



FUTURE SKILLS

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Are You Ready for the Future?

The rate of change in the world of meetings and events is dizzying, and compounded by a stubborn pandemic that doesn't want to let us return to "normal" any time soon.

Even what this new version of normal will be is a matter of great debate and uncertainty.

To help you navigate this uncertainty and prepare for whatever version of the future manifests, the content teams at Meetings Today and MPI teamed up to produce this eHandbook exploring what skills meeting and event planners will need in the future.

We've tapped into current meeting professionals and some of the top hospitality school educators to bring you their predictions for the future, and what skills you'll need to be successful in it.

Enjoy this eHandbook, and make sure to check out all of the additional educational resources that MPI and Meetings Today produces, from webinars to additional eHandbooks, as well as the in-person and digital opportunities offered by MPI Academy, to help you succeed no matter what the future may bring.

The future is here. Are you ready?



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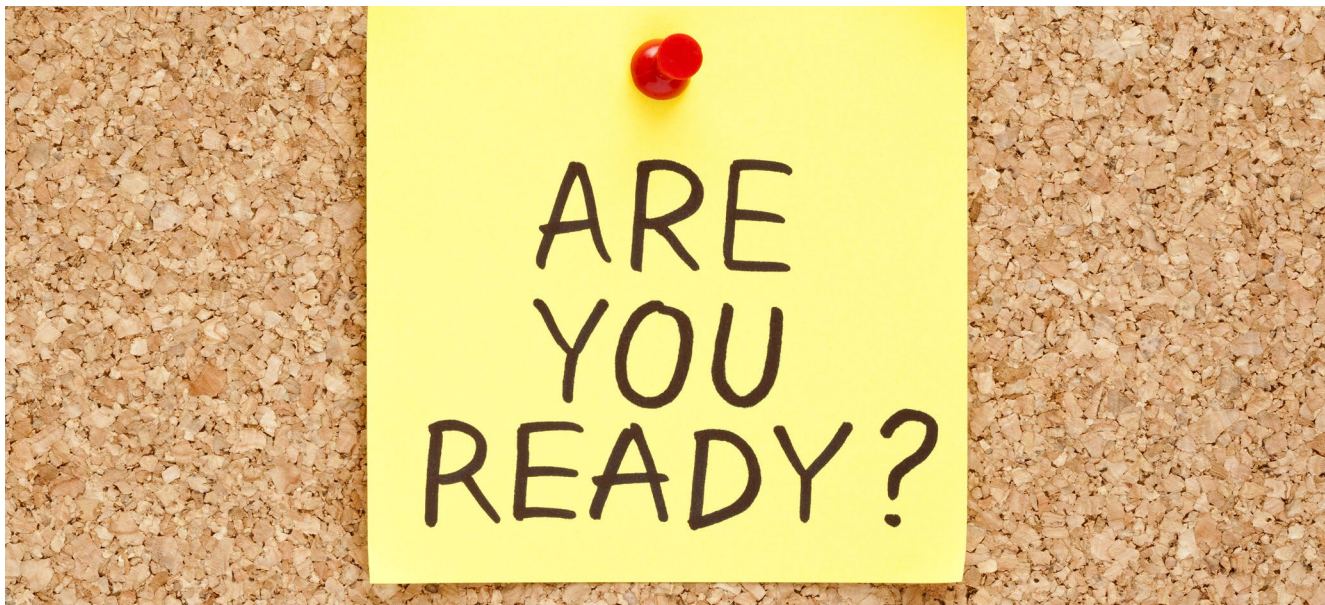
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How to Embrace the New Era of Meeting Professional Skill Sets

From seeking feedback from family and friends to staying calm under pressure to cultivating your network, here are the skills required for success going forward

By Blair Potter

According to Prudential's Pulse of the American Worker Survey, 43% of workers believe their long-term financial security will be in jeopardy if they fail to retrain or learn new skills. Nearly half (46%) of respondents said they will have to learn new skills within the next year to perform their job, and 74% of managers said their staff would be more productive with an expanded skill set.

A focus on new and evolving skills is increasingly obvious in the meetings and events industry, which has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Many meet-

ing professionals weren't prepared for a plethora of virtual or hybrid meetings when 2020 began, much less ready to ensure their contracts covered the outbreak of a contagious disease that could rise to the level of a global pandemic.

"We should be seeking feedback on a regular basis from our superiors, clients and even family to understand what we do well and where we can improve," says Deanna Nwosu, CMP, DES, a speaker, event emcee and moderator who also offers event strategy and consulting. "We can get great insight from those who are on the

outside looking in. And I think if we're curious about the industry



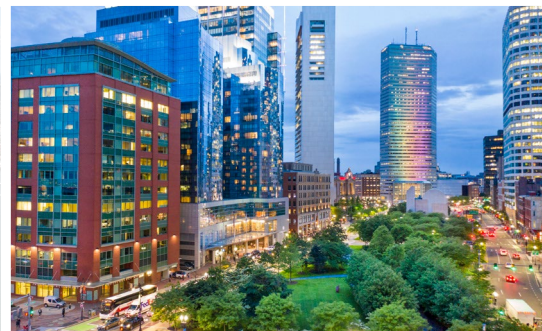
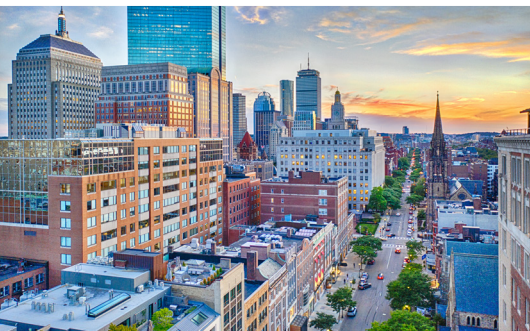
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or the world around us, new ideas pop up all the time. When those ideas come, find ways to implement them, even if you can't at your full-time job. You acquire new skills by doing."

Dawn Rasmussen, CMP, chief resume designer for Pathfinder Writing and Career Services, says that



DAWN RASMUSSEN

by reading voraciously, one can stay abreast of the meetings industry's changing skill set requirements.

"Learning what types of emerging technologies or trends could impact you is a good way to identify what types of skills you might need—if not now, then probably in the future," she says. "Another thing to do is monitor job postings. You might not actually be 'looking,' but it is good to see what employers are actually desiring. If skill sets you don't have are suddenly appearing in multiple job postings, it's a good indicator that it is time to go take a class."

Rasmussen says staying informed by attending MPI chapter

meetings and conferences, as well as the World Education Congress, is also critical for those being mindful of requisite meeting industry skills.

"MPI and its chapters are always working hard to deliver heavy-hitting content that covers a lot of these trends," she says.

A Virtual/Hybrid World

When it comes to skills and hybrid meetings, Rasmussen says we are "truly in a new era."

"There are so many skills that are needed," she says. "Crisis management (i.e., we have to cancel due to pandemic surge) is important, and technology skills are important for understanding what types of tools and platforms can help us conduct our meetings. Then there are even hygienic skills (pandemic cleaning protocols). Communications skills are also critical, especially when we are trying to communicate important details about onsite logistics or online operations."

Nwosu says the most important skill set for a virtual or hybrid environment is not technical in nature.

"Being calm under pressure is necessary, because it's not a matter of if anything will go wrong, but when," she says. "Harness some Zen before you log in and work on your stress responses, because you have to accept it's a high-stress situation—more so than in-person

conferences for an experienced event professional."

But, alas, technology is unavoidable. So, when you're choosing a platform for your virtual event, Nwosu says you must ensure that it's user-friendly, especially if you don't have the budget for production partners.

"Everyone wants a flashy, seamless event until they realize all the tools required to pull it off," she says.

"Even Zoom seems straightforward until you want to add customization. It's okay to opt out from knowing the intricacies or details of the technology, because you shouldn't expect to be an expert in everything."

Rasmussen says "analysis paralysis" is common when one is faced with too many options, so she advises asking your colleagues what works best when it comes to

"Everyone wants a flashy, seamless event until they realize all the tools required to pull it off."

— Dawn Rasmussen,
Pathfinder Writing
and Career Services

choosing event tech.

"Find out if they have recommended classes, experts or companies that can offer those solutions or training so you can get up to speed with the tools that would work best for your situation," she says. "There is no need to reinvent

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the wheel. Going into MPI online forums and asking questions of your peers is a great way to get real-time feedback on what works and what doesn't."

The Importance of Networking

So how important is maintaining a strong professional network?

Well, Rasmussen says networking is nothing short of your career lifeline.

"A Career Xroads survey found that if you are only applying for jobs online, you have a 2% chance of getting an interview; if you are networking, that number goes up to 50%" she says. "People hire who they know.

"The point is to start networking before you need a job. Referrals are the gold standard, and your goal is to become a referral for opportunities. Leverage your MPI membership into getting involved on committees or boards, or even just volunteering. These are great ways to kick-start your networking. LinkedIn is also vital. Think of connecting to someone on LinkedIn as the beginning of a conversation that can pay off years in the future—if you nurture that relationship correctly."

Nwosu says you aren't aware of how much your professional network is often working for you behind the scenes.

"The strength of your profes-

What skill or skills should meeting pros focus on to ensure success going forward as our industry recovers from the pandemic?

"One of the most important skills for a meeting prof to possess is the ability to plainly articulate the purpose of conducting a meeting (clear objectives), how and where that meeting will be most effective (live, virtual, hybrid) to achieve the objectives, and how success of the meeting will be measured.

At a time when many will look at the cost savings in conducting



a virtual event, if a face-to-face meeting will be more effective, the planner needs to be able to explain why the additional cost will be worth it. And the explanation must be more compelling than 'people really want to get together.'"

— Terri Breining, CMP, CMM, CED
Principal, Breining Group Inc.

"As the hospitality, travel and tourism industry recovers from the pandemic, flexibility and adaptability will be key skills needed for meeting professionals. The ability to be nimble, adapt quickly to changing scenarios and a positive, can-do attitude will be vital in a post-pandemic environment. Additionally, the willingness to cross job responsibilities will be vital as roles are blended across disciplines as organizations are considering future growth."

— Nicole Newman
Vice President,
SearchWide Global





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sional network is the difference between you being headhunted for jobs versus endlessly filling out job applications that lead nowhere,” she says. “As a solopreneur, my personal network has brought in more than 50% of my revenue—it’s the difference between being profitable or going out of business.”

Are you bad about networking? You’re not alone. Nwosu advises starting small.

“Reach out to someone you know for a virtual coffee chat and ask them to introduce you to one person in their network,” she says. “If you rinse and repeat, you’ll get more confident with meeting strangers and making connections, and before long you may get invited into larger groups via social media or industry organizations.”



Blair Potter
MPI

Blair Potter is managing editor for Meeting Professionals International (MPI), coordinating content for *The Meeting Professional* magazine, newsletters and blog. He has more than 20 years of experience covering the meeting, hospitality and travel industries.



“The pandemic united our industry like never before, leading to amazing innovations on several levels. It has put a spotlight on strategic partnerships, strengthened the value of collaboration and increased available market intelligence across the board. To ensure our industry remains successful and sustainable, we need to continue this mindset beyond the recovery stage and embrace the fact that we are stronger together.”

— *Mark Zanetti*

Destination marketing professional

MPI Canadian Advisory Council member

“Consider global competence and inclusion and their roles in designing events and experiences that are meaningful and matter for individuals across cultures, abilities and backgrounds.

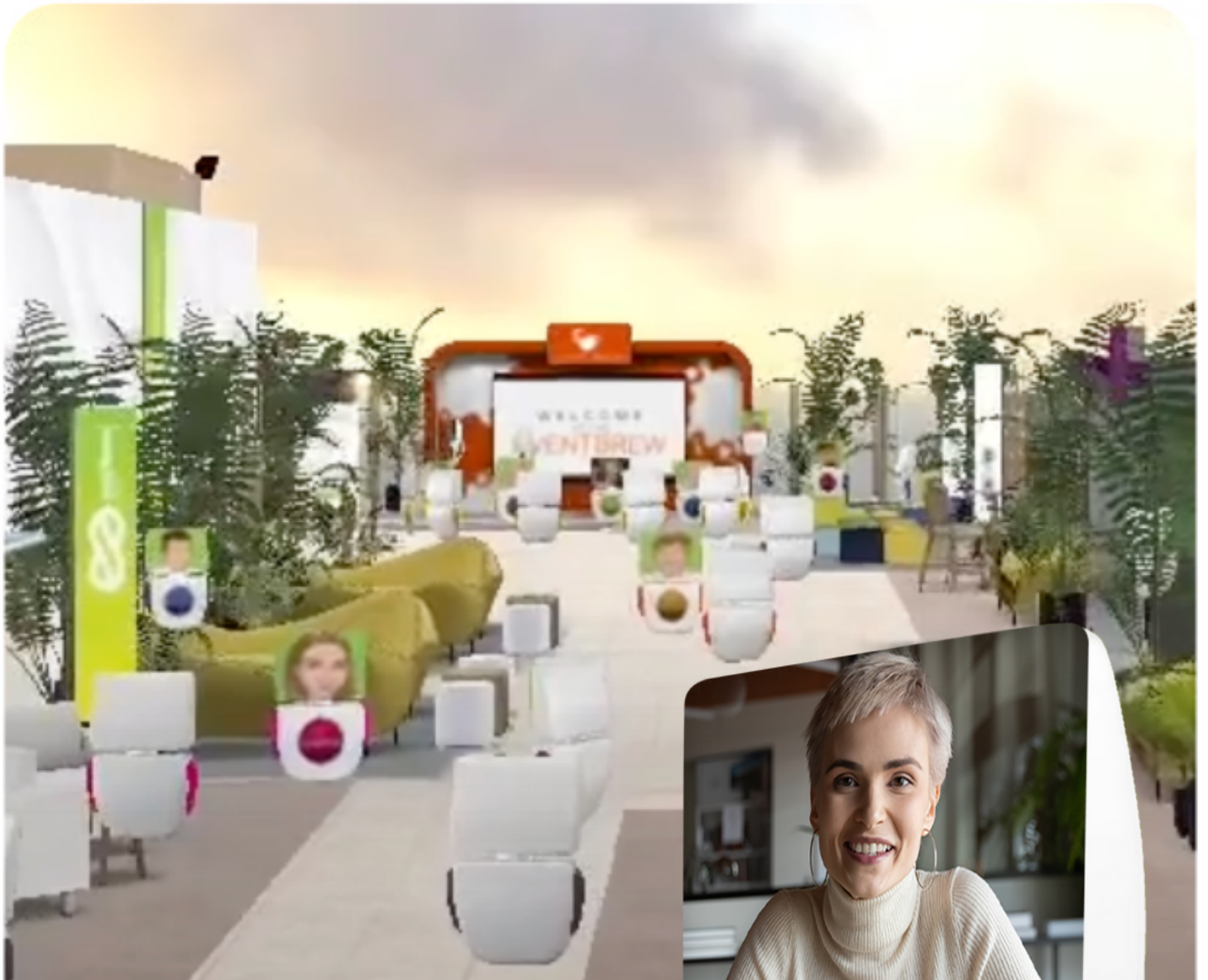
As meeting professionals lead their businesses in implementing experiences that solve organization-wide challenges, problem sensitivity and solving will enable critical conversations that rethink outcomes with a meetings-first mindset.

And then consider the skill of persuasion, enabling meeting professionals to convince key leaders to consider new outcomes and markets. All of these competencies are actual skills that can be studied, honed and practiced regularly. Consider starting with MPI’s Eventwise micro-certificate series.”

— *Jessie States, CMP, CMM*

Vice President, MPI Academy





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The Path to a Successful Tomorrow

While many meeting professionals feel there's ample, available education to help future-proof their careers, the situation isn't as straightforward as many hope

By Michael Pinchera

Preparing meetings and events industry professionals for the business landscape of tomorrow has been the No. 1 goal behind Meeting Professionals International's (MPI) quarterly Meetings Outlook report ever since its inception more than seven years ago.

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has, of course, shaken up the near-future business needs of people throughout our industry. For instance, in the fall 2021 Meetings Outlook report—published in the November issue of *The Meeting Professional*—37% of respondents said they were finding it difficult to fill job vacancies with suitably

skilled staff. That's up slightly from the previous quarter, in which 29% said the same. (Respondents indicating uncertainty about whether or not their organization is having hiring difficulty remained consistent, at around 21% for each of those quarters.)

Keep in mind, the staffing equation is more complicated than just workers needing new skills to adapt to COVID-19 safety protocols or to become better acquainted with virtual and hybrid planning and execution. However, as the adage goes, it's best to only worry about that which you can control or affect change. In this instance,

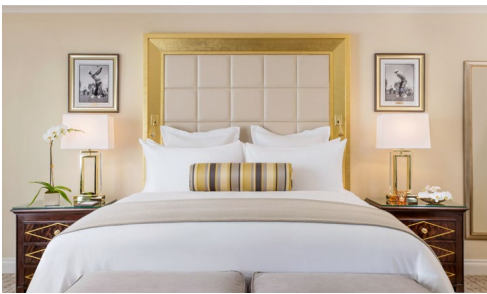
new and updated professional development for meeting pros is something upon which individuals, organizations and associations can all directly induce some degree of change.

The good news is that, overall, the majority of Meetings Outlook respondents (64%) believe the education necessary to prepare for the role of tomorrow's meeting professionals is readily available. There was a slight variance in survey results when comparing planners and suppliers (63% and 65% answered in the affirmative, respectively). With 24% of respondents indicating uncertainty about

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this topic, a mere 12% believe the necessary education is not, at this time, readily available.

“The education seems to be readily available,” says Crystal Chism, HMCC, senior sales execu-



CRYSTAL CHISM

tive, Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin.

Based in Georgia, Chism notes that her local MPI chapter helps a great deal to connect members with needed study groups, professional development courses and certifications.

“I received my Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) from MPI and this is where I will always look when I have a need for new education or certifications,” she says.

Chism does point out, however, that challenges remain for many seeking to update existing skills or learn new ones.

“Education that has a hard cost, though readily available, may not

What skills will you most need to learn/expand upon to be competitive in the meeting industry of the future? (Fall 2021 MPI Meetings Outlook)

All respondents

- 54% Technology design/programming
- 43% Creativity, originality and initiative
- 35% Event design and architecture
- 31% Analytical thinking and innovation
- 31% Leadership and social influence
- 30% Critical thinking and analysis
- 30% Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
- 28% Emotional intelligence
- 27% Complex problem-solving
- 23% Active learning and learning strategies
- 17% Systems analysis and evaluation

Top planner choices

- 1) Technology design/programming (62%)
- 2) Creativity, originality and initiative (42%)
- 3) Event design and architecture (39%)
- 4) Analytical thinking and innovation (32%)
- 5) Critical thinking and analysis (19%)

Top supplier choices

- 1) Creativity, originality and initiative (47%)
- 2) Technology design/programming (41%)
- 3) Emotional intelligence (39%)
- 4) Leadership and social influence (34%)
- 5) Critical thinking and analysis (31%)

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be an option for many [who may be struggling due to the pandemic],” she says, adding that there are still quite a few scholarships—including from MPI chapters and the MPI Foundation—for professionals unable to afford continuing education. “Many hotels are experiencing significant costs for PPE while group business has drastically declined, and as a result cannot fund the continuing education for their associates as they have in the past.”

On the planner side, Chism says her peers are experiencing virtual meeting fatigue, feeling taxed and unsure of their abilities.

“They feel called upon to learn a new job in addition to the job they

“As we look at what is most important—flexibility, adapting to change, critical thinking—these are not things you can train in traditional ways.”

— Molly Marsh, AMR Management Services

signed up to do,” she says. “Many are unhappy and considering other potential career paths as the hesitancy to return to face-to-face meetings continues to plague our industry. Knowing this, I believe



MOLLY MARSH

it is important to our industry to find more education to help these planners understand how to navigate the virtual world with more confidence and less stress. If 2023 truly is the year we can expect markets to fully recover, our planners have another year to weather this stress.” (Indeed, data from the latest Meetings Outlook found that 35% of respondents anticipate a return to pre-pandemic business levels in 2023—this is later than was predicted in this summer’s survey, but roughly on par with expectations from the spring survey.)

But which skills will meeting pros most need to learn or expand upon to be competitive in the industry’s future? Given 11 topical buckets from which to choose, Meetings Outlook respondents expressed the greatest concern for and/or interest in technology design/programming (54%); creativity,

originality and initiative (43%); and event design and architecture (35%). (See page 16 for full results and planner-supplier comparisons.)

For her own development during the pandemic, Chism earned a Cvent certification and wanted to work on the CMP but hasn’t been able to fit that into her schedule just yet. While she believes that designations and certifications may not always be necessary, “when an individual has them and applies for a job, I believe it shows deep commitment to our industry.”

Molly Marsh, CMP, director of engagement and event design for AMR Management Services in Kentucky, is one of the survey respondents who does not think the essential education and skills for meeting pros of the future are readily available. Her response, however, is more nuanced than a simple, binary yes or no.

“As we look at what is most important—flexibility, adapting to change, critical thinking—these are not things you can train in traditional ways,” Marsh says. “They are not tasks to be done or boxes to be checked, they are ways of working, perspectives and attitudes. The industry is doing a good job of trying to tackle the ‘what’ that is changing in meetings and events, but success for us will be much more reliant on ‘how’ we approach our work, our clients, our events and our participants.

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Education increasingly needs to focus on that side of our business to really help us take the next steps forward.

“The challenge for more soft-skills training is that it’s not necessarily just a knowledge set to be delivered or content to be consumed,” Marsh adds. “By its very nature, it shifts and changes as the environment and circumstances change. When success is found more in the day-to-day decision-making and how we respond to new challenges than it is in mastering any set of material, short-term events and programs can only inspire ideas, they can’t help people maintain that long-term change.”

To really address these education and skill updates/changes, Marsh recommends interspersed learning.

“For example, a learning cohort that works together over a set of weeks or months to learn and apply the concepts is much more effective, but getting people

“Navigating what’s next is so much more about having the right conversations and asking the right questions, rather than providing the right answers.”

— Molly Marsh, AMR Management Services

to really commit and change the mindset about learning is its own obstacle,” she says.

In her own position, Marsh says her company has continued to invest in employee professional development throughout the pandemic and that one of the most beneficial tools has been an emotional intelligence assessment and training.

“It helped me to recognize and

understand where my leadership gaps are and compare how I communicate and respond to change with how other team members and key decision makers do,” she says. “Navigating what’s next is so much more about having the right conversations and asking the right questions, rather than providing the right answers. [Emotional intelligence] resources give us personal insight so that we can empathize with and understand others. When you do that, you can be flexible, adaptable, creative and innovative. You’re not afraid to learn new things or try new technologies. I truly believe that is what will help us all be successful moving forward.”



Michael Pinchera
MPI

Michael Pinchera is senior editor for Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and has been recognized with more than 40 professional awards for writing and editing while covering the global meeting and event industry for nearly two decades as part of MPI’s publications and media team.

Building Your Future Through the MPI Academy

The MPI Academy offers countless options for live and on-demand education to help grow your skills for the future. Of specific note is the ongoing series Eventwise 401: Critical Next Skills for Meeting Pros. Upcoming live, online sessions in that collection include the following.

- Exploring Network-Building: November 17, 2021
- Exploring Emotional Intelligence: December 15, 2021
- Exploring Improvisation: January 19, 2022
- Exploring Persuasion: February 16, 2022

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Professors Share Their Future Skills Curriculum

Future and current meeting and event professionals can take a cue from what's being taught in university meetings and hospitality programs

By Tyler Davidson

The global pandemic radically disrupted the very way we conduct meetings, as in-person events were cancelled and meeting and event planners had to rapidly adjust to a virtual environment that demanded a radical transformation in their core skills to stay relevant—and employed.

But it can be argued that this abrupt transformation was really the culmination of forces that have been in play for years, as technology, data analytics and cross-departmental communication and strategic coordination have propelled the requirements of what it means to be a successful meeting planner beyond site selection and

logistics and travel management.

And as with any major shift in a profession, the skills needed for success are quickly becoming core elements in the colleges and universities that are building the next generation of meeting and event planners. Conversely, current meeting and event planners can discover what skills they need to develop or sharpen in order to remain relevant.

Following are the observations of several hospitality school professors who are preparing their students for successful careers in the meetings and events industry by focusing on the skills they need to develop in a highly dynamic environment.

Future Skills Taught by Hospitality Schools

**Dr. Michael Cheng, Dean
Florida International University
Chaplin School of Hospitality &
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The future competencies that clearly rise to the top include mastering digital skills, how to crunch analytics strategically and learning core marketing concepts, as meetings and events in many cases have undergone a migration to fall under the marketing umbrella.

“There is definitely a need to incorporate digital skills along with analytics and marketing skills,” says Dr. Michael Cheng, dean of Florida International University’s (FIU) Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. “We have taken a holistic approach toward our curriculum and woven a technology thread throughout all of our courses. Our faculty have deconstructed our curriculum and are currently making the necessary changes to all of our courses, without losing sight of the need to continue emphasizing soft skills like teamwork, communication, critical thinking, emotional intelligence and strategic thinking and innovation.”

Cheng says one way FIU has stayed on trend was to offer Programming-On-Demand, a series of one-credit, hour-long courses that are outside of its core curriculum and taught by hospitality professors. This allows students to learn skills on the quick, without having to wait a year until a new course can be offered.

Dr. Suzzette Shaw Goldmon, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Hospitality and Tourism

Department of Human Sciences
The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

According to Dr. Suzzette Shaw Goldmon, Ph.D., assistant professor of hospitality and tourism, Department of Human Sciences, The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, the future work environment itself is a trend her university pre-



pares students to adapt to.

“One of the things that I have started to stress, especially in the last year and a half, is technology and being flexible, and being able to operate remotely,” she says.

“You need to create a plan and details and execute from a distance, and as an advantage, that opens up the whole world to us.”

The ability to operate in a digital world, including effectively using social media channels to create interest in destinations and meetings, is a key to success now and

in the future.

“I want to extend the world to them and say, ‘You need to be really proficient with technology, have great graphic skills and great written communication skills, so when you describe that meeting, people will read it and want to register for it,’” Shaw says. “I envision it being more 3-D, more exciting. I expect my students to be able to take that to a higher level, so that first eye contact you make with whatever people see it, it makes them want to participate.”

Shaw says that students also need to sharpen their communication skills in this new environment to be able to respond quickly in a professional, constructive way to negative comments that may be posted in the myriad social media and online channels.

Kevin Dunayer
Assistant Professor of Theater and Event Production
George Mason University



The most radical change forced on most planners who remained gainfully employed during the pandemic was the need to quickly master virtual meetings. While many in the meetings industry pine for the days when in-person events were basically the only game in town, there seems to be a consensus that virtual will live on, even if merely as part of a hybrid event.

“We’ve been focusing on virtual events, and the technology infrastructure and logistics that go into that setup,” says Kevin Dunayer, assistant professor of theater and event production at George Mason University. “They learn what questions to ask clients, customer service, all of the things that revolve around both the possibilities of hybrid events or completely virtual events. They get a real strong dose of both. When they graduate, the goal is they’re a complete person who can work in the industry and have a familiarity with everything there is to putting on an event, as the market may demand you have all of these skills and then some.”

According to Dunayer, important skills meetings and events students must master include the following:

- Computer skills
- Understanding processes, systems and design
- Understanding data systems
- Communication skills
- Demonstrating initiative

- Problem-solving skills
- The ability to think on your feet and react quickly

“Data analytics will also be vital,” Dunayer contends, adding that proficiency at understanding and executing the fundamentals of process are a key foundation no matter what the future brings. “It’s hard to predict exactly where we’re going to go, but if we give our students a strong foundation of process, then they can go out and react to those things when they go out in the world to work. They have the foundation to deal with anything as long as they understand the process of events. Technology is going to change. The baseline process is key to dealing with this change.”

Dunayer, who has taught at George Mason for 15 years, brought a background in events and stage production to the university, having spent a decade in New York City working on major events such as the American Image Awards, Grammys, NFL Draft and the Republican National Convention.

This background led to him initially being hired to teach production and logistics, but that has morphed into instructing on virtual and hybrid events.

“There’s such a similarity between the two,” he says of theater and event production and meeting and event planning.

Perhaps ironically, Dunayer contends that his students will also need to sharpen their in-person communication skills to prepare for when traditional meetings resume.

“They’ve been virtual for the last year and a half, so we want to have them increase their [in-person communication] skills because the last year and a half they’ve been in front of a computer,” Dunayer says, adding that his students are eager for face-to-face education, as well as meetings and events, to resume.

Berkita S. Bradford
*Associate Professor and
 Department Chair
 Department of Hospitality
 Management
 Virginia State University*

As the demographics of society are changing, with a surge of younger workers starting their careers and social advances creating a more positive environment for racial minorities, women and people from diverse cultural backgrounds,



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meeting and event planners must increase their cross-cultural understanding to be effective.

“It’s cross-cultural, but not only cross-cultural; I think it’s imperative for the Millennials and Generation Z to understand it’s cross-generational,” says Berkita S. Bradford, associate professor and Department of Hospitality Management chair, Virginia State University. “[You may have a meeting] where you need additional hearing devices. And when you’re looking at hybrid types of meetings, you’re bringing more and more opportunities for people to attend, so now you’re going to have to bring in translators.”

Along with developing skills to produce virtual and especial-

ly hybrid events, Bradford also believes that communications and marketing skills are becoming more integral to meeting and event planning, and may actually be a part of formal curriculum in the near future.

Understanding business concepts such as financing and marketing, as well as technology—Virginia State University emphasizes that students should be Cvent certified when they leave—and partnering with those who are experts in those fields, will also be part of the future skill set.

“I think that we have an opportunity on our level to talk about things like integrated curriculum,” Bradford says. “We have an opportunity to pull in that mass commu-

nications course as free electives.

“I think that now the industry is looking for a more specific skill set,” she adds. “When you first got in it you heard things like, ‘We can train them if they have a good personality.’ I don’t think it’s that way anymore. There are more specific skills being required, like revenue management. It’s almost an expectation. The industry is now expecting them to have more of a working knowledge of that.”

Dr. Erinn D. Tucker, Ph.D.
Faculty Director and Associate Professor of the Practice
Global Hospitality Leadership
Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies



Strategic digital analytics is a lofty, but necessary, goal for future meeting planners in a world that is increasingly run by number crunchers and analysts.

“That data analytics piece is really understanding who our customer is better, and how the business interacts with the com-

Key Skills for the Future

Here are the skills meetings and hospitality professors believe are critical in the future meetings and events planning environment.

- Virtual meetings proficiency
- Multicultural and multigenerational understanding
- Cross-discipline basics (i.e., marketing, business fundamentals)
- Computer/technology
- Analytics
- Understanding processes, systems and design
- Understanding data systems
- Communication (writing and graphic presentation skills)
- Demonstrating initiative
- Problem-solving
- Strategic and innovative thinking
- The ability to think on your feet and react quickly

munity,” says Dr. Erinn D. Tucker, Ph.D., faculty director and associate professor of the practice, Global Hospitality Leadership, Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies. “At Georgetown, we’ve introduced not just digital marketing but also consumer insights. Everyone has to know that, and that’s where data analytics is absolutely a part of it.

“It’s about knowing your customer,” Tucker adds, “but also how does your customer really engage with the sponsor? We’ve always had that, but now we have accountability in whether we’re reaching our target and how we’re engaging.”

Tucker contends that the focus has recently shifted to suppliers in terms of demands on what planners must implement, such as hybrid meetings.

“The supplier is really the one who has the upper hand in terms of protocol and what is required of planners to provide,” she says. “Everyone wants a hybrid meeting but no one wants to pay for it. Those prices have not come down. Venues have requirements of how many people they can host. And it’s not just COVID, it’s a complete shift.”

These added skills and responsibilities are resulting in increasing clout for meeting planners, Tucker says.

“The distance between a meeting planner and a board, or a meeting

“There is definitely a need to incorporate digital skills along with analytics and marketing skills. We have taken a holistic approach toward our curriculum and woven a technology thread throughout all of our courses.”

— Dr. Michael Cheng,
FIU Chaplin School of
Hospitality & Tourism
Management

planner and executive area, that wall has just shut down now,” she says. “Everyone is in that space now and interacting much more. In the past, the meeting planners did not have the strategic skills that were needed for that; it was very much just logistics. Now you’re in the C-suite discussion. The planner is part of the strategy team and in the presence of the C-suite.”

The racial reckoning that society is undertaking is also greatly influencing how future meetings and events will be designed and executed in virtually every aspect, from speaker selection and marketing to reflecting a diverse audience in terms of meeting content, and beyond.

“Diversity and inclusion is now in the lens of strategic design in coordinating meetings and on the supplier side,” Tucker said. “On the multicultural end, it’s very import-

ant to ask the questions and make that part of your assessment.”

Like the other professors interviewed for this story, Tucker is also seeing more synergy between communications majors and meeting and event planning curriculum.

“I’ve had students that were communication majors,” she said. “They understood the why of the event: why this is important; why a sponsor should be a part of it. They didn’t know the what. Hospitality students understood the what part of it but not the why.”

In the end, Tucker has one key piece of advice for planners.

“Flexibility is definitely number one,” she advises. “Throw away your linear thinking and really put that spatial thinking into play, because that’s what it is now.”



Tyler Davidson
Meetings Today

Tyler Davidson has covered the travel trade for more than 28 years. In his current role with Meetings Today, Tyler leads the content team in delivering print, digital and in-person meetings and events coverage, along with webinars and other educational offerings.



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