



Pam Paul took baby steps to go from public and community relations to her own special event and meeting management company.



How Did I Get Here?

THE STRANGE-BUT-TRUE STORIES OF HOW SOME MEETINGS PROFESSIONALS GOT INTO THE BUSINESS.

Ask any number of meeting planners how they got into this business, and you'll probably hear different stories from every one. As in any profession, some people got here on purpose, some by accident. We asked five planners how they got to where they are today. Pull up a chair, pour yourself some coffee, and read their stories. **BY ROGER GORDON**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS LAKE

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME Pam Paul sort of fell into her current profession as a meeting planner more than 30 years ago. ¶ “At the time I entered the event-planning arena,” Paul recalls, “there wasn’t any course on meeting or event planning. My education and background were more or less related to both public relations and community relations and, basically, on-the-job training.” ¶ While working as a public information officer and community relations officer for the Illinois State Comptroller and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (now the Illinois Office of Education), respectively, Paul also became involved in the political process. She held staff positions in a couple of small, statewide campaign offices that included coordinating volunteers, planning the logistics for fundraising events, scheduling and advancing the candidates’ media appearances, and basic administrative functions. ¶ In 1978, an acquaintance of Paul’s happened to be leaving her position as director of special events for the Chicago Board Options Exchange. “She introduced me to her boss,” Paul remembers. She got the job and spent nearly a decade coordinating meetings and events for the Options Exchange. But when the stock market crashed in late 1987,

she was essentially laid off. “The Options Exchange had me work on two projects while I was also receiving a severance package,” Paul recalls.

“After interviewing for a short time, I decided that, rather than work for someone else and be in a middle management position again, I was a great event planner and would try working for myself. In a worst-case scenario, I would give it a try and, if it didn’t work, I could always get a job.”

There was no need for that because, 20 years later, Paul’s business, Eventive Inc., is a thriving, full-service special event and meeting management company, specializing in events production. Based in Chicago, Eventive is a mix of corporate, non-profit and government meetings and events. From time to time, the company also engages in social business, primarily as a result of its relationship with corporate clients.

Eventive has spent 20 years building relationships with third-party vendors and suppliers. As a result, the company offers its clients the best alternatives based on their corporate images, the tasks at hand and their budgets.

We think that it is best to stick to what you are good at,” says Paul. “For example, I might be able to write decent menus when putting together a proposal for a client, but I am not a caterer and don’t pretend to be one, either. I turn to the professionals for what they do best, and I expect the same in return.”

Paul is delighted at how far her business has come during the last two decades. She is confident that success will continue but, at the same time, she is cautious. “Every year, I say to myself, ‘Well, if this isn’t working, you can always get a job!’ ”

Once again, no need.

(GET CONNECTED)

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