

Magic and association events

I was recently in Kuching, Malaysia, as a panellist-delegate to the 55th Congress of the International Congress and Convention Association (Icca). A total of 831 delegates from 61 countries attended the event. I was one of four Filipino participants, three of whom were from the Philippine Tourism Promotions Board.

The Icca put together meeting professionals, destination and venue marketers, event suppliers and association executives who learned, mingled and availed themselves of the many simultaneous educational, meeting, networking and business exchange sessions that the event offered.

The four-day program featured six plenaries, 37 education breakout sessions, 26 organized meetings and two business-to-business exchanges. It had 86 international speakers/panellists, 31 moderators/facilitators and hundreds of mentor-volunteers, not to mention those involved in logistics, fellowships and tours.

One of the first plenaries was interestingly called “Monday Morning Wake Up Call”, which featured three short and sharp bursts of “intellectual wonders”, as the organizers had described it. The three excellent speakers presented separately their take on culture, networks and, surprisingly, magic.

It was the last speaker that resonated to me the most, being an association executive myself. The presentation of Vinh Giang, a magician-storyteller-cum-entrepreneur, not only captivated the audience with his card tricks, but was able to relate doing magic with event planning and management.

Associations organize meetings, incentive travels, conferences and exhibitions, or MICE, as the four activities are oftentimes lumped and referred to. Vinh Giang said at least two elements set apart a mediocre magician from a top-notch one: showmanship and risk-taking. His depiction was spot on for associations aspiring that their events will not be boring and will be memorable to their members.

Wikipedia defines “showmanship” as the skill of performing in such a manner that will appeal to an audience or aid in conveying the performance’s essential theme or message. I think this augurs well to organizing association events. More

often than not, mediocre conferences feature one Powerpoint presentation to another; speeches, not storytelling; and hypotheticals, not experiential case studies.

An association event should also be exciting and be able to take some risks in the context of trying new and innovative ways of “producing the show.” This connotes pleasant surprises and authentic personal experiences which, to me, are essential to have a top-notch event.

My experience attending the Icca Congress for the first time was a great one in terms of content through learning from peers and others, ideas that bring forth organizational innovation to my association and the priceless face-to-face meetings with old and new friends alike.