

# How to Attend an AMS Conference

## or

# An Introvert Survives the Weekend

By P. Donohue Shortridge

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Have you sworn you'll never ever go to another AMS conference *ever* again? Do you wonder if anyone else feels the same way? If your answer is yes and yes, read on. There is hope. As an INTJ, with emphasis on the "I", herewith are a few survival tips.

**Survival Tip #1:** Get Real. If this is your first conference, adjust your hospitality expectation, as there is no roving AMS hospitality ambassador to greet you when you arrive at the hotel to tell you how glad they are that you came. This year, AMS people weren't even manning the credentials desk, which is usually where you encounter

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your first smiling face. Disinterested outsiders did that task in Washington, with professional indifference. However, if you do seek them out, you can find an AMS table near registration and also in the Exhibitors Hall. But there is a line and lots of people swarming round, buying hats.

**Tip Number #2:** If your school budgets for you all to double up, or horrors, triple up in the rooms, tell them you'll pay the difference for your own room. This is the single most important survival technique for any introvert. You have to be able to get away from the throngs. So start saving now for next year's conference, just enough so you can kick in to get your own room. Introverts need quiet to rebuild their stamina to go the

long slog with all those effusive extroverts. Our faces hurt from all that smiling.

**Next, you have to have a logistics plan.** Most of these shindigs take place in cavernous size hotels with labyrinthine mazes that make it tricky to find conference

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rooms, the fitness center and bathrooms, let alone the bar. So go early and check out the place. Take some time to map out where everything is. Hint: bellhops and doormen are your secret source for everything. Bring tip money.

**Sticker shock.** \$3 for bottled water in the hotel? Yep. On the first day in Washington, I was riding up in the elevator with an obvious newbie, who was in sticker shock. She was carrying a bottle of water and a small bottle of juice and a staring aghast at the few coins left over from her ten-spot. She looked up at me, and all she said was, "I can't afford this." There is an alternative,

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*Introverts do not smile, let alone talk to people at breakfast.*

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but you have to be pro-active. Ask the doorman where the closest convenience store is. Go there on your first day and stock up on water, juice, fruit and whatever else you'll need. The hotel usually will deliver a small fridge up to your room for no charge. Use it for that cheaper

water and your booze and juice. Bring that bigger suitcase or if you fly on the right airline you can bring a second bag. I stuff it with hard boiled eggs, baggies of dry cereal, small containers of peanut butter, tiny bottles of liquid refreshment, a small tablecloth and silverware, a corkscrew, and other essentials. Introverts do not smile, let alone talk to people at breakfast.

### **Make your hotel room your home away from home.**

Call ahead and ask for a room with two doubles. I use one for sleeping and the other one for extra seating or to put stuff on. I put all those hotel signs and advertisements away in the drawers as soon as I arrive in my room. I unpack right away and put my suitcases

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either under the bed or in the closet. Housekeeping is very happy to bring you more hangers. There's usually a florist near by the convenience store in town and I grab a bunch of whatever is fresh and put some flowers in one of the glasses in the room. Those accommodating housekeepers are happy to give you another glass. Hint: Be sure to leave a small tip on the dresser every day for that helpful housekeeper and a bigger one on the day you check out.

**Tourist or conference attendee?** If your school expects you to attend most of the sessions, you should honor that. See if you can get away from home a day early and do the tourist thing right away. Otherwise, when yet another conference speaker is saying, "Can you hear me?" Or, "give me a minute to figure out how to get this projector to work . . ." and your eyes glaze over and you're thinking, "I could be shopping or taking in the sights," you'll smile and know that you did that already.

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**To bail or stay in a deadly session?** There are two schools of thought here. While it is rude to leave a session, it is the speaker's responsibility to make the session lively so that you wouldn't dream of leaving, however there are times when it is so bad and there was that other session . . . So here is my suggestion. If you're not sure you'll be staying, do not sit near the front. Choose a seat on the aisle in the back and leave

quietly only when there is a natural pause, and don't let the door slam. Be sure to let AMS know how deadly this speaker was. Or, on the other hand, be a good attendee. Come to the session a bit early, meet someone new, sit near the front, pay attention and contribute to the

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success of the session. Tell AMS about the good ones. If you're anywhere but in the back row and it's bad, too bad for you. You cannot in all good graces leave.

**Outsmarting the throngs at lunch.** By the third day, the introvert cannot stand in one more long line, making small talk to strangers. So, here are two suggestions. In the morning, go to the little market and grab a sandwich or something else for lunch that day and stash it in your fridge in your room. Then come lunch time, you just head up to your room for 30 minutes of peace and quiet. You could also order room service ahead to be delivered to your room just as you arrive back there at the lunch break. Often, the meals are so large that you can wrap up half of it and have it tomorrow.

**Meeting people.** Even introverts want to talk sometimes, so even if you know no one, you can get

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*The audi-CD people from Egami do an incredible job of recording every session.*

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along. Make it a goal to talk to new people every day. Just go up to someone at a session and say, "Anyone sitting here?" Introduce yourself and start a conversation. "Where are you from?" "Have you been to any good sessions yet?" If that person is alone, he or she might be as glad as you for a little company.

**Remember why you came.** When you do choose a session, go for it all the way. Take notes (but bring something hard to write on because most sessions are set up theater style). There is so much information during the conference, you won't remember much if you don't write it down. So think about the session as a mini college course and take it seriously.

**Vendors and the audio CDs.** The audio-CD people from *Egami* do an incredible job of recording every session. We missed them last year in California. They are entrepreneurs and make their living by doing this.

So buy a CD or two and take home an additional order form for your school or for yourself later. I don't know about you, but I need repetition and the good session I want to listen to again.

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*I support the silent auction because the money goes directly to scholarships for those seeking to take the Montessori training.*

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**Take some time to visit the vendors.** Not only do they sell cool stuff, they are knowledgeable in their area of expertise. Talk to them and buy something from them if you can. It's really expensive for them to be there too. We want them to come back next year.

**Stay to the end.** In Washington, the best session was the last one at least for me. Although throngs had checked out by Sunday morning, I was glad I booked my flight home for Sunday late afternoon. (Hint: you can leave your bags with the bellman and attend the Sunday sessions.) That inspirational talk by Gail Blanke

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was the most professional talk all weekend and a great way to end it all, even if the ballroom was more than half empty. I was reminded of Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock, however. He was scheduled last but the festival ran over and he ended up singing at dawn to piles of trash and the hung over ones. But Gail was a pro. And anyone who was in that last session knew how good she was.

**Support the silent auction.** Although I am not a big financial supporter of AMS because I don't agree

with how they spend their money, (e.g. Manhattan headquarters rent?) I do support the silent auction because the money goes directly to scholarships for those seeking to take the Montessori training.

**Your responsibilities.** It's a big event and it's expensive; that's just how it is. Deal with it. Get out of it what you can, don't expect to have a party, unless that is why you are going, and even then, you'll have to make that happen as well. The AMS poo-bahs are a self-congratulatory bunch and spend a lot of time rehashing the past. If it's your first conference and you're attending any of the plenary session, don't expect them

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*Have a sense of humor about it all . . . help out someone who looks lost.*

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to welcome newcomers specifically or invite you to get involved in AMS. You'll have to jump in on your own. Find a topic or cause or group that interests you and go for it (or not). Make a proposal to speak next year, (but don't use power point unless you want us to leave your session. Power point presentations are dreadful in the hands of most Montessorians). Nevertheless, learn something new, say thank you wherever you can. Have a sense of humor about it all. Be nice and help out someone else who looks lost. We're all in it together. And next year, don't forget the peanut butter.

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*Donohue Shortridge is a cranky introvert and veteran of many AMS conferences, with all the tote bags to prove it.  
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