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## May the Force Be With You

*Why in-person meetings are such a powerful means to connect, inspire and learn*

By Andrea Driessen, President, No More Boring Meetings, a Division of Amplify, Inc.

In this era of webinars, video conferencing and podcasting, the need for authentic, human-to-human connection in a *live* meeting has never been greater.

Marty Fisher, former Vice President, Store HR & Training at Abercrombie & Fitch, posed what he called “The Big Question” in a “Power of Audience Engagement” session he presented to Meeting Professionals International in Spokane, WA last March:

**“What will make your next event worth attending—vs. sending the information presented in an email?”**

And, by extension let’s ask:

**“What added *value* does the presence, energy and content of a well-chosen *speaker* provide when she presents *in person* rather than *virtually*?”**

I believe a key part of the answer is demonstrated with the concept of a *force field*.

You may associate “force field” with science fiction, the “Star Wars” Trilogy, or a high school physics class. Yet it can also apply to the power inherent in live meetings.

Highly effective, charismatic, eloquent speakers are effective in great part because **we humans are naturally drawn in by their “force fields”**—that invisible yet *palpable* energy that thought leaders often exude. That energy can draw us into formal and informal meetings—at work, at home, in churches and nearly anywhere people connect.

And within someone’s force field...we find a range of possibilities.

We find the chance to be more deeply *inspired*, touched and informed. We are exposed to someone else’s **authentic character**....we allow it to shape our own knowledge, excitement, and energy....and apply it, with perhaps a deeper motivation, to our own situation. We learn that we’re not at all alone in overcoming a particular challenge or meeting a certain goal.

After all, if admirable experts were *without* force fields...who would flock to experience an in-person Oprah visit? The show’s TV reruns would do just fine. And why on earth would we pay to hear musicians perform live—and want to sit as *close to the stage* as possible? Replaying old CDs would work just as well.

With that in mind, let’s come back to Marty’s great question:

**So, what are you going to do at your next meeting that can’t be done virtually? How will you, as a meeting planner, create a memorable experience that your audiences could never have experienced virtually?**

Let’s look at **specific ways that you can maximize the force fields—and thus the energy—of your meetings**—between participants and guest speakers, among executives and employees, amidst team members. These ideas boost inspiration, knowledge and connection to a level that could never be achieved in an email or experience via a webcam:

1. Boost your “force field factor” considerably by scheduling a **breakout session** with the “larger-than-life” keynoter. Attendees will have a more personalized, smaller-group experience, and more powerful force-field exposure. Furthermore, most speakers offer a substantial discount for adding a breakout if it’s scheduled on the same (half) day as the plenary session; some will even *include* a breakout in the keynote fee.
2. Immediately following the keynote, and before participants disperse, pair attendees and have them discuss how they’ll personally integrate the speaker’s recommendations—and encourage them to become **“accountability buddies”** who will check in with each other to monitor progress long after the conference ends. You’ll have a whole room full of force fields at work!
3. After a speaker’s program, have an “up-close-and-personal” **book or poster signing**. This gives attendees the chance to come face to face with the speaker, talk one on one...and, of course, truly experience one another’s force fields.

4. **Take your book signing to another level:** hold a pre-event contest through which attendees vie for chances to win an **exclusive and intimate reception with the speaker/author**. This creates an exceptionally memorable experience for participants, and builds more event buzz as people get motivated to enjoy a unique event designed just for them.
5. Give attendees the chance to have their **photos** taken onsite with a celebrity keynoter at your event [making sure to confirm the speaker's permission in advance, at the time of contracting]. Participants will always remember their time in his or her presence, and the photo will serve as a **tangible memory** of a rather intangible day.
6. Integrate a **talk show** into the typical (and usually plodding and predictable) keynote+breakout+lunch+breakout meeting format. You'll succeed at mixing up the agenda in a more engaging, memorable way....AND can **invite your force field-producing speaker(s) on stage with employees, managers and executives for an intimate, authentic and on-message set of conversational interviews**.
7. Always be sure you choose a room for your event that is as small as possible...without being too small for the audience. That way, you create a **sense of deeper intimacy and connection** between the audience and those on stage—*voilà*: easy-to-implement force-field builder.

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