

PROFESSIONAL PARTYING

WORDS THERESA SCARAMUZZA

PULLING OFF A GREAT EVENT TAKES A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK AND A LOT OF PLANNING. THERESA SCARAMUZZA HAS PRODUCED EVENTS ON MANY WELL-KNOWN PRIVATE YACHTS AROUND THE WORLD AND KNOWS IT CAN BE A MAJOR CHALLENGE TO PULL OFF SOMETHING TRULY SUCCESSFUL. TCR WENT STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE TO STEAL HER TOP 10 TIPS FOR PLANNING AN AMAZING PARTY TO WOW THE VIPS.

1. KEY OBJECTIVES

Understand what is required when planning the event for the host. The more information you can obtain from them, the better you can perform your role and ensure you are on the right track to producing the event of their dreams.

Why are they having the event? What is it for? When do they want it and where? Is the date flexible? Does it conflict with a nearby event or another yacht owner having a party for a similar reason? If so would you potentially be inviting the same guests? Is it a formal black tie party or an exclusive cocktail party? How many guests do they expect to attend? Have they considered a theme? What type of entertainment do they have in mind?

2. START PLANNING EARLY

There is no such thing as too much time to plan an event. Start making preliminary plans as soon as you are first informed of the potential onboard event. As anyone who has worked in yachting knows, it's a "standby to standby" environment.

Be as prepared as you can to be able to proceed smoothly when given the go-ahead. One thing you should be aware of is the number of permitted guests allowed onboard the yacht (both in port and at anchor), which could be significantly lower than the intended number of invitees. Of course, there are ways around this to achieve your end goal. But you need to be aware of and address any legal and safety issues. >

3. UNDERSTAND THE BIG PICTURE

Create an event planner. Think about the final result and consider what needs to be done in the lead up. Who will be responsible for what? Deadlines can be renegotiated but giving a job a timeline will keep the planning on track. Think about securing the entertainment early to avoid disappointment. No matter how organised you feel, or how long you have been planning, the final days leading up to the event will be very fast paced; on the day, no doubt quite hectic. Be prepared; use the lead up time for as much back-of-house preparation as you can.

On the day a lot of time will probably be taken up dealing with deliveries and polishing of rental equipment. Prepare files containing paper copies of all of your event planning information for easy reference. This "event bible" should include information such as contact names and phone numbers, vendor orders, invoices and agreements, floor plans, calendar containing schedule of deliveries, flight information and the event roster for crew.

4. BUDGET & BARGAINING

Having a good brief from the host or host's representative and understanding your key objectives will give you a good platform to create the budget needed for the event. Perhaps you have already been allocated a budget; it is now your job to make it work within the parameters set for you. Make a list of everything you may need from a vendor and shop around for prices. It can often work out better to go to a one-stop-shop both financially and logistically. Don't believe a vendor when they tell you there is no room for negotiation; there is always room, as they will not want to lose out to their competition.

The host will always want to look good in front of his or her guests and impress them with how he or she can throw a party. It is important during the planning stages to keep the host informed and provide samples and quotations for goods and services; they may well be more flexible in some areas of the budget than you think.

In addition, there will almost certainly be an element of the event that has not been considered or perhaps simply an unexpected cost will arise. It is always smart to have a small buffer put aside for such occurrences. Each event is different but typically a budget is split into the following categories: food and beverages; decoration and rental; music (live band/DJ or both); flowers; photographer; invitations and miscellaneous (the buffer).

5. GUEST LIST

Determine whom the host wishes to invite and then how you are going to connect with them to announce the event and send the invitation. An invitation should always state the date, the occasion and include an RSVP. Having this organised as early as possible is important. Not only will it give you sufficient time to produce a fabulous looking invitation, it will give high profile guests or dignitaries time to accept, as often their calendars fill months in advance.

That said, if you are catering for a large event, an accurate guest list with a final tally will not be known until the very last minute. In this instance, you will need to decide what your cut-off point is and when the guest list closes. Keep in mind that not all RSVPs will attend and there may be a good chance of VIPs wishing to attend at the last minute.

6. IT IS NOT A ONE-MAN SHOW

Divide and conquer. A great event team onboard is not limited to the interior department. Make it a social affair and get everyone involved with the event planning. Shoot ideas back and forth across departments to ensure all operational needs have been thought out properly. You may be pleasantly surprised - the technical minds onboard can sometimes run with a creative idea and turn it into something truly spectacular and, who knows, maybe that new deckhand not only looks good but can shake great cocktails too.

7. PLAN B

On a yacht, the most common reason for going to plan B is the weather. Rain, strong winds and even temperature will have a deciding factor on how the evening will pan out. If the outdoor spaces are predominantly to be used, perhaps an item will not arrive or turn out to be not quite what was ordered. Things go wrong. However, anticipating what could happen in advance and having a plan B to implement if such inconveniences occur will significantly help you in the final stages of preparation, as well as keeping stress levels to a minimum.

8. MEMORIES

You can never take enough pictures. Having a dedicated photo/videographer on hand can be invaluable and not just for providing memories of the night. It can also benefit you, the producer, as it will become a storyboard of the event from set-up through to completion - extremely helpful when considering future events. Do not forget to send a memory. Follow up with guests after the event with a thank you for attending and include a few select memories in photo format.

9. WALK & TALK

Imagine arriving at the event you have as an idea in your head or on paper; walk through from arrival onboard. Does the cloakroom and shoe organisation system work? Is the welcome cocktail/champagne station in the right place? Is it fully self-sufficient for the evening? How are the bar and food stations set up? Can they be easily restocked during the event with minimal disturbance? Are there sufficient seating areas? Will the plans for décor logistically work? What is on the menu? How is it to be plated? Does the chef want a practice run with any sample dishes?

On the day, when all is set, have a few of you make that walk through again. Check, double check and check again. You will be amazed at how many points you pick up that need adding or amending.

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10. DEBRIEF

Ensure that your event finishes on a successful note. Thank the host for the opportunity to organise the event for them. Afterwards, it is important to schedule a team meeting while thoughts are still fresh. Remember the key objectives; were these accomplished? Thank the team for their hard work and ask them for feedback. What did they notice worked well and what would they think of doing differently next time? Don't forget to also follow up with your vendors and thank them; your requests may have been quite challenging and they'll appreciate you recognising this.