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FACE2FACE

#PCMA12 Day 2: Glenn Thayer at the Learning Pavilion on general sessions

by Sue Pelletier in [face2face](#)

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Let's face it: Most general sessions are pretty boring. People go expecting to have to suffer a half hour, an hour, some seemingly endless amount of time as the association runs through its business issues and updates, thanks sponsors, etc., before getting to the keynote speaker. Or attendees just skip over that part and show up an hour into the session, hoping to spare themselves the experience.

In his 15-minute whirlwind at the Learning Pavilion, online and IRL conference moderator extraordinaire [Glenn Thayer](#) said we don't have to follow the old formatting rules—who made those rules up, anyway? Why not make up your own rules based on the unique needs of your organization and your attendees? Let's not be afraid to evolve, he said.

As [Dr. Medina said](#), we learn in 10-minute chunks, so that's a place to start, he said. What else do we experience daily that chunks up content? How about TV shows? Not that your general session is murderously dull, but it could take some clues from shows like CSI, which lead off with a pretty compelling setup (i.e., someone dies in some bizarre/grotesque/mysterious way), then breaks for commercial. We're accustomed to that, so why not adopt a TV show format for your general session?

As Glenn pointed out, PCMA actually did in its opening general session, which was broken up into nine segments, just as a TV show is. The keynotes were short. Sponsors were thanked only after we got a payoff in interesting material, and we even had a video ad (Hawaii did a very cute, even humorous, video that I won't describe because it will sound hokey, but it worked in context). Other ideas instead of just having a sponsor introduce the keynoter would be to have them do a behind-the-scenes vignette, or have live demos, or produce funny YouTube videos.

Don't just look to TV for inspiration, he said. Check out what makes you excited to be at everyday places. What gets your attention at the mall? How does Disney World make long lines palatable. And don't forget to ask your event producers what you can do to make the format fresher and more engaging.

Side note, sort of: I've now met Glenn a few times, and each time he impresses me more. We got to talking for a while after his session about meeting planning career paths and how to really get strategic, and he just blew me away. If you ever get the chance to talk with this guy, take it!

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