

Em saves the day—or rather the cake—when attending a personal not professional event. Every personal and professional event that you do or attend provides the opportunity to learn and develop your event planning design and operations skills and take your creativity to new levels.

## **JANUARY 15**

What a day. Attending my friend's wedding as a guest was almost as stressful as running an event. Part of the nature of the industry. Your mind never shuts off when an event is unfolding in front of you and it doesn't matter if it's your event or someone else's. There are just so many opportunities to learn what to do and what not to do, if you keep your eyes open.

I can remember when I was first starting out in the business and attending a supplier presentation at a new venue. That event was a true eye-opener of what to do and what not to do at that venue and little caring touches that would work at other events. I loved how they had people stationed in the parking lot across the street with double umbrellas to walk people from their car to the venue in case they were not prepared for the sudden thunderstorm.

And the sax player at the top of the stairs by the entranceway set the tone for the evening ahead. That was the good.

Stepping inside, the bad was very apparent. They had set up the buffet so that it was one-sided, not accessible from both sides. The waiting line was endless. They hadn't set up multiple food stations to draw people into the room and create a better room flow. Instead, they compounded the problem by stationing the buffet right by the coat check and the two lines were crossing and causing confusion and congestion. Those were great learning lessons and I had only just stepped 10 feet into the event.

And I will never forget the disastrous boat cruise I went on for another supplier event. When people arrived at the dock, the first thing they saw was garbage piled around. Then, when guests went to board, it was discovered that the gangplank was missing. Imagine the women in heels, including me, having to jump from the pier to the boat. And the learning lessons did not stop there. During the cruise, the boat's electricity went out and there was no backup generator. That disrupted the food preparation and service. When the boat finally returned to the dock, no one had done anything to resolve the problem of the missing gangplank and guests had to jump from the boat to the pier after spending time drinking, and not everyone was as surefooted exiting as they were arriving. I knew when I left that that was one boat cruise I would not be booking for my clients.

The wedding today, overall, went pretty smoothly. From an event planning perspective, the one area of concern was that the children attending were running totally out of control with no one overseeing them. They were making service for the wait staff very difficult and you could feel the staff's frustration mounting as no one stepped in to manage the kids.

Then event planning disaster struck. The children began playing tag around the server who was in the process of carrying the

wedding cake out to position it for photographs, and one of them collided into her. I watched the wedding cake tumble to the ground and land upside down. Luckily, the cake had been covered with a cloth to keep it from the guests' view until it was ready to be unveiled, and with careful maneuvering—keeping the cloth in place—the cake was able to be righted and brought back into the kitchen to assess the damage. The entire top of the wedding cake was damaged beyond repair. One guest set off to see if they could find a local bakery that would be still open but that was very unlikely as it was past closing time on a Saturday night.

I began to feel eyes focused on me to fix this problem—most knew what I did for a living—so that the couple could still take their wedding photos with the cake. Venturing into the kitchen I saw the chef, who was not a pastry chef, at a loss for what to do. To me, there was only one viable solution and I had one of the wait staff set off to bring me back one of the bridesmaid's bouquets to see if we could create magic with the help of some visual aids. And that we did.

The chef was able to create icing from ingredients on hand, a veritable miracle considering this was a catered event at a private venue so it wasn't a fully equipped kitchen, and together we were able to create a beautiful floral wedding cake topped with some of the flowers from the bouquet that—with the help of the icing—covered the damage that had been done. Up to this point the bride and the groom were unaware of what had taken place but when told and they saw the results they were delighted. From what we could see from the digital proofs, with proper ambiance lighting showcasing the cake, the pictures turned out fine. Neither the chef nor I are especially talented when it comes to flower arranging but together we pulled it off. Life as an event designer is never uneventful. Note to self: Remember to take a flower arranging course in the future.

## **Discussion Questions**

## **Training Your Event Design Eye**

- 1. How can movies, going to the theatre, etc. spark your creativity?
- 1.1. Watch a movie or television show of your choice with event planning eyes and see what ideas for themes, food and beverage, entertainment, activities, etc. come to mind and assess how they could be used to create something new for an event.

## **Sources of Creative Inspiration**

- 2. What professional avenues are open for event planners to increase their event design knowledge and operations skills?
- 2.1. Review an industry publication and an industry association site to see the range of opportunities to develop event planning on an ongoing basis. List them below.
- 2.2. Also, *list at least two personal passions and pursuits* that could be of value and reasons why (for example, golf, baking, fashion...etc.).