAG screen (live video image) lower than seven feet, or you'll be condemned to watching a speaker whose projected feet or torso is perpetually floating overhead. Also, a few ferns are lovely, but stop before it looks like a chimp may swing by on a vine.

► **Cast well** — If it hadn't been Zero Mostel, it wouldn't have been "Fiddler on the Roof." Broadway directors line up actors around the block for

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room. Set up a platform on the side midway or switch from rounds to theatre-style to move things forward. The cheap seats will thank you.

► **The bull's-eye agenda** — Most professional speakers have a modular program they can expand or cut based on time. But they also often have a favorite length — a certain number of minutes that is their sweet spot, where all core content is included but delivery is relaxed. **For you:** After scraping and saving for the keynoter of your dreams, don't limit your success with an arbitrary session length based on other factors. Reverse your planning. Ask speakers what time frame loads the bases for them, and tweak other elements to allow a grand slam.

► **IMAGravation** — Scenography is the art of creating performance environment; it can include sound, light, clothing, structure, and space. Students of this

auditions because they know the right fit is everything. **For you:** Realize that the person introducing your speaker sets the tone for the first pivotal moments of impact. Don't choose introducers by organizational hierarchy or turn-taking. Ask yourself: Who is the most articulate and charismatic person in this room? Who could put a smile on the CFO's face at tax time? Find them and have them fire off your speaker's first moments with flair.

In times like these, content is the star. Meeting planners must validate conferences by delivering takeaways from every moment. But performance takes content off the page and injects it into memory. The emotional ride your audience members take together opens the learning mind and inspires the spirit to take action. Your role is to set the scene for this magic to occur. ■

ON THE WEB: Watch classic "Candid Camera" clips on Juliet's Web site — under Why Book Juliet — at www.julietfunt.com. Read the first part of "All the Meeting's a Stage" in the July 2009 issue of *Convene*: www.pcma.org/Convene/Issue_Archives/July_2009.htm.