

Behind Great Events

A Practical Q&A for Assistants and Workplace Event Planners

A conversation with Flow Hancox and Jodie Mears

Whether you are organising a private client dinner, leadership off-site, team social or company celebration, event planning often lands on the desk of someone already juggling ten other priorities. So instead of another generic event guide, we wanted to ask the questions that assistants genuinely need answered by someone who works in events every day.

Let's start...

Thank you, Flow, for joining me in this Q&A. So many administrative and executive assistants are involved in event planning as part of their roles these days, and I wanted to tap into your expertise and decades of knowledge in this space with 10 questions from my community.

1. What information should we always have ready before approaching a venue?

Flow: A rough idea of the numbers and budget is really helpful, along with a date (even if it's just the month and day of the week). Venues can then give a good idea of availability and of the spaces that are appropriate for the event you are looking for. Knowing your why is also a great starting point. This helps with the look and feel of the venue you want.

2. What are the biggest mistakes people make when choosing a venue?

Flow: Not seeing the venue first and just booking based on the website's look and feel. Knowing your delegate journey (especially with larger numbers) will get your event off on a good footing. Especially if you have a number of rooms in use – understanding the venue's flow for yourself and directions from public transport can really make the difference. There are some stunning venues that can work for a one-room board meeting, but adding the use of many rooms can become a logistical nightmare. Know what you are booking!

3. What details do people usually forget until it is too late?

Flow: Is the venue looking after the finer details for you? Wayfinding signage, menus, name cards, room signs. Ensure there are clear pre-event comms about what you expect from the venue; this could be billing (especially worth having in final details if you have a dinner, drinks, etc) to avoid embarrassment, break times. Who is the on-the-day contact? Arrange to run through the morning of the event, especially with the function sheet the ops team have. Don't assume the comms have been clear from Sales to Ops for your event!

4. What separates an average event from one people genuinely remember?

Flow: Everything/everyone is where they should be when they should be! Making the venue aware of key touch points, VIPs or things that have been sticking points previously so they can be given either extra care.

5. What small hospitality details create the biggest impact?

Flow: Personal touches and understanding that each event is different and treating them as such. Arriving on site and the front of house knowing what events are happening on that day and where they are. Directional signage is up and visible from the start of the day, providing easy access to the booked rooms. Flexibility from the venue – do they serve soft drinks during breaks but not the CEO's favourite? Can we change that? I have an EA I book venues for, and always ensure she has a Diet Coke in the package as that is her soft drink of choice.

6. What are companies getting wrong about workplace events right now?

Flow: They are forgetting the event doesn't end when the guests walk out the door – this is where the work begins – especially with the likes of Sales Kickoff meetings and full-colleague engagement events. The purpose of these events is to provide information and a call to action. Leave staff with a clear purpose, actions, and the motivation and drive to put it all into action. Do you want to build sales? Motivate staff? Thank clients? Celebrate a big year? Work backwards from outcomes and then pull your agenda together for the message on the day.

7. How can assistants create events that work for both introverts and extroverts?

Flow: Think about the spaces they are working in and the day's agenda. A good mix of smaller groups and refreshment breaks that allow decompression, where guests can get some time away from the larger group or reconnect with colleagues they are more familiar with. Appreciate and recognise that there isn't a universal love of taking part, or of being expected to take part, in group activities. Activities within the agenda that allow all personality types to feel comfortable can be provided to reduce pressure and anxiety.

8. What is worth spending more money on because guests always notice it?

Flow: This is such a “how long is a piece of string” question. Go back to your Why. If the purpose of the event is to showcase a new vehicle, then pay a bit more for a venue that offers easy vehicle access and showcases them well. Are you from the tech industry? Pay more for your AV and production.

9. What helps an assistant stay calm when everything changes at the last minute?

Flow: A great line of communication with the venue and a DEEP breath. However, I would also say two heads are better than one – rely on the experts and lean on your agency if you work with one – they are an extension to your team and will have multitasking systems in place to support you. Don't be afraid to ask – that is what they are there for. Making your life easier.

10. What advice would you give assistants who have unexpectedly become “the event person” in their organisation?

Flow: Have a plan, work backwards from the event date and populate your plan with dates moving backwards – when does the venue need numbers for catering, when are bedroom allocations being released, do you have print deadlines, etc. This keeps you on track and gives you key milestones. There are event agencies that offer a pick-and-mix of services – use them for what you need. Venue finding, creative bespoke design of merchandise or branding, AV & Production. Agencies that can offer a one-stop shop cut down on comms – you can have one project manager and delegate as much as you want or your budget allows.

Thank you for all of this valuable information, Flow. Overall, what is your best piece of event planning advice?

Flow: Allow yourself to enjoy the event too - especially if it is large-scale. If bringing in support helps you to do this, it is worth considering. Having an extension of your team and a sounding board, especially when you think something isn't quite right, can bring peace of mind! Keep clear lines of communication open with your venue and suppliers. And remember your 'why'. Even if it is a small event, why are you running it? This will then dictate other elements. And don't be afraid to negotiate on rates, minimum numbers and contract T&Cs. I am part of the [Eventurous](#) team, a full-service event management agency working with clients to bring their events to life. From executive board meetings to family fun days, we provide in-house teams to support busy event organisers with venue finding, team building, conference enhancements, AV & production and a creative team that offers branding, bespoke creative design and marketing support.

I hope you have found this document useful - please share it with a colleague today and get in touch with Flow Hancox to explore your next event.

[Jodie Mears](#) & [Flow Hancox](#)