

Greetings! In my first article last month I wrote about what many of the future articles will be about as well as where some of this information is coming from. I hope you took time to read it.

Recently at a contest, I was asked some questions about how things work. The answers were easy, and surprising to those who asked them. If you take time to read this article and the ones following over the coming months, you may be surprised as were those who have been asking questions as maybe you will learn something you did not know. Or understand.

As always hope you enjoy.

Chapter 2 - Organizers – the Make It Break it of BBQ Comps

Organizers. So, who are these people?

They come from all walks of life. Professional promoters to the common man/woman. Some have an idea of how well-run contests occur while others are new to the game. A good portion of the Organizer portion of the thesis I wrote listed contests I had attended as a judge or as a rep that had issues. A few overcame them and yet others did not and were one and done or two and done, never to return. As a judge or cook team, I am sure you have a list of contests that for you were a one and done or know of some. Unfortunately, much of the issues are self-inflicted by those organizers. I will not name names, though some of you may be able to tell just from the description of the issues as to which they might have been.

Before becoming a sanctioned event, the organizer should have had conversations with KCBS or reps to help answer questions, offer suggestions or even visited a contest to see what all is involved in hosting. I myself have met with 5 such possible events in the past two years that never came to be. Once what was needed and expected, they found they could not host, or it was not the money maker they expected. One expected the teams to be set up in single car parking spaces. Another expected the teams to provide free BBQ samples to up to 500 towns people. A third was expecting a profit in the tens of thousands of dollars. And yet another expected KCBS to provide the payouts, awards, equipment rental etc.

Once sanctioning is paid is not the time to decide if they can host a contest. As my mother used to say “One does not learn to dance when the music starts”. KCBS does not refund sanctioning so it’s best to know before paying it what role they as an organizer are expected to fill.

As a judge, we like communication. Contacting judges on Wednesday the week of the contest to tell them they have been chosen does not work very often. For me, not having heard anything from a contest, went to Memphis in May World Championship with a team. Got the phone call 8:30pm Wednesday night that I had been chosen to judge that weekend. Obviously, I stayed in Memphis. Good organizers let their judges know what’s happening. When they can expect to hear of a selection to judge. But, teams dictate this date by signing up at the last minute.

Teams also like to know what's going on. Some organizers are very good at that. It's great to know power, water situations, what rules are being used on ancillaries. But teams also need to let organizers with space issues to know actual size of rigs, if they need 50 amp and not 30 amp now because they bought a bigger rig since last year or since they applied.

Communication therefore is a two-way street. But it's not the only thing. Organizers need to work from a budget, know how and where they will park teams, what power and water ability they can supply, what type trophies to secure, a place for judges to judge and park, heat or A/C for the judge area, do they have the promised funds to pay out. A contest lasted two years and though KCBS had a guarantee letter of payment from the organizer, failed to pay out teams either year. They went from a 60 plus team event to a 30 plus event in their second year and never returned. Power was also a major issue for the teams. Judges were in a tent too small and no heat provided in early March, yet a perfectly good VFW hall was a couple blocks up the road. When pointed out to the organizer, their reaction was they thought they HAD to use a tent. Obviously, an organizer not knowing what they were doing.

Organizers need to begin working way ahead of time. Not just a few weeks out from the contest. One aspect, team's look at in choosing events to attend is payouts. However, if some or much of the payout is based on team entry fees, that does not work as KCBS requires a signed promissory note of how much is being paid out 90 days prior to contest date. VERY few teams will have signed up by then. An example would be BBQ Gives Back. Mary advertises \$5,000 to \$ 8,000. In actuality she has paid out over \$ 10,000 each year since day one. She fills the form out this way as she knows 90 days out, she can do the \$ 5000 to \$ 8000 without any teams. But with teams and sponsors signing on, that number will go up.

Some contests offer an early fee to save a spot. This helps them know a number of teams to be expected. There are always a handful of drop outs over time. But with this early fee, they can see if teams coming are in line with expected numbers or less which can affect not only payouts but judges needed for the event.

Do they work with a budget to better understand what's coming in versus what's going out? It really helps to know and insure they can cover their expenses for the event. Have they shadowed a "like" contest to their own? It does not help to shadow a campground contest when their contest will be held in a paved parking lot requiring generators and water hoses run everywhere. Unlike a campground where power and water might be found at each team's site. Do they have a committee of people ready to help and handle specific parts of the event? One person cannot do it all. Jobs can be handed off like working with trophies, sponsors, parking, trash pick up, power supply, supplies for judge room, selecting judges, securing hotel rates, etc. But the organizer needs to be sure they will follow through with what's assigned.

Having been a judge for several years prior to hosting a contest, I had seen things I myself did not wish to deal with. We have on our committee cook team members, judges, reps, organizers of other events. This way we can get input from all aspects of the event. I have been known to come up with some wild ideas and I need these people to rein me in.

KCBS offers an Organizers Guide. It recently underwent an update that all organizers should read through before proceeding to sanction an event. Some things in it will not apply to a specific organizers event. But there are lots of good info in it to help at least get them on the right track.

Once a rep team is assigned to a contest, they should be talking with the organizer, about their event. Especially if they are new to hosting a contest. Asking questions as well as answering them. But reps I work with talk with experienced organizers as well. It's helpful to share info organizers may not be aware of in drops in team numbers, rule changes, judge confirmations, KCBS fee changes, etc.

Some organizers are great at communication with teams, their reps and judges. And their events are well run. One such organizer was Gary Moss in NC at the Tilly Harley Davidson contest. Gary would visit contests all over talking with teams about their event, promoting it. Due to an accident and passing of the owner of the Harley dealership, the contest did not continue. Mary with BBQ Gives Back does the same. Talking with teams at all contests she attends. She also promotes other Va contests when talking with teams. Funny thing with her is complaints she hears from teams about having too much info shared. Sometimes it's because teams failed to provide her with the info requested so she has to ask again. And again. And sometime again. Simple things like how many are coming to dinner Thursday night? When do you plan to arrive? Have you acknowledged the gate you used to come in is now closed off? We actually had teams go to the wrong entrance because they failed to read the info provided. Another contest advised teams of a bridge height restriction. But some took that route anyway and had to backtrack. Some contests though just think if they sanction a contest, the teams will come. Many time's that does not equate. Teams (and judge's) like to know more than just a date and a location.

Great organizers begin thinking of next year almost as soon as they are done this year's contest. What went wrong, what could they improve, what changes can or need to be made. Asking questions of teams, judges and reps as to what went right but more importantly what did not. Our first year as a contest we thought we had it all down pat. A simple issue of the campground's bathroom running out of toilet paper was a problem. One we did not see coming. Now, under our contract with the campground, they maintain the bathrooms on a regular basis all day long. We also will make some spot inspections. Simple things sometimes get missed.

I feel confident all teams and judges have experienced events that lacked direction or were not well run. Thinking back to them did you ever go back or was the contest a one and done? There are many specifics that could be shared but just these alone and your own past experiences should tell you that an Organizer can make or break an event.

Next month we look at Reps and what they do. For now,

By-Cycle!