



YOUR FULL SERVICE EVENT SPECIALISTS

Entertaining with Style

Party planning tips by Dana Coates, Event Producer

Be Organized Article 1

So you say you want to host a party! Whether you are working with a professional party planner or you decide to go it alone, organization is key to a successful outcome. Remember Party Planner is just what the title implies, you must have a plan. If organization is not your strong suit, enlist a friend to help or hire a professional

Binder Rule...

On day one of your planning stage, purchase a binder. You may now begin the first phase of organization.....write everything down!

Dear Diary...

Maintain a journal of conversations and a calendar documentation of promised dates. Accumulate décor ideas, menu plans and make notes on any thoughts that pop up. On the front page of your journal record names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of everyone with whom you are working. Try and obtain cell phone numbers in case of event day emergencies. Keep this party related info with you at all times. Depending on the significance of this event, this notebook will become your lifeline to a successful event.

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Be Organized – Article 1, continued...

Check and Double Check...

As your party date grows closer, create a time line (critical path) leading up to the big day. Make check lists and task schedules. Faithfully follow up on progress and make sure things are on track. Plan and coordinate every detail, thoroughly and completely, but expect that some of your plans may not cultivate as planned—accept this. If you do your best to plan, mishaps will be minimal.

D-Day...

One of the most overlooked details of party planning is the “event day” schedule. If you coordinate a time line for load-in items (tables, chairs, linens, floral, décor, etc.) it will prevent everyone from tripping over one another. Don’t just have friends or volunteers show up and have no specific jobs for them. It will prove to be a hindrance rather than a help.

Follow the Leader...

Assign a “point” person for these people to report to and have specific jobs lined up. If they will be setting tables, make a prototype table for them to mimic. If they will be decorating, show them exactly what you want them to do. This will make set up day flow smoothly and conserve precious time.

Kindness Counts...

If you have volunteers or friends helping, allow them to have ample time to go home, relax and get themselves ready for the big bash.

Applause! Applause!...

Your guests will be delighted and amazed by your skills and your hard work will have paid off. Now relax and enjoy your event!

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Themes & Concepts Article 2

Fantasyland

Themes can give a party purpose, not to mention giving you a "concept" to work around. It makes the development process of the event easier and definitely more fun. For instance, if you choose a country western theme, it obviously opens up many avenues of decor. It might even be woven into your food choices and music. Guests love a party with a theme that requires them to dress in a certain way, however, it must allow for broad interpretation for each guest to apply his or her own style. Don't be too specific in your requests.

Roses are Red, Violets are Blue

Maybe your theme/concept will just be a particular color. It could be hats or another accessory. Use your imagination - it's your party. Give your guests a fun idea to work with and they will come up with a flair all their own.

Blow Some Fuses

Don't be afraid to push your guests out of the comfort zone. You may be surprised to find denim lovers enjoy an Oscar night of Hollywood glitz. Or maybe they would love to relive their youth in garb of the 60's.

Themes add an energy to your party that gets your guests involved before they even arrive!

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The Invitations Article 3

Lucy, You Have Some 'splaining' To Do

The importance of the invitation should not be overlooked. It is your opportunity to spark interest and heighten your guest's sense of anticipation. Create a little "advance buzz". But that's not all.

Nitty, Gritty Details

Obviously, you need to inform them of the date, time and location, but they will also expect to be advised of attire. Guests will appreciate a little information about what kind of a party to expect. This can always be conveyed in a fun, clever way. You may also want to include any special parking instructions, directions or time limitations that you are required to abide by. Remember, it will be your guest's first impression that this is one party they do not want to miss.

Advance Preview

Invitations do not have to be on stationery, neatly printed with matching envelopes. Have fun with your invitations. In planning a beach party you might want to mail a deflated beach ball that when blown up reveals the details.

Spark Interest

Successful parties begin with the invitation. Give it some thought. Look around for ideas in unsuspecting places. From surprise parties to formal dinner parties, give them an invitation that is truly "inviting".

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Creative Room Design Article 4

Here, There and Everywhere...

You've heard it before, location, location, location. Very often location will determine or even dictate the atmosphere you want to create. Be it indoors or outdoors, don't work against the surroundings, work with them if at all possible. Whether it's poolside, in a garden, an ornate ballroom, a stark warehouse or even your own dining room, the possibilities are endless. Every event is as unique as the hostess throwing the event. Don't be afraid to 'color outside the lines'. Have fun and give your creative juices a workout.

Think Big...

If you find your space too large for the number of guests, your focus should be on large decor items. This could be anything from backdrops to props. For example, if the atmosphere you wish to create has a nautical flair, an actual boat could be part of your decor or a dingy filled with ice and cold drinks. You can visually "break up" a large space by creating a central focus point. You may want to place your bar, D-jay, buffet or even the dance floor in the middle of the room... remember, everyone wants to be near the "action".

Less is More...

In the opposite situation, you may be tight for space. In this case more emphasis should be placed on the small details. Don't overlook the small items... these are sometimes the ones guests remember the most. Guests love wearable decor and like to take items home from a party. Some options might be sunglasses, hats, boas, leis, etc. These simple items not only liven up the party but actually add to your room decor. You will be amazed by how excited guests will get over something purchased at the Dollar Store.

Start Your Engines, Please...

Creative, lively spaces can ignite a party and will be a crucial element in the formula for a successful event or soiree.

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Food for Thought

Article 5

Express Yourself

How important is the food at your party??? VERY!!! When deciding to host an event, your menu should be a culinary expression of your style and taste. Before selecting the menu, decide what the overall atmosphere of the gathering will be. Then let the food and presentation compliment the atmosphere. For example, if you are hosting a casual, tropical party a "grill station" might be in order. If the event is a breakfast, have an omelet station. Let the food and menu become part of the entertainment!

Dinner is Served

If your budget allows it, consider hiring a caterer. It will take the pressure off you and many times it will prove to be just as economical. When choosing a caterer, reputation and "word of mouth" are very important. Keep in mind a professional caterer will also do the clean up work. Some caterers also offer food drop off service. All of these options will ensure that you have a good time at the event you are hosting.

Timing is Everything

Whether you go it alone or use a professional caterer, timing is everything. Don't make your guests wait until they are famished or it gets very late at night to serve the food. No matter how good the food is your guests will lose interest in eating and all your hard work will go unnoticed.

Reputation at Stake

Finally, whether your event is a small cocktail party, an extravagant affair, buffet style or a sit down, if you follow these guidelines the result should be one that leaves a long lasting impression with your guests.

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The "WOW" Factor Article 6

It's your party

Do you remember the last time you went to a party where you didn't know any of the guests? Did you stand around, drink in hand, trying to make small talk with these strangers? Unless you're at a singles mingle, it can be a brutal experience.

As a hostess, you have the opportunity and responsibility to bring your guests together by giving them something to either do, watch or to talk about. A "WOW" factor will add excitement and will stimulate conversation amongst your guests.

Have you got "it"?

So what is a WOW factor and is it expensive? A WOW factor can simply be your decorating theme or concept. Stimulate your guests through surroundings. By setting a creative scene you can actually direct the mood of the party.

WOW...so cool!

Maybe it will be as simple as flashing wine glasses for each guest. When using this particular element and you look around the room, the landscape comes "alive". Guests will talk about the glasses and think you are the "coolest" for coming up with something so unique.

Kick it up a notch!

Having a cookout? Kick it up a notch and go Hawaiian, turn it into a luau. Greet your guests with a lei and tropical drinks with fancy stirrers or umbrellas. Add some straw skirting around your serving table and a big bowl of fresh tropical fruit on the table. Local stores are stocked with inexpensive décor that will make your party POP!

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The "WOW" factor, Article 6, continued...

I want a turn!

Another WOW factor idea is entertainment. Palm readers and magicians are fun for small get togethers. Everyone will get a kick out of talking about their "future" or their life lines. Casino games are also always a huge attraction.

Yummy

Food can definitely be a WOW factor. Get creative with your food presentation. Consider using a chocolate fountain with fresh fruit for dipping or carved watermelons full of fruit. Maybe you can talk a friend into painting his or her face and sticking it through a hole in the buffet table. As guests pass by the "head" can surprise them with funny conversation. Brand your martinis with a special name that relates to either you theme or the group gathering.

Dana Coates is the Event Producer and co-owner of Eventmakers International. With her team of professional caterers, tentmen and equipment/rental experts she has produced events from small to large in tents and various venues. She is a member of the International Special Events Society, served on the Décor Committee for the Grand Gala of Special Events and serves on many fund-raising gala committees in Martin County.

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