

The 'Day-Of' Dilemma *It's up to you to show your value.*

"I think I can plan the event myself. I just want to hire you to be there the day of the event. You know, just to make sure everything goes smoothly."

If I had a dollar every time an event planner was told this by a potential client, I'd be sipping cocktails on a beach in the Caribbean. Forever. Because I'd be able to own the island.

The Planner Wanna-Be

For better or worse, this is reality, and complaining about it is like trying to hold back the tide. These are the facts:

1. There are lots of clients who are planner wanna-be's. That's good, because it means we have cool jobs that people want to emulate.
2. The wanna-be's know that their event is too important to do it completely on their own, and know they need some level of professional support (even if it's just day-of). So let's say there's this final 15 percent of the planning process where they perceive enough value in what we do that they're willing to pay for it. That's also good.
3. But the wanna-be's don't perceive enough value in the other 85 percent. And that's not good.
4. There will always be SOMEONE who'll take a few bucks to show up "day of" and try to be some kind of security blanket to the client. That's neither good nor bad; it just is.

(One way to look at these wanna-be's is not so much as full-paying clients who now want to just pay for day of, and instead think of them as an entirely new market sector who never would have hired anyone at all. The market for planner services has grown, and this kind of thing is an inevitable step.)

That said, the biggest challenge planners face in showing up the "day of" is that you're literally walking into a storm. It's like being given a stop sign, a whistle and a pair of white gloves and being asked to direct traffic at the roller derby.

Option 1: Educate the Client on the Value of Full-Service Planning

Odds are this is the crux of the problem. Look, if you got arrested, you'd never think of saying to your attorney, "I think I can handle my defense myself (I was on the debate team, you know), but I'd like to hire you to just sit next to me the day of the trial. To make sure things go smoothly."

Can an attorney provide SOME value showing up the day of the trial? Yeah, but given what's on the line, wouldn't you prefer he look at the case files in advance? Of course you would, because you're smart enough to know that you don't know law. So your job here is to educate the client on all that goes into the planning process to ensure a successful event.

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Here's a suggestion to help you out: Start keeping a journal and jot down all the things you do that a typical wanna-be doesn't realize you do. The list will grow quickly.

This is part of the value you bring to the table, along with your experience, creativity, vendor relationships, etc. Getting to the point where you realize the full value you offer, and being able to communicate that to a client and stand behind it, is the holy grail of running an event planning business.

Option 2: Re-Think "Day-Of" as "Planning Lite"

Clients came up with the whole day-of idea, but that doesn't mean we have to stick with it. What they really want is very limited planning; that last 15 percent, as some kind of insurance policy against an event disaster. So how about you re-frame your service offerings as "Planning Lite" and give the client eight hours the day of the event, plus let's say six hours in advance, broken down into one hour calls or meetings with the client every month for the six months prior to the event.

This accomplishes two things: 1. It prevents you from walking in totally blind, and 2. It gives you a chance to up-sell the client and convert them into full-service planning along the way. Each of these one hour planning discussions is an opportunity for you to show your stuff, and invariably the client will start to see all the important things you should be doing on their behalf, but can't, given the limitations of "Planning Lite."

If you do go this route, be up front with the client about the limits of what you can accomplish with 'Planning Lite,' and be sure to advise them you can't be responsible for the event's success, but you'll do your best to make things go as smoothly as you can.

One benefit to this kind of service is it really forces you to track your time. When I teach my class on Planner Pricing, regardless of the pricing model people choose, I tell them it's critical to know how many jobs you can do in a given year, which requires time tracking.

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