What keeps me awake at night: a facilitated mastermind group discussion from PCOA22

In the last few months, I've facilitated several workshops with event managers, or similar roles, around current challenges: conducted in the style of round table, mastermind group discussions.

You're no doubt familiar with the expression round table, originating from the myths of King Arthur where all who had a seat had equal voice and opinion. Mastermind groups have long been used for mastery: the underlying concept being a group of minds will create fresh perspective around the topic, idea or challenge at hand more sophisticated than a single mind alone.

It was fantastic to facilitate such a session for PCOA 22 on the theme 'what keeps me awake at night!'

I found it interesting that challenges raised here were different than previous workshops. So, after the summary of what's been keeping us awake at night, you'll also find links to other challenges you'll likely relate to.

Finding new talent

In a year associated with the great resignation, amidst talent shortages post pandemic, it's hardly surprising this was the first conversation raised. In some ways it's a little like Merlin, King Arthur styled, magic isn't it: to miraculously conjure great talent out of nowhere!

- Find new recruitment partners, outside of specialised recruitment channels who are also equipped to help. Think TAFE's, schools and education systems of all kinds. The logic also being if you can engage fresh talent (then look after them, which we'll get to soon) you may build a fresh team that sticks around. Given we've just had the world cup, you can relate this to a couple of teams performing strongly there. France or Morocco spring to mind as examples. Prior investment (years ago in their case!) in fresh talent, early in their careers, means you have a team to field play here and now with the potential to become super stars well into the future. Another idea was to create work placement styled roles. This allows an innovative, testing ground, for both parties.

- Consider recruiting from industries with existing talent pools where core skills can be extrapolated and easily applied. Other industries are having to do this due to nature of demand. Technology springs to mind! As we know, tech is a massively booming sector, with no indication of slowing down, so where exactly will those tech companies find the hundreds of thousands of roles projected for industry over the next few years? Not all tech roles require coding, many require the human skills of empathy, service and care, so non-typical industries, think nursing or health care, may yield such talent. It's the same logic here when it comes to events and hospitality. Think about the core skills required then brain storm other sectors where that talent already exists. In current economies skills are more extrapolatable than ever before. We can perhaps thank the pandemic for that too! The loss of talent and knowledge from some industries hardest hit (think travel, tourism or hospitality) was the gain of others. It's perhaps time to see that cycle reversed!

Retention of talent

Once you find great people, holding onto them is imperative! The over arching consideration emerging here could be bundled under the action item of creating fantastic employee experiences! A business that looks after its people increases the likelihood of keeping those people. And businesses, a little like dating, are going to be more attractive when they're charismatic, interesting and cool rather than being needy or clutching!

- Money is great. Money is important. Yet money doesn't always look like money. There are many other factors equally valued by team members. Think flexibility: which may include flexibility relating to remote work, hours of work, shared workloads or even role sharing. We all know the old adage too that time is money, so think about creative ways you can 'give time back' or the flexibility that allows your team to navigate other life priorities that surely includes family, parenting and health.

- Investment into your team. We all know mental health and personal well being had a bright spotlight shown on it these last couple of years. Investment developing your team will prove fruitful too when that investment is broadened. Invest in their professional and personal growth. An extra couple of 'k' in a pay pocket is often spent swiftly. The extra investment in bankable skills will keep returning dividends over the course of a lifetime. Most businesses are, by their very nature, pyramidical with limited promotional slots. Investment into skills and growth, regardless of title, therefore helps counter this. The best time for people to learn skills required for their next career evolution is prior to even stepping into the role. We'll say it again; investment into skills is bankable for returning dividends for life plus keeps people around longer.

- It's a good opportunity to refresh your approach to employee experiences, reward and recognition. We all know the year has been a bumper one. Events, live ones especially, have bounced back in full force. We've all had to get busy to cope with or accommodate the demand. It's perhaps wise, as some of your peers have learned, not to get so busy reacting to the nature of work that we forget to get innovative creating the best environment that makes people feel good and want to stick around to be of service and do the work. Look for ways to create fun, enrich your teams lives with experiences, invest in their continued growth or have a purpose so inspiring people will feel inclined to want to stick around. We can't keep people in a seat for life so easily, yet every month or year in retention makes a massive, measurable difference.

Productivity and efficiency

With increased workloads and pressures on reduced teams it's not surprising the topic of productivity was raised. For those in room, you may recall, this theme became an interesting and enlightening one. We had the chance to hear from peers in addition to clients we are trying to connect with and serve. Strategies for personal productivity may be at odds with the people we are trying to better serve. The idea of polarising views also showed up around the discussion in the use of technology!

- With live events bouncing back many of us are screaming to connect in person. We are, after all, human beings, not robots (not yet anyway!), so face to face meet ups beckon given they're particularly good in terms of building client relationships. So, yes, we would prefer to have those meetings in person where possible. Some of the people we are trying to connect with may want to catch up yet due to the nature of workloads it's not necessarily a brush off if they ask to do so via a zoom or teams meeting. Put aside any tech fatigue you may be experiencing when it comes to client meetings: maybe check in with them to see which they'd prefer.

- There were some great suggestions here about putting a little more thought towards priorities, meetings and meeting structures. Better planning may mean we can engage all core decision makers and stakeholders together rather than running separate meetings. Or we may be able to group meetings together (based on location or priority) to save time. Clarity of agenda and purpose means discussions can be kept on track. Confirmation of key points from all involved, ensures those all-important commitments, post discussion, remain a priority and are acted upon.

- Technology can certainly positively impact productivity and efficiency at both the individual and team level. Examples were shared where incorporating certain technologies (including automation and AI) tasks are handled far more effectively. The trick here is making sure you find the right technology, having the best tech stack, rather than turning to technology by default. Technology was simultaneously seen as distraction. Just because emails show up, usually whilst you're in mid task, it doesn't mean you have to stop what you're doing to respond. We could have lengthier discussion around the 'myth of multi-tasking' yet for the purpose of this summary think about it this way. Personal productivity is, often times, counter intuitive. In order to get more done, focus on less. Be where you are! Set appropriate times to check in with emails, what's app chats or socials. Don't drop what you're doing to react to beeps, buzzes or alarms. It kills your flow. Set better boundaries to use technology on terms that work for you and make sure you have the best tech (budgets and resources considered!) for the job at hand.

Several attendees later commented they found the session very useful. Firstly to see they were not alone facing challenges and secondly to gain fresh, actionable perspectives. I'm sure the format will be one the PCOA may well consider embracing for future events. There's something rewarding hearing from peers or offering fresh perspectives. The important thing to remember, if you do attend, is that facilitated workshops and brainstorms work a little like experiential sport: be ready to participate!

Mark Carter, sponsored by ICMI for PCOA22, is a director, author, international speaker, TEDx speaker and regular media contributor. He's a business partner and supporter of

industry. His 'son et lumière' signature style stage productions (which we had a taste of at PCOA22) are innovation for events. He regularly delivers keynotes and training programs on a variety of themes including: value, leadership, culture, sales, adaptability and human behaviour.

https://www.markcarter.com.au/keynote-speaker/
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