

VENUE

PROFESSIONAL



With New Beginnings Comes Great Hope

» KAREN TOTARO, CVE

No one ever thinks the world will turn upside down in their lifetime. We read these crazy stories in our history books. We watch movies that let our imagination experience the good and the bad from taking the first steps on the moon to struggling through the Great Depression. Every day change happens mostly in small predictable ways, but sometimes in unsuspecting powerful gut punching ways. How do we take it all in, keep the good we gained from the experience, and let the rest be filed away in “lessons learned”? Like many of you prior to COVID I had a different job, I lived in a different state, owned a different home. It has been mind-numbing at times watching one more newscast or having one more conversation about “what is going to happen next.” With new beginnings comes HOPE. Let’s take a breath and celebrate this new road we are on, these new beginnings, and the opportunities they present.

At our Convention Centers we have had to re-assess everything we do repeatedly as we move further away from COVID. It has become an opportune time for all of us to focus on three key elements: our people, our places, and our clients.

PEOPLE

Never have I ever been prouder of our team members then what I witnessed this last year as we had to pick ourselves up and prepare for an uncharted future. I am going to guess that is true for so many of you. It is never too late to celebrate those around us.

What has been working in our venue at Huntington Place in Detroit and could work for others:

AUTHENTICITY

When the going gets tough you cannot “fake” caring about your team members and what each individual may be going through in their personal lives. We have taken this word and put it into action every single day. We recognize active listening and compassion and spend the time with team members. We have to trust our teams to have real conversations, hard conversations, and the ability to find resolution.

Our core team started bringing our lunches and eating together in one of our Board rooms when COVID was at its peak and it continues today. There were so few staff working and it was a safe refuge. We don’t talk about work, we laugh! We talk sports, families, and stories about our younger years which usually leads to laughter.

DIVERSITY IS OUR SUPERPOWER

We have an incredibly diverse and inclusive group of people at Huntington Place and I am most in awe of the “mind-set” that trickles through every level of hiring. While diversity is our superpower, inclusion is the secret sauce. We all want to be seen for who we are and what we can bring to the table. By fostering inclusion and giving everyone an equal voice at the table we have better ideas, better deliverables, and better teamwork.

ONE TEAM!

We have to ensure all we say and do reflects that statement. We cannot be one team when things are unraveling but throw a holiday party just for our venue employees and leave out our integral partners like F&B or AV, etc. We celebrate the wins together and we pick up the pieces and make things right together. Town Halls help with consistent communication but the magic happens when we each take a moment to walk in another’s shoes. We had a crazy weekend in March with over 50,000 people in the venue. Parking was non-stop and it was freezing outside. Our F&B general manager took it upon himself to ensure a carafe of hot coffee that got sent out to our parking team. They still talk about this months later because someone thought about them when they were really struggling. Low cost, high reward, ONE TEAM.

PLACE

Our venues are the lifeblood of our communities. During COVID our venue -- as I am sure many of yours -- served as a hospital, a vaccination site, a COVID testing site, a place for meals for our most vulnerable citizens, a food distribution site for non-profits working within the communities, and so much more. When we could no longer focus on our mission of economic impact, we opted instead to focus on social impact. We are the communities we serve; we live and work in them and want to ensure they thrive. As we continue to move on from the immediate impacts of COVID we need to look at our buildings with fresh eyes. We are all asking the same questions: Do we go back to basics? Do we go BOLD and prepare for a future we want but not quite see yet?

CLIENTS

More is wanted for less cost within a much-reduced timeframe. Sound familiar? Our clients are in just as much turmoil as our venues as they too start over. We are learning to walk again and when learning to walk you have to lean on each other, support each other. We have indeed become more flexible and creative in finding solutions that can work. So many of our creative solutions are coming from the staff working on the frontlines. They pick up quickly as to what the stressors are for our clients and then we pounce and address by offering options before it grows into something more. We had a recent show and our leadership team spent a great deal of time taking the show team out for fun, checking in on them throughout each day, doing all we could to ensure confidence. Everyone wants to just know it is all going to be OK. Take that breath and just know new beginnings are constant but we have HOPE on our side. **VP**

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