

Insights and Inspiration from the World Of NASCAR

When the unsung heroes shine

By Rhea Blanken

What operates amusement parks for kids and driving fantasy camps for adults, offers shopping and dining opportunities, is an association and is also the name for a sport? That's the National Association for Stock Car Racing or NASCAR. With an ever-increasing wildly enthusiastic international fan base and loyal sponsors investing millions to have their company's logo cover a race car's exterior (and interior) and, of course, the driver's racing attire NASCAR is flourishing.

Whether it's the Daytona 500 or the Brickyard 400, or any other race from the 36 NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series, it takes hundreds of people before and during the race to guarantee an enjoyable experience for all those viewing on television or onsite. From the Owner who secures sponsorships to the Team Manager overseeing all manner of equipment and personnel details, to the Crew Chief expected to supervise the best car built, to the tire and engine Specialists, plus the numerous Engineers and Mechanics; all are aligned to provide the best possible car for their driver.

Specifically, on race day, even more people are in the background dedicating their energies and expertise, so their driver is the one taking the final victory lap. From the larger team comes a special group commitment—that of the Pit Crew. Who they are and how they work together for that day's championship is what really makes a victory possible it's never just the driver or the car.

The Pit Crew, responsible for servicing the car during the race, is made up of a maximum of seven men. They watch and wait to come over the wall whenever their car comes onto pit road. Almost like a ballet without the music, the pit crew must come over the safety wall with four tires weighing 75 pounds each and two fuel cans weighing 90 pounds each to service their car in mere seconds. Fourteen seconds is considered really good time for a car to be refueled, have its four tires changed, have its grille cleaned and its windshield film covering torn-off to improve the driver's view. After a mere fourteen seconds, a car could fall a lap behind so it is obvious that the faster a car is safely in and out pit road, the better its chance to maintain its track advantage. Since it's easier to gain time in the pits than on the track seconds gained here could win a race.

The men who make up a Pit Crew are selected for their eye-hand coordination, agility, strength, calmness under pressure, their fast reaction time and ability to remain focused. These days, racing teams are looking to hire college graduates who played football. They are strong, know how to work on a team, and are used to performing complex choreographed actions and are intelligent. Most of these men are never known by name to the general racing public, nor do they get a victory lap around the track. However, when a driver does reach Victory Lane, the first thanks he gives are most often directed towards his pit crew, knowing full well his skills behind the wheel are only part of the day's winning strategy.

In comparing the critical contribution a pit crew makes to insure the driver arrives safely at the Victory Lane, we could relate the same attitudes and expertise of your organizations many unsung heroes in the creation and execution of your annual meeting.

Your team has varied responsibilities from the mail room staff in getting the materials onsite to facilitations management having the room set to specifications, to the registration staff securing a seamless experience of belonging and the AV staff making sure technology is a friend not a foe each and every day of the meeting, to the staff making sure the right handouts are in the correct breakout room

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in concert with the hotel staff having all the breaks beautifully set and ready to go on time. That is the race of an annual meeting. In many cases, it is the back-office support that makes the conference success possible. These results go way beyond revenue produced its increased member satisfaction and extended impact to fulfill your mission. It's the onsite staff that works long hours in the background and those back at headquarters contributing their part which is mostly unseen. Because when they do their jobs well, it is transparent. They are the unsung heroes of the meeting 's success.

Consider:

- Who makes up your organization 's Pit Crew? Where are you looking to secure more Pit Crew staff?
- What skills and abilities are you looking to add to their ranks?
- What appreciation and recognition does your organization provide after a well-run race?
- What positive feedback is available yearlong?

“To win a championship, you’ve got to do it throughout the whole year”.

—Jeff Gordon, champion race car driver