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## Why Uncomfortable Meeting Attendees are Smarter

By Andrea Driessen, Chief Boredom Buster, [No More Boring Meetings](http://www.NoMoreBoringMeetings.com)

On a recent adventure in China, I spent at least half the time being uncomfortable. Hot, sweaty, crushed by crowds, lost, confused. After a few days of being cranky, I realized that in exchange for this discomfort, I had the **rare chance to experience forever-memorable moments that would have been impossible without first being uncomfortable:**

Trekking the Great Wall, viewing Mao Zedong's embalmed body, eating some of the world's most delicious dumplings, communicating in a very foreign language, standing amidst some of the most gorgeous scenery on earth.

But I'm not here to talk about what I did on my summer vacation.

Via discomfoting travel, I also saw a **strong correlation between discomfort and meeting success**....and how building in some discomfort into meetings helps attendees experience lasting—and positive—memories and deeper learning.

It can mean the difference between significant behavior change and complacency-maintaining status quo for your audiences.

### How to purposefully add Discomfort to your Meeting Agenda....

It's natural to view *high levels of comfort* as central to a successful meeting. Of course, want to provide a comfy venue, lighting—and enlightenment.

Yet when attendees are UN-comfortable in particular ways...exposed to the unknown....they actually pay more attention—if anything, to **regain some lost**

**comfort. And, they become more open to changing their circumstances and learning something new.**

A few examples of intentionally building discomfort into your meeting—even at the executive level.

## **ENHANCE CUSTOMER EMPATHY**

Let's say you need to help employees gain more empathy for your customers as they learn to serve more effectively. In a meeting setting, put employees directly in the customers' shoes by **giving them the literal experience of how it feels to be a vulnerable new customer:**

- Have everyone stand for the average length of time your customers spend on hold (our bodies hold the clearest, most visceral memories)
- Withhold the standard agenda, so they have no initial road map of what to expect, at least in the early hours of the meeting. (New customers don't have any initial anchors either.)
- Write signage in another language. (Company jargon can feel that way to the un-initiated.)
- Serve dessert as the first course (On the premise that the best events surprise, confuse, even frustrate—and **open up the learning channel**).

With just a few adjustments in transforming your meeting format, attendees will physically, mentally and emotionally sense the same type of vulnerable experience that your customers do when they first consider your product or service.

## **CREATE A TWITTER FALL**

This new concept in meeting formats is designed to showcase real-time input, reactions, and conversations from attendees' Tweets. The "unplugged"/unedited nature does bring with it some level of risk—that's where you get the discomfort. Yet again, in **exchange for this discomfort, you gain fresh insights, feedback and "field intelligence"** at a depth that only social networking can achieve.

**In exchange for controlling all the content of your meeting, you gain richer content, longer lasting learning and more buy in to your organization's most important initiatives.**

Ask your venue AV staff how to project a TwitterFeed (AKA "TwitterFall") from cell phones to big screens. Many planners find the **TwitterFall screen one of the most popular, buzz-producing aspects of their meetings.**

## **FORM UNLIKELY COUPLINGS**

**You really want to shake things up—and start problem-solving conversations that extend long beyond the life of your event?**

Imagine the fascinating, unusual and perhaps sometimes-heated discussions that'll take place with the following participants in one room:

- Gather a cross-functional mix of employees from each department (executive team, marketing, finance, sales etc). Give them (or have them generate) a list the top 5 problems that, if solved, would propel your organization to new heights.

Then assign a variety of department reps to each table, and give each table one of the 5 problems to solve. Punch up the conversation further by asking: what within our processes gets in the way of exceeding these goals? After 45-75 minutes, have each table report back to the full audience.

- As we approach another Olympic year, invite an Olympian to your event....and apply her experience with achieving top performance to your biggest business challenges.

Such groupings—which may first feel uncomfortable and even silly—can lead to exceptional, ground-breaking learning. And allowing the audience--not just 'the sage on the stage'--generate content fosters more growth and positive change.

So...how will you grow more comfortable with discomfort--and **give meeting attendees the chance to experience higher levels of growth?** In these unusual times, it's time for business as unusual—and for getting more comfortable with discomfort—in meetings and in life.



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