

Welcome to the Event Brew, where event professionals from different backgrounds talk about the latest, most controversial and interesting topics dominating the minds of the industry right now. This is a candid conversation, the likes of which can only otherwise be found late at night in host hotel lobby bars during industry conferences. So relax and drop in on what event pros really say when no one else is around. This show is brought to you by Endless Events, the event AV company that tells you how it really is. Now let's brew something up.

Dustin Westling:

Hello again friends. This is Event Brew episode eight. The Brew Crew is down one today, Will is off doing what Will does best. I think he said he was sitting on a beach drinking Mai Tais today, so thanks for leaving us to do this one by ourselves. This is Dustin Westling from OneWest Events and my brew today is good old H2O as usual.

Nick Borelli:

Exciting. This is Nick from Borelli Strategies. I am drinking a Naked strawberry banana because I am drinking my lunch.

Thuy Diep:

That is so unlike you drinking something like yummy and healthy Nick.

Nick Borelli:

Yeah. I mean it's got 250 calories. So for a beverage it's not, there's a lot of sugar in here too, but whatever.

Thuy Diep:

And this is Thuy Diep PRA Business Events and I am also with Dustin drinking water. I'm trying to drown my insides with just being very hydrated on this day.

Dustin Westling:

Are you feeling sick Thuy?

Thuy Diep:

No, I just want like great skin and-

Dustin Westling:

Yeah, yeah. Water is the key to great skin. So you just keep drinking that water. [crosstalk 00:02:00] Thuy, you look so lovely anyways, you don't need to worry about that.

Thuy Diep:

Aw, thanks.

Dustin Westling:

Anyways, so, today we are talking about the Global Event Forum report that was released this week by the International Live Events Society. Did I say that wrong?

Thuy Diep:  
Yes.

Nick Borelli:  
ILES.

Dustin Westling:  
Whoa. I think I just blended two brands together. I've been around way too long. Today we are talking about the Global Event Forum report that just came out from the International Live Events Association. I'm going to give you the link right now, so it can be downloaded at [ileahub.com/globaleventforum](http://ileahub.com/globaleventforum) and if you want to grab that, it would be really helpful to follow along in this conversation. To bring everybody up to speed as to what the Global Event Forum is and a little bit of history. The Global Event Forum brings together high level influential international live event professionals to debate and discuss relevant topics impacting the live event industry globally.

Dustin Westling:  
This year the group met in Minneapolis in August, a lot of the conversation was bridged from the 2018 report. That was a lot of conversation about commoditization through that report, which you can find on ILEA hub as well. There were four issues that were discussed and outlined, one of them was communicating the value of live events professionals. Establishing live events as a profession, selling creativity and differentiating live events.

Dustin Westling:  
So after that report was put out there was a lot of conversation in our industry about commoditization. I think a lot of people were learning about the details of it for the first time, which was a really, really important conversation to have. And as the Global Event Forum was put together this year and came back to the table in August, the next step to that was talking about how do we continue that conversation of what we see as the commoditization issue? And there were topics about the importance of value and this year the forum established three phases, each of them with 10 principles.

Dustin Westling:  
So we're going to try and keep this as digestible as possible. I do think if you are listening, you should put the report in front of you. It will really help. I'm going to throw to Nick and Nick's going to talk about what the three phases were and give you a quick rundown of some of the principles or the high level of what each of them are. Go for it, Nick.

Nick Borelli:

Yeah. So for a long time event professionals have had this really nebulous hard problem of differentiating what someone does for a living. So I've met the same person and they've said at different times in their career that they were an event strategist, an event planner, an event designer. And I've had a hard time myself trying to figure out where one ends and one begins because they're so intertwined. And the words themselves are fairly subjective unless you've subscribed to some sort of already designed and put together ideology.

Nick Borelli:

So I think what's really great about this is that these three phases kind of set that at least with this organization, have done their best to like set aside linear fashion from this, to this, to this, to this in a way that I think any organization could pick up and say, regardless of what you do in events, and say, "Okay, this is the part that I contribute to." Or more likely, "I contribute a little bit to here and a little bit to here." But at the least, there's an understanding of where one is and one isn't.

Nick Borelli:

And also I think it does a lot to make our value, to communicate it in a much easier way versus just kind of like the Wild West, which it's been for decades. So just being able to say really, as long as you own it, you can say you're anything and you can kind of say you do it in any single way. I think on the macro level, that really hurts us as an industry.

Nick Borelli:

To give you like an example, like doctors aren't making up specialties, right? Like they're not saying like, "I'm a this, and that is a little bit of the knee and a little bit of the upper bicep." There is specialties, they do a thing, everyone knows what that means and they're really excel in the lane that they're in.

Nick Borelli:

So what's cool about this is that it's very linear. It goes from strategy to design to execution. And in the background, as Dustin mentioned, this conversation that preceded it the year before was about commoditization. And I think one of the kind of underpins of all three of these phases are showing how there are things that are very likely to be commoditized and there's things that are further away that are less likely to be commoditized. So it kind of goes from the work of pure intellect, to eventually at the end of it, stuff. Does that sound right?

Thuy Diep:

Thank you so much Nick for explaining that to the point where I understand that and it's great and I'm glad that we are even having this conversation because this is my first time seeing this report and I have a lot of questions. So if anything I'm here, it's really cool because we all come from different perspectives. Like Dustin, you were on this, you were honored to be a part of this. So it can range from the veterans in this industry that have seen this report come out. And so actually my first question is what year? Like how many years have you guys been doing this? What's the process?

Nick Borelli:

Well, I mean I will say that like for the whole Global Event Forum, this is its third iteration and each iteration has kind of taken a different direction that's kind of organically become a different thing each time but fairly building on the establishment. I think the first one really was just proof and concept. Is there validity with the association to bring together a selected group of people based on kind of some diverse backgrounds and the different things that they bring to the table as far as the experiences they've had. Be it people who've worked on smaller events, people who've worked on huge multinational events, diversity from that perspective. More on their work output really and their contribution to the industry than their personal diversity, if that makes sense.

Nick Borelli:

And I think that the proof of concept was established and I also think there was a lot of bells and whistles on the first one, again, I wasn't there so this is just conjecture, that probably weren't as necessary to the end goal of what I think that was the most exciting output of the first one, which was ideas. So like it was at Scotland and it was a big kind of like partnership and it had this kind of fam trip element of it too. And I think at the end of it they were like, "Boy, I think we just want to have more time to talk because there's a lot to talk about."

Nick Borelli:

So the second iteration was in Denver. It proceeded ILEA Live and that's the one I was actually at. And that one was kind of an unconference model, but also a summit. So it was a selected group of people. Again, a percentage of people that were there previously and a percentage that weren't in order to have continuity but also interject new ideas. And that was also by design. And the output of that, again, was like more focused on what can we create that the industry needs? And everyone voted with their feet. So, they had the ability to spend the time on the subjects that they thought were the most valuable and fruitful, that they can contribute the most to it.

Nick Borelli:

And then, once that kind of democratic way of organizing an event ended, then, especially after the first day, there was kind of a direction. And then, I think that there was a kind of a mandate after that to be able to have a little bit more actionable content. And the third iteration, which was the 2019 iteration in Minneapolis in August, and with that, it was, "Okay, let's give our stakeholders, i.e. our members, something that is a useful thing that they can use." Not just like this high level intellectual conversation that is interesting and also pretty... I don't know, at times esoteric, but also at times still the big conversation that people in that need to have. But, what could we give a third year in the industry DJ to give them a position that they can elevate what they do? Let's make this valuable to all members, not just the people who are at the 20 years into their career. But let's give you something that is actually a tool.

Thuy Diep:

Okay, that's helpful. No, absolutely.

Nick Borelli:  
Sound right, Dustin?

Thuy Diep:  
I'm going to ask all the one-on-one questions right now. How was this group of people collected?

Nick Borelli:  
Yeah, no worries. I want Dustin to validate what I said.

Thuy Diep:  
Yeah, Dustin, go ahead.

Nick Borelli:  
Some of it was conjecture.

Dustin Westling:  
Yeah, no, I'm with you. I'm with you with all of that. I think a couple of important points is ... and I think this will lead into your next question, Thuy. So there's a team put together by ILEA because ILEA really is the driver of the global event forum. There's a team put together that looks into the industry. The goal, I believe, as I understand it, is to fill the room with industry professionals from all walks of our industry. One of the things that was really great this year that came out of some feedback last year is we actually had somebody from MPI join us this year to work that in.

Dustin Westling:  
Yeah, which was really, really great. And Kristi Casey Sanders, who I absolutely adore, and I hope she's listening to us. She joined us from MPI and got to... I think what we got was insight as to where other organizations are at, because I think it's, as much as we try for this not to be about ILEA, the room is not full of ILEA members, not all of these people are supporters and members. It really is to be a sampling of industry professionals, and not just from America. There were some great people there from the Middle East, from the UK. I'm probably missing some countries. Obviously from Canada.

Thuy Diep:  
Canada!

Dustin Westling:  
Canada! So, yeah. So no, it is really... Australia. It is really intentionally to be a diverse group that can bring thoughts from their markets, their countries together. So, yeah, there's a committee that is put together. They use their networks. I believe that members of the forum,

past forums are asked for input, and that's how it's built. I don't know that there's a strict criteria of how big your business needs to be or how many employees you have or what brand you are, which I think is a good thing. I have done it over the last two years. I've actually been quite honored to do it the last two years. It's a really overwhelming group of really smart people, and it takes a lot to keep up just because it's... Moderating these conversations would be my worst nightmare because it is 25 event professionals that all have varied experiences and are quite opinionated and not afraid-

Nick Borelli:  
Points of view.

Dustin Westling:  
... not afraid to put their foot down. Points of view to be, to put that better. So yeah, it would be my worst nightmare to moderate this group.

Nick Borelli:  
So, I was asked at one point to consider that and for that reason specifically, said, "No, thank you."

Thuy Diep:  
That's very candid of you.

Nick Borelli:  
I am an okay moderator in very specific terms, but I'm not... I am one of those people with opinions. So my ability to hold it is very, very limited. So, I found, I introduced ILEA to a friend of mine, Donna Kastner, who I work with on some things with Experient. And she's a great moderator, and she also, what I thought would be potentially interesting, is that she has been in the events industry in a bunch of different roles that are outside of the typical roles, but not in the kind of ILEA world, more so in the PCMA world.

Nick Borelli:  
And then, she also is an entrepreneur herself with her organization Retirepreneur, and she works with people who are 50 years or older, in kind of an encore profession as consultants. So kind of like a consulting to teach people how to be consultants, but that age group. So, she's very cognizant of putting together people who are very different and getting different results, and also working with entrepreneurs.

Nick Borelli:  
But, yeah, same deal. These are some intimidating people, people with opinions certainly. And also, they're very diverse. So to be a generous moderator, you have to be able to find the people who are quieter, who have a lot of smart ideas, and bring them out of them, because the dominant ones, dominate is what they do. So it's a-

Thuy Diep:

And this is on page two and three. Right in the beginning it lists it. And what I really do like, Dustin, you mentioned that it's... and Nick It's really diverse and it's coming from... These aren't huge, corporate companies either. They range, and I think that it's great to have all of that from all angles, from all perspectives, from different regions, from different areas within the event industry. It really, if anything, that makes me, it's like wow, okay, you guys actually, this group really thought about how that synergy is going to happen in order to talk about those high-level topics. So, let's keep going.

Dustin Westling:

It's interesting to see how two days of intense conversation gets packed into a report that is digestible so that it's something that isn't a 100-page transcript. But something I think they've done a really good job at is, there are some great principles in here, and there's some great information that if you're looking at this from your business view and you're struggling to put the pieces together, if you're struggling to figure out where you fall in the process, one great thing that you can find in this report is where you are in the process and better understand the phases before you, the phases after you, and how they all tie together. So, I'm curious to know, from your perspective, Thuy, can you find yourself in this? Can you see, which part of these phases you fall into? I'm putting you on the spot.

Thuy Diep:

No, I love it. This is on page what, like this is six, right? Of the report?

Nick Borelli:

Yep.

Dustin Westling:

Yeah. Six or seven. On seven, there's a graph there that just talks about the event creation journey. So, how the strategy phase blends into the detailed design phase, which then blends into the delivery phase.

Thuy Diep:

Event creation journaling. Let me think of, let me actually deep dive into this, because it's like-

Nick Borelli:

It's easy for me.

Thuy Diep:

Oh Nick, what's yours?

Nick Borelli:

So, the execution phase has nothing to do with me whatsoever, other than I read output, as far as like what in post-con conversations. I look at the data and maybe do interviews and maybe

do surveys of attendees. But, short of that, being onsite, like when I'm onsite for an event that I've worked on, I literally just walk around. I have no role. I have nothing to do. I just am curious. I watch people, but I have nothing. I always feel terrible, because all of my friends who are working on the teams that I work with, they're running around like crazy people, and listening to headphones and stuff, and I'm just kind of meandering around.

Nick Borelli:

Because the majority of my work is in the strategy phase, and a bit of it is in the design phase, because I do work with applying behavioral sciences to intentional design and translating the strategy into a live experience concept. That's often still part of my role. Eventually, once I divorced myself from all the work I need to do in strategy, there is a baton passing in the first couple parts of the design phase that I do spend a little bit of time, and then once everyone who is in the role of logistically planning events and designing events with intentional experience design, then I back away and I'm just there, going back to strategy throughout the process as a trusted advisor.

Nick Borelli:

So, I'll stay on a phone call for six months, eight months to a year, of planning an event after I've given all the strategy stuff, and I might chime in a little bit, but mostly just to bring people back to whatever the organizing principle is, or saying, "Well, based on the persona work that we did, they actually do like this kind of stuff." But when it talks about BEOs or a ampage or well, what color Chiavari chair? I'm like, "No I didn't."

Thuy Diep:

That's why I jump in, so I'm definitely design phase in this. I have things here and there from each of the other areas, but one thing that I do like is that, these, the notes in here, these three phases do not necessarily happen in order and this isn't a checklist. It's great because I think there is that flow. It's dependent on what the situation is or the opportunity. I would definitely say I'm on team design phase. What about you Dustin?

Nick Borelli:

You're all over the place.

Dustin Westling:

I'm a bit all over the place on this. I definitely learned, I don't want to say learned. By the end of the forum, I better understood where my businesses fell in this. I have a business that is a design production agency. We have a lot of stuff, so we also own product, we don't operate like a traditional rental company. You can't pull up with your pickup truck and take our stuff away. The inventory is private and exclusive to our clients only. I definitely bridge a few of these.

Dustin Westling:

One of the things that I thought was really interesting and I think Nick will either laugh or speak to, we're in a funny time where everybody wants to call themselves strategists. At every level of



this, everybody is talking about their value is in the strategy. One of the things that really dawned on me is that, yes, as a floral designer, you need to have strategy, but that strategy is more for your business. You're not the strategist for an event.

Dustin Westling:

That language and this word strategy is becoming more and more common in somebody's value proposition. Maybe Nick, maybe take that and tell me if you agree, if there's a lot of people out there calling themselves strategists that are, really do live on the delivery side of the three phases that are outlined here. Yeah, what do you think?

Nick Borelli:

Well, here's the thing, like from a real practical standpoint, everyone wants to be at the earliest stage as possible, because that sets everything. I mean on the most practical, it sets budget. On the higher level of it, it sets the North star, so it's the decision making apparatus. If you can create that, you're in the driver's seat. I understand the allure of wanting to position yourself as a strategist. I would argue that if that's not your complete domain, like if that's not all you do, then you're very hampered by what you really do. If you're an event strategist, who creates floral creations, well, I assume that most of your strategies are going to shoehorn the floral in to it.

Nick Borelli:

I say the same thing all the time with people like rental companies. If you have an inventory, you're not a pure designer, you're sales. Then you have a design mind and you work with the design aesthetics. I'm not saying that you're less than, I'm not saying that you aren't creative. I'm saying that there is a finite window of your real mandate, which is to move inventory. We'll put all that to the side because that's my main baggage.

Nick Borelli:

I don't know. I think everyone should be able to have a strategic mind, regardless of your contribution to events. You should be able to take the understanding of that phase, and apply it to what you do. A florist doesn't need to be an order taker. A florist can say, "Well, based on your event strategy, this year is, organizing principle or this year's theme is this, because you're trying to elicit this kind of behavior. What I've done is I've included more reds at this phase of the event, because it will bring out this emotion," et cetera.

Nick Borelli:

Then you're a strategic a floral designer and you're doing it with purpose, and you're also understanding it. I would imagine you're probably not in the driver's seat of the creation of the strategy. I think there's a lot to be said as far as differentiating yourself from your competition, which would probably be the main thing you want to do in that kind of position. To adopt strategic thinking. Does that...

Dustin Westling:

That makes sense.

Thuy Diep:  
Yeah.

Dustin Westling:

That was it? Yes, that is actually a big part of the conversation that we had this year, was about everyone understanding their role in the strategy. Strategic thinking and understanding the strategy is actually the most important thing you can do at every level of this. If you have a great strategist working on a project and the phases or the professionals that are after the strategy has been set don't understand how to read or...

Nick Borelli:  
Realize it?

Dustin Westling:

Realize it, then everything just kind of falls to shit. There's definitely a role for everybody to play in the strategy of the event. Once you get down to the delivery, it really is about understanding what is being asked of you and providing the input to the middle guy, which is the designer, which takes it back to Thuy. I'm curious to know within your organization, how is the blend between strategy and design? Where do you guys get involved? At what point do you involve yourself? Is it something that you guys take on? Maybe tell me a bit about how that works for you guys.

Thuy Diep:

Absolutely, and I highly compliment this journey, event creation. It is visual first off, and it's so easy to read. The strategy, how it blends into the detailed designing and the delivery, it's the why for strategy, the story, the how, how we're going to do the tactics. That's obviously the longest portion, which I'm going to be like, "Yeah." Then the delivery, like what, the fulfillment. Then on top of that, it's the thinking and the doing portion of it and how it's split.

Thuy Diep:

I'm actually going to print this one portion, just put it on my desk because it is so easy to read. If you ever are wondering what the PRA model is, it's this. We have three main departments. We have our sales, our experienced design and our event production, which is operations. We have this teamwork mentality, because it does... Everyone has their core role, but it all blends together. Am I creative? Yes, but am I also logistics? Yes, because it's really difficult to design knowing that doesn't have a free elevator, can't get through the door in this venue. I really have to be that local expert, which is a different model.

Thuy Diep:

I feel like in other industries like the advertising industry, where creatives, they don't even care about the, from what I know, about the budget. They really just sit in a room and just design,

have these crazy ideas. Yeah, I'm just so impressed by this and I'm really impressed by...  
Dustin, how long is it, this meeting?

Dustin Westling:  
Day and a half.

Thuy Diep:  
Day and a half, to have such complex ideas and just higher level thinking, and to put it in what is this, a nine page document in the first two... It's really if anything four to five pages, because the other ones are introducing who was there and everything. It's incredible how it's summarized, and it's just so easy to read from someone that's reading it for the first time.

Nick Borelli:  
I'm in the middle of finalizing a report right now actually from a high level of what took place from all eight phases as Maritz describes an event, that's a whole other ball game. It's very difficult for me to write things in five or six pages. If you allow me to do it in 40, it's effortless. It's condensing things down to just this, and everyone agreeing on just this is really, it's a difficult process. I think a lot of times when people see, they're like, "Oh that many people buy that much time, should this not be a 12, 20 page piece?" It's like it is not an actionable valuable tool if it's lengthier than it needs to be.

Thuy Diep:  
I agree with you Nick, absolutely. This is actually harder to do this.

Nick Borelli:  
Way harder.

Thuy Diep:  
Even how I tell stories, people are usually like, "Oh good." It's like the inverted pyramid, it's how when you're reading like a newspaper, any article that you want to just get to that main point and then do the details. I am very reversed, where you talk about like the cat in the alley and I paint the boat. That's I guess the creative mind in me, and then I get to that point. Yeah, it's just great job. I'm just so impressed by this. I'm learning so much of anything and having this real conversation with you both.

Dustin Westling:  
Thuy, you talked about the graph for the event creation journey. Let's talk about that little purple sliding hill or whatever that little graph it's called. It talks about where the differentiating value is at its highest, and where it's at its lowest. This graph says that the strategy phase is the highest as far as being able to differentiate your value, therefore it being the least. Likely to be a commodity or to be commoditized. As you go through the creation, so you go from strategy to detailed design to delivery and the differentiating value ends up all the way down to the bottom.

It's at its highest level at the strategy phase and at its lowest level at the delivery phase. Maybe, Nick, what is your thought on that? Do you agree that-

Nick Borelli:  
Yeah.

Dustin Westling:  
Yeah?

Nick Borelli:  
One is commoditization, the real, I always think the most negative aspect of it, because I think that there's a positive of commoditization, which very few people talk about, but you have to put yourself exclusively in the role of the consumer. The consumer wants to know what they're getting for their money. That's what commoditization is. They wanted to know within a verifiable way, what's the direct ROI? In fact, I was in a Facebook group with a bunch of planners this week, and one of them said, "I have this client who wants to know the hard ROI of engaging with me on this event." Another person commented and said, "Well, that's a red flag that these people are going to be hard to work with." I'm like, "No. They want to know. They're willing to invest. They just want to know what they'll get out of it." If you can give them that in a pretty concrete way, that's a commodity if everybody can also do the same thing.

Nick Borelli:  
I think that the negative aspect of it, if that's the positive for the consumer, the negative is there's an inherent race to the bottom. If you have it and I have it, what's our differentiator? If all things are equal, it's just price. When you think about strategy, I have it and you don't because it's of the intellect. It's only one person can have it. Because it's a unique offering, because there is only one person whose ability to discern all of your ideas and mix a little bit of art and science together, because that is a unique thing, there is no set price on creativity.

Nick Borelli:  
Think about the smallest cities in America, just because that's where I live, but anyways, the smallest, tiniest hamlet, and think about the advertising agency that works on marketing for those local restaurants. Then, think about some Madison Avenue, 60-year running with all these partners at a marketing or advertising company. They both sell intellect. I bet you one is a lot more expensive than the other. Why is that? Well, they have a track record. They have results. They have worked in big situations and not all these other things. That's the results of it, but the reality is that what they offer is something that is supposedly the best of the best, and it's one of one.

Nick Borelli:  
I think that that's why it's black and white. The more concrete and physical the offering, the higher likelihood to not only be a commodity but also race to the bottom style commodity. Whereas, offerings of pure intellect ended up being kind of set your own price.

Dustin Westling:  
Thuy.

Thuy Diep:

I'm going to slightly disagree because how I'm reading it or how I'm understanding it is I just feel like the execution is still... We're talking about the value, but I feel like operationally, that's also really important. I feel like when someone looked at this, like I said, looking at it for the first time, it looks like, yes, you want to have those core details, the bigger picture, the vision, everything. If that's not executed properly or that's not delivered, then that client is not going to return or that company I feel like is going to fail because you can plan and wish and graph and do all of that stuff, but it's more about the execution. I want to say I wish that it wasn't as... I wish the angle was a little bit acute. You don't know what I'm saying.

Dustin Westling:

I'm glad you made that comment because I think I can help clarify what that scale and what that graph is really saying. The sliding scale is not talking about the value in the process. It's not talking about bringing value to the project. It's talking about who can differentiate their value in that process. When you think about it, and I think Nick put it quite well that this graph is saying that the strategy phase has the best opportunity to differentiate their value to the buyer. The delivery stage has a harder time differentiating their value because in most cases at the delivery phase, there's a lot of people selling the same thing.

Dustin Westling:

It's not about their value to a project because I agree with you, I think you're absolutely right, I think at the end of the day, the value that the delivery phase brings is going to make or break you. If they're not great, then you're screwed. This graph is more talking about how those businesses can differentiate their value. Does that make sense?

Nick Borelli:

I also think that you could look at this event creation journey as the entire event. You can also look at it as any contributor. I could look at this and say, okay, an event has a strategy stage in which people exclusively work on the strategy, then there's people who work exclusively with a little bit of bridging in the design and a little bit of bridging from the delivery. You can also look at it from the standpoint of let's say a rental company. If you want to differentiate yourself in the market, you don't have to just charge for a chair. I think this is one of the key things that I really hope a lot of event professionals start doing more of. That is adding value and assigning value to the different phases they have in their process. There's a strategy element to what they do.

Nick Borelli:

Again, I'm not saying that they're setting the strategy for the event, but they're making strategic choices. They're using their experience that is unique to them in order to interpret the overall event strategy and provide a strategy for why they have chosen the pieces that they have and

then the design aspect of it to make sure that there is a process that is repeatable, that has redundancies, that has the right labor, all that good stuff. The delivery of it, in a literal sense, the delivery but also in all the nuts and bolts of the physicality of it.

Nick Borelli:

I think that this is something that applies on the macro level for the event itself, but it also applies to each individual in the event industry. I think that what could happen is, what should happen very much in my opinion, is that we could all charge regardless of what we do for a strategy phase, for a design phase, and for a delivery phase, like a lot of other industries do regardless of our role. That's very specific. That's just the wish of mine, but does that clarify? They're all interdependent on each other.

Thuy Diep:

Can I like... inception in your mind right now?

Nick Borelli:

Okay.

Thuy Diep:

Could each of those three categories also be a process within each of those categories? Because if you think about it, say a strategy, you have that vast strategy doing all that stuff, but you also have those detailed designs, and then how are you going to end up delivering that strategy? Same thing, delivered a detailed design. You have to have a strategy in which you're going to fulfill those tactics, design it, and then actually-

Nick Borelli:

They're not in a bubble.

Thuy Diep:

Yeah. It's all in everything at the same time.

Dustin Westling:

Right, but never confuse your business or your tactic strategy with the event strategy. I think that's where we start to-

Nick Borelli:

That's where people screw up.

Dustin Westling:

That's where the strategy word starts to get muddy-

Nick Borelli:

Agreed.

Dustin Westling:

Because, yes, of course, there is absolutely a strategy and a very important strategy to how are we going to get this stuff to this place and get it in its place? That's not the event strategy.

Nick Borelli:

Which by the way, when I work on event strategies, I have no idea how things get anywhere.

Dustin Westling:

It shouldn't matter to you.

Nick Borelli:

I don't care. I usually just am around good people like that. They do it. Yeah, you're right. I think that there is such a fine line between... I don't know if fine line, but there really isn't. There is education that needs to happen in our industry for the idea of event strategy and strategic thinking. They're of the same family. They're the same muscles being flexed. It's just there's different roles and there's an order to it that we all... not there is an order to it of one being better than the other. There's an order to it that is logical and linear because there's an end date. This is a thing that's happening, so there has to be a linear nature to it.

Nick Borelli:

As I was like listening, I wrote this down. This might be something that works or not. I said that the best strategy is understand execution. Like I said, I don't really know how it works. I do actually a little bit more so because I used to be more exclusively in the world of delivery. My strategies, not that mine are superior, but I do understand a little bit better on how things could be actually executed. Similar to how a really good... I'm going to try and see if I can make a jump with this. In catering, a really good catering salesperson understands what food actually works together or what meats can be held at certain temperatures. They're not a chef, but they know that.

Thuy Diep:

Yes, agree.

Nick Borelli:

Those ones are good, and then the same thing it goes the other way, where I think the best executors work in execution, but think strategically, so they can go like that. I think the pivot role is really important. I think that the designers create... They create the strategy. They make it tangible, and they also understand the entire palette that they have to work with, which is all the things in execution. So I think of it like writer, director, actor, which is a jump, but-

Dustin Westling:

Nope, I think that-

Thuy Diep:

Dude, the LA in me is like, "Oh I love all your examples because you guys are really putting it to a point. I mean this document is so easy to read as it is. Now, I shouldn't say really easy, but I understand it. It's not-

Nick Borelli:

It's not highfalutin-

Thuy Diep:

... Really well... Yes, exactly. And so, okay, my question is what do you think is the hardest in this world? And actually before that, the cross training and what you just said, Nick, I completely agree with you. If one wants to really exceed in their... Does need that phase and anything else they have to really understand the other, everything else. And so I'm glad, and I completely agree with you. So what would be probably the hardest one to really-

Dustin Westling:

I think the hardest is of course, the one that can differentiate the value the most. I think that the strategy component is the hardest. I think that is where you need a very different skillset to understand a business. The amount of information that you need to process in order to build a strategy is insane. And if you're a good strategist, you have to have a huge amount of knowledge when it comes to business operations. And when it comes to the goals of the business or the project and I think that is where the... When that work is done well, all the other phases are set up for success-

Nick Borelli:

They're easier.

Dustin Westling:

I stumbled through that a little bit, but Nick, I'm obviously going to ask what... Kind of the same question, maybe don't answer me as much, but which one do you think is the hardest?

Nick Borelli:

I'm struggling to figure out how I define hard because this is usually what I do with things is, I can't even answer questions because I don't have the definition of each of the words yet. So then I end up not doing anything. But let me say, so if I looked at hard as in... For starters, I think there's different levels. So at the really, really, really high level of everyone's all at the super highest level of what they're doing, all three phases, then, yeah, I agree. I think it's strategy. I think that you can, to be an average to okay strategist is probably the easiest of the three, because you're not validating a lot of what you do. What you're doing is, you're making just arbitrary decisions for people who can't make decisions and you're just kind of sticking to your guns.

Nick Borelli:



And I've seen a lot of people be able to just kind of push their strategy agenda to someone. I've seen it in advertising as well, just because people believe in them as a creative whatever. But there's no real meat to it and that'll fool some of the people some of the time. I don't know. Honestly, I think that at the high level there, I'm trying not to do all cop-out answers because I'm like, "I would say that they're all really hard." I mean, for an individual, I think that you're only good at the thing you're good at. I think that it's very difficult for you to be good or great at all three of those things.

Nick Borelli:

As I should say, when it comes to implementing for an event, not necessarily applying principles to the work that you do, I think that you could be good at all three of those, for sure. You can be as strategically... Strategic thinking, solid design or who executes on events, and do that in the role of audiovisual or in the role of rentals, I think all three really well. I think that as a person who is creating the strategy for an event and also has the tools to be at the top of their game for execution, I don't know if that's a thing.

Dustin Westling:

I think, something that actually came up during the forum and it was really hard for me to get my head out from this is that the strategist, the designer and the delivery, they're not three different people, in a lot of cases.

Nick Borelli:

Right.

Dustin Westling:

And I kept going to this place where it was like there is a strategist, there is a designer and then there are the delivery components. And that's not-

Nick Borelli:

But that's not how a strategist-

Dustin Westling:

... necessarily the case. And in a lot of cases, what happens is the strategy and design is being delivered by the same company, if not the same producer. So, I think I just wanted to throw that out there just so that it's-

Nick Borelli:

I'm in a luxury spot and I am a small consultant. So for me, I am brought into teams that have defined groups of all three of these things, where that's a team. I'm often on a strategy team that exclusively creates strategy or I am the strategist or I am the marketing strategist for an event because I don't do execution, even in marketing. But, it's a luxury and the majority of events have planners who... That word is the most meaningless to me as far as it comes to any of this stuff.

Nick Borelli:

And I think the planners is kind of the just bucket of just all of this, right? They do a bit of all of it because, I don't know, maybe just the level of the event, maybe it just isn't that high of a... Whatever it is. But, I think that a person oftentimes will probably find themselves in a position where they are taking themselves through that journey. Where they are doing strategy work and then they're doing design work and then they're doing... And I think that's probably the majority of events that are produced.

Dustin Westling:

So maybe let's switch gears to how these phases interact with each other. So, Thuy, within your-

Thuy Diep:

Yes.

Dustin Westling:

... world where... Let's talk about the design phase, handing off to the delivery phase. Why don't you talk a little bit about how those relationships work, what's important to you, where some friction sometimes comes up, what are some common misunderstandings? Or why don't you talk a little bit about getting from paper to reality.

Thuy Diep:

Okay. I feel like I've had many late night conversations with a lot of people in the industry about this because I really truly feel like this industry has constantly shifted to a point where everything that I was saying, everything is so last minute now, I think it's vital for that... I don't want to say handover but changing the lead. It is difficult and one really has to be a part of this harmonious team especially because, when it comes down to client expectations and everyone... Even when we receive leads and opportunities, it's so much later now. So I would say back, I don't know, three years ago, I would say I would... How we work is, we would give the file over and still be, like we always say, on the bus. And, at that point, there're constantly changes.

Thuy Diep:

Now, because everything is so last minute, we hand it over later and all those changes, we get stuck in this kind of limbo where here are the designs, and here's... Contracts are signed, or we've partnered, we've selected our supplier partners and now the ops person, our event producer now has to make it run. But there's a shorter window. And even on my end, I'm supplier partner facing, making those decisions and I'm giving them a shorter amount of time because I have a short amount of time and then... The question is just what Dustin's like, how that transition... I would say, nowadays it's tough. It's always been tough, but it's definitely tougher.

Thuy Diep:

And turning it into reality, man, I give every area and phase kudos because it's its own level of responsibility and stress and rewards. But I would say to be type... You really have to be type A, in the execution phase. And, for me, if I have design within two days, I freak out. I'm like, "Oh my goodness, how can I be inspired?" But they have two seconds to put out fires and so it's these different levels. I'm so impressed by everyone. Even on the other end just, even the strategy, that's really important because if you have bad strategies, everything else just falls apart. So it's this constant working of this unit where everyone else has these roles. Did I answer your question? I don't even remember what the question was.

Nick Borelli:

Yeah. The type A thing, is so interesting to me because that is the area where I feel like I am the most distant from the largest majority of event professionals. I am not type A at all. Deadlines, I kind of jazz with it. If you say it's due Friday, I feel like you're not going to be working on the weekend. And at that point Monday is, you're going to have most of your day, so you're probably going to get it Monday afternoon or so. And then I look at the type A requirements of, "4:05, the Kabuki drop has to happen and then this happens. And then this..." I'm like, "Well, as long as it's within the same hour, it's cool." I'm so broad strokes, just of it. And I'm also like, "Oh cool, that totally didn't work. So now we know that this group doesn't like this." And I just look at the horror of the faces of the more design of the phase people. And I'm like, "What? We just learned a ton."

Nick Borelli:

This is great. I could tell you so much more about these people now that they all go left when this fork in the road is there. "What a cool thing that we learned by this not working," and then there's just the horror is still on their faces. So for me I think that there is something to be said about where do you fit in as a person to these things. I think a lot of that is another interesting part. So where does your business fit in? Where is the design of an event? What are the phases for that. But also as a person, where do you think you should put your time? I think there's probably something we could mine deeper if we had the time to say, "What's the makeup of a person?" In order to tell them what phase they probably would thrive the most in.

Thuy Diep:

I love that. That should be a feature. That's like event astrology.

Nick Borelli:

We could do a disc analysis or Myers-Brigg, because there's four of us. At some episode and just, "Check out our Myers-Brigg to see where we are." Because, by the way, you talk about relationship stuff. Either you're the type of person like me to do this. But I would say most don't. I've done both Myers-Brigg and what do you call it, the other quadrant with my wife. Once you know that kind of information than it doesn't allow people to wiggle out of it. You're just telling them that they're expressing their D of the disc or whatever it is. I don't know. It's cool for teams. I think I took it too far, but I digress.

Thuy Diep:

I know, we're totally getting a little off topic. I do want to touch base on that because I'm ENTJ. I don't know if that changes with Myers but then I'm also a super Virgo and then also I'm a snake in Chinese Zodiac. And it's so funny because when it comes to astrology, I am definitely the definition of a gay Virgo.

Nick Borelli:

So I know nothing about astrology whatsoever because I'm such a super realist, not into superstitious... I'm every atheist stereotype possible. That said I got my whole mind thrown off on this when I was in the car with David Adler going somewhere and he's, "So you're talking about personas. You know that the first persona work that was ever really done by mankind was astrology." And I'm like, "Oh. That's cool." I don't think it's rooted in any science whatsoever, but still that prison makes me go, "Hmm maybe I could look at it from that perspective." That's super digression.

Thuy Diep:

Dustin's like, "Get back on track," but I'm sending you both Cafe Astrology so you can look at it. Because I live in LA, so we love our crystals, we love astrology.

Nick Borelli:

Absolutely.

Thuy Diep:

And it's broken down and there's actually a really good doc. I'm all about documentaries and there's something really great about that that goes through it. But I would absolutely drink the Koolaid if someone made an event version of that. I don't know if it would be based on your birthday and this and that, but maybe your characteristics and kind of your morals or where... All of that.

Nick Borelli:

VALs is a good one to look at. So I look at, it's values, attitudes and the L is... I don't know the L one. But there's a bunch of psychographic groupings of ways that you can categorize people. But in astrology, they borrow from all of that stuff, but really it actually predates all of it. It just puts it around a fairly arbitrary thing in my opinion. But it still is a good gateway into that kind of thing. But honestly-

Thuy Diep:

I really want you guys to fill this out. Because it really isn't just, "I'm a Virgo." You have all these sun signs and really breaks it out depending on where you were born, what the moon... All this stuff I'm sending it to you. Go ahead Dustin.

Dustin Westling:

Holy moly you guys. Jesus.

Thuy Diep:

But these are the conversations we have. I feel like when we are on or offline, this is what it's all... It's not just let us go over the global forum.

Dustin Westling:

Yeah.

Nick Borelli:

I didn't think that astrology would show up, but here it is.

Dustin Westling:

The two hardest job in the world. Moderating the brew crew and the whole...

Nick Borelli:

Yeah, for sure.

Thuy Diep:

Will is laughing at that one portion now in the recording.

Dustin Westling:

So yeah, you send us those links and we're going to put it wherever underneath this podcast and you can go on and feel free to contact Tui directly with all of your chat about astrology. We're coming up on an hour. So I want to just have one more quick little round table communication. I think is probably going to be one of the most important things when we talk about these phases and how they work together. So I'm just curious to know, what is your communication pro tip when it comes to communicating with, throughout these phases, so from Nick at the strategic level. What are some of the ways that you use to make sure that the work that you have done is communicated down to the next phase?

Nick Borelli:

Yeah. We create a bunch of concise pieces that are around key words and language and kind of mandatory goals. So the people have the opportunity in the execution phase to say, "Look, all we have to do at every juncture is ask yourself does it help you accomplish this or will it not lead to this," and just some real North star work. So as long as you can make things really simple and just give people guides, then the rest of it, which becomes a little bit more maybe on the tactical side of the strategy, is mostly just given to the the designer in order to take in, absorb and then communicate to their other people. But the only artifact that really survives in a pure form all the way to the bottom is the most concise wrap up of what this is about.

Nick Borelli:

So for me it's always do or never do kind of lists. Or I've mentioned a couple of times today, the idea of the designing and organizing principle. That takes in all of the market conditions and

everything that the attendee potentially would be experiencing out in the world and says, "This is why this event exists and this is why this event is mandatory. This is why this event's important." And as long as everyone on the whole team understands that, they should be able to make a more thoughtful, strategic decision making in the process as they have to make quick decisions. They're doing quick decisions based on something that we've all decided is important.

Dustin Westling:

That's awesome. I love that too. Thuy, same question, communication. What are some ways that, and maybe you can take the role from the design process to delivery. What are some pro tips on communicating what it is you need to be delivered from a high level? Obviously not specific tactics, but how do you get your vendor or your supplier partners engaged and onboard with you?

Thuy Diep:

Okay. So when I asked you both, which one was the hardest position? I will say from experience being the designer. Because what you guys don't understand is that it's right in the middle, right? It's all flowing and everything. But do you see that there's that merge between strategy and that merge between execution? In this case, and my role day to day, I have two other teammates that we all have different objectives, but we all need to work as a unit. And so communicating is so key, from every single phase in protocol, in order to get down to that. From the idea all the way to the execution and from a design standpoint, being able to have to do both. If you look at that on page seven, we are both thinking and doing. So I actually want to say detailed design is the hardest when it comes to day to day because we're not only thinking and doing we're also managing and ensuring the strategy team is great and then also the delivery team doesn't hate you.

Thuy Diep:

And so communicating effectively too, and realizing. Going back to whatever your event astrology personality trait is, you also need to know who that individual is and how they communicate. Talking about the love languages for example. We just did one for work where, "How is the best way to receive and show love and communicate?" I'm someone that's very visual. Someone could be just, "Hey, tell me the details." Our ops people, they don't tend to care about, "Hey, how are you? Let's send this email. How's how's your cat doing?" They're like, "What time is delivery?" Going back to the type A personality. So communication in anything, and balance in anything is so vital. Because if one department or one phase isn't communicating to the other, everything falls, and it's really that split of like responsibility. How do you feel about that, Dustin?

Nick Borelli:

Yeah, I think that if you want to have a successful project, I think engaging everybody in the same information is really important. So, however you communicate to your supplier partners, make sure that you include a brief, and make sure you include the strategy. Make sure you tell them what it is that they're working towards in a really clear, easy to understand way. And

maybe they don't need the full document that outlines every metric. But create a really great brief for everybody working on the project that tells them exactly what it is that you're trying to accomplish.

Nick Borelli:

And I think you'll see a better investment. And don't leave anybody out, from the DJ to the photo booth guy to the limo driver to the... Everybody. Make sure that everybody has the same information. And I think instantly you'll start to see people will invest a little bit more, because everybody wants to do a great job, and the more information you give them, the better.

Thuy Diep:

I'm glad you said that, Nick, because going into specifics, when I send an RFP, request for proposal, to supplier partners... Some other companies might not include the name of the end client. If I've vetted you and I want to partner with you, I'm going to give you all the information that I have. The example I use is, if it's a company and I'm sending it to a transportation and it's a bid, I want that transportation company to not be sending me Hummer limos when this is eco... A sustainable... I want them to do the research.

Nick Borelli:

That's a great example.

Thuy Diep:

They are the perfect... Nick, I pulled a "you." I'm giving examples, but it's so important, right? Because if a certain group of demographic, I always give demographics, it's why, who these people are, these attendees, and why they're here. If you can understand that, and I trust you to do that research, we can talk. Let's not jump into talking about what centerpieces and florals, and what colors. Let's talk about who these people are, why they're here, and what that company stands for, in order to then design and to go into all those little nooks.

Thuy Diep:

And so I think it's really important to give the end user and the client name out, because then they're able, everyone's able, to really research. I don't know about how many times, Dustin, you've gotten opportunities, or even Nick, where it's undisclosed. You're like, "Well, how can I plan a strategy based on... Why are you... I get-

Nick Borelli:

That's the first thing I ask, because they try to protect it. I get it. Or they just feel like, "Well look, I'm just hiring you to do this bid or whatever." And it's like, "Well, yeah, but I need to invest in who these people are," because I would express something completely different from one group to another. And I think that once you understand... That's why when the briefs that I would give to anyone who is working on in the execution phase, they included the mission, vision, and values of the organization. They need to know, "Look, you can't violate the mission or their

values, and you have to help them fulfill their vision. That's what you're here to do. And it's expressing itself today in this event."

Nick Borelli:

But it's kind of one of those things where I would go back to someone and say, "Look, I was really kind of disappointed with this." And they would say, "Why?" It's like, "Well look, this is your contribution. Do you think that it was flying in the face of the values of this organization?" You know? It doesn't matter if they're yours as much. In this instance, you're helping someone fulfill their... That's what you're brought on to fulfill their mission.

Dustin Westling:

We are going to do an episode about RFPs, specifically. And talk about that. Talk about all of our experiences and what those issuing the RFPs can do to get the best out of us. I think that's a great topic.

Nick Borelli:

Oh, yeah.

Dustin Westling:

We're out of time for this one. It doesn't surprise me that we managed to find a lot to talk about, and I think-

Thuy Diep:

We were nervous about that before, you guys. It is so great how we can just have conversations about this.

Dustin Westling:

No, it's awesome. No, it was a really great chat today. We're encouraging everybody to go to [ileahub.com/globaleventforum](http://ileahub.com/globaleventforum) and download the report, if you have not done that. Take this report to other people in your companies and create a conversation around it. I think that there's something that everybody can take out of this and apply it to their business, and that's what it's there to do.

Dustin Westling:

As always, we want to know what you guys think about the report, about this conversation. If there's anything that you guys want us to talk more about, you can always contact us at [EventBrew@helloendless.com](mailto:EventBrew@helloendless.com) or just put it out in the world on social media. Use the hashtag EventBrew. We watch for that. We're still new and growing, so we would appreciate any rates or reviews on Apple Podcast, Pocket Casts, Google Play, and Spotify. If you're not subscribed, you should do that. So the best place to make that happen is go to [EventBrew.com](http://EventBrew.com). Thank you both for doing this with us. I hope-

Nick Borelli:



Thanks Dustin.

Thuy Diep:

Yeah, Dustin, thank you.

Dustin Westling:

I hope we did Will proud. I think he's...

Nick Borelli:

I feel like a grownup now.

Dustin Westling:

I kind of do too. We'll wait to get our report card on the next episode. All right, thanks. Thank you both again, and thank you, everybody who is listening. And we'll see you on social media with all your comments and questions and, preferably, no hate mail. That's it for now. Goodbye, everybody.

Nick Borelli:

Bye.

Thuy Diep:

Bye.

Thanks again for listening to Event Brew. Be sure to rate and review us on your favorite podcasting app. Also, be sure to head to [EventBrew.com](http://EventBrew.com) and leave us a comment about this week's episode. See you next time on Event Brew.