

## Convention Agenda

Start with several hundred people, each of whom has a separate agenda. Subject many of them to security checks, crowded airplanes, bad food, and crossing through customs. Know as a certainty that some of them have come to the convention even though they are not feeling well, have had to have a pet put down, their car is in the shop after an accident, a family member was just diagnosed with a serious illness, or their agent told them on Friday that their publisher is dropping them.

Combine them in unfamiliar surroundings for three days, with more activities going on than they could do in three weeks. Add alcohol, hotel food, and freezing air conditioning. Tell them to have a good time.

Strangely enough, most people do.

### Welcome to the world of fan conventions

A fan convention is a mix of the people who do (writers, actors, producers, agents, book sellers), people who want to do (aspiring writers, actors, etc.) and people who enjoy (fans).

You're there to network, to get your name out for future reference. In return, collect all the business cards you can. Get, at the least, the person's name, a factoid, and an e-mail address. When you get home, send everyone cards or e-mails.

#### Metabolism and Personality

Are you a morning person? Can you go for long stretches at top speed and collapse afterwards, or do you need some quiet, down time every hour or so? Does meeting new people absolutely terrify you?

Whatever you're like at home, you'll be doubly so at a convention. Plus, at a convention, there is always the temptation to cram in as much as you can. After all, you've spent a lot of money to get here. You need to make it worthwhile. Right?

Wrong. The best way to enjoy a convention, and profit from it, is to stay as close to your normal rhythms as possible.

Try to get two real meals (not sandwiches and chips) every day and five hours of sleep a night. Reversing these don't work; that is trying for five meals and two hours of sleep won't keep you going.

Eat as though you were in training, because you are. Sure, treat yourself, whether it be a sticky dessert or a bit of alcohol, but also keep doing that vegetable-fruit-whole grain thing. Hotels and convention centers are notoriously dry. Drink water.

When you get your convention program, sit down and divide the program into three lists: absolutely must do, would really like to do, and everything else. Work your eating and sleeping schedule around the absolutely must do things, with a few really like to do things thrown in. Let everything else go. If you get to everything else, fine; if you don't, fine.

If you're shy, or if crowds scare you, aim for a few up-close and personal contacts. You might talk to someone sitting in an alcove or to the other six people at your banquet table. You don't have to force yourself to be gregarious when you aren't.

#### Bathrooms and other bodily functions

Give the gal (or guy) a break. Just because you've spotted your favorite author of all times, or the agent you would die, just die, to have as your very own, do not accost them in the bathroom, or the elevator, or break into the dinner conversation they are having with a publisher, or invite yourself along to the private dinner they are having with friends.

But you might notice what they're wearing, so you can spot them later on. When they're not otherwise engaged, it's okay to go up and introduce yourself. Really. To anyone.

Don't worry if you get flustered. I once introduced myself to a writer who had just been given a major award. I totally blanked on the name of her book, which I admitted to her. She winked and said, "I can't remember the names of my books, either." Then we had a lovely conversation.

#### Strut your stuff

You are on display. Yes, you, whether you're pre-published, or have one book out, or are working on book twenty. People will remember you.

Dress in nice casual or nice dressy, depending on the tone of the convention. Jeans and sweatshirts are out, but also dress to be comfortable. It's part of that being in training thing. If you great-looking, but uncomfortable, by the end of the day, you'll be in a terrible mood.

Smile. Do all of that *What I learned in Kindegarden* stuff. Smile. A few hours of volunteering to help a the convention will not only endear you to the convention organizers, but you'll also have a great time. Smile. Say nice things about other writers. Smile. Well, you should have the idea by now.

Look for opportunities to spend time with individuals and small groups. Smile at someone eating alone and ask if you can join them. If you belong to Sisters in Crime or some other group, go to their meals, hospitality room, or other gatherings. Volunteering has already been mentioned. Being a volunteer gives you a chance to see and be seen behind the scenes.

"Dealing with rejection: The free world does not hang in the balance. You are only writing a book." ~Sue Grafton, mystery writer.

I would paraphrase that to say it's only one convention. If this turns out to be the worst convention you've ever attended in your entire life, take a deep breath, cry if it helps, and keep going. There will be another convention soon.