

THEIR FUTURE IN FOCUS

Next Gen Leaders Speak Up



Introduction

What can we do to keep the next generation of event professionals in the industry? What do they need to thrive? These were the questions we explored at Convening Leaders 2024. We invited 50 of these emerging leaders to Next Gen Event Profs Break Down What They Need to Lead the Future of Events, for an open, honest, and future-focused conversation about the business events industry and their place in it.

During this collaborative workshop, co-led by Filament and PCMA Next Gen scholars, participants openly discussed aspirations, voiced concerns, offered advice and suggested ways current leaders might better support the next generation of industry talent. Here are the ideas and insights they shared.



I Wish / I Wonder / I Worry

We began our session by asking each aspiring industry leader to consider the future of the industry and share their responses to three simple prompts:

I Wish We Could ...
I Wonder If We Would ...
and I Worry That We Won't...

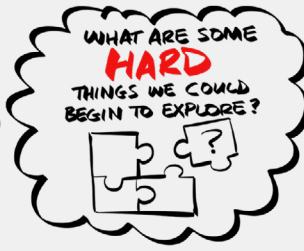
Their responses reflected a deep desire for a more inclusive, sustainable, and innovative industry that values personal growth, professional development, work-life balance, and mental health as much as the bottom line.

They expressed wishes for greater openness about industry challenges, standardized practices for accessibility and sustainability, and a stronger emphasis on mentorship and personal development. They want an industry that not only recognizes the interconnectedness of all roles but

also provides ample opportunities for networking, engagement, and recognition of the hard work event professionals put in, often beyond conventional working hours.

They wondered about the potential for cross-sector collaboration, the integration of AI and other technologies, and the establishment of more formalized education and training within the industry. They hope for a future where the industry not only keeps pace with rapid technological advancements but also fosters a stronger, more definitive voice for its professionals.

Finally, their worries highlighted their apprehensions about the industry's ability to adapt quickly to changes, particularly in areas like sustainability and AI, as well as a fear of losing the momentum gained in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

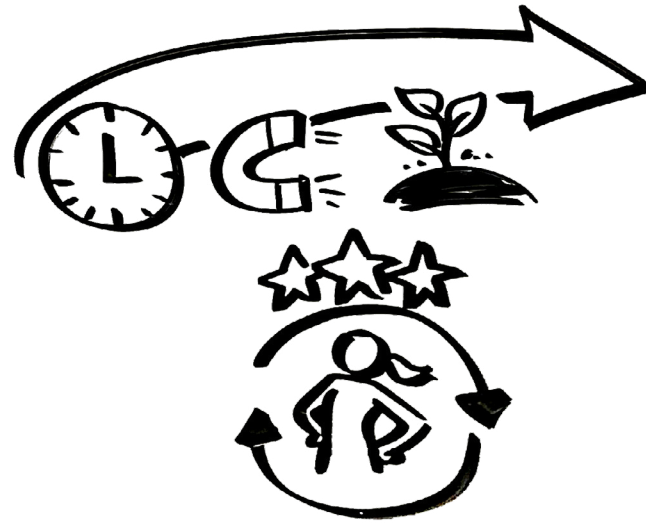


Easy, Hard, Safe & Crazy

We next assigned smaller breakout groups of four hypothetical scenarios designed to drive creative thinking and conversations about the future of the industry and their place in it. Each group was tasked to develop four different kinds of solutions for each scenario:

- **Easy** things we should do
- **Hard** things we could begin to explore
- **Safe** bets we could make
- And ideas so **crazy**, they might just work

SCENARIO ONE:

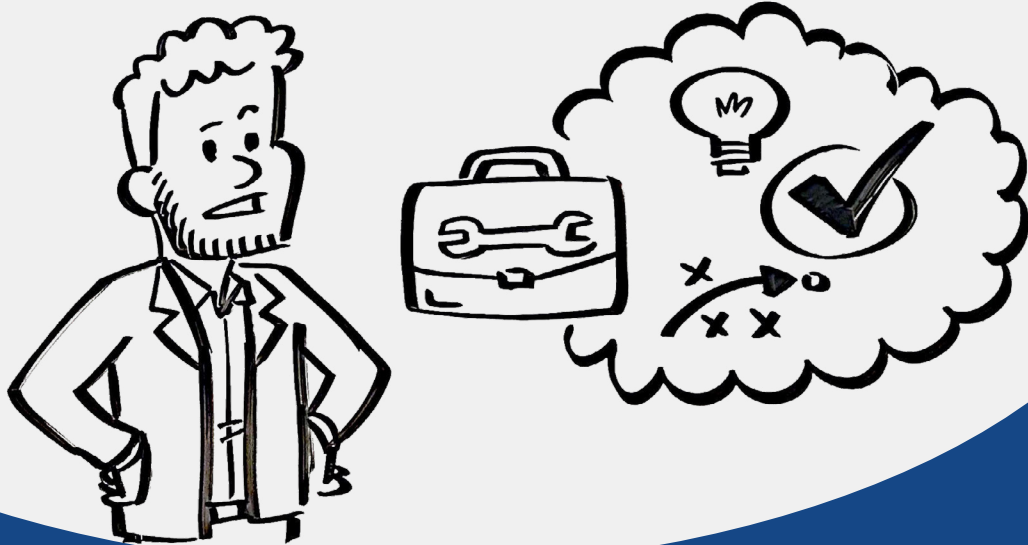


Scenario One:

Your team is consulting with an old-school leader about ways to build a future-friendly organization that attracts, grows, and retains its best young leaders. What are some easy, hard, safe, and crazy things you might suggest they implement?

- **Easy:** The group felt that immediate, straightforward actions could include implementing wellness credits to emphasize work-life balance, offering constructive feedback outside of formal reviews, and enhancing employee benefits.
- **Hard:** More challenging yet impactful measures involved adopting flexible work schedules to foster trust, analyzing exit interviews for deeper insights, and increasing paid time off for greater flexibility.
- **Safe:** As safe bets, the participants suggested conducting surveys to gauge employee sentiment, maintaining consistent performance reviews, and supporting remote work options to adapt to modern work preferences.
- **Crazy:** The boldest ideas proposed reallocating budgets for promotions, establishing comprehensive maternity/paternity leave policies, launching DEI initiatives, and adopting a “work when needed” approach to revolutionize the workplace.

SCENARIO TWO:

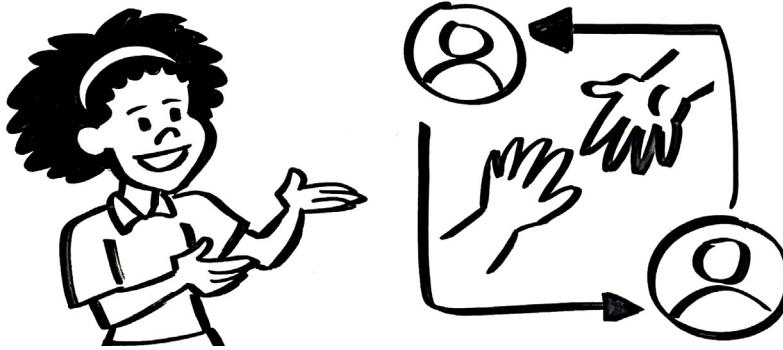


Scenario Two:

Your team must create a “managing up” toolkit filled with tips, tricks, and tactics that early-career professionals can leverage to grow their influence and improve their “managing their managers” skills. What are some easy, hard, safe, and crazy approaches you suggest might go in the kit?

- **Easy:** The group identified straightforward strategies such as reading professional development books, documenting roles versus job descriptions, and proactively seeking educational opportunities as immediate steps to enhance “managing up” skills.
- **Hard:** More challenging suggestions included leading meetings with managers, creating unique roles outside standard norms, and advocating for ideas to demonstrate initiative and resilience even when initially rejected.
- **Safe:** Participants considered regular initiatives like setting up meetings with managers, understanding career growth paths, and tracking positive feedback from external stakeholders as reliable, low-risk strategies for managing up.
- **Crazy:** The most ambitious ideas involved making all salaries transparent within the organization, and encouraging open feedback channels to executives, pushing the boundaries of traditional workplace practices.

SCENARIO THREE :

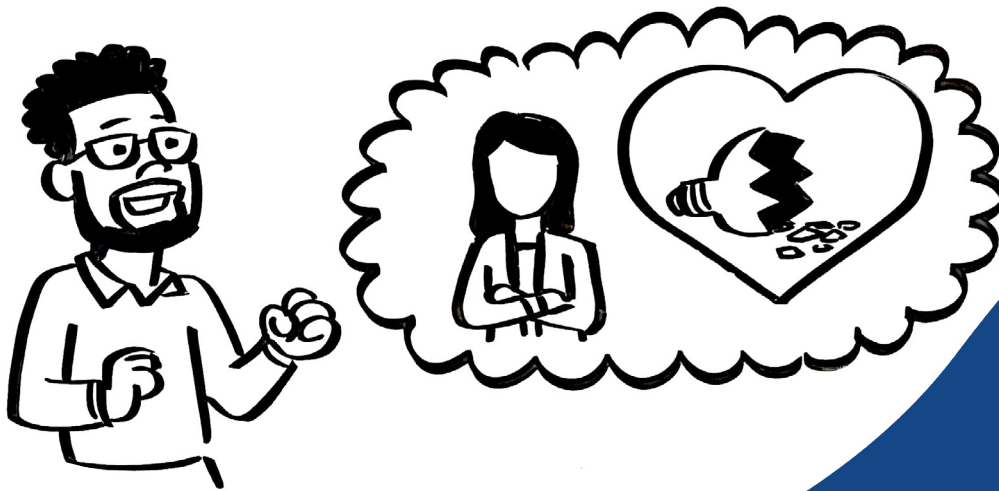


Scenario Three:

Your team is building a peer-mentoring model for an event-centric association. One key challenge early career professionals face is learning how to best mentor, coach, and teach their peers. What are some easy, hard, safe, and crazy things you might recommend they try?

- **Easy:** Immediate and simple actions included allowing mentors and mentees to set their own agendas, creating networking platforms, and organizing social events like happy hours to foster informal mentorship opportunities.
- **Hard:** More complex initiatives proposed were developing training programs for mentors, clearly identifying mentorship objectives, and exploring different communication styles to enhance the mentorship experience.
- **Safe:** Safe bet options included creating dedicated spaces for mentorship, facilitating cross-departmental partnerships, and setting up structured one-on-one meetings to build mentor-mentee relationships.
- **Crazy:** The most innovative suggestions involved bi-directional multigenerational mentoring opportunities, job swaps or shadowing for hands-on learning, and random or strategically paired mentorships to encourage unexpected connections and learning opportunities.

SCENARIO FOUR :

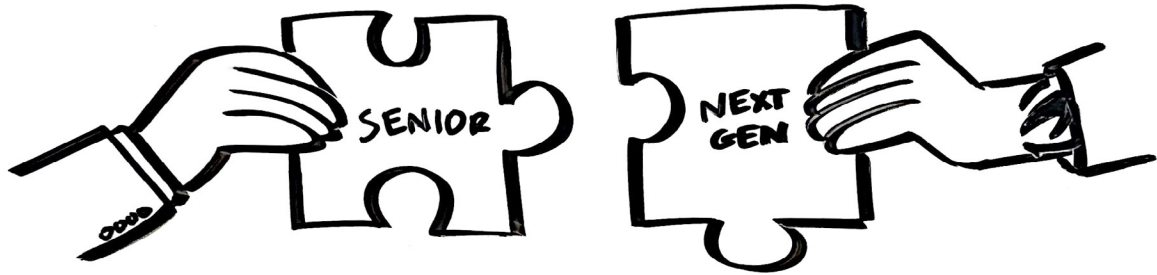


Scenario Four:

Your team is advising an innovation-focused CEO who wants her team to “embrace failure” so the organization can quickly learn from its mistakes. She wants to build a culture where high-potential young leaders won't be afraid of committing a career-ending screw-up. What are some easy, hard, safe, and crazy things she might do?

- **Easy:** Participants felt that simple steps like organizing brainstorming sessions, providing encouragement for new ideas, and being open to feedback could create a safe space for innovation and learning from failures.
- **Hard:** More involved strategies included offering leadership training specifically designed to help leaders respond constructively to failures and encouraging role swaps to gain empathy and understanding of different positions within the organization.
- **Safe:** Reliable approaches included scheduling regular one-on-one meetings for personalized feedback, team-building activities to strengthen group cohesion, and providing constructive advice without criticism to support a culture of growth and learning.
- **Crazy:** The most radical ideas proposed were implementing a formal process for employees to review leadership performance and encouraging a culture where roles and responsibilities are fluid and open to innovation, challenging traditional organizational structures.

BRIDGING THE SENIOR-NEXT GEN LEADERSHIP GAP



Bridging the Senior-NextGen Leadership Gap

As our session neared an end, we shared an array of “non-obvious advice for young leaders” gathered the day before at the PCMA Executive Leadership Summit. This advice spanned a spectrum from embracing change and spurring innovation to the crucial aspect of personal well-being and the cultivation of robust professional networks. Senior leaders underscored the virtues of adaptability, staying curious, perpetual learning, and the need to challenge the status quo.

However, a troubling disconnect emerged during these discussions. While the aspirations and advice from senior leaders resonated with the Next Gen cohort, there was a palpable gap between these ideals and the young professionals' actual workplace experiences.

For example, advice like, 'Be patient. Not everything needs to happen right away,' directly contradicted the rush-rush-rush mentality of the young professionals' deadline-oriented work and the message from event team leaders that things were 'due yesterday.' In this environment, Next Gen participants expressed concern that they were missing out on opportunities to learn and explore the industry as senior leaders suggested.

This disconnect highlights the need to bridge the gap between senior leaders' visionary guidance and the on-the-ground realities faced by emerging talent. Put another way, how might we not only recognize the importance of imparting wisdom but also ensure its practical application and cultural integration within the workplace to truly empower the next generation of industry leaders?

INSTEAD OF THINKING ABOUT
THE "NEXT GEN" WHAT CAN
WE DO TO BEST SUPPORT AND
ENHANCE THIS GENERATION?



Paying it Forward: Advice for Future Leaders

We asked each participant of the Convening Leaders 2024 Executive Leadership Summit to share their 'Best Advice' to help guide emerging professionals in the event industry. Across the more than 100 responses, several common threads emerged, emphasizing the importance of embracing change, pursuing passion with patience, and the invaluable role of continuous learning and networking.

Leaders encouraged young professionals to step out of their comfort zones, take calculated risks, and remain adaptable in the face of an ever-evolving industry landscape. The advice underscored the need for future leaders to cultivate a deep sense of curiosity, foster meaningful connections, and maintain a balance between personal values and professional aspirations.

Here are ten bits of advice that were echoed again and again:

Understand that 'book smart' isn't the same as 'real world.' Continuously ask 'why?' about everything.

Don't believe anyone who tells you to be one thing professionally or to show up in one way. Be yourself, be curious, and explore different functions, roles and specialties.

Meritocracy is a myth. Find two to three career sponsors and nurture those relationships. Work that network.

Get a few industry friends who don't work at the same company as you but have a similar role. You need trusted peers to share with and vent to. This industry is all about relationships.

Experience everything. When offered an assignment, take it, then form your opinion on how to create the best experience. Lean on those you can learn from, engage with their experience, and then offer them the vision and energy to see things differently.

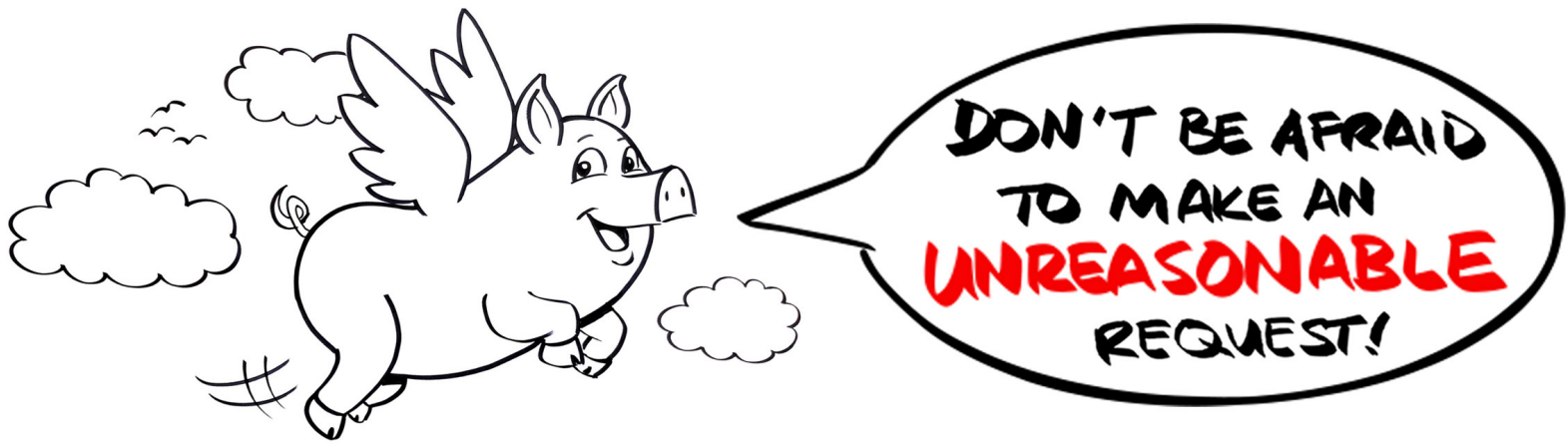
Try everything. The potential for discovery is unlimited. Build relationships and network even with those you are not sure about, as it may end up being the right thing for you.

Be a champion for others and invest in good shoes for the journey.

Prioritize curiosity and optimize for what's interesting. Choose paths that offer excitement and enjoyment.

Be patient. Not everything needs to happen right away.

Don't be afraid to consider novel ideas from different industries. Creative ideas often come from unexpected sources.



Unreasonable Requests

To conclude our workshop, we invited every Convening Leaders 2024 Next Gen session participant to think ambitiously and make an "Unreasonable Request" to their leaders.

These requests ranged from improving personal and professional growth opportunities to advocating for significant shifts in industry norms and operations. Such requests underscored a collective yearning for an industry that is more adaptable, inclusive, and nurturing, one that places a premium on innovation, well-being, and collaborative efforts.

These requests, while labeled "unreasonable," underscored a collective aspiration for a more dynamic, supportive, and forward-thinking industry:

- "Could we organize more young professional events that provide comprehensive education across all industry aspects?"
- "Is it possible to align our compensation and benefits with standards found in other industries, including IVF support, unlimited PTO, and extended paternity leave?"
- "Can we develop and implement detailed onboarding plans for every new hire that focus on management, leadership, and DEI/JEDI principles?"
- "Could our growth and compensation model be based on proven performance rather than just years of experience?"
- "Might we offer more personalized and specialized training opportunities tailored to individual career paths?"
- "Is there a way to provide coworking spaces for those who miss the office environment?"
- "Could the company assist with significant student loan payments to alleviate financial burdens?"
- "Can we adopt more flexible work arrangements, allowing for remote work except when physical presence is explicitly necessary?"

- ▶ “Would it be feasible for industry associations like PCMA to ensure at least 50 percent of their board members are under the age of 30?”
- ▶ “How can we integrate DEI initiatives from the strategic planning phase for all meetings and events?”
- ▶ “Is it possible to recognize employees’ actual workloads in our promotion system and offer title changes, salary increases, or hybrid work options?”
- ▶ “Could we organize sit-down meetings with teams to discuss career advancement opportunities and the support available?”
- ▶ “Might there be funds allocated for team retreats and training sessions outside the state to enhance development and collaboration?”
- ▶ “Can we streamline project management and RFP technology platforms across the company to support the onboarding process effectively?”
- ▶ “Would PCMA consider creating a visual library to foster innovation and collaboration, where planners can share solutions and suppliers can showcase their offerings?”

Conclusion & Next Steps

As this session concluded, it was evident to all that the exchange of ideas between Next Gen leaders and seasoned professionals is vital for the evolution of our industry.

The insights gathered, from the aspirational to the practical, underscore a collective drive towards a more innovative, inclusive, and balanced professional landscape. This foundation of shared knowledge and diverse perspectives sets the stage for deeper exploration and actionable change. This is an essential dialogue that we're eager to continue.

At edUcon, we'll pick up where we left off, focusing on addressing the gaps and building on the ideas shared. This ongoing conversation is crucial for shaping the future of our industry in collaboration with both young professionals and experienced leaders.

Won't you join us?

APPENDIX: I Wish, I Wonder, I Worry

These are all of the attendees' I Wish, I Wonder, and I Worry responses.

I Wish We Would ...

- Be more open about the struggles/issues that pop up.
- Value mental health, work-life balance, and timing.
- Bring everyone to the table.
- Consider more sustainability at every level & process.
- Standardize accessibility practices.
- Prioritize mentorship between next-gen and industry leaders outside of your organization.
- Focus on personal growth rather than the bottom line.
- Have more networking opportunities and engaging sessions with organizers and suppliers.
- Be more recognized for all of the work that we do and how our roles are interconnected with all departments.
- Understand we aren't a 9-5 industry; we can't work 12- to 18-hour days and then go back to work.
- Focus more on personal development along with professional development.
- Share more about this career to make more people aware of the event industry.
- Have more opportunities for next-gen or early professionals to be mentored by mid to senior-level professionals.
- Value event professionals as integral parts of teams.
- Support & pay event professionals like other roles are paid.
- Develop better networking opportunities.
- Value the younger generation on programs.
- Connect better senior-level planners with beginners.
- Have more time and resources to fulfill the potential of the CVB qualities.
- Move past traditional constraints.

I Wonder If We Could ...

- Have more opportunities to cross-share tips & tricks.
- Collaborate cross-sector in bringing in best practices.
- Keep the industry moving at the pace of AI.
- Maintain a stronger voice.
- Formalize meeting planning education and training.
- Successfully integrate AI as a tool in our jobs.
- Work more collaboratively with partners/competitors for idea sharing.
- Have resources to support both the organizers and suppliers.

- Have more of a work-life balance.
- Care more about quality rather than worrying about deadlines.
- Reach a flexible work structure, despite the time requirements of events (as a Supplier).
- Trust young minds.
- Have a reception during PCMA to specifically engage next-gen with senior professionals.
- Better define career trajectories.
- Amplify and invite more entry-level/new to industry persons to speak and actively encourage their involvement & input.
- Have PCMA Next Gen calls, meetups outside of CL.
- Sound more definitive in creating value during brainstorming sessions that end with action items that can be visibly begun in our daily lives.

I Worry That We Won't ...

- Adapt fast enough in the fast-changing landscape (sustainability, AI, etc.).
- Consider the environment and hurt it worse by creating an event.
- Further grow & develop each other in healthy, supportive ways.
- Get beyond the curve and lose the experience of goals.
- Standardize RFP processes across the industry.
- Utilize team-centered planning.
- Evolve as fast as other industries.
- Lack of education for future professionals.
- Have the time, flexibility, and resources to keep up with the industry.
- Maintain the DEI initiatives that stemmed from the pandemic.
- Value young work and new ideas due to the status quo and lose new innovation and talent.
- Honor the ideas and concerns of a diverse industry on a more practical level.
- Stop engaging in gatekeeping ideas and processes.
- Get next-gen professionals the tools to confidently continue in the meetings and event industry.
- Recognize, support, and invest in event professionals.
- Lose the next-gen that we already have.
- Read and pay attention to any of the issues we could potentially develop to source better networking opportunities for both senior-level and young professionals.
- Utilize social impact effectively.

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