

And the Award Goes to . . .

Award presentations are boring. There, I said it. Nobody will ever stand up and demand that award galas be changed. We just keep going through the motions, giving out pointy glass awards, and eating our chicken dinner. Managers feel good. The organization handing out the award feels satisfied. The audience wants to stick a butter knife into their eyeball to stay awake.

HOW DID EVERYTHING GET SO TIRED AND BORING? WHERE did we go wrong? Awards presentations should be fun and festive. We should celebrate the winners. We should appreciate and thank everyone involved in the success. Most of all, the awards should motivate us to be better and to achieve. * So, what do we do? A vice president or committee member, who should not be allowed near a microphone, is allowed to read a list of winners with the same amount of passion they call upon when reading the ingredients on a breakfast cereal box. The presentation becomes a long march toward a black hole of emptiness. Sure, we applaud at the right time. We congratulate the winners. And then, we drive home and forget the night ever happened.

We can change. We can grow. I have a few ideas that will turn your award presentation into a fun, motivating, exciting evening. Slowly put down the butter knife. Everything is going to be fine.

Best Use of Wasted Time: The Photographer

HERE'S AN IDEA: Let's bring the event to a screeching halt while the photographer takes a picture of everyone standing in a line on stage holding a pointy glass award. Yep, sounds like a winner to me. We should stop the action after every award. Nothing will happen on stage. The room will be as quiet as a macro economics class on a Friday afternoon. And now we have an awesome photo of everyone standing in line on stage holding a pointy glass award. ➡

The solution: Have the photographer take as many candid photos as he or she wants during the event. Just don't stop the action for a photo. Instead, ask the award winners and presenters to stay after the program. The photographer can quickly take all of the photos. Not only are you not halting the event's flow, you are probably cutting about 15 minutes out of the program.

Best Recognition of Everyone in the Room

Winning an award is fun. Watching people other than Halle Berry win an award is not fun. It is easy to forget the other people in the room. Every person should be appreciated. This is very easily done. During dinner, have a slide or PowerPoint presentation with photos of other stakeholders (members, employees, industry partners) with quick notes on their successes or career highlights. Sprinkle in some fun facts and photos. Attendees will casually read the slides while having dinner and start talking about the presentation.

If you don't think seeing a photo slide of Garland from the data center in a Civil War uniform reenacting the battle of Gettysburg is interesting, well you just aren't living.

Look for other ways to include everyone in the special evening. The more inclusive the event is, the more fun the attendees will have.

Best Use of Reading to Inflict Boredom

Do we really need to read the entire nomination letter for every winner? Here is a simple goal for every award event or meeting: Read less. The last time people enjoyed someone reading to them was when they were four years old and their father was reading *The Adventures of Harold and the Purple Crayon*. If you have to read, choose a short paragraph and summarize the letter. Too much reading makes people sleepy. Reading one letter is a great idea. Reading a letter for each of the 20 awards makes me want to grab a butter knife. Make copies of the letters available in a booklet to be given out after the presentation or post them on the Intranet. If you don't have an Intranet, ask Al Gore for help.

Instead of reading the nomination, have a colleague speak from the heart about the award recipient. Please do not script the presenters. Have faith. They didn't get to their professional level without occasionally having to string a few words together. Award scripts all sound the same because they are written without feeling. Let the presenters speak from the heart (giving them a reasonable time limit) and the presentation will be more memorable and more entertaining.

The only thing less exciting than reading the nomination letter is reading off a long list of names. What do we think happens when someone hears their name read from a list of 35 names? "Honey, I had to call you. Someone read my name

off a list because I have worked at this organization for five years. I feel so recognized and satisfied."

Save the list for the Intranet. Just ask everyone to stand and applaud.

Best Way to Save the Evening: Hire a Professional

I like Marvin, the vice president of international global sales. Marvin is a very nice guy. I am not sure I need to listen to Marvin host the awards evening. Marvin doesn't go to rehearsal. Marvin doesn't listen when you explain the flow of the evening. Marvin should stick to international global sales.

Why don't we give Marvin a little help? The easiest way to add some fun to an awards presentation is to hire a professional comedian or host. Like anything, there are good hosts and bad hosts. The good hosts know how to recognize the winners, include the audience, and make the night entertaining. If you have a limited budget, ask your keynote speaker if he or she would be interested in also hosting your awards. Most good speakers make excellent hosts or emcees and will not charge much if the event is the same day they are speaking.

By hiring a professional, the event will run smoother. A professional will also be able to transition from one award to the next and handle any production hiccups. Marvin would throw his hands in the air, look blankly into the audience, and ask nobody in particular when he is supposed to give out the next pointy glass award.

Best Makeover


It is time to shake up the awards presentation. If you have been doing the same thing for 15 years, it is time to change. Find ways to be creative and add fun to the evening. You don't have to take every moment so seriously.

Any change will be appreciated by the attendees. A simple adjustment like changing the order of the awards during the evening will refresh a stale presentation. Ask the award winners to say a few words. Some will choose to speak and some will not. When I have seen the winners say a few words, it is a memorable experience and adds a little life to the evening.

When all else fails, tell Marvin the event is at a different hotel and remove the butter knives. ■

↔ **Joel Zeff** (www.joelzeff.com) is a sought-after speaker, humorist, and emcee for meetings, conferences, and special events. His topics include increasing passion and fun at work, creativity, teamwork, communication, and change. He began his career as a newspaper reporter and started his own consulting business in 1994.

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