



Anne Findlay-Gomes
Senior Account Executive, IQ
Toronto, Ontario

We asked Anne what was the best piece of advice she ever received about the incentive industry:

"Never panic. I know that sounds super simple, but (as anyone who has worked in our industry can attest) it's often quite difficult! Our business is not for the faint of heart. No matter the curve ball, you must take it in stride. "

As part of our Member Snapshot initiative we conduct short interviews with our members about their industry, career, etc. See below for Anne's full interview.

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What are you most looking forward to as a SITE member?

I'm looking forward to rebuilding relationships, reconnecting with colleagues and partner suppliers as we begin to travel again and the industry's living, breathing pulse comes back. Of course, the industry won't be the same. We can anticipate some of the changes, but we will also need to be agile and adaptive, ready to tackle the issues that will inevitably challenge us all. There was a time when "more was more," then a time when "less was more." I think we're shifting to "now is more," where presence and connection offer us a wealth of options.

Quick overview of your role and where you see your organization headed.

I'm a Senior Account Executive at IQ. My strength has always been in client relationships, in earning and maintaining trust.

At IQ, we made the bold decision to expand our services during the pandemic – to create multiple lines of business. We now offer much more than incentive travel. When Covid hit, we asked ourselves: how can we best help our clients connect, motivate, and reward their people? When our clients' need changed, our business changed. We became event producers in the virtual world. Instead of facilitating the where of an event, we delivered on the what and the how. Today, we offer the full range of event creative and production – for virtual, hybrid, and live events. Making our offerings more robust has only enhanced our business.

What has living in COVID times allowed you to develop or focus on that you may not have done otherwise?

Continuing education. So much of what we do came to a grinding halt during Covid. We focused on supporting our clients in every possible way. Although Barb Issett, IQ's founder/owner would prefer a more elegant term, she says, "we fire-hosed ourselves in new industry knowledge." We took on production elements that we'd never tackled before. And gifting, while not new to us, certainly took on an expanded role in the virtual world. Understanding this new space was a learning curve for all of us, and we embraced it with gusto. I took courses in

Virtual Event Meeting Management with the Event Leadership Institute, joined MPI, and participated in industry-relevant webinars and product destination events. Industry organizations – including SITE – helped me stay current and connected. They really were lifelines during this time.

The pandemic forced me to slow down and re-assess professionally and personally. I had time and space to think about my own health and wellness in ways I never had before. When I was travelling constantly, I hadn't the time or desire to invest in myself in those ways. It will surprise no one to hear that such investments really payoff: I'm better at my job if I take care outside of it, too.

Can you share with us a WOW event you planned for an incentive group and some of the key components?

The events that continue to live in my heart are the CSR events.

At an event years ago in Hawaii, we went into a homeless shelter that was literally just a warehouse with chest-high cubicle walls throughout. We completely stripped it down, cleaned and painted it, installed shelving for a library, and made a garden area outside. In short, we created a better living environment for people who really needed it. My favourite events are transformative – literally life-changing.

I think that we're going to see even more CSR events in the future. The pandemic has really highlighted the need to pay it forward and to give back to the local communities.

What is the best piece of advice you ever got about our industry?

Never panic. I know that sounds super simple, but (as anyone who has worked in our industry can attest) it's often quite difficult! Our business is not for the faint of heart. No matter the curve ball, you must take it in stride. Oxygen helps in these instances: take a deep breath, maintain composure. You literally need breathing room to communicate intelligently. There is nothing wrong – in fact, there is a lot right! – with taking a step back, going away and consulting with your team, doing whatever research and/or problem solving is needed. You want to provide your client with viable solutions to the problem at hand. I've spent my career trying to cultivate this sort of unflappability!

What career advice would you give to your younger self?

Talk less, listen more. This is intrinsically connected to my previous answer, as listening facilitates calmness and focus. These skills come with age and maturity, certainly, but I think you can start honing these skills when you're a young professional.

Everything that I'm talking about here is related to empathy, ultimately. Active listening is a patient approach that avoids knee-jerk reactions. It's okay to say. "I don't know," "I need to look into that," "I'll get back to you." We're experts, yes, but no one has all the answers all the time. Thoughtfulness goes a long way.

What do you do for fun?

This is where I get to talk about my dog, right?! I've spent a lot more time outside during the pandemic and a lot of time with my best canine friend. I've also become a better cook of late. The time at home has allowed me to dive back into my cookbook collection and try new recipes. I've recently been reading more again – which has reminded me that new destinations and adventures can be imaginative, too. I couldn't travel during the height of pandemic, but words on a page can transport me to wonderful new places and experiences.