

## the official newsletter of the pcma capital chapter

### Tipping – Where is the Best Practice?

There seem to be as many opinions about tipping as there are meetings and venues; however, the most consistent “Best Practice” I could find is to ask questions.

Service charges vary from venue to venue and what’s included in that service charge is just as varied. This process becomes more confusing when you consider some venues do not direct 100% of the service charge to the service professionals.

During the contracting and budget process, your best bet is to ask your venue how they distribute the tip and what their (official or unofficial) policy is about tipping.

There are many places to show your appreciation for service at a venue, ranging from the housekeeping staff to the bell desk. Make sure to consider all of the individuals who will likely provide service to meeting attendees and organization staff/leadership. The following list sticks with the meeting services team, and suggested amounts you might consider including in your budget:

Set-Up Crew	\$5-7 per person per day
Banquet Servers	\$5-7 per person per function
Bartender	\$50 for a cash bar where no tip jar was used (hosted bars typically include tip)
Banquet Captain	\$10 per meal function
Banquet Chef	up to \$50 if carving stations are used
Audio Visual Tech	\$50 per technician if they provide on-going technical assistance
Conference Services Manager	\$300-500 depending on your company policy
Group Reservation Manager	\$50-100 depending on level of service provided to group (i.e. rooming list)



These amounts apply to exceptional service and your final generosity will depend upon the level of service received and the number of days services are provided.

While you will want to budget for added expenses in tipping during your United States meetings, your budget line items for international meetings should be limited to appreciation gifts. Gratuities and service charges for meetings held in most international destinations are included in the cost of the meeting; however, it is customary to share a token of appreciation with your direct service providers. Use caution when choosing a gift and be sure to understand the customs of the culture where your meeting is being held. Food from your home state is typically a safe choice, chocolate, cheese etc.

The bottom line is to ASK QUESTIONS. There are no real industry standards of expectation and until one is created, gaining knowledge is your best practice. •

by Tanna Pearman,  
National Sales Manager, Silver Legacy Reno, NV

### The PCMA Capital Chapter is where “You Belong”!

**Mission:** The mission of PCMA and the Chapter is to be the leading organization for meeting and event professionals by delivering superior and innovative education and promoting the value of professional convention management.

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If you have any comments, suggestions or would like to write an article for The Chatter, email: [PCMAchatter@gmail.com](mailto:PCMAchatter@gmail.com)



# Message from the Board

Kim Allison, CAE, CASE, CTA  
 Associate Director of Sales, Visit Baltimore



Recently, I had the good fortune to attend a session at the Disney Institute. Mr. Disney's constant pursuit of perfection and excellent customer service has served as a Best Practices model for our industry for over 60 years!

What about those of us who don't have our own theme park? Can't we just multi-task and get it all done?

One of our popular PCMA Speakers, Dr. John Medina, offers us scientific proof that our brains are not wired for successful multitasking. How can we do our best if our brain is not wired this way? Stopping to do something else in the middle of another project usually means we have to reboot both projects. We are more successful at prioritizing our lists by completing one project and then moving on to the next. The drive to "check that box" and move on to the next project has become commonplace as time is our most precious commodity.

Ok, but I'm still strapped for time! Most of us have heard the legendary Van Halen story of the "no green M&M's" The truth behind the story is brilliant. Having experienced less than perfect light and sound installations, not only a performance issue but also a safety issue, Van Halen included a requirement deep in the contract that a jar of M&M's be placed backstage with all the green ones removed. The band felt that if someone read this far and did this task, they could feel confident that the details were attended to and the rigging was correct. An ingenious way to hold people accountable. Achieving our best creates a greater sense of accomplishment in a job well done. When we lower the bar and rush to just "git 'er done" we open the door for errors and "whoops" moments! Full disclosure: The author of this article needs to be reminded of this as well!

In the meetings and conventions world we do amazing things every day. The blank slate of a ballroom or convention center floor becomes a bustling marketplace, a working factory, a book store or a full production with lights, camera, action! Simple advice that merits repeating: Aim High, Focus, Communicate, and Prioritize. Always be proud of your efforts and remember we do make magic happen. At the end of the day, knowing you gave it your all is the best benchmark to success.

Read more in this newsletter to learn more about best practices in dealing with housing pirates, tipping, managing your room block and finding work life balance. •

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Wanted: Convention Center

WiFi Options!

As conventions and tradeshow go increasingly digital, access to WiFi has become as important to the success of an event as location, content quality, and good food. Meeting planners are looking for affordable WiFi packages from convention centers to meet demands for online resources, social media, and crowdsourcing. WiFi has changed the look and feel of conventions, and that's a good thing for the meetings industry. But what happens when you have too much of a good thing?

With numerous exhibitors and attendees using personal WiFi hotspots, overall bandwidth at a convention is decreased, and overall service can slow down throughout the convention space.

It's a simple supply and demand equation. If there is X amount of bandwidth, and Y individual devices drawing from it, there will be less to go around. There's more competition, and so some people will be bumped offline, even with convention-wide WiFi provided.

As a result, some hotels and facilities had blocked personal WiFi access, which has been deemed illegal by the FCC and has had a ripple effect in the industry.

Good convention centers know that WiFi access is increasingly an expectation and not a perk. There are many convention facilities across the country that offer complimentary WiFi access as part of the overall package, with the option of upgrading to higher speeds at a nominal cost.

Whether venues are offering it for free or not, planners need to understand that there is a significant financial investment in installing, upgrading, and managing WiFi. Free WiFi in one convention center is not the same as in another center. Therefore, communication-communication-communication is critical in the dialogue about WiFi needs. This way you can ensure that you not only get the best bandwidth capacity required for your event, but that the quality is guaranteed. Obtaining reports from your prior meeting venue outlining the exact WiFi usage at your past event will help you in dialogue with your next venue. And this conversation needs to take place as early in the process as possible. •

by Marco Bloemendaal,  
Senior Vice President of Sales, VISIT Milwaukee

Strategies to Unblock the Block

When it comes to selecting hotel rooms for your meeting, attendees have choices -- book the block or not. Unless given a compelling reason to stay at one of your meeting hotels, they'll select the option that best suits their needs. So how do meeting planners stress the urgency of booking the block?

It starts with education. Attendees need to understand the direct correlation between rooms and space. To meet in their preferred cities, guest rooms need to be consumed. Attendees need to know that booking the block helps ensure contractual obligations are met, avoiding the potential of costly attrition penalties. Booking the block helps keep registration fees low; provides guaranteed reservations at low group rates; provides protection against housing poachers; and more. But what happens when, despite this knowledge, they still don't book the block?

The ASLA Annual Meeting and EXPO attracts between 5,500-6,000 attendees a year, but in 2012 our peak night was barely 1,300. We have a good amount of commuters, and some even double up, but we had to face it -- our attendees were booking outside the block. We had to do something.

In 2012 we integrated our registration and housing under one company for the first time: One-stop shopping, with one website; one registrant profile; one credit card transaction; one confirmation. Registrants opting out of housing had to tell us why.

In 2013 we took the integration a step further by offering a \$75 discount on registration fees at checkout if they booked at one of the meeting hotels. These two simple strategies took us from barely making 1,300 peak to well over 2,000.

In addition to the housing discount, we started the "Random Acts of Kindness" program in 2013. It awards unused room upgrades and complimentary room nights from overflow hotel concessions to room block attendees. It generates a sense of excitement and appreciation for booking the block. So while we still have a ways to go, we have made significant progress in a short time. For ASLA, room block integration and booking the block comes down to education, practicality, and a little bit of recognition. •

by Joyce DePass, Director of Meetings & Special Programs  
American Society of Landscape Architects

**The Meetings Industry Fund, launched just over a month ago with a mission to help those directly involved in the planning, execution, delivery and support of meetings, has already awarded two grants to colleagues in need. "The Fund's ability to help is tied directly to the donations it receives," said Fund Co-Founder David Peckinpugh, President of Maritz Travel Company. "We encourage everyone in the industry to help by making even a small donation."**

**Donate today at [www.themeetingsindustryfund.org](http://www.themeetingsindustryfund.org)**

Housing Piracy – Best Practices

A client of mine recently received a copy of an email from a fake housing company offering discounted rooms for their upcoming convention. The email came from "Reservations" and the company was listed as "Global Housing Services, Corp." Unfortunately, this situation is now fairly common among citywide conventions utilizing multiple hotels, and there is no easy solution in defeating these housing pirates as they attempt to deceive attendees and exhibitors into booking outside the block. The following practices are necessary to keep these housing pirates at bay, and keep your attendees safe.

- 1.) Cease and Desist Letters – It is imperative to contact your legal department right away and have cease and desist letters drawn up and sent to the housing company and current address they are using. This will typically force the housing company elsewhere and make them stop communicating with attendees.
- 2.) Create a Company Seal – One way to combat housing pirates is to use a company housing "seal" that is tied to all communication for housing needs. Any replication of a trademarked company seal or logo would be subject to copyright infringement, and would let attendees know that any email communication not containing the official seal should be considered fraudulent.
- 3.) Communication – You should continually be checking with exhibitors and attendees to see if they have received any emails or calls in regards to other housing platforms. In addition, it's imperative to post verbiage on your housing site identifying your housing company from the start. For example, "Our organization only endorses room reservations booked through the official housing bureau." Email marketing campaigns should be set aside informing attendees of the preferred housing provider.
- 4.) List Distribution – Be careful of providing lists of your exhibitors, attendees, etc. as they provide the exact contact information housing pirates are looking for.

Preparation, communication and reaction are the key components to combat housing piracy. Make sure your organization has a plan in place to fight back! •

by Ryan Barth, CMP Global Account Executive, ConferenceDirect

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## Meeting Contingencies: Playing It Safe by Preparing for the WORST!

No meetings or events are ever held that do not have risks inherent in their planning and execution. In addition to inclement weather, which is usually the first thing considered, risks faced often include:

- Speaker no-shows or cancellations
- Late or never arriving materials
- Weather (good or bad)
- Transportation (delays, vehicle breakdowns, drunk drivers)
- Health/ medical needs of participants or organizers/key stakeholders
- Crime (in or outside meeting venues)
- Displacement of meetings due to conflicting or last minute (World Series, for example) events
- Changes of hotel ownership or management company

Risk “elephants in the room” – that is, those risks that are often not on the radar of planners and supplier partners - include:

- Infrastructure (sinkholes, falling bridges, road outages, failing power grids)
- Climate (in particular drought and the implications)
- Weapons

Assessing risk for every meeting takes time. In order to do so:

- Develop more thorough RFPs/RFQs asking more questions about safety. Include questions about a property’s back up power and water supply and how the venue shelters in place. Venue partners should provide this information whether it is asked by a group or not, let them know you are on top of the situation!

- Request information about CPR and AEDs. AEDs save lives and our responsibility is to ensure the safety of people first. For example, we learned just before the last Chapter program that the host hotel had no AED.

- Expand destination and site inspection checklists to include discussions with city, county and state emergency offices to understand coordination with the hospitality community during an emergency. Involve transportation providers as well as federal emergency management providers. IF an emergency – or crisis – strikes, the cooperation of all parties will be critical.

- Assess risk by considering all the ‘what ifs’ that could impact the people, place, and meeting or event. Leave nothing to chance. Sometimes what may sound silly in the safety of your office becomes the exact risk for which you need to assess and be prepared.

- Contract intelligently with venue and vendors to cover all contingencies. Once you’ve assessed the risks, you’ll know what should be included to ensure safety and limit financial risk.

- Make no assumptions about anything, even if you’ve done meetings in the same destination or venue or worked with the same service providers. Just like CBS suffered the loss of a veteran newscaster when a car service they used sent a new driver who had not been vetted, horrific accidents happen. Check, double check and triple check what venues and vendors do to protect people and property.

- Prepare Written Plans for each and every meeting and event you do. If you’re with a venue or another supplier of services, ask to see and provide input for the plan. Every partner to the meeting or event has a stake in the safe outcomes. (Email eisenstodt@aol.com for Risk Plan table of contents.)

Emergencies and crises happen. We can manage them better if we prepare ahead of time and have written plans – including communications plans – in place. •

— by Joan Eisenstodt, Chief Strategist, Eisenstodt Associates, LLC

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## Down on the Farm -- PCMA Gives Back!

PCMA once again partnered with DC Greens, working with this unique organization whose mission is to support food education, food access, and food policy in the nation’s capital. DC Greens works toward a city where food education is on the menu in every classroom; where doctors write prescriptions for fresh fruits and vegetables as a matter of course; where urban agriculture is a valued element of our cityscape; and where zip code doesn’t determine life expectancy.

On this beautiful October afternoon, PCMA got down and dirty prepping a beautiful urban garden for the season. Volunteers pulled weeds, harvested squash and black beans, planted blueberry bushes and turned the soil of plant beds in readiness for the next batch of crops.

To learn more about the great work of D.C. Greens, visit [dcgreens.org](http://dcgreens.org). The Community Service Community is also looking for ideas for future volunteer engagement opportunities! Specifically, they are looking for organizations that PCMA can partner with that will foster hospitality/meetings industry crossover opportunities, projects that can accommodate large “helping hand” volunteers, and/or organizations that can benefit from regularly scheduled volunteer support throughout the year. **Selected nominations will win a \$100 gift card!** Contact [b\\_johnson@acs.org](mailto:b_johnson@acs.org) or [peter.obrien@marriott.com](mailto:peter.obrien@marriott.com) for more information on how to submit your ideas. •



by Kristin Hanley, Independent Event Planner



The Baltimore Convention Center





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## Valuing Your Meeting Beyond the Contracted Room Block: The Event Room Demand Study

The advent of electronic booking engines and now the growing Airbnb impact leaves planners certain some of their attendees will book outside of their room block for any number of reasons including:

- secure better rates
- loyalty to a hotel brand
- preferable location

But just how many rooms, and how does this practice affect your negotiating power when you are trying to secure room blocks for future dates?

Ultimately, there is real power in quantifying the actual event room demand of a meeting, instead of just the peak rooms picked up in the contracted room block. However, quantifying that number has been difficult for the meetings industry to understand and communicate, and has propelled the action behind a recent study to start a broader conversation in the meetings marketplace.

Released in July 2015, a landmark study, *The Event Room Demand Study – How Many Rooms Does Your Convention Really Use?* reveals, on average, one in three group room nights in the United States are booked outside of the event contracted room blocks.

While 34.1% is the average, it does not mean it will apply to every event. Factors such as gross square feet, size, location, and meeting type all play a role in determining the amount of rooms booked outside of the block for a particular event.

In fact, according to Tourism Economics, Director of Impact Studies, Christopher Pike:

- Almost one-third of the events in the study had less than 20 percent of their attendees booking outside the block;
- One-quarter fell into the 20 percent to 40 percent range;
- One-quarter fell into the 40 percent to 60 percent range;
- An unlucky 16 percent had more than 60 percent booking outside the block.

We urge you to review the study, learn more, and become an active participant in the ongoing conversation on this issue for our industry. We all have a stake in being able to declare the real value of any event. •

by Christine “Shimo” Shimasaki, CDME, CMP,  
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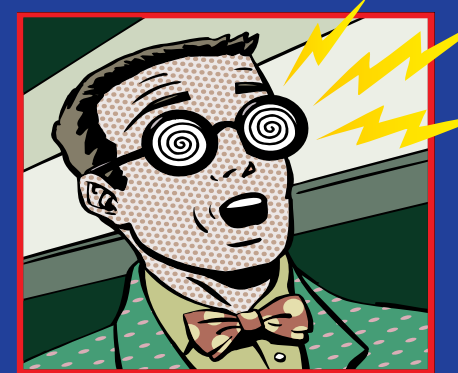
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## The REAL ID Act and Your ID

In 2005 Congress passed The REAL ID Act based on a 9/11 Commission recommendation for standards around issuing identifications. Most importantly for our industry, it governs the driver's licenses we use to go through TSA check points to board planes.

Driver's licenses issued by Alaska, California, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington are most immediately at risk. These licenses are under review for an extension; these IDs will be accepted until at least January 10, 2016, unless a longer extension is approved.

New Hampshire licenses have an extension through June 1, 2016. The following states have an extension through October 10, 2016: Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas and Virginia.

Some states are issuing Enhanced Driver's Licenses. These newer Enhanced Licenses are considered compliant, but older licenses from the same states may not be considered compliant. Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, and Washington are the only states that currently issue Enhanced Licenses. If your state isn't listed, you have a fully compliant license, including those issued by Washington, D.C.

Why aren't states changing their IDs to be compliant? New Hampshire sees this new level of security as creating a de facto national ID card. Compliant IDs require collecting Social Security numbers and photos. New Hampshire allows their residents to opt out of having these pieces of information collected when getting a driver's license. Not complying with the standards, opponents of the Act say, helps to keep the government out of people's personal information.

According to the Department of Homeland Security website, implementation of the REAL ID Act for identification cards will go into effect "no sooner than 2016". (<http://www.dhs.gov/real-id-public-faqs>) As a meeting professional, what does this mean for you and your attendees? Keep an eye on what is happening in your state so you don't run into issues yourself. Provide attendees as much information as possible on potential identification issues; suggest they bring a second form of ID to the airport if they are unsure about their state's ID. Communicate early and often; your attendees will appreciate your assistance in having a smooth event experience. •

*by Beth Pernerewski, MBA, CMP, Manager of Seminar, Partnerships and Programs  
National School Public Relations Association*

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## The Evolved Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX)

In such a fast-paced and ever evolving industry, the Convention Industry Council's (CIC) Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) initiative promotes the development and implementation of industry-wide best practices to create and enhance efficiencies throughout the meetings, conventions and exhibitions industry.

APEX has been reinvented over the years and today, the Standards Review Committee, composed of 15 industry leaders, has successfully evolved into a data-driven strategic body with standards as the overarching charge. Volunteers represent both suppliers and planners and bring a more inclusive voice to all segments of the industry.

"The introduction of a workgroup model has created the opportunity to engage a wider body of knowledge beyond the committee and expand capacity significantly. While celebrating noteworthy successes, we are fully engaged and excited to continue reviewing what's now, and discovering what's next for APEX and our industry," says Michael Owen, Chair of the APEX Standards Committee. The workgroups create content and cultivate best thinking on current industry issues and topics. The valuable output from the workgroups is maintained on the APEX website for easy access, free of charge, and is formatted to be used as an educational tool, delivered through presentations, articles, videos, web and podcasts.

Currently there are five active APEX workgroups focused on: Hotel Room Block Poaching, Bandwidth and Wi-fi (which is transitioning into Cybersecurity), eRFP efficiencies, Global Focus, and Legacy and APEX Glossary.

Room block performance is a perennial issue in the meetings industry. This group started by looking at the issue of room block "poaching," where unofficial housing companies lure event attendees away from official room blocks and into other hotel bookings. The group created a Poaching Toolkit which includes a whitepaper and best practices to help industry professionals address this growing issue.

The eRFP Workgroup developed a whitepaper on improving efficiencies, in partnership with the Global Business Travel Association.

The HSIA and Event Bandwidth Workgroup continues to develop and promote content that raises awareness of the importance of high speed internet access at meetings and events. This workgroup developed an industry bandwidth calculator and is currently working on other projects to be released soon. •

*by Kasey Connors, CIC Director of Programs and Events*

# I'm **HERE** for your success!



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It’s OK to tell me NO

You are not going to hurt my feelings or offend me by telling me no. You might actually help me.

While my job is to try and get you to buy my solutions, if you choose not to select my company and go with another provider, it is okay. That does not mean that I will like you any less, won’t speak with you at events or invite you out to lunch or drinks occasionally.

When we first met, chances are my primary interest was centered on my goal of trying to determine if you might be able to help me professionally. With that as a foundation, we may have become good acquaintances and in some cases friends. While our ‘friendship’ and ‘professional’ lives may overlap, as a professional I have learned to separate the two. As my friend, not only do I need you to tell me no when needed, but I also need you to be transparent and truthful as to why. Was my solution not what you were looking for, was the presentation and/or RFP response not on-point, was it price, or did you get internal pressure to ‘go a different’ direction?

The only way for my organization and I to serve you and your organization better is with truthful and honest feedback. If you are going to ask me to invest valuable internal resources to respond to your RFP, take the time after the decision was made to have a cup of coffee with me or a ten minute phone call to let me know where we could be better or where we got beat.

The questions will be pretty simple—Where did we fall short? How could we better meet your needs in the future? Who did you select? What is the best way to stay engaged and connected with you moving forward? If you tell me no and answer the above questions truthfully, I have a better chance of providing you with the right solution the next time you go out to bid. I am not going anywhere; my friendship and my services are here to stay! •

*by Jim Kelley, Vice President Sales & Industry Relations, Production Research Group (PRG)*



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You agonize over the finite details of your meeting down to which breakfast bar will work best, but have you ever really thought about where your guests are sitting, what type of seat they are in and how those seats are configured? The design of your meeting directly impacts its effectiveness. You can elevate the attendee experience by infusing your meetings and conferences with furniture, which is so much more than just a seat.

The environment you create can foster a more productive, educational experience, resulting in retention and creativity. Let’s explore a few outlets where we can alter the environment with furniture.

**Educational Pods:** Gone are the days of the standard round table and chairs, but peer-to-peer learning is one of the most effective styles for adult learners. By removing the large, cumbersome table, individuals can get closer together with cubes or bucket chairs. This opens up the eye contact and helps engage conversation and involvement. This revised setup of a furniture “pod” is also applicable for training and problem-solving sessions. When everyone is in a circle they are equal and contributing to the conversation, unlike in a traditional classroom.

**Large Meetings and General Sessions:** This is where attendees can be seated for an extended period, unfocused and uncomfortable. Add sofas and cushioned chairs to create a relaxed environment where they can absorb a lot of information being thrown at them and increase productivity. Do you have a brand or logo you are trying to promote? Create a pattern or use specific colors in the furniture you select. For example, chairs arranged in a blue, yellow, green and red square would convey that this meeting is for Microsoft.

There are many ways to incorporate furniture. Pledge to step out of your meeting comfort zone and get comfortable! •

*by Heidi Brown,  
Account Executive: DC Metro Area  
AEI Furniture Rental & Event Furnishings*

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Member Spotlights

Spotlight on a Planner

Lisa Cox  
Vice President, Events and Education  
National Association of Federal Credit Unions



Lisa has been getting by with a little help from her friends for a long time. In fact, she wouldn't have become the Vice President of Events and Education for the National Association of Federal Credit Unions had it not be for one key friend who was just finishing up business school. Lisa had been really curious and eyeing the possibility of going to business school, but based on Lisa's strong organization skills as well as project management skills, her friend really thought that meeting planning was a better trajectory. Lisa began as Associate Director, and after 8 years now holds her VP position. Now, it seems so natural for Lisa to use her strengths to bring an event to life for her memberships and attendees.

Lisa loves to travel and hopes to have enough time to concentrate on one area of the globe, so she can dig into its people, culture, and cuisine. This much time off is a pipe dream with her incredibly busy schedule. She is very active and enjoys yoga, running, and being outdoors with her husband Justin and her English bulldog Layla.

Being a planner may have been Lisa's "ah-ha" moment since she loves travelling and cuisines – two essential aspects in our industry. She is also very thankful for the continued support from her wonderful friends, and hopes that she can return the favor. •

by Will Trokey,  
National Sales Manager, Visit Charlotte

Spotlight on a Supplier

Joe Felperin  
Director of Business Development  
Cadmium CD



A native of the Washington D.C. area, Joe fell in love with the conference industry at his first job selling custom designed exhibits for Explus in Northern Virginia. Anyone who knows Joe would agree that he is the most social and outgoing person around – always with the biggest smile and up for a laugh. And the meetings industry fits Joe like a glove. He gets tremendous joy from networking, building business relationships, friendships, and giving back to the community through charitable events. For Joe, the meetings industry is like one big social group, geared around face-to-face meetings and everyone "pulling together as one."

Joe's greatest achievement in his career was at PSAV when they won the World Bank annual meeting contract. Joe subsequently received a PSAV employee excellence award in 2010. Another one of Joe's accomplishments is facilitating partnerships between Cadmium CD and meeting industry organizations, making him and the company very proud.

On a personal note, Joe has a strong passion for coaching and teaching. If he were to live his life over again, he could see himself as a teacher or guidance counselor in a high school and coaching basketball and baseball. Not surprising given Joe's social yet nurturing personality, always wanting to help others. Joe worked for the Baltimore Orioles in 1983 when they won the World Series, and is the proud owner of a World Series ring that he enjoys wearing as a reminder of his love of sports.

In Joe's spare time, he enjoys refereeing basketball and softball, playing golf, seeing movies and spending time with his kids ages 22 and 27. Joe loves PCMA for its exceptional education, strong chapters and tremendous networking opportunities. •

by Kim Bercovitz, Ph.D.,  
President & Chief Exercise Officer, Exercise Bytes

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Please join us for these upcoming events. Visit our chapter website for details and to register:  
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1/10 **Capital & Chesapeake Chapters Reception at Convening Leaders**  
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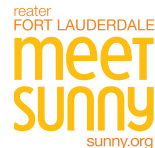
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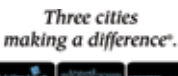
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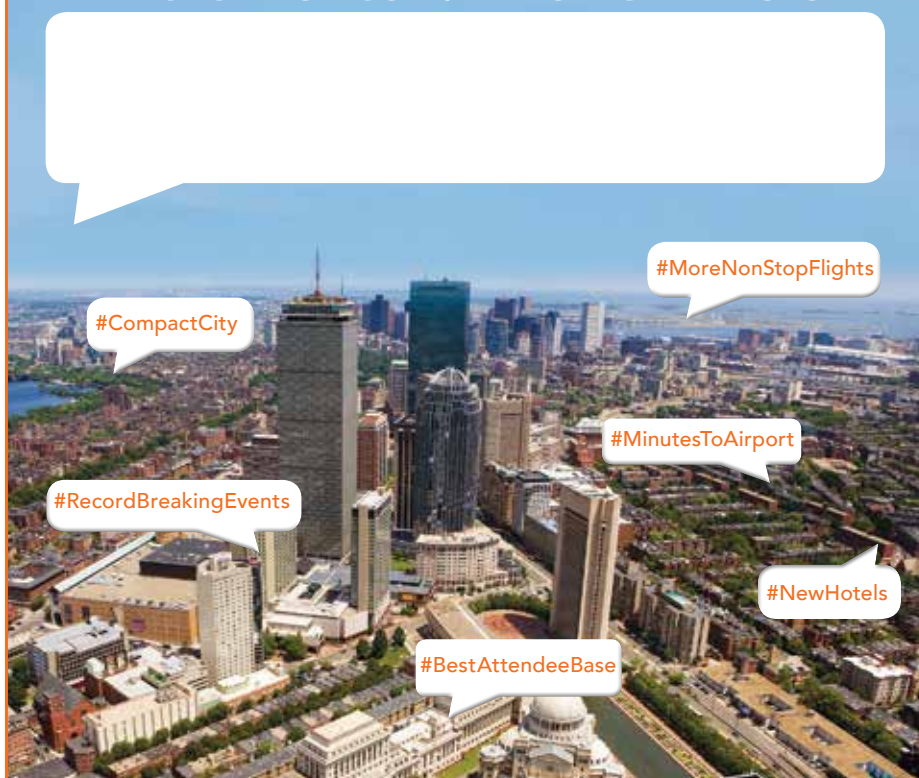
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