

# ADVICE FROM THE PROS

**O**FA – The Association of Horticulture Professionals will host its biggest event next month — 2013 Short Course. From mapping out 1,500 exhibit spaces to scheduling 140 educational sessions and accommodating more than 9,000 attendees, an event this

size could make any event planner's head spin.

*Lawn & Garden Retailer* recently caught up with the OFA staff to learn how they keep it together for a successful event year after year. We hope their tips can help with your next event, no matter the size.



**Michael Geary,**  
Chief Executive Officer

"Be sure to include all of the stakeholders in your planning. You should not assume you know what everyone wants or needs."



**Sherry Johnson,**  
Senior Manager –  
Business Development

"Don't forget to smile — it's showtime!"



**Michelle Gaston,**  
Director – Education & Events

"Assign someone to take pictures of setup and during the event. The pictures will serve as a good reminder for the next year when it is time to do the event again."

"Get as much done as possible by a couple days before the event because there will always be unexpected last-minute projects to occupy your time."

"Have more staff/volunteers on-site than what you think you need. There is always a need for extra hands."



**Brian McLaughlin,**  
Manager – Business Development

"Planning for next year's event starts during this year's event. Remember, everyone is a customer: attendees, exhibitors, sponsors and advertisers"



**Tracy Phillips,**  
Manager – Business Development

"If you don't know the answer, get the answer. We are all human, and people appreciate your going the extra mile to help them."

"Keep your energy level up; it's infectious and shows."



**Jamie Schafrath,**  
Director – Business Development

"You're always 'on' — you never know when you are in front of a customer or your new boss."

"Have plenty of business cards."



**Laura Kunkle,**  
Director – Communications & Marketing

"Most businesses will get 80 percent of their sales from 20 percent of their customers. Know exactly who those 20 percent are so your marketing strategy is effective."

"Develop and use a crisis management plan. You never think a crisis will happen during one of your events, but it eventually will."



**Alicia Rittenhouse,**  
Manager – Business Development

"Goals, goals, goals. Every event should have several goals — financial, attendance, marketing, etc., so everyone is aware of and working toward the same goals."

"Entertainment. Waiting isn't fun, so make sure there's something to entertain them — magician, music, crafts, etc."