

**NOTE: For the record: Cavalier does NOT endorse any hotel or other facility or service by name.**

Any facility either does or does not suit your company's needs—you don't need me. For service considerations, see the last paragraphs.

"I don't endorse" is a general disclaimer. Better to present some specific reasons for bringing up the topic here:

--although it probably shouldn't confuse anyone: a Chinese group has just told me that I could buy my name there, too, from them, because another Chinese group wants to use my url exactly--except for the nation-ending: '.cn'--for China. I'm not interested in blackmail. What legitimate use could there possibly be?

Watch the nation- and carrier-endings for all your incoming messages: A business associate's e-name/address was just used from London against her entire mailing list--with a different carrier-ending for the scam attempt !

--a European hotel chain first linked itself to this website. . .and then cancelled within a short period. It's likely that somebody there took time to read my requirements for serving intelligent meetings. If they don't belong in the professional leagues, they ought to know. Any attempted hotel links in the future also would not be done with my approval.

--because it's too close to my own name and enjoys questionable recommendations at the parent company, [www.CavalierConferencing.com](http://www.CavalierConferencing.com) is itself questionable for me. That service name (in early-year '11) offers only TELEconferencing--telephone connections: absolutely no message, editorial or other content help; no A/V prep service; no training knowhow; no meeting management; no anything-else that Cavalier would call 'conferencing service.' I objected. Their attorney did offer to "hire someone with a Cavalier surname--if that's acceptable." Duh! They do run Centers--such are facilities, not services.

The name 'Cavalier' is generic, especially in Virginia, where--as Colonial British politics--it's part of Virginia's history. However, the [www.complaints.com](http://www.complaints.com) entries for the parent company, Cavalier Telephone, are not too enthusiastic. If anyone chooses to sell you telephone connections instead of true meetings assistance, as bannered, you might be buying bait-and-switch. Shouldn't you understand that possibility before you commit? Honesty requires a 'telephone-conferencing' tag, in my estimation. Then, audio-only will not be confused with audio/visual electronic formats. Check the 'complaints' site noted plus 'Cavalier Telephone'--then decide.

Unfortunately, the meetings industry is rife with false claims and smoke-and-mirrors maestros, all featured in the industry's several freebie (advertiser-dominated) slick magazines. Part of your Meetings Management job for your company's meeting(s) design, development, and presentation(s) will be to determine who can help you and who will simply make you feel good. . .until the meeting falls apart. And then you've paid. . .for what?--besides a black eye?

Service and equipment claims in the meetings field are always marvelous and super-magnificent. Check them all out first! . . .if you hope to get a fair measure in advance of purchase!

Although you can see the hotel's physical structure when you visit, the degree of service that you might expect or receive during your function depends both

a) on the skills and attitudes of the staff who serve you; and

b) on the hotel/chain policies that might restrict those skills and attitudes; and

c) intramural competition. All considerations of attitude, policy, and facilities aside, with whom you will be competing for the hotel's attention during your program days there? Most hotels have one regular house staff who must do all work for all guests, regardless of demands. That often means overworked house staff who cannot perform to even their own standards (much less, meet someone else's) on some occasions. One of those occasions could be yours. Extra help, if you insist on it, is usually billed to your account. If your group is not

the only group in that hotel on your program dates, be wary. And if you agree to be one of several, good luck!

So even the most personally-cooperative person might be hamstrung by local or national policy or over-commitment. Because service-staff turnover is fast, no one can gauge in advance the potential outcome of any contract. In any case, contracts are written by/with persons other than the on-site houseman service and technical personnel.

For perspective, Cavalier estimates that during his six years (12 seasons) of multiple-client professional coordination, perhaps three hotel crews *consistently* deserved to be commended. In the industry, today, “manufactured expert” writers are frequently published, although they might have more experience in writing than in preparing or overseeing meetings and conventions. That might be acceptable to you if they’re identified as being writers, not hands-on professionals. . . .Men can write about childbirth, too. . . .but you’ll understand throughout that it’s not from first-hand experience.

Chapter 18 reflects Cavalier’s 12-seasons of hands-on experience. In office hours alone, that’s more than the 10,000 hours usually required to create expertise in any performance area. Google that book, “10,000 Hour Rule.” How many hours of hands-on experience does the writer of that sales-seeking writer have?

Cavalier knows that his ideas work because they’ve all been tested and proved by him. . . .and reader/users, too.

Final caution: caveat emptor!

## 18

**Handling hotels**

**NOTE:** MPI (originally, Meeting Planners International; now, Meeting Professionals International) asked permission to reprint two chapters from *Sales Meetings That Work* (1983) in that organization's "First Professional Handbook." Permission granted on request—over ten years after MPI was formed and *SMTW* had appeared under the imprint of Dow Jones-Irwin .and only a couple of years after MPI had awarded Cavalier its Tony Award for the best presentation at its Tenth Anniversary Convention (December, 1972), in NYC.

At that convention, Cavalier called for standards and ethics—never passed by MPI, even though the Cavalier how-to forms (first created for his 1973 *Achieving Objectives in Meetings*) had become the first and de facto user-how-to methods for that meetings/conventions industry.

MPI then proceeded to reprint one of those chapters verbatim but censored the other: Chapter 18. All text for user protections (100%) was stripped, and only two of the three forms were reprinted. Those were separated behind the work of other writers, as if Cavalier agreed with those writers. The form entitled "Protective Contract Provisions" was not reprinted! Apparently, according to MPI's actions, customers are not supposed to be able to understand when they're buying safely and wisely and when they're not.

Chapter 18 is reprinted here so that you can understand (when reading these MPI-censored materials) how a user-organization was converted into a supplier-dominated organization while only an organizational name change signaled that shift in allegiance. If you didn't know the original, then you can't know the present group's direction.

Since publication in 1983, *SMTW* has championed Video Conferencing as an alternative to supplier-dominated emphasis in the meetings/conventions field. At that time, VC was constructed of still photos that were refreshed every 10 seconds or so. Jerky, yes, but an alternative to the already-current distortions in the meetings/conventions industry press.

Because American Express has estimated that about two-thirds (yes, 2/3) of a typical corporate travel budget is spent on the central sales meeting, your route to major cost-savings is clear. Now spend some of those savings on intelligent programming. You'll enjoy more-focused meetings with less event-hassle plus more frequent and timely contact with scattered employees. . . .at less cost!

The current (2002) edition of *SMTW* contains arguments that support Video Conferencing in two chapters, one expanded and one new. One new form will help you to ask questions about facilities on the web from your peers. Their experience, not industry promotion, is your best hope for buying wisely!

As Cavalier has written in response to Marshall McLuhan's mindless dictum, "The message is the message". . .and don't you forget it!

Quality facilities are important to your program if you are still site-committed. However, that quality should not be expressed as the advertising suggests—as the biggest/newest/flashiest/most extravagant place on earth. Rather, it must convey respect for the individuals participating.

In scientific terms, the hotel/motel becomes a major part of the surround; that is, everything in the participant's conscious and unconscious awareness of place, excluding people.

An unspoken message of attitudes reflected by the facility is received by your participants on arrival; it must be acceptable at minimum. Yet it's not necessary 'that the facility be fancy; the quality level that most participants would choose while on vacation is the proper starting point. Trade up to the degree warranted by the importance of your message.

Convention life would be far easier if innkeeping and the public space capabilities of each facility were well matched. But some very fine inns—offering good rooms, good service, and tasty food—have small meeting rooms or none at all. Other facilities in demand because of their abundant meeting space offer shabby service and shabby attitudes and cardboard food. Inspect; test.

Rooms, food, and staff service and attitudes are far more important than the public space in terms of the surround. Most urban areas have many auditoriums and theaters and college halls to aid your space needs; but nothing compensates for uncomfortable living.

Always treat your inn and convention hall as separate entities, even when they're under the same roof! Living conditions and hotel cooperation count for more than national trade name or bowing-and-scraping waiters when the chips are down.

Once you accept that wisdom, you're ready to decide on the general type of facility to be sought. For brief or very large meetings, the city or city-airport facility often wins. For personal contact and enough solitude to encourage serious study and discussions, the conference center or hidden-away resort are in front. For an incentive award, contest award, or celebration (anniversary, banner year, major new product, and so on), the big ski or sun resort is the place.

Keep in mind that some companies offer portable classrooms. These trailers can be rented for short or long periods and will accommodate the smaller groups usually preferred for training and other small-group purposes. With portables, you can have your meetings in the company parking lot and avoid most of the site and transportation problems of the "distant" meetings.

Some planners are cautious about Las Vegas, New York City, and San Francisco, contending that there's so much to do that not only do participants stay out late at night, but they also spend more money unintentionally than the family budget will stand. Family budget problems lead ultimately to new job interviews.

When you're ready to go shopping, where do you start? Not with the travel trade directories listing every facility in the nation. Those are used by travel agents and airline clerks on a daily basis to do a different kind of job. Those directories are of little value to you, since even the telephone Yellow Pages tell you every hotel/motel in a given city—and so what?

What really matters is the current availability of a facility that has the capacity and equipment you need. The best place to get up-to-date information on availability of multiple facilities is the local convention bureau; in small towns, it's the chamber of commerce that has the information.

No bureau or chamber? Then use the Mobil Travel Guides. Because they rate the facilities, they are valuable aids to you when scouting strange territory.

Knowing who else will be in town will also help you to decide whether or when to be there. There's not much sense in fighting a world's fair or even a county fair, because everything in town that week is geared to fast turnover of transients. Yes, some participants might like to attend, but that's a different discussion and makes their problem yours.

With the list of availables named by the convention bureau or chamber of commerce, phone the hotel/motel. Ask the operator for room rate information and check the rack rate (that rate quoted to individuals, sometimes unreserved) for single accommodations—you might get a range; jot it down; then get your call switched to the convention office and get down to business. Were you treated courteously and promptly early in the call? If so, say so; if not, keep alert to other negative indicators in the conversations that follow.

Without stating that you have already obtained the rack rate, ask the convention rate for your group size—there should be substantial percentage difference, climbing with size of group. There are also seasonal differences in tourist regions and resorts.

In addition, most city hotels are under booked on weekends and will offer substantial discounts if you use Friday and Saturday nights. Ask. Bargain—they expect it.

Hotels are among the most cost-conscious, supply-and-demand-oriented enterprises in the world. To their net price they add the commissions paid to any middlemen. That includes intra-corporate referrals via national-franchise IN-WATS telephone reservation service as well as the celebrated "independent hotel representative." Today, add www and e-mail to your options. Hotel reps are independent businessmen who will be paid several dollars per room per night for calling a few hotels in your name. If you're sleeping several hundred, that's an expensive telephone call. Besides, if he commits in your name they treat him as the source of business, and you get the facilities "as is."

From the hotels/motels you consider prospects, get the existing brochures plus a letter from them stating that they can accommodate your group of (count) rooms/beds on (inclusive dates) at (price) per room/bed. Get a specific date by which the “blocking” of space, if they offer it, must be confirmed or released. Generally space will not be blocked on the first casual inquiry but only after, on studying the brochures and visiting the site, you confirm continuing interest. However, customers are not so plentiful that your prospective facility will cancel you out without warning.

As a rule of thumb, assume that all printed materials you receive are to some extent out of date. Ask the facility about specific inaccuracies or recent changes; you might get some.

But most printed material is prepared in vast quantities at infrequent intervals; and so many things could have changed that it’s unlikely you can work for long from printed matter.

Only by personal inspection can you be sure the facility can physically accommodate your meeting. Only by personal visit can you be sure you want those people to serve yours. There is no substitute for a personal visit in advance of contract!

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the ideal time to contract for the facility is after you have a good understanding of your production needs. However, if it’s unavoidable to commit earlier than that, consider the maximum specifications of the last two or three similar meetings to be your minimum needs for this one. Anything short of that could force you to bend your entire meeting to unwelcome limitations.

Because physical facilities will make the difference between competing facilities of equal innkeeping quality, we have created a special Facility Comparison Guide which appears at the end of this chapter.

However, because misrepresentation of capabilities and services is so blatant in the convention industry, *apparent* capability does not always translate into *real* capability or service. Therefore it’s necessary to consider some of the problem

areas as well as the ways to understand and deal with those problems.

*Would you buy a used car there?*

On those infrequent occasions when a hotel manager concedes that hotels do indeed goof, the example is invariably represented as forgetting ashtrays or ice water—and we all agree that’s not a catastrophe. The real problem is that few “honest errors” of the hotel/motel are either honest or errors.

The three common and cardinal sins of any offending facility are these:

1. To sell a function room to another group to use immediately prior to your contracted arrival date and setup time. This is accomplished by telling you the room would be unused and available free of charge—and by discouraging you from reserving it in writing. The convention sales office and the catering department are both profit centers, and those managers benefit from personal bonuses fattened by overlapping promises. The official explanation is “Whoops.”
2. To sell a function room to another group after you have already moved into that room simply because you do not have a profit-producing function scheduled for that time. Ditto on dissuasion on your writing a provision for *exclusive use* once moved into the room. The official promise is, “We’ll reset it perfectly at our own *house* expense. By *house*, they mean only their only labor crews...but how will those semiskilled laborers reset your screens and projectors perfectly? You’ll be stuck with the cost of all complementary reset charges—as well as the headaches for the lost time and effort accommodating them. If they tear down your set-up without your permission, bill them for *all* costs and/or damages; deduct that from the final bill; and never go back. There’s no compensation for unnecessary problems.

**Sales Meetings That Work  
Protective Contract Provisions**

Note: Most facility standard contracts are modeled on the standard Hotel/Association Facility Contract of the American Society of Association Executives, Washington. Variations can be critical; compare. Within the context of your or their standard contract, add these essential self-protection concepts. No attempt has been made to draw legally acceptable phrases, which is best left to your company attorney.

1. It is understood and agreed that the following function rooms shall be reserved and held available for the exclusive use of (Company) between the times and dates listed, unless later released as hereinafter provided, and further agreed that time and exclusivity are of the essence:

Rooms reserved	Available	Date	Time	If released	Date	Total cost
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. It is understood that (Company) shall release any function room(s) which might not be used, and said release shall be delivered in writing not later than \_\_\_\_\_ days prior to the dates reserved. Any reserved function rooms neither released nor constructively used will be subject to a daily rental of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, if offered for use without charge above. Failure to provide the reserved facilities named at the times stated herein shall render the Hotel liable for direct and consequential damages, if any.

3. It is understood and agreed that the Hotel is engaged as a convention facility and therefore the Hotel staff services agreed upon are equal in importance to the Hotel physical properties reserved and/or provided. As a consequence, all requested services agreed upon in subsequent conferences shall be detailed in a written Master Requirements Summary not later than \_\_\_\_\_ days prior to the dates reserved herein and shall become an integral part of this contract. Failure to provide the agreed services of first quality at the stated times shall render the Hotel liable for direct and consequential damages, if any. *First quality* shall be construed to mean that all supervisors and at least (75?) percent of semiskilled laborers shall be fully experienced in this hotel and that none shall arrive to begin set-ups for (Company's) first day of programming after being (10?) hours on the job in that workday or if the completion time scheduled shall keep them beyond (12?) hours on the job in that workday.
4. It is understood that the exact physical structure of the reserved function rooms can affect the plans of (Company) and it is hereby agreed that should any physical alterations be scheduled to begin in any of the reserved function rooms prior to the dates reserved herein, then the Hotel shall immediately notify (Company), and (Company) may, at its sole option and without penalty, elect to cancel this contract.

3. To permit hotel staff (including the hotel's own convention sales and service managers) to walk away from problems, especially those that hotel policies or employees have created. Since most corrective measures seem to be "against policy" or "not in your contract," you get some sympathy and no help, unless at extra cost. The official excuse is, "We don't seem to have a record of it."

Because all three of those abuses are routinely and knowingly perpetrated, they must be viewed as unethical practices. Write a full, tight contract. (See accompanying Protective Contract Provisions.)

### DEALING WITH PERSONNEL

Those offending management policies and attitudes generate related personnel and service problems, such as:

- A. Inadequate staffing and inadequate training of staff. Both result from narrow (usually absentee) management based solely on bottom-line figures, which incompetent managers still don't see as short sighted and destructive. Such hotels still see themselves as being in the booze-and-beds business, rather than in the people business. While some really don't understand your needs, others simply don't care.
- B. Overworking of house labor. During peak periods, your assigned house crews might arrive on your project after having been on the job a dozen or more hours (up to 30, in our experience) without a break. They cannot perform to their own standards even if they want to. Include in your contract a provision that no laborer will begin work for you after 10 hours on the job; and none will begin work which cannot be completed before the twelfth hour

on the job. The hotel can hire additional labor; their crew chiefs can supervise, if required.

- C. Switching of personnel. You might find yourself talking details with one group of convention-service supervisors but facing strangers during the actual event. Consider that avoidable and intolerable; guard against it in writing.
- D. Personnel turnover. Anybody can quit any job at any time in any trade; to that normal hazard, the chains add frequent personnel transfers. Whatever the reason, when key personnel leave they take with them all details not committed to writing, as well as subjective understandings and ideas.
- E. Faulty personnel attitudes. Hotels are a minimum-wage industry. The kitchen, laundry, supply room and maintenance/house laborers—and even the chambermaids—earn little or nothing above the legal minimum. Yet they are directed to serve the exacting demands of companies billed at a premium price.

In our largest cities, most—of these unseen service workers are minority groups. Because they don't feel an overwhelming conviction that one of them will be the next president of the hotel corporation, their enthusiasm might occasionally flag. Handling different people every day of every year calls for the utmost flexibility and infinite patience; and it also teaches staff that you will be gone soon and won't return for a year, if at all. When there's a choice between your having a headache and their having a headache, it's understandably yours. Extra performance is usually demanded of a person who had no part in the promises made and no share in the profit realized if he goes the extra mile. Think *attitudes* as you fill in the accompanying Hotel Personnel Directory.

**Sales Meetings That Work**  
**Hotel Personnel Directory**  
 (Make one for each facility considered)

Facility name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Facility Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ Catering Manager: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Convention Sales Mgr: \_\_\_\_\_ Convention Service Mgr: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hotel's convention coordinator assigned: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Exact chain of command above during our meeting/convention:  
 Service Department Heads (meet all on first trip!):

	Name: Chief/Assistant	Regular hours	Reports to	Phone extension	Attitude +,-
Electrician:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
(Sound):	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Carpenter:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Head Houseman	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Front Desk:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Credit/Acctg:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Housekeeping:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Telephone Operator:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Bell Captain:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Security:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Elevator Starters:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other:	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____
(Resorts, cruise ships):	_____/_____ /	_____	_____	_____	_____

Social Director \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
 Sports/Recreation: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Basic checkpoints: Will these supervisors be on duty then? If not, why not, and who will be? Are any newly hired personnel totally familiar with facilities? If not, who can assist? Do they listen to your needs and suggest better, faster, cheaper, or easier ways? Do you want to work with and depend on those individuals? Transfer appraisal to Facility Comparison Guide.



## COMPARING PROMISES AND PREMISES

It should be evident that if you put everything in writing—and if you don't expect anything more—you'll be adequately served. Most facilities now honor their written contracts, in letter if not always in spirit. Consumer pressure did it.

Your obligation to yourself, therefore, is to become a savvy buyer as fast as possible. You can do that by determining exactly the type of facility you need; then by comparing the promises and premises of potential sites; then by measuring and checking all needed public space and equipment in a personal inspection tour; then by writing a contract binding space, dates, and prices with provision for a late service addendum. Let's take all those ideas in turn.

Considering the purposes and production requirements of your meeting or convention, decide which of the following facility orientations best serves your needs:

- A. The inn. The emphasis is on personal living; prestige and decor are important elements in some; bars and restaurants set the tone.
- B. The conference center. The emphasis is on group business; efficiency, quietness, and technical preparedness are their strengths; rooms, meals, and lounges are usually good but not elaborate. The true conference center is distinguished from all false claimants because the center cannot sleep more individuals than can be accommodated in its meeting rooms. Recommended.
- C. The convention center. The emphasis is on simultaneous group activities; beware plastic food, people, and furniture. In Europe, the recommended facility—advanced, equipped, capable.

Misrepresentation is common: space alone does not constitute a "convention facility." Staff skills—services—make

the difference! Unfortunately, many managers of major complexes proved themselves in the days when space and decor were the prime attractions. Those managers have never been required to understand the communications objectives of their clients; so they can't require it of their staff. If you let their bluff and arrogance intimidate you, you're buying trouble!

If you can't find everything you need in one facility, then combine several. Take any fine inn and shuttle your people to a good theater or college lecture room where all seats are equipped with desks. Buying perfection piecemeal takes longer, but isn't that better than buying mediocrity in one lump?

Your alternatives include movie theaters, small regional legitimate theaters (most of which need the money), church halls, high school gyms and auditoriums, as well as the public hall or clubroom. Just look around.

Don't be dazzled by decor. Beautiful but uncooperative facilities become a blight on your program. When the facility lets you understand in subtle ways that you're lucky it will let you in, you're in the wrong place.

Look for helpful attention. Eager but unendorsed facilities take on new stature as contenders for your business. Certain major hotels use the endorsement argument against neighboring facilities, with the result that some fine complexes have never served a major national company or association. The national-endorsement ploy is totally without merit. When any facility has successfully organized for, and competently served, a technically complex meeting, it has proved itself worthy of your consideration. If the competition didn't think so, they wouldn't use the ploy.

Keep an open mind on facilities. When you know *what* you should be saying, *where* you say it is of secondary importance.

## LOOKING PAST THE TINSEL

Don't buy glittering generalities. When a sales person calls on you, he has been very carefully briefed on all the catchwords

(“buzz words” in Washington) and throws them about with abandon. If the convention and catering managers you meet are suave and reassuring, so in their junior way are the salespersons who call on you. Salespersons know you want “prompt, efficient, courteous service,” and can certainly swear that “a responsible convention staff is at your disposal.”

They know everyone likes “impressive atmosphere at prices unbelievably low for what you get.” Food service is impeccable,” as they tell it, and the food itself is “superb.” The “flow pattern” for the crowd is unchallengeable, and the entire hotel is aware of your need for “split-second timing and silence.”

It sounds so idyllic you can almost forget that the sales person has never planned or coordinated a convention, probably hasn’t attended many, and has gained what little familiarity he might have during the three weeks he was inside practicing on some poor Meeting Manager’s agenda. And there just might be one of his counterparts waiting at the hotel to practice on *your* agenda.

Promises are as much a stock-in-trade in the hotel sales industry as they are in the political industry. Both groups spend a lot of time and money telling you they know exactly what you want before proceeding to do exactly as they choose. In both cases, your complaints come after the fact and fall on the most insensitive ears ever found.

When that spit-and-polish sales person comes in, ask him to spend a few minutes telling you some of the pertinent details about recent conventions in his facility. What were the special problems, and how did the hotel help to meet those problems? How did the sales person assist? Whom? Can you phone to verify? If the sales person can’t answer meaningfully, accept his folder and send him home. There’s nothing more he can do for you.

Hotels needn’t teach all their sales people how to run a convention; but all sales persons and service staff should respect your viewpoint and needs, know how they originate, and realize how easily they can be damaged. Sales people shouldn’t

misrepresent. If they sell from folders and hearsay, admit it, and merely try to arouse your curiosity for the facility, their job is done. But when their quota forces them to sign you at all costs—what does an extra promise here or there really matter? Besides, no one at the hotel will ever know!

Whose opinions can you trust? Your own and your assigned committee members, once they’re fully briefed. For space, if you need it, measure it. For equipment, if you need it, test it. You take any facility “as is” unless there’s a provision in the contract for improvements or modifications.

The on-site shopping for a facility is the business version of a ritual courting dance. If you arrive at the hotel or motel as a prospective buyer, then you are greeted with light banter at the check-in desk; given the best room (or suite) in the house, usually complimentary; find the telephone operator answering almost before you pick up; swear a bellhop has been stationed outside your door; and get unbelievable room service—all before you meet the hotel’s convention manager. He waves off your profuse thanks, of course, because you got nothing more than “regular service.” Once in a while that’s almost true.

If you really want to know how your people will be treated, check into a paid, reserved room without fanfare; specify a minimum or modest cost room, and start taking notes. All you suffer is the loss of free liquor or fruit basket. That’s a bribe; and if it didn’t work, it wouldn’t be done.

When you’ve checked the reception service, bell service, and even room service, tour the restaurants and bars and other public space—get a real feel for the place. Then phone the hotel convention office—they’ll probably find time to see you. If you don’t like what you’ve just seen and experienced, and it seems incurable, check out; but sometimes you won’t have a good alternative. So armed in advance with specific complaints, get the sales manager to offer corrective measures, and write them into the contract.

Once you’ve made contact with the convention office, you can meet the staff and analyze the public function rooms. While

inspecting the physical plant, make a habit of seeing the Big Three of the labor force immediately; electrician/soundman, carpenter, head houseman. Without their cooperation, nothing will happen right. They also control all sound, stages, exhibit areas, and drapery and lighting and can give you a rundown of inventory as it matches your needs. Does each have ideas and suggestions to simplify the task? A really capable man can spell out the plant's main advantages and shortcomings faster than you can spell your name. All you have to do is ask.

Verify details on every aspect of every room, access area, and equipment you need. Take nothing for granted. Elevator sizes and door widths limit the size of constructions you can bring in. Electrical outlets: determine whether you can or cannot use small equipment once the overhead lights are turned out. Controls: where? Dimmer-boards: test all circuits.

It's best to hear the sound system in operation with a group in the room, because people change acoustics just by being there to absorb sound, if not ideas. Most hotels have acceptable sound systems, but few are excellent.

Is there a true stage with wings and hidden access? Must the temporary platform stage be located in a particular place because of electrical circuitry entry points? Does the hotel have the cable to move the current elsewhere?

Is professional stage lighting available? Connected to the dimmer-board? At what cost? Many hotels ask \$5 per 500-watt flood or spotlight, and you need 20 or more to do a passable lighting job. Considering that you pay electricians directly and they re-rent the same lights for 1,000 hours per bulb, the hotel's profit is enormous. And unjustified.

In most cities, portable dimmerboards can be rented, along with professional lighting equipment, including fixed spotlights (called lekos or ellipsoidal spots) or lens-focused lamps (fresnels, pars). If there's to be movement on stage, use a follow spot, which is probably owned by the local stagehands union. To light huge areas, especially for ambient room color, use the two-foot hemispheric reflector lamps (scoops). Adequate lighting is

essential to everything except rear-projected visuals; and if front-projection is used, then lighting patterns must be dim and strictly controlled.

If you need several breakout rooms, are they available? Refuse the airwall-divided "ballrooms" because they are not soundproof, unless a visual break is all that's required. Don't force several groups to hold workshop sessions at opposite ends of one big room unless you don't care whether they can concentrate. Better to empty the furniture from sleeping rooms and meet there. Baize-covered tables and extra floor lamps will make the rooms suitable for workshops of a dozen or so participants.

If the physical plant and related equipment seem adequate, take an extra half hour to walk through your Working Agenda. Go from the sleeping floors down the elevators to the main meeting room; back to the breakout rooms; then to the dining rooms; back to the meeting room(s). Back to the sleeping floors. Where are the bottlenecks, the rest rooms and telephones, the wrong turns which need signs? Are the restaurants so far as to waste time? Does that mean sandwiches served?

Handling sometimes excessive hotel noises near the meeting room(s)? Will kitchen noises interrupt sessions? This, too, is PERT planning.

Take nothing for granted. Keep potential problem situations in mind, of course; but often it's the small detail that actually escapes your notice that causes problems.

During the entire inspection process, make it possible for the hotel/ motel/auditorium staff to help you. State your end objective rather than its pieces: that is, say "cabaret atmosphere" rather than "candles and checkered tablecloths." The facility has fulfilled common requests many times and might be prepared with special background or theme elements, available at low cost. If the hotel must rent outside you will pay a fee above costs—so do the shopping yourself, if you can.

Above all, after you state your needs, listen to their suggestions. If they don't have any, maybe they're not

interested; take the warning. If they have thoughtful suggestions, you might want to use some. If the suggestions are valid but unusable, say why. No one likes to be confronted with endless rejections.

Details matter! Keep notes on everything you inspect. A good starting point is the Facility Comparison Guide which follows. Use a single vertical column for each facility; you can easily compare several prospective facilities for every important aspect before you make your final choice and place a contract. The Guide begins in Chapter 18.

Almost never will the facilities you consider offer the same advantages and disadvantages in like ways. So you will usually be required to trade off one essential for one or more preferred elements. Weighting various evaluation categories by the numbers might help in a pinch; but you can start with your personal code marks in the essential/preferred column. Review the Facility Comparison Guide now.

<b>Sales Meetings That Work Facility Comparison Guide</b>		No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4
Facility	Name				
	Address				
	Telephone				
	Owner/Chain				
Convention	Convention sales manager				
Services	Convention service manager				
Staff	Banquet manager				
	Meal guarantees, hours/%				
Personnel attitudes	Supervisors				
	Reception				
	Telephones				
	House labor				
Class	Luxury/deluxe				
	First/standard				

Facility Comparison Guide (continued)					
Facility Name		No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4
Capacity	Suites				
	Rooms, double				
	Rooms, twin				
	Beds, total				
Credit cards or terms	Cards accepted				
	Charge: Man/company				

Service facilities (count and quality)	Laundry; price, speed				
	Restaurants				
	Bars				
	Secretarial				
	Shops				
	Barbers				
	Hairdressers				
	Health club				
	Telex address				
Contract offered	ASAE standard				
	Their standard				
	Our specific				
	Service addendum via master requirements summary				
Languages — if appropriate	Management				
	Front desk				
	Telephone operators				

**Facility Comparison Guide (continued)**

Facility Name		<i>Rank following as essential or preferred</i>	<i>No. 1</i>	<i>No. 2</i>	<i>No. 3</i>	<i>No. 4</i>
Direct access to main function room	Participants					
	Freight					
Registration area	Multiple phones					
	Electrical outlets					
	Size					
	Security					
Master function room (specify size or count, as ap- propriate)	Length					
	Width					
	Height					
	Stage, perm/platform					
	Lecterns/lighted					
	Dimmerboard, circuits					
	Auditorium-style seats					
	Banquet-style seats					
	Cocktails, seated					
	standing					
	dancing					
Schoolroom						
Obstructions (posts or chandeliers)	Yes/no					
	Number/location					
Partitions of master room	Number/type					
	Sizes: 1.					
	2.					
	3.					
Personal conveniences	Toilets					
	Telephones					
Control room (sound, lights)	Dimmer/switch					
	Sightline to stage					
	Intercom system					

**Facility Comparison Guide (continued)**

Facility Name		<i>Rank</i>	<i>No. 1</i>	<i>No. 2</i>	<i>No. 3</i>	<i>No. 4</i>
Secondary meeting rooms	Name					
	Length					
	Width					
	Height					
	Prox. to master					
	Name					
	Length					
	Width					
	Height					
	Prox. to master					
Personal conveniences	Toilets					
	Telephones					
Control rooms (sound, lights)	Room:					
	Room:					

Equipment inventory (total count)	Microphones, lapel					
	Microphones, floor					
	Lecterns/microphone					
	Tape recorders/players					
	Spotlights, etc.					
Electrical supply (stipulate supply point)	Master function room:					
	Max supply, amps					
	Volts, cycles, AC/DC					
	Secondary room:					
	Maximum supply, amps					
	Volts, cycles, AC/DC					
	Secondary room:					
	Maximum supply, amps					
Volts, cycles, AC/DC						



**Facility Comparison Guide (concluded)**

Facility Name		Rank	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4
Exhibit capacity	Floor load: lbs./sq. ft.					
	Direct entry					
	Electrical supply					
	Compressed air, water					
	Useable floor size					
Elevators (adequate?)	Guest: count, capacity					
	Freight: count, capacity					
	Service staff: count					
House labor service charges (note if unions and mini-mums)	Labor, per hr					
	Equipment					
	Printing/copies					
	Drapery					
	Signs					
Other equipment (rental?)	Video-conferencing					
Other facilities (health, medical/handicapped aids, sports, recreation, clubs, conditions—not already covered)						
Personal observations, opinions						
Values	Group rates					
	Complimentary rooms					
	Free services					
	Average meal cost/day					
	Phone charges					
	Other					

## TALKING TURKEY

Once you've made your personal inspection, you know how well the given facility will serve your meeting. If you're disappointed with the first site, maybe it's poor or maybe you're expecting too much. That is, if you're paying for chicken, demand chicken; but don't expect pheasant; and don't accept turkey.

By the time you've toured your second prospect, you'll know which of those factors is operating; by your third tour, you'll be a pro and have confidence in your judgment. For future meetings, all past inspections become valid experience, and you're never again in a quandary. Experience is one of your best allies.

But even after your first-ever inspection, you still must reserve the right to see other sites. Tell this facility's sales manager that you are interested but that you are committed to seeing one or two other places. He expects that

If physical plant and service are acceptable, you can talk prices. If there are incipient problems, outline them and see what can be done to eliminate them. Then go on to prices.

Associations often seek complimentary rooms so the cash expense of association staff is minimized; a ratio of one *comp* per 25 to 35 paid rooms is standard; the cost burden is thereby shifted to the members attending voluntarily.

However, the corporation will be paying for all costs; so assuming you know almost exactly how many persons you will be sleeping, convert the *comp* ratio to reduced room rates—about 4 percent below the association group rate.

Remembering that *breakage* on advance guarantees for meals (see Part I) is an industry-wide ethical problem, make arrangements now for any estimates you must deliver because of unpredictable circumstances (such as voluntary dealer/distribution attendance, early departures, or spouses invited).

Waiters and foodstuff deliveries are at issue; and a change of menu can often eliminate a problem deadline. If you must

guarantee in advance, hold to a 24-hour advance plus 5 percent up-or-down variation from the set number; that's fair to both. Some hotels routinely demand 48-hours and 3 percent up only and pretend it's the industry standard. Beware 72-hour demands.

It's also important to remember that in today's computer-crazy world, the cheapest rooms seem to be on the world wide web. An interesting idea is to get a quote from the appropriate office of the hotel(s) being considered regarding your group size and dates. Then check *www* generally or *priceline.com* and its competitors specifically to see whether anyone is getting it cheaper simply for knowing it's there. Whether you do or do not obtain a better price from the web, you will gain good insights into the forthrightness of your group of prospective site(s). This information is, of course, related to that in Chapter 16—it's all travel-friendly, and all non-contributory to your message.

Because of the freedom of the web, you will be able to scout the competition in a way and with an ease that seemed previously open only through the large convention exhibitions once used in order to command your attendance—in order to give you the same one-stop shopping that the web delivers now. That convention exhibition promoted advertising interests more than member interests, in our opinion. Brochures are brochures, even at exhibitions. You still need to view the hotel in advance.

With luck and the time-and money-saving potential of video conferencing, meetings managers might even be able to concentrate on the messages in their meetings. And won't that be a welcome change!

Remembering that much trade literature warns against the routine padding of liquor bills, decide up front whether to pay by the drink (it's recommended if controlled by tickets) or by the bottle (if opened, whether or not used up) at an open bar. Pay for the bartender separately for total control; if he's paid separately, drinks should cost less per glass.

Estimate the number of hours of each type of labor needed for room set-ups and changes; who pays? Ask the per-hour cost of house crew chiefs and their workers, if chargeable; which are

union controlled? If unions are involved, what's the minimum union *call* (the hours paid, whether or not worked)? Advance notice required? Penalties for overtime? If any of these apply, plan to keep a time sheet on all labor during the event itself.

Assuming that what you hear is acceptable, you're ready to talk about the *blocking* of specific public and sleeping rooms. In blocking the space, the sales manager is guaranteeing you its availability until the agreed-upon confirm/cancel date. Obviously you must inspect the alternative sites before that date and staff the budgeting requests; so don't cut yourself short. But plan to honor the date you agree to.

Discuss incidentals, too. What is the cost of the laundry service? Some prices are staggering. During a long meeting, that could become a considerable cost. Two-week training programs get into trouble this way.

Don't forget tipping. Some facilities tack on a mandatory 15 percent gratuity for house crews as well as waiters. Some tack a percentage onto the total bill to distribute to all employees. Even if you pay a mandatory gratuity, key employees still have a hand out, and it's difficult to refuse. If you pay gratuities to individuals, pay by check. Never give cash to one individual to distribute on your behalf because too often it never leaves the original pocket. One auditorium manager even kept an entire case of Scotch, delivered tagged with the names of intended recipients. Checks avoid suspicion and accusation.

Now you're down to specific contract provisions. Ask whether the facility uses the standard contract of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) or its own version. If the latter, ask to have the specific variations outlined and explained to you. If the ASAE standard is used, read through it together and insert the necessary information. Be certain that both parties have identical notations; a photocopy of the initialed master is best for comparison, but not legal. None of the industry's standard contracts mentions the standards and penalties outlined in our Protective Contract Provisions form. Discuss your needed clauses at this point. In a climate of

malpractice, those clauses defend your rights as a purchaser of stipulated services and facilities. Insist that the sense of needed clauses be added to the standard version. If the hotel refuses, it's probably not without reason; pick up your materials and walk out. That could be one of the best decisions you've made to date in choosing facilities.

Given a more aware industry, most facilities will try to provide what they promise in writing. Therefore, you must provide for submission of the Master Requirements Summary as an expected addendum to the contract under negotiation. Set a target date for submission of the Summary and meet it.

If your chosen facility later performs marginally, never go back. If it flatly defaults, bring suit: that's what contracts are for. And if it succeeds—if it provides everything it promises—book it for years ahead, even if it costs a little more than the average. You're getting paid for results, not hazardous duty.

Copies of the *ASAE Hotel/Association Facility Contract* are available from the American Society of Association Executives, Washington, D.C.