

EVENTS | STU KATZEN



WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

It's how you handle problems that will crop up that matters, says Stu Katzen.

It was a large event, 4000 people. I had spent months selling it in and it was my first event with that PCO. The largest event I had been a part of at that stage. I was the eager young entertainment director.

There were no two way radios on the job and analogue phones had no signal in the venue.

The production manager missed the final rehearsal and talk through; he was too busy and when I briefed him afterwards, I could tell he wasn't really listening.

He also missed the 10 minute shift in program, despite his nods of assent. The jazz band would finish, the MC would drive a car through the drape that would drop down around him and the headline act and his band would be on main stage and kick in...what a show! Now 10 minutes earlier than scheduled.

Unfortunately the production manager was responsible for getting the band on stage. Unfortunately he wasn't listening to me. Unfortunately... he didn't set the band.

The show ended, the MC drove through the drape, and 4000 guests watched a silent main stage with lights moving, no band, no sound and no wow!

I still cringe when I think about it. I did try to contact the production manager. I did try to find him. All to no avail. I did find a very angry client and she did tell me how disappointed she was. All perfectly understandable... and I still cringe.

THE OTHER THING I LEARNED THAT DAY IS NEVER UNDERESTIMATE ANYONE ON YOUR TEAM. YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN OR WHAT THEY KNOW.

they are an easy fix. A mentor of mine once told me the mark of a great event manager/producer was not so much that things go wrong, but how you manage or handle them. That comes with experience.

About two years ago I was producing a large outdoor event for about 2000 guests. It was literally 20 minutes before guest arrival, rehearsals were happening, and the main generator kept cutting out.

No-one knew what to do. My technical director, a whiz at everything was stumped. The generator company had no idea. We rechecked all connections; everything was as it was supposed to be and yet the generator still kept cutting out. Guests were now starting to arrive, my client was asking why there was no music and things were starting to look grim.

It was at that moment that one of the audio techs mentioned that there was a small screw that when turned 90 degrees clockwise acted as a safety cut out switch for generators used in the mines and we might want to check that.

But our generator hadn't been in the mines... surely!?

We all looked at each other for a comic moment and then all dived on the generator. We found the screw, turned it 90 degrees and lo and behold - the generator didn't falter again that day.

The other thing I learned that day is never underestimate anyone on your team. You have no idea where they have been or what they know.

Never run, never panic and use your team to help you. That is what they are there for.

I used to watch an event manager start screaming at everyone onsite when things went wrong. I watched another event manager in panic literally pull the primary three phase plug out of the socket mid-show to stop the show on stage. Neither helped. Both caused chaos.

What I am trying to say is that, shit happens!

It's your job to fix it fast and without a fuss so you and your client's event can move on. So when it goes wrong, stop, think and use your skills and your team to make it right.

Coz that's what we do! **m**

There is no-one in the event industry who doesn't have a similar version of that story. Something that just went horribly wrong. No matter what you did to try to circumvent it.

In fact there are lots of things that go wrong or differently on a job and most of the time