

KINDRED SPIRITS

By **Cindy Campbell**

I had the pleasure of attending many of the U.S. state and regional parking and transportation conferences this past fall. With the conference season now behind us, I got to thinking about the extent of work and planning it takes to execute a successful conference event.

The board of directors, committee chairs and members, and conference coordinators make it all look so easy. The rest of us show up on opening day ready to learn and experience all that is new and exciting in our industry, rarely giving a thought to the incredible amount of preparation it takes to provide us with a quality experience. The association volunteers and staff are responsible for so many details: negotiating a reasonable contract for a conference hotel and related services, determining appropriate educational sessions, laying out an optimal tradeshow floor, creating an educational schedule that meets the expectation of attendees, making sure all of the audio-visual requirements are set up or arranged for, determining the appropriate food selections and beverage items for a variety of occasions ... the list continues on to include putting out fires—both small and large—as they invariably arise throughout the conference event. Whew.

For participants, it's nearly invisible. But then, that's the goal, isn't it?

The Overall Experience

As conference attendees, our experience should not focus on how the event came together but rather what our overall experience was while we were there. We spend little to no time considering what effort, monitoring, and oversight it takes to deliver the service we received. If it all goes as planned, attendees walk away from a successful event feeling positive about the experience, blissfully unaware of all the planning and efforts that were required from so many people to make it happen.

While I just described what could be considered a typical conference attendee experience, the overall experience of our own parking customers is actually very similar in nature. Let's face it, no one heads out of the house thinking, "Today's the day I'm going to go out and experience some outstanding parking services!"

You've heard it before, and it's true: As parking professionals, we are frequently the first service providers customers encounter as they go about

their day. Like conference staff and volunteers, we complete a number of important, time-consuming tasks that are routinely overlooked or simply assumed by the public. We make sure parking areas

are well-lit, properly signed, and clean and that all equipment is functioning properly. We also assist customers with directions to their destinations, take payments, receive appeals, and help with special requests. In addition, we're tasked to enforce regulations that are intended to make sure our parking resources are optimally utilized.

We do all of this in an effort to make our customers' experience pleasant and safe. While they may never consciously be aware of

the efforts we put forth on their behalf, we know that without these efforts, customers' overall experience would be far less positive.

To all of the state and regional volunteers who work tirelessly to provide association members with a great experience and to all frontline parking professionals who do the same every day, we appreciate your efforts. Thanks for a job well done. **P**

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