
Keeping It Safe

There's nothing common about common sense.

Ken: So Brian, here's how it goes: I'm usually a vendor coming into someone's venue. When I get there, I have trouble keeping the reins on the folks around me — getting them to do what's best for the show. There always seems to be simple, common sense problems with the venue's representative or another vendor. And they're usually doing something wrong that eventually becomes dangerous. I try to give them suggestions, but the trouble usually starts when one of these guys feels the need to give me his verbal resume to convince me of something that I know is a bad idea. Saying "I told you so" just makes me the asshole. Putting this problem on paper makes me sound conceited, but what is a guy supposed to do?

Brian: Have confidence. Sometimes I just have to take charge of the situation and say how it's going to go. If I'm running the event site like it's mine from the minute I get out of the truck, I'm able to take charge and let others view me as a figure with experience and authority. The guy that spills his verbal resume is just cocky. And it just makes him look like he's searching for respect that he doesn't deserve. Me? I'll wait until someone recognizes my talents and asks me what else I do, and I casually begin to drop names here and there.

Ken: I'm talking about easily anticipated problems. I try to be discreet and let them come to their own conclusions, gently convincing the client, venue, performers, generator guy, other vendors, etc., to use a little sound judgment. (Ha!) I know I have been doing this a long time, but I also know that one big turn off is listening to someone on the job site who starts his sentence with "I've been doing this for 25 years."

Brian: I know what you're talking about. It's the folks who can't lay cable out of a walking path or don't extend it when they should, leaving power lines draping through the air as they come off the distro. It's the idiots who start loadout by coiling the first cable that hit the floor on the in. Or my favorite one — the generator guy who left a trailer genie parked in the middle of Pennsylvania Ave. in Washington, D.C., with the ground rod lying on the fender. We pushed that puppy over to the curb and found a soft spot in a flowerbed to get the rod started in the earth. I got my size 9 1/2 up on the other end of the rod and stood on it until it sunk down flush with the earth. I hope he had fun getting that one out.

Ken: Ooh — very evil! Sounds as though you might have saved him from an FBI probe, and we all know how painful that can be. As I get older, I think I am better at recognizing the situations — and knowing which vendors will take the hint. But my patience level has severely dwindled for those who don't get the clue after a third suggestion. After being proven right in about half a dozen issues over the last two gigs, including the resulting FIRE, how do you handle the dim bulbs (that was a hint) on the job?

Brian: Oh, I'll tell it to them straight. This is how it's gonna be, and this is why. You're not running loose feeder across a publicly accessible walkway, and you're gonna strain relief it where the tails come out of the disconnect. And, for goodness sake, you're not going to mate camlocks in the dark. Believe it or not, red and white look very similar in an unlit room. And why aren't your ground and neutral running reverse gender from the hots? Oy vey!

Ken: I tend to use more precise expletives. Of course, you are right. I want people to do it right because it's the right thing to do, not because I think it's correct. I think I will try your method and just pretend I am the production god on the gig and my word is law. And woe to those who defy me and suffer my sweaty wrath! I have spoken!

Brian: That's the attitude we're looking for! You've got to get out there and run the show, not just work the show. And we can lend some common sense to the idiots we have to work with along the way. Don't be afraid to put your foot down when you see something going on that's stupid, inefficient or unsafe. Whether you realize it or not, your reputation can be affected by the other production companies on the show with you. If someone

were to get hurt on one of my shows because of something the lighting company did, it's still going to get around town that someone got hurt on MY gig. No matter what, we've always got to work safe and make sure those around us are doing the same. It's just good business.

Got a question for the Anklebiters? E-mail anklebiters@fohonline.com.