



FOR CORPORATE EVENT PLANNERS

5 Things That Make or Break a *Corporate Event*

*The overlooked decisions that quietly decide whether your
event lands or gets forgotten by Monday.*

THE MAGIC OF CHRIS WHEEL

Corporate Magician & Event Entertainment Expert

If You Have Done This Before, *This Guide Is For You.*

Most corporate event planners are good at their job. The venue is booked, the catering order is in, the AV company has the right cables, and the run-of-show document is six pages long. The basics get handled.

What I have noticed, after performing at hundreds of corporate events, is that the difference between a forgotten event and one people are still talking about a month later almost never comes down to the basics. It comes down to a handful of small decisions that the planner made (or did not make) before anyone walked in the door.

This guide is not about the things your checklist already covers. It is about the five things that quietly decide how your event actually feels, the ones experienced planners sometimes stop noticing because the rest of the machine is running smoothly.

A polished event with a forgettable middle is still a forgettable event.

— SOMETHING I HAVE SAID TOO MANY TIMES

A few of these touch on entertainment specifically, because that is the part of the night I see from the inside. The rest apply whether you ever hire a magician or not. Use what is useful. Skip what is not.

01

THE FIRST FORTY MINUTES

The Awkward Stretch *Nobody Plans For*

Guests arrive in waves. The food is not out yet. The program has not started. People are standing near the bar, scrolling their phones, waiting to be told what is happening next. That is your event.

The opening of a corporate event is almost always under-planned. The agenda starts at 6:30, but doors open at 6:00, and those first thirty to forty minutes are treated as a buffer instead of a part of the event. Guests show up, get a drink, look around, and decide in real time whether this thing is going to be fun or whether they should have stayed home.

That decision sticks. If the opening feels flat, no amount of dessert or closing remarks will fully recover it. People form their impression early and spend the rest of the night confirming it.

The fix is not complicated. You need something for guests to do, something that gives them a reason to talk to the person standing next to them, and a reason to put their phone down. Background music alone does not do this. A photo booth in the corner does not do this. You need an active element that pulls people into the room.

THE MAGICIAN'S TAKE

This is exactly why strolling magic during cocktail hour outperforms a stage show at the same event. It breaks the ice without anyone having to make small talk first, and it gives the room energy before the formal program ever starts. By the time you sit down to eat, people are already laughing with strangers.

02

ENTERTAINMENT PLACEMENT

Where You Put It Matters *More Than What It Is*

A great act in the wrong slot will underperform a decent act in the right one. Most planners book entertainment, then ask where to put it. It should be the other way around.

The classic mistake is scheduling a performance after dinner, after the speeches, after the awards, when the room has gone quiet and people are checking their watches. Even strong material struggles in that slot. Energy in a room is cumulative, and once it drops, picking it back up is much harder than maintaining it.

Entertainment works best in two places: during the cocktail hour as a connector, or as a planned mid-evening reset right when energy starts to dip. The dip is predictable. It happens about ninety minutes in, after dinner has been served, before dessert lands, when the room is full but quiet. That is your window.

Avoid stacking entertainment against speeches, awards, or any moment where leadership is meant to be the focus. Strong performance content competes with executive content. They should never share the spotlight.

QUICK DECISION FRAMEWORK

- ❑ **Cocktail hour:** strolling, walkaround, anything mobile and conversational.
- ❑ **Mid-event reset:** a focused 25 to 40 minute show during the dinner lull.
- ❑ **After awards:** high-energy closer to send people out happy.
- ❑ **Avoid:** right after speeches, during plated service, in the final twenty minutes.

03

THE ROOM ITSELF

The Room Decides *How People Feel*

Guests do not consciously evaluate the room. They feel it. And what they feel determines whether they stay engaged or quietly check out.

Most corporate events happen in spaces that were not designed for the event you are throwing. A hotel ballroom set for two hundred guests, half-filled with sixty, will feel cold no matter what is happening on stage. A conference room that fits the headcount on paper but has no flow will feel stuck. The right room for your headcount is not always the biggest room your budget allows.

Lighting is the most underused tool in a corporate planner's kit. Overhead fluorescent or harsh white wash makes everything feel like a meeting. Warmer, lower, more directional lighting makes the same room feel like an event. If your venue lets you bring in even basic uplighting, do it. The cost is small. The difference is large.

Sound matters more than people think. If your guests have to lean in to hear the person across the table, conversation dies. If background music is too loud, people retreat to their phones. The volume should let two people seated at the same table talk without straining, and let a presenter on a microphone be heard without feeling pushed.

THE MAGICIAN'S TAKE

When I scout a venue for a client, the first thing I look at is sight lines and the second is ceiling height. Low ceilings make a room feel intimate. High ceilings make a room feel grand but swallow energy. Both can work. Both fail when you mismatch them to the headcount and format.

04

THE VENDOR BRIEF

Tell Your Vendors *What You Actually Want*

When experienced planners run into trouble with a vendor, the issue almost always traces back to one moment: the brief. Most briefs cover logistics. Few cover intent.

Logistics are the easy part. Date, time, headcount, run-of-show, load-in details, contact for the day-of. Any vendor who is worth hiring will execute on those without much hand-holding. What they cannot guess is the part that actually shapes how their work lands: who is in the room, what mood you are trying to create, what tone leadership wants struck, and what success looks like to the executive who has to sign off.

A magician booked for a "fun corporate event" might lean into laughs. The same magician booked for a "client appreciation evening for high-net-worth clients in a quiet ballroom" performs differently. Same person. Same skill set. Completely different show. The brief is what tells them which version to bring.

This applies across every vendor. Caterers will plate differently if they understand whether the goal is "impress" or "feed." Photographers will shoot differently if they know whether you need posed shots for the company newsletter or candid moments for a social campaign. The five extra minutes spent on the brief save hours of recovery.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN EVERY VENDOR BRIEF

- ❑ **The audience:** who is in the room, age range, industry, formality level.
- ❑ **The mood:** two or three adjectives that describe how you want the night to feel.
- ❑ **The win:** what would make leadership say this was a great event.
- ❑ **The avoid list:** topics, jokes, songs, or anything off-limits for this audience.

05

THE CLOSING MOMENT

Plan the Last Ten Minutes *Like the First*

People remember beginnings and endings. The middle blurs. If your event ends with a thank-you slide and a slow drift toward the coat check, that is the version of the night your guests will retell.

Almost no corporate event plans its ending with the same care it plans its opening. The agenda usually winds down with closing remarks, a few logistical announcements, and then a fade-out. Guests check the time, gather their things, and leave with a polite but neutral feeling. The actual high points of the evening are already a memory.

A strong closing does not have to be elaborate. It just has to be intentional. A short, sincere thank-you from a senior leader who actually means it lands harder than a five-minute scripted speech. A small surprise, a gift bag with something thoughtful, a final shared moment, a closing performance, all of these create the memory that guests carry out the door.

The principle behind this is simple. The last thing that happens is what people will tell their colleagues about on Monday. Make sure the last thing that happens is a thing worth telling.

THE MAGICIAN'S TAKE

A closing performance does double duty. It gives the night a clear emotional ending, and it pulls guests back into the room one last time so they leave on a high instead of trailing off. If your budget allows entertainment in only one slot, putting it at the end is often the highest-return choice.

+1

BONUS · THE SIXTH THING

Brief Leadership *Like You Brief Your Vendors*

The most common late-stage derailment of a corporate event is not a vendor problem. It is a leadership surprise. The CEO decides at 5:45pm to add a few words. The VP wants to recognize someone unannounced. The agenda quietly stretches by twelve minutes.

Twelve minutes does not sound like much until you realize what it costs you. The DJ pushes back. The dessert service collides with the closing remarks. The entertainment slot you carefully placed at the energy dip now lands during dessert plates being cleared. Every domino after that surprise tips a little further off.

The fix is upstream. Before the day of the event, send leadership a short brief that does three things: tells them exactly what their slot is and what time it starts and ends, names the things that would cause real downstream problems if they ran long, and makes it easy to say yes to staying on time without feeling micromanaged.

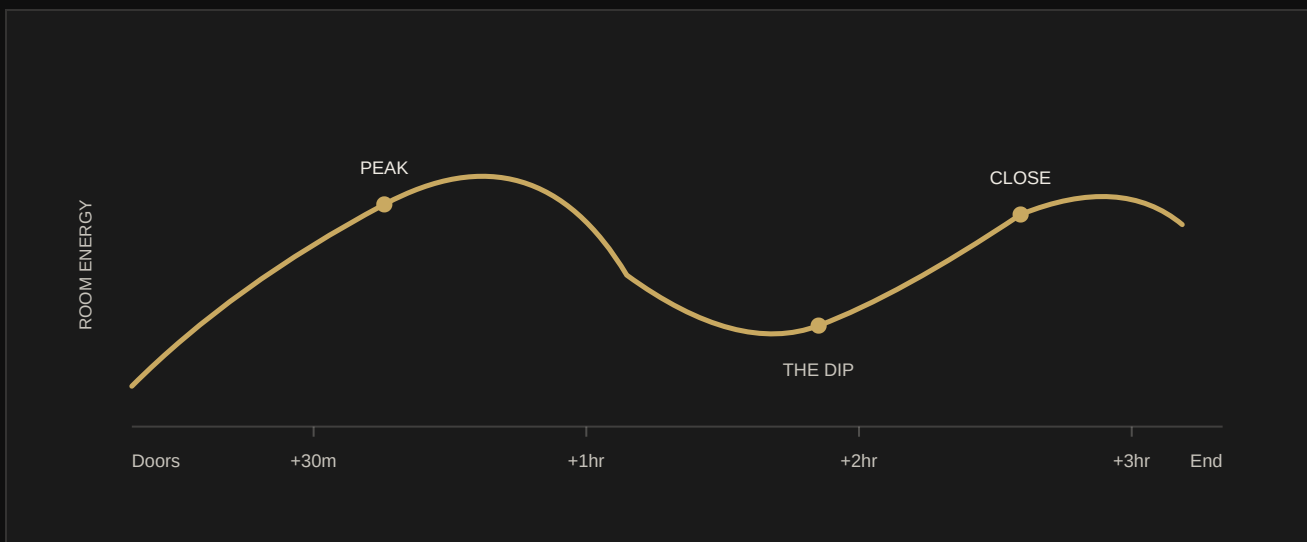
Frame it as protecting their moment, not constraining it. A leader who runs ten minutes long during awards dilutes the awards themselves. A leader who hits their mark gets the room's full attention. Most executives, told this clearly once, will hit it.

A THREE-SENTENCE LEADERSHIP BRIEF THAT WORKS

Your slot runs from 7:42 to 7:50. Right after you, we transition straight into [next thing] which is timed to the minute, so anything past 7:50 starts costing us downstream. If you want to add anything live, the safest place is during the open at 6:30, where we have built-in flex.

The Energy Curve *of a Three-Hour Event*

Every corporate event follows a predictable energy arc. Knowing where the natural peaks and dips fall lets you place entertainment, speeches, and key moments where they actually land instead of fighting the room.



- **Doors to +45m — The Build:** energy is fragile. Cocktail hour entertainment, music, and a reason to mingle. This is where strolling magic earns its slot.
- **+45m to +90m — The Peak:** seat people and run your highest-stakes content here. Speeches, awards, leadership remarks. The room is warm and attentive.
- **+90m to +2hr — The Dip:** dinner is hitting, blood sugar is shifting, attention drops. This is the slot for a focused show, not more talking.
- **+2hr to End — The Close:** deliberate ending. A short, sincere wrap-up. A closing performance. Something that becomes the Monday story.

What I Wish Planners *Asked Me More Often*

Planners are great at asking about pricing, availability, and tech requirements. There are a handful of questions that almost no one asks but should, because the answer changes how the night actually plays out.

Q.

What is the right headcount for strolling magic vs. a parlor show?

Strolling shines from 25 to 200 guests when people are on their feet. A parlor show works for a seated or semi-seated audience up to about 75. Above 75 seated, you want a stage show. The wrong format for the headcount is the single most common entertainment mismatch I see.

Q.

How long should the cocktail hour actually be?

Sixty to seventy-five minutes is the sweet spot. Under forty-five and people feel rushed. Over ninety and the room starts to drift, drinks get heavy, and the dinner that follows feels like an interruption. If you have entertainment during cocktails, plan for the entertainment to end about ten minutes before you call people to seats.

Q.

Do I need a stage, lighting, or AV for the entertainment?

For strolling, none of it. For a parlor show, a clear performance area and one good handheld microphone usually covers it. For a stage show with seventy-five plus guests, you want proper stage lighting, a wireless lavalier or headset, and a small platform or riser so sight lines work past the back tables.

Q.

How far in advance should I book entertainment?

For corporate work, four to six months out is comfortable. Holiday season (mid-November through mid-December) books up nine to twelve months ahead. If you are planning anything in that window and entertainment matters to you, lock it in early. The good performers go first.



If Your Next Event
Could Use the Kind of Moment
Guests Talk About on Monday,

*I would be glad to be part of it. No hard sell, no follow-up
sequence. A short conversation about whether it is the right fit.*

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