

## **TO WIN AN A+, DESIGN YOUR ON-SITE EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS FOR ADULT LEARNERS**

Without question, the attendees at your convention or annual meeting have come to network with their peers. But chances are what also draws their registrations is cutting-edge substantive content, unavailable anywhere else, offered during the conference educational sessions. How can you ensure that these sessions delight and stimulate participants? Make sure that they take into account the learning styles of adult learners.

Below is a quick list of the major characteristics of adult learners and what those characteristics suggest for the way you and your invited speakers structure the educational sessions of your program. If you want the educational sessions at your next meeting to offer enough "talk with" and "listen to" instead of too much "talk at," keep these few reminders about the learning styles of adult audiences in mind.

### ***Adult learners prefer an interactive environment.***

Adults have knowledge, skills and experiences they would like to share with others. They find it valuable to gain insight from others.

- While opportunities for give and take with the presenter may be sufficient in some situations, most sessions should include an opportunity for several participants to interact simultaneously, be it in pairs, trios, or small groups of as many as eight people. Today's meeting-goers are used to the control the Internet affords them. Few of them will be content to sit passively while being bombarded with an uninterrupted stream of conveyed wisdom.

### ***Adult learners have a bias toward the concrete.***

Information adults can take back and implement in their workplaces wins the prize. It may be fine to begin with abstract concepts, but specific examples had better follow soon after.

- Case studies where the presenter has an opportunity to explain in detail what happened in a particular situation are a popular format for sharing "how to" and lessons learned information with participants.

### ***Even adults have short attention spans.***

Adults can focus on any one point for approximately seven minutes; uninterrupted lectures bore most listeners after half an hour.

- No presenter should talk for more than 30 minutes at a time. As a rule of thumb, to keep the majority of participants engaged, no workshop or session should exceed one and a half to two hours, consisting of one third lecture, one third group work, and one third general discussion and questions and answers. If more time is required to cover the learning objectives, consider breaking down the topic into several one and one-half hour modules.

### ***Adults have favored learning modes.***

Some people learn primarily by hearing, some by doing, others by seeing or reading.

- To reach the greatest number of participants where they learn best, structure educational sessions to cater to all three modes. Although Powerpoint presentations have become almost obligatory—and are too often deadly boring—you might want to consider using other media such as film or video presentations as an additional tool for meeting your audience members' individual learning-style preferences.