

What's THE Big Mistake While Delivering Invocations?

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You might look at the title of this article and ask, "What IS an invocation?" (pronounced in-*vu*h-**key**-*shu*h n)

The invocation, in its simplest form, is a prayer or request for the spiritual presence of God in a ceremony or event. Whether it's appropriate to have an invocation at your corporate, association or organizational event isn't a path I'll choose to debate. However, when I emcee or speak at events, I commonly see one *big* mistake made consistently.

Is the mistake in offering an invocation at an event? No.

Is the mistake making it nondenominational? Nope.

Is the mistake in the content? Not that either.

This mistake is far simpler and easier to fix than the challenges posed here.

What the Biggest Concern?

As an engagement expert and professional master of ceremonies, my concern is the *engagement factor* of that invocation. Will the message of the invocation be received in an appropriate, respectful and effective manner?

THAT's where the big mistake can come in. But making that mistake isn't related to your speakers, their content or the bulk of your planning. Rather, *it's a failure to communicate well with the food and beverage captain.*

What Typically Happens?

The emcee introduces the invocation and the speaker who will give it. As the music fades, the speaker takes to the stage. People in the audience stop conversing and quiet down. The speaker begins in a prayer-like tone.

At the same time, the servers bustle around with activity, both on the main serving floor and EVEN MORE SO behind the scenes, thinking they can't be seen or heard. In reality, every serving spoon, fork or knife they throw into the tub with its loud **ching** carries throughout the hall. So does the **clank** of every dish they're gearing up to serve. Conversations about work-related table numbers and inappropriate humor spew forth. The drapery that acts as a visual wall can't hold back the fast-paced dialogue from a team ready to spring into action.

Now, preparing to serve guests is great; creating an annoyance that distracts and offends is not. What gets lost in the shuffle? *Engagement with the speaker and the importance of the message*. And that affects everything!

What Can Event Planners Do?

Take these steps every time:

- ✓ Confirm with the catering captain if and when an invocation will take place. Place it into the "script" of the event.
- ✓ Jointly plan what will be cleared and pre-served prior to the invocation, then work the plan.
- ✓ Decide who and how the cue will be given to go into the "invocation mode."
- ✓ Determine how that cue will be communicated to the service team—visually or verbally.
- ✓ Ahead of time, decide what movement or actions on the floor and behind the curtain would be acceptable, if any.

What Can Food and Beverage Leaders Do?

- ✓ In your pre-event planning meeting, ask your client (the event planner) if an invocation will be held.
- ✓ If yes, decide together what actions should take place to advance the meal while still honoring the invocation and its purpose.
- ✓ Be clear you understand how your client wants your activities to be handled during that time.
- ✓ Address agreed-upon actions when you meet with your team, identifying visual as well as verbal cues for all team members.
- ✓ Tell them to stop all verbal communication and noisy actions on and off the floor. Wait until the invocation has ended before furthering your service duties.
- ✓ Educate your service team! When they get caught on the floor with two water jugs in hand and the invocation begins, do they know to freeze?

How do you keep your attendees engaged physically and emotionally? By not allowing this massive distraction to occur. Use this checklist as a guide and share it with those in charge of managing the meal.

While these details are simple to consider, overlooking them leads to annoyance, offense and distraction. Don't let it happen on your watch. THAT's the big mistake!

Jon Petz is the author of *Boring Meetings Suck*, (Wiley Publishing 2011). He is also [Professional keynote speaker](#), [emcee](#) and [corporate magician](#). Learn how to GET MORE out of your meetings in our short-attention-span-high-distraction world and get out of those that bore. Pick up *Boring Meetings Suck* at your local bookstore or at www.BoringMeetingsSuck.com

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