

Taking risks, Thinking Without a Script *by Megan Scully*

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It wasn't all work and no play at Meeting Professionals International's (MPI) Professional Educational Conference, Jan. 31 in Nashville, Tenn. More than 100 meeting planners and suppliers spent the afternoon learning how to take risks, be more creative and think without a script, all the while playing improvisational games and exercises designed to stimulate creativity, teamwork and problem solving in a fun and positive environment.

The session, "Learning to Think Without a Script," was led by Joel Zeff, president of Joel Zeff Creative and an award-winning comedian, creativity speaker, actor, writer, who established early on that his goal was to both teach and entertain the crowd.

"We need to create an environment where we can be silly, where we can be fun," he said. "It is key to create an environment like that."

According to Zeff, establishing such an environment not only sparks creativity, but also enhances productivity, makes people more content and builds personal and corporate success.

The keys to improvisational thinking and acting, he said, are openness and flexibility.

"If you are open and flexible to change and you go with the flow, the game is going to be a success," he said. "If you are not, then the game is going to fail, the team is going to fail."

Thinking without a script is a "new road" for many adults, who have little opportunity to be creative in their daily lives.

"We stop getting the opportunity as we grow older. When we were children, we wanted to be Batman," he said. "Now, if you went out in public as Batman, you 'd go to jail."

Nevertheless, Zeff encouraged attendees to care less about what other people think, and focus instead on taking risks.

"To be creative, we have to take risks," he said. "If we do not take risks, we cannot change things."

In order to stimulate creativity, Zeff suggests "feeding your brain" and "making the idea box bigger." Brainstorming and working together are other key ways to jumpstart creative energy, he said.

"Just let your mind work," he said. Let your mind play and you will be happier and more productive."