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Live
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Trend people talk about key trends in event management, production, brainstorming, technology, visualization and networking

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*We do not host events,
we host guests!*



We do not host events, *we host guests!*

LAURA SCHWARTZ

The power of the event planner is creating an event that is not only enjoyable, but productive. One must make sure that every detail is about the guest.

Laura Schwartz is an internationally recognized keynote speaker, emcee, television commentator and author of *Eat, Drink & Succeed* — the one of a kind guide to networking at events. With an amazing background of working at the White House as Director of Events, where she produced Presidential events on a world stage, she received some really priceless lessons to share with professionals of the live industry. In this exclusive interview with Live Magazine Laura reveals the key points of her incredible biography she has never shared before, talks about the real power of networking and gives real tips for all event producers on how not to host an event, but rather to host guests.



Quick-fire questions

NAME AND TITLE

Laura Schwartz, professional speaker & emcee, author of *Eat, Drink & Succeed* and international television commentator

WHAT IS YOUR MOST VIVID MEMORY?

Flying Air Force one for the first time

WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO CHANGE IN YOURSELF?

My sleeping pattern

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE A PROFESSION AGAIN, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

It would be exactly the same....or a Professional Paddle Boarder (I love the water)

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU COULD NEVER GIVE UP?

My family

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE?

I have many for many different reasons... Sarajevo, Bosnia is at the top of my list for their resilient human spirit

WHAT DO YOU FEAR AND WHAT DO YOU CHERISH THE MOST?

Time....

WHICH TRAITS WOULD YOU LIKE PEOPLE TO LEARN FROM YOU?

Positive attitude, determination, mentorship & a spirit of volunteerism

Where did it all begin with Laura Schwartz?

I grew up in the heartland of America raised in Wisconsin, a Midwestern cheese and dairy town with a population of just 8,000. It was there I learned the importance of family and developed strong values and a dedicated work ethic from my parents. They taught me volunteerism whether in the community, at school or in church — it was a way of life and they were always at the ready (and still are) to volunteer, get involved or just help someone out. Then they taught me perseverance when my Dad lost his job in the office at the cheese factory and turned his passion of photography into his profession — my Mom, sister and I were all involved. I witnessed my parents growing a business they never dreamed of having — they thought they were starting from nothing but after opening the doors on their first tiny studio... they found they had something: a firm foundation from their involvement, volunteerism and partnerships from helping others.



THE WHITE HOUSE PERIOD

Your story is a real fairy tale. An ordinary 19 y.o. girl from a small town enters the White House as a volunteer and in just several years found herself as the Director of Events. What was it? Destiny? Luck?

Maybe it was a bit of both – but to be honest I don't think **luck comes into your favor unless you have the tools to deliver.** In 1993, I started out at The White House as a college student volunteering to answer phones in the Press Office with no pay and no expectation of a job. I was just in Washington, DC at the American University for a semester program. When people from the Administration of the President-Elect Clinton rang up the school and asked for volunteers...I thought it would be interesting, it would be something bigger than myself even if it would be just answering the phone.

I was putting myself into a situation that I could learn from

But it is true, that you were not only answering the phone, you were also building your network, which eventually helped you reach the highest levels of success.

Exactly. I was putting myself into a situation that I could learn from. I was up early every day, there at 6:30 a.m. and left at 9 p.m. I wanted to make sure that everyone got what they needed, was always ready to help and learning through it all. Again, like my parents, I wasn't doing it on purpose or with some ulterior motive. When the semester was over, they asked me to stay for the summer. I started escorting crews to the Rose Garden for Presidential Statements, ran scripts, changed hundreds of ink cartridges and answered a lot of phones! It was in that moment of my life I truly learned the difference of looking at something as "Optional" versus an "Opportunity".



Soon after the Summer ended and I continued volunteering they brought me on board officially as a Staff Assistant. Then the Midwest Press Secretary left and I helped cover while they hired someone...that someone turned out to be me. A year later I became the Director of Television ... and in 1997 I was proud to move over to the East Wing and take on the responsibility as the White House Director of Events. It was an evolution, an incredible journey — I never could have done one job without having first done the other and I could never have done any job without first earning the respect of others by working hard and being available to help anyone out anytime they needed.

So, my story of success, as they call it, is based on two fundamental things that my parents taught me: a strong work ethic and giving without expecting anything in return.

As the Director of Events for the Clinton Administration, you created and executed more than 1,000 White House events. Among all these numerous projects which ones are the most memorable for you? What are your highlights from that time?

Empowering a team by sharing information is a key factor in determining an event's success.

I loved them all, learned from each one and enjoyed even the tough ones! Two very different to highlight. One is a small private event with the Children's Miracle Network, an organisation which takes seriously ill children and their families to tour Washington, DC. They would always do a private, guided tour of the White House. If he was in town, I would bring The President over to surprise them. He spent so much time with them, showed them around, talked about the portraits on the walls, took pictures. It was just amazing. For that one hour the kids and their parents weren't thinking of their next doctors appointment, they were present...in the moment and just happy and free of their burdens. A simple tour proved that it's not about high technologies or performances of A-list stars, the real power of live events is the emotions it creates in you. Another event which was the complete opposite and one of the most challenging in terms of set up, logistics and protocol would be the celebration of NATO's 50th Anniversary in 1999. It was the largest gathering of heads of states at any one time at The White House (think of the traffic!). The White House hosted two high profile events — on Friday it was the heads of state and their spouses from the member of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and on Saturday it was heads of states, spouses and foreign delegations of all NATO countries — over 1000 guests under a pavillion on the South Lawn.

Key tips

on creating a successful networking event

1 THE KEY TO EVENTS IS INCLUSIVITY.

Empower your staff with as many details about the event as possible behind the scenes to guarantee success from the guest perspective in front of the scenes.

2 IF YOU'RE USING A BAND OR DJ, MAKE SURE PEOPLE CAN HEAR EACH OTHER.

Because if you can't hear each other, you cannot communicate. Create a wonderful atmosphere with music, just don't let it interfere with the partnerships and networking that are occurring at the event.

3 ALWAYS THINK OF THE THREE S'S: SEAMLESS, SUBLIMINAL, STIMULI.

Seamless as you move guests from one part of an event to another while keeping them in the moment whether at a conference or State Dinner; Subliminal as you do it without having your guests even think about it; and use Stimuli to move the guest subconsciously by putting music, florals and other resources to work

4 FOOD ALL AROUND! And make it easy to chew and swallow between conversations!

5 MAKE IT PERSONAL! Beyond the decor, look to create touchpoints from the hosts — from the welcome to the toasts to the departing gift and final farewell.

FROM LAURA SCHWARTZ

When you think of an event you should think of your guest

Rooms can be stunning....they serve an essential purpose along with the elements of floral design, audio/visual equipment, temperature, linens, color patterns, invitations, name cards, menu cards, musical choice...there are many moving, wonderful, beautiful parts. But any of them can be all for naught if one person can't reach the buffet before it closes, or the music is too loud to hear anyone, the video screen too small to watch or the podium speakers so low that no one can hear the host make an exciting announcement. During the planning process, the load-in, the execution elements of all aspects of the room, one should think of it not only from a logistics perspective of what makes a room stunning by physical design...but also what within that room works with a memory that will last a lifetime.

MAKE THAT EVENT EVOKE AN EMOTION IN YOUR GUESTS THAT WILL FOREVER CHANGE THEIR LIVES.

"WE DO NOT HOST EVENTS, WE HOST GUESTS" WHEN YOU KEEP THAT IN MIND, YOUR GUESTS WILL RAVE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE EVERY TIME. THEY'LL EVEN OVERLOOK THINGS YOU THOUGHT MAY HAVE GONE WRONG.... AND **THAT POSITIVE GUEST EXPERIENCE – THAT ALONE CAN DEFINE SUCCESS.**



Friday night's dinner for the NAC leaders was an elegant black tie dinner hosted in the East Room around a crescent shaped table so all guests were at the same head table and yet could see each other around its curve each other around its curve, an idea from the First Lady herself. The music chosen was a single pianist from The President's Own United States Marine Corps band – this way the heads of states could talk with each other, some with translators seated behind them, without having to strain their voices or yell to be heard.... it was the perfect background music because it was in...the background. As you can probably tell, background noise is my biggest event pet peeve. All of the over 20 head of state arrivals were conducted as if it was their own State Dinner with a Military Honor Guard, an official announcement to hundreds of press in attendance at the North Portico and the Clintons greeting each one for an official photograph. It was simply the head of the states and spouses at the table, translators, a US Marine for piano and butlers for service. It was a success! It was, as I often say, the epitomy of creating an event that is both enjoyable and productive. It was a smart collaborative effort that was successful because of the committment and hard work from a myriad of offices, staff members and volunteers.

How did you select suppliers for such events?

The White House has a lean, but incredibly effective full time Residence Staff. If supplemental lighting, chairs, tenting etc. is needed there would be a list of approved vendors and a Request for Proposal would be sent out just like every other event producer has to do for procurement. The White House looked for honest vendors at a good price that can fulfill the services or products necessary for execution...oh and they pass a full background check — the company and employees — but nowadays everyone should be vigilant and extensive whether it's "The White House or Your House".

What is a key factor to making your events successful?

Empowering a team by sharing information. For example, before we opened up the gates for any event, I would do one last walk through. I would start from where the guests were to arrive, go through their motions to when they would depart that everything was in place and to ensure that everyone working the event knew the event's purpose, layout, their responsibilities, responsibilities of others and the timeline. I would do that walk not only with the "SIC" ("Staff In Charge") I would do that with everyone on the team including volunteers.

EAT, DRINK AND SUCCEED!

Sharing information will empower your event and make your team stronger – you will teach and you will learn from each and every walk through to make yourself and the event better.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The most significant result of that period is your book "Eat, Drink & Succeed". What's the concept?

It's about partnership no matter where you are (literally), because you never know when your next conversation will change someone else's life or your own.

What is behind the title of the book?

Behind the scenes at the White House I saw some guests "Eat, Drink and leave...with the White House towels stuffed in their pockets!", and others who were able to "Eat, Drink and leave with new relationships that turned into partnerships and ideas that turned into realities." The latter was the result of positive, powerful networking. I begin by defining networking as a "what can I do for you" approach. Then, sharing success stories from President Clinton, Oprah (while on a date at a burger joint) and Steven Spielberg (while attending a State Dinner) as well as other entrepreneurs, stay at home parents and small businesses; I empower the reader with actual networking tools, techniques and exercises to incorporate into their own professional and personal lives. Bottom line is that as guests we can all get more out of any event than just the great food and drink. Whether you are eating a power bar or filet mignon, having a glass of water or martini...we all have the power together to Eat, Drink and Succeed!

I believe one of the most valuable things for all emcees to keep in mind about the role is that you are there representing a company or association...not yourself

I BELIVE IN
WALKING THE
WALK...NOT
JUST TALKING
THE TALK!
BEFORE EVERY
EVENT I START
BY DOING MY
“DEEP DIVE”
RESEARCH TO
UNDERSTAND
THE INDUSTRY,
COMPANY OR
ASSOCIATION
AND ITS
MEMBERS



ABOUT BEING A PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER

It must have been difficult after 8 years in the Administration to transition to other work. Why and when did you decide to become a professional speaker? What’s in this profession for you?

After the Clinton Administration ended in 2001 I faced the challenge of figuring out what to do next. How could I continue to make an impact without the fancy White House business cards?! It was now just my name on a set of cards I printed off my parent’s computer.

I didn’t know what I was going to do and I was asked to speak at a conference. They wanted me to discuss State Dinners and I happily accepted while mixing in their substance with their beauty to form the central message of what is now, Eat, Drink & Succeed.

After that first speech I received requests to speak again to share and relate my experiences. And there was such an immediate validation from the audience about what I had to share. So that’s when I realized that it’s exactly what I am meant to do in life. Knowing that you can change (even a little bit) somebody’s life, helping people to become successful, and delivering a message which can empower others in their offices, homes and communities is just amazing.

You have been called the best keynote speaker by an authorized professional magazine. What are your key characteristics as a speaker which led you to succeed in this role?

My speaking style and how I present it all comes from my event experience. While working at the White House I always tried to make sure that every event I created was relevant and relatable to all audiences. That’s exactly the approach I follow as a speaker. I aim to make sure that any story I tell is relevant & relatable. I want to make sure that my message knows no boundaries, no age limits, no demographic, no economic background. And that’s why my key message on the importance of networking and partnerships can be presented to make an impact in any corner of the world.

How do you prepare a speech?

I belive in walking the walk...not just talking the talk! Before every event I start by doing my “deep dive” research to understand the industry, company or association and its members. Then, I listen....I speak to the senior leadership and new employees alike. This provides me with a complete picture and necessary background for my speech. It helps me to really undertsand why and how I should deliver my speech and message and reach not only part of the audience, but all of it. The key secret of successful speaking engagements is to research and listen before you ever open your mouth to speak.

What is the worst mistake a speaker can make?

Not knowing their audience. That’s why I invest the time to research and listen before I speak.

Besides being a brilliant keynote speaker, you are also a professional moderator. They call it one of the most complicated roles at business events. What are your special tricks?

Great question — to begin, I think it helps that I enjoy the opportunity to emcee a 1-hour event or 5-day conference as much as I do keynoting or television commentary. I spend just as much time researching and listening while I prepare for an emcee/moderator position as when I keynote. I also am open to and suggest various formats as an emcee. For example, some CEO’s would rather be interviewed about a new product or program then just lecture about it for an hour. Many celebrities share their stories but don’t “present” a program. In all these cases I often do sit down, “talk show style” interviews from the stage. I ask questions to which their answers communicate the desired message in a conversation that includes the audience more than just as if they were standing behind a podium.

I take the position very seriously and see myself as an Ambassador of the host and their mission, objective, product, industry or company. And just like the White House events I described — I am inclusive. I continue the conversation beyond the stage speaking with audience members between sessions and events. Attendees become this great community at conferences and I have appreciated and thrived on that all my life.

The key secret of successful speaking engagements is to research and listen before you ever open your mouth to speak.



Laura Schwartz was named one of the Best Keynote Speakers by Meetings and Conventions Magazine, as well as one of seven American speakers who exceed and surpass expectations by Successful Meetings Magazine. She is an unforgettable, high-energy speaker who delivers customized keynotes packed with powerful ways to propel your audience to the next level in business and beyond!



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