

CEFMA | CORNER

As an officer of CEFMA, I knew that it was only a matter of time before I was asked to write an article for the CEFMA Corner. So when the call came in August, I was not surprised. While I was anticipating the call at some point, I still had no idea what I was going to write about. I am writing this in September, so my first thought was to compose something about H1N1 flu preparation, but I knew that everyone has information overload on that subject by now. The next subject that popped up was target hardening our facilities from terrorist attacks. I quickly dismissed that, because if you have not implemented some precautions by now, an article by me isn't going to help. So, the third topic was the charm, or at least I hope it is.



Tim O'Connell



The economy has undergone its worst decline since the depression years in the 1930's and it has affected every segment of the country, including collegiate athletics. The vast majority of us have been forced to reduce spending, and things do not look any better for the near future. As facility and event managers, how are we going to get through this?

Unfortunately, I do not have any ground breaking ideas or magic potions on how to increase your budgets, but I do have some common sense approaches that I would like to share that might help get you and your staff through these difficult times. Let me begin with the budgeting piece, since it is the foundation of the issue. Budget reductions are happening and there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. So, let's just deal with it! When reductions are asked for, we need to divide our budget into "needs" and "wants." A "need" is something that is absolutely required to meet obligations, such as funding for rental if you must pay rent for the use of a facility. While a "want" is something that is not required but is nice to have. An example of a "want" can possibly be new uniforms for the staff. Every budget has both, so when looking at reductions the "wants" have to be reviewed and cut before the "needs."

There could be a time, and it could be now, that you have eliminated all of the "wants" and have to look at the "needs" to make reductions. At this point, creativity is required. First of all, please guard yourself from the "take whatever you want, I don't care" response, since that outlook, while natural, will only make the job more challenging. To get the initiative accomplished, I would suggest assembling an advisory group. The group should consist of those that oversee the facility and/or event operations to provide technical knowledge and others outside of your operation that can look at things from an impartial stance. Additionally, don't rule out involving a

customer or two so that you can test ideas from a customer perspective. The purpose of the group is to assist you in looking deep into the "needs" to generate creative ideas and/or operational modifications that can be employed to permit a budget decrease without dramatically impacting the customer or harming the operation. I recently practiced what I preach when I was developing my budget this past year. I employed a group and ended up discovering that I could change the door opening time for basketball games by a half hour without any impact on safety or to the customers and I quickly saved \$15,000. Just a reminder: If you elect to make a change to the operational norm, like a door opening modification, good communication must be an essential byproduct.

While we are worrying about budgets, there are certainly some of our employees, and maybe even you, worrying about their jobs. The loss of a job is one of the most stressful occurrences that a person can experience, so we must manage to that. Undoubtedly there will be stress, frustration and anxiety occurring with the staff, including the part-time staff, if there is even a hint that job reductions are going to be made. This is the time that we must take the proverbial leadership role in order to bring calmness to the environment and to help those that possibly could become unemployed. In order to do that, we need to communicate since information is essential and it eliminates the "muck" that starts circulating through the rumor mills. When communicating, we must be honest and accurate. Sugar coating the truth or making assumptions will only come back to haunt us. If you don't know the answer, which is entirely possible in these times, say that you just do not know and promise that once you find out something you will share it. If layoffs or position eliminations are inevitable, don't hold that back — give those employees enough time to make plans. The approach of keeping that hidden so that the affected employees don't create problems just isn't fair. The other thing that we must keep in mind during job reductions is that we have an obligation to assist the affected employees with potential job leads, unemployment insurance filing, and keeping in contact to make sure that they know that we are thinking of them. Care is a wonderful thing during bad times. It is easy to be a leader doing good times, we discover what we are made of in the bad times and in all likelihood we are being tested.

The old saying is that all bad things will come to an end. Our economy will strengthen, as it seems to be doing now, and then so will our budgets. One day we will look back on these times as just a bad memory.

Thanks for this article to Tim O'Connell, senior associate director of athletics at the University of Dayton and CEFMA 1st Vice President.