



# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Stu Katzen says that on reflection the skill he most uses as a creative event producer is communication.

**P**re-event, during and even post-event, I spend most of my time communicating with my clients, my suppliers, or both simultaneously. If you can't communicate effectively then you might as well get out now. Events are ALL teamwork. Everything we do is based on a team effort and that team operates best with effective and clear communication between all parties. Making sure everyone knows what they are doing and why. There are always going to be hiccups; it's communication and experience that will get you sorted out.

We had 20 large chandeliers to hang at the MCA, each one at a different height. I was grabbing a coffee for the crew when I got a call to come back "now"!

I came back to find one of the riggers in a scissor lift, holding a chandelier and screaming. On the ground, under the chandelier, was my stylist for that event, also screaming. They were both screaming. At each other and neither were listening. Just screaming!

Did I mention there was screaming?

Like a car crash, everyone was standing around watching. Rigger and stylist realised I was now on-site and stopped screaming at each other, only to start screaming at me about why they were screaming at each other.

Of course the issue was solved and the chandeliers hung. What had happened was that each insisted that their needs were more important and the other's did not matter. Neither were communicating effectively.

## Effective communication is critical!

I often hear the words, "nah don't tell the client..."

I disagree! Always tell the client. Also tell them what you have done to fix the issue or what you can do to circumvent it. Effective communication is an amazing thing. The more you communicate, the less you have to communicate.

I tell my clients what is happening at each stage and as such they generally trust me and allow me to do my job without interference. When I call my suppliers to brief them for an event, that communication is critical. The better I communicate with them the more accurate the quote is and the less likely I have to re quote or get caught out.

I always insist on a face-to-face brief with a client. There is so much that happens without words that affects what I need to know and how I build or pitch an event to make it work for the client. There is no way I am leaving that to text, email or even a phone call.

So often I have told my staff to not just email suppliers, but actually pick up the phone and talk to them; or even better, go and meet with them. Then you can email all you want. I know it's easier to email, but after meeting that supplier, they are always going to see your face when they email or speak to you and are far more likely to help you out when needed.

Many years ago I was contracted to manage the entertainment on a massive job. There were about 30 performers due that day and with 20 minutes to doors, one of my key meet and greet performers had not arrived. I was frantically calling the performer to try and find out where they were. All to no avail and I was getting more panicked by the second.

Eventually I had to go to the event manager and explain why the performer was not on-site. He looked at me and asked in a calm voice if I had tried to contact the performer. I replied I had, multiple times.

"Then," he replied, "there is nothing more you or I can do until the performer arrives."

He was right. I had done everything I could and the show would go ahead with or without the performer. He hadn't yelled at me for not doing my job. He hadn't berated me for something that was out of my control. All he had said was do your best and fix it when you can. He could have communicated differently with a very different outcome. He chose not to.

When the performer arrived five minutes later in a panic, I calmly told them to get changed and get on the floor and we would talk later. The performer did. I informed the event manager and everything was fine.

I always remember the way he communicated with me on that day and have tried to emulate that ever since (not always with success). He taught me a lot in one small incident. That was 17 years ago and I am having lunch with him next week. **m**