



# FIVE STAGES OF TRADE SHOW ATTENDANCE

by C. Woodrow Browne, managing partner, Building Q

I have been attending trade shows for most of my career. If I bothered to count, I probably have attended more than 250 shows in almost every capacity. I've walked them, manned booths, set-up and closed, paid off tradesmen to get my booth open on time, and paid bonuses to security guards so our samples would not "disappear." I've been the gofer and the boss. Maybe my strangest trade show episode is that while closing a booth at CES, I squeezed in a CNN interview with a fever. By the time I got home, I had a full-blown outbreak of the chicken-pox!

With all this trade show experience, I have come to the realization that there are five stages we all go through as we work the trade show circuit. The June Licensing Expo is no different. Here is what to expect:

## ANTICIPATION

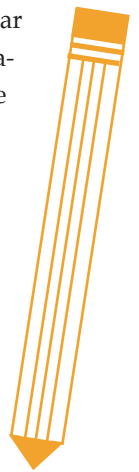


Many months out, we decide to attend the show and get excited about the new opportunities, seeing old friends, and making new contacts. From a distance, the travel, hotel, and "Las Vegas experience" is thrilling. We are jazzed to be going, and we

carefully mark our calendars and make our travel arrangements. We have conversations with friends about the show and how we can get together while doing all the business we have to do to make the show work for our companies.

## PREPARATION

As the dates get closer, and the calendar moves toward the show, we start our preparation. Who do we need to see? Who do we want to see? What problems need to be solved? And—for licensees and licensors—what are the holes we need to fill in our program? We begin making calls and scheduling our time. We prep for the meetings, collect required samples, and write presentations. If there's any "secret stuff," we need to figure out how to present it at the show without exposing it to everyone.



## DREAD

The calendar is getting short and the excitement and anticipation from the earlier months morph into dread. We start to think, "Do I HAVE to go?" Like school kids whose homework is not as finished as we would like,

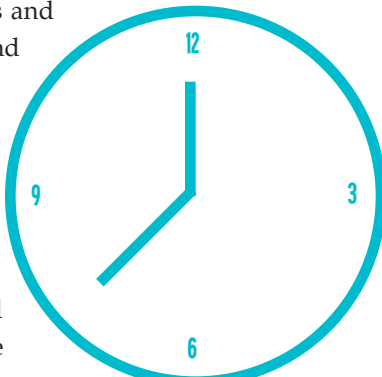


we dread that our preparation is not enough. Horrifying thoughts of missing elements nag at our psyches. The big meeting we planned on suddenly becomes “tentative.” We find out that our bosses will

be there/not be at that meeting and that is either good or not good. Every detail gets blown out of proportion. And then, with no surprise, the calendar flips to June and we are there!

## WORK

The show opens and we are on all day and all night. Our first meeting is late and screws up the rest of our schedules. Our assistants did not take into account that we had to walk from one meeting to another or even allow for bathroom breaks. We suddenly begin to question all of our show logic. Walk-ins and walk-bys take up valuable time, and in the heat of the moment, we don’t have time to think about whether it is going well or whether it is just going. We have trouble getting cell service in the hall. That key meeting suddenly becomes a drink at a bar squeezed in right before dinner. We find ourselves presenting from our laps in a noisy bar and—although we know what we are doing—we feel like Pee Wee Herman about to crash. We go to bed exhausted and realize that we have only just finished day one. Yikes!



## RELIEF

The show is over, done—and we are still standing! The disasters that we imagined did not happen. The problems that did arise were overcome. The booth did not fall down, and—from our perspective anyway—most of the presentations seemed to go well. We have a wad of cards in our pockets for follow-ups, and there are at least two really good opportunities that will make the show worthwhile.

As you pack your exhausted self into a cab to the airport, you also realize, happily, that you made more than a couple of new friends and—good for you—an old coworker who you really liked some years ago is now heading up a toy company or studio, so you keep his card in a very safe place.

The good news from here is, as of this writing, I’m still somewhere between “Anticipation” and “Preparation.” I am still looking forward to heading to Las Vegas in June. I will see you all there!




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*Building Q, established by Woody Browne in 1992, is headquartered in Durango, Colorado. The company specializes in building successful marketing programs for its clients by developing long-term licensing strategies that repeatedly match clients with winning licensed properties. During the last decade the firm has secured a broad spectrum of licenses—including household names such as Arm & Hammer, Craftsman, Coca-Cola, SpongeBob SquarePants, Sesame Street, Power Rangers, Scooby-Doo, and Star Wars—to provide a competitive edge for its clients. Building Q’s clients span a wide variety of industries, including Comic Images, Modern Gourmet, Product Works, and United Exchange Corp. For more information and a complete client list, visit [www.buildingq.com](http://www.buildingq.com) or call (970) 385-7208.*