



Self Strategies: Your Education Edge

At a certain stage in your career you have to decide whether to keep building your street smarts or dip back into school for some book smarts. Two new CMMs share their stories.

The Certification in Meeting Management is run by Meeting Professionals International, and aims to educate and certify management-level meeting and event professionals. The focus is on strategic decision-making as these leaders manage and deliver meetings and events that drive organization success.

Of the recent 55 CMM recipients, just two are Canadian. To qualify for this program you have to have at least 10 years experience, and the time commitment is not for the faint of heart.

“One of the most challenging aspects is making the necessary time commitment. This is often difficult in our industry, due to last minute events and increasing time constraints,” says Kirsten Strand, CEO of Invenia Incentives, a site selection and strategic meeting management company in Vancouver, and CMM recipient. Strand, who has always had a belief in ongoing professional development, took on the CMM program in order to offer her clients more value and service. “In addition to participating in the sessions, a significant amount of time was spent on writing both the test and the strategic business plan. The latter was extremely worthwhile as my plan is now forming the basis of a new operating division of Invenia Incentives,” says Strand.

For Louise Gervais, senior conference administrator, conference management and protocol services, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in Ottawa, taking her CMM was all part of the plan. “It was part of my career plan. It was about taking my meeting planning experience to the next level through a formal process,” she says. “Although I always try to think of the big picture, the CMM process provided me with the tools to do this a little more naturally.”

The process includes applying and getting accepted into the program; a pre-reading of material; attendance at a six-day in-residence educational program; completing a take-home exam; and completing a business plan.

“During the in-residence program, we had presentations from highly respected industry leaders addressing leadership, contingency planning, marketing and communications, measurement and metrics, strategic negotiation, operational excellence, and strategic financial management,” says Gervais. “The in-residence education component was excellent and worth the time commitment.”

Gervais’s biggest challenge? Making a business plan work for her association. “The biggest challenge for me personally was clarifying the return on investment as the business plan I wrote was from an association’s perspective,” she says. “One must remember that ROI is more than just financial gain.”

For Strand, getting to rub shoulders and network with high-level professionals from around the world in itself made the process worthwhile.

“Having the opportunity to meet experienced meeting professionals from all over the world was a great benefit,” says Strand. “The program in Dallas was well executed, with meetings industry professionals sharing the latest developments, trends and thought-provoking topics. I found that the CMM program was attended by a group of very seasoned individuals who all had much to contribute.”