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Dear Fellow Planetarians

"The future belongs to those who are creative, not to those who merely follow instructions and act on command."

This statement reflects a paradigm shift now emerging in our educational systems, businesses, and IPS. It was said by Robert Firmhofer, CEO of Copernicus Science Centre, one of the most successful science centers in the world and host of our incredible IPS 2016 Conference. I was fortunate to have many occasions to speak with him and discovered valuable insight into his success, which will touch upon within this article.

Since many of our readers attended the IPS2016 Conference, I want to use the conference as an example of what happens when we allow creative freedom to resolve certain long-standing issues with our conferences, which it did, and it added a few surprises!



Monika Malinowska and I enjoy a chat during one of the luncheons. She and Maciej Ligowski, along with the entire staff of the Copernicus Science Centre, worked miracles for the conference. Photo by Frank-Michael Arndt.

Robert had given his young, talented professional team the task of organizing the conference. Monika Malinowska and Maciej Ligowski were assigned lead positions, and both were fully committed to organizing the best conference ever. One of the ways of achieving this goal was to address and resolve recurring conference complaints. The biggest, for more than a decade, had to do with sponsor presentations extending into the late evening hours.

The Copernicus Science Centre team clearly had to be creative in their approach because IPS had never solved the problem. We couldn't give them instructions as to what to do. Robert could not give his team instructions as to how to solve the issue. The team shouldered the task.

Their idea was to add two temporary domes outdoors, fully exposed to the elements. These domes had to withstand sun, rain and windstorms, and be fully equipped with sound and projectors, seats, air conditioning, lights, and generators. Climate control trailers attached to each one acted as server rooms for all computers. For this to happen to satisfy certain sponsor requirements, one of the domes was custom

designed, as it turned out, by the same Polish company that built the domes featured in the movie *The Martian*.

A new type of schedule had to be created to move hundreds of people from one dome to another and through the dome village and exhibit areas while allowing each delegate the opportunity to see everything they desired. This all had to happen during the day so that the evenings were free for social events and networking. In order for this to work, sponsors had to repeat their presentations 5 times.

The paradigm shift worked

This was not business as usual. It required a fundamental change, a paradigm shift, in conference planning. And it was a wild success! Delegates and sponsors were satisfied—no, ecstatic! The old complaints evaporated into thin air. What did we learn? Get out of the way and let our teams loose to collaborate, problem solve, and create.

I think of Robert Firmhofer in the same category with Elon Musk and Carter Emmart. These courageous and gifted people have provided the safe environment for creative young professionals (as they once were themselves) to work together to achieve that which has never been done before—something that benefits us all. They allow their teams the freedom to challenge themselves and drive their own passion and creative thought processes. It's a risk—one shared by all members of the team and ultimately by the leader who entrusted the team. What ensues is an adventure with the full realization of consequences. A call to boldly cooperate towards success.

One of the highlights of the conference was the creative sponsor presentations which blew my mind. Please remember that I have been watching sponsor presentations for 35 years so I am a good judge. Many of the presentations were nothing short of sensational.

Dancing the night away

Earlier, I mentioned the host had planned some surprises. My best memory of all was our final evening together at the banquet held in the artsy Soho section of Warsaw. We were served wine with a delicious dinner while enjoying a band. Lovely, but not unusual, until I noticed movement to my right and turned to see planetarians from all nations dancing in the center aisle between tables. I had never seen this before at an IPS Conference! Planetarians of all ages and cultures dancing together!

But the best was yet to come. After dinner, Robert encouraged me to look behind the stage. I found 3 DJ's, including a celebrity DJ who was 76 years old. Just then, she started spinning "The Twist." Those of us who grew up with Chubby Checker and the Twist found ourselves right in the swing of things as the younger generation asked "How do you do that," making their best attempts.

The disc spinning continued as we danced passed midnight. (And, if I were giving a special award for the coolest dance moves, it would go to Ryan Wyatt. Ask him about it the next time you see him.)

What great fun! What a great surprise! What a perfect way to celebrate the end of the best IPS Conference of all time!

Thanks to all who volunteer and contribute to IPS. The shift has already begun to foster the safe environment for you to creatively and boldly go where we have never gone before! ☆