



#MeetWithConfidence

# Flash Forward: Reinventing the F&B Experience

# Our goal is to ensure you #MeetWithConfidence

**For all future meetings and events.**

In May of 2020, we launched our #MeetWithConfidence thought series. We kicked it off with the idea of reinventing Food and Beverage in a post-COVID world. Flash forward almost 5 months, we are beginning to see some live events and in many destinations, we are still under restrictions limiting the number of guests that can gather. In May we thought we would be tackling more of these ideas 'live', but the good news is we are seeing planning start for 2021. We revisited some of the questions with our experts, James Flitz and Dr. Aurora Dawn Benton, to see if their thoughts had changed.

## Reinventing the F&B Experience



**James Flitz, CMP, CPCE**  
Dir. of Meetings & Special  
Events at the Ritz-Carlton  
New Orleans and  
Vice President at NACE



**Dr. Aurora Dawn Benton**  
Founder of Astrapto, LLC

## #MeetWithConfidence Talk Series:

Based on the overwhelming number of participants and the positive feedback we received, we've published the full series and our takeaway summaries on our website for everyone to access, any time. From our expert speakers and our team at Hosts, we hope these resources help.

**View the talks & download the takeaways:** [www.hosts-global.com/resources](http://www.hosts-global.com/resources)



**"Have you seen any companies use this time to focus on their sustainability programs internally? Any advancements that serve both guest safety and sustainability?"**

Aurora: This has all been a shock to the system and for some sustainability is the key to resilience. I recently learned of a hospitality business that switched from foam to-go containers to reusable containers. They serve an “in-house” audience, similar to a hotel, so the containers are not leaving the building. This was driven primarily by costs! They were accumulating a mountain of garbage and were about to have to add one dumpster pull per week. In a place where sustainability was not a priority previously, as evidenced by the choice to use non-recyclable foam, suddenly sustainability was the answer. And the fear over using reusables, which is unfounded based on scientific research, also went out the window because costs drove the decision. All the normal excuses like “the containers are expensive” and “we’ll have to wash all those containers” are greatly diminished in light of having to suddenly do business in a way that exposes you to your own trash. It’s unfortunate that it took a ton of landfill trash to get us there but I am happy to hear stories like this because it shows what many of us have always known: sustainability is truly a triple bottom line thing – people, planet, and profit!

**"In May we talked about the theatre of safety in food preparation and service – have you seen this trend change or stay steady?"**

James: Visible PPE for our staff has been recognized as a strong factor in our guests feeling safe. Here at the Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans we only allow the use of disposable blue surgical style masks or plain black reusable cloth masks. This makes for a much more professional presentation in line with our branding and it makes our clients comfortably knowing we are supplying proper gear – masks aren’t slipping down, they properly cover your mouth and nose, etc. We have hand sanitizer everywhere and sanitizing wipes are available in many places as well which guests appreciate. These trends are both to show clients they are safe, but necessary as well.



**"Have you seen any standards emerge for room set ups?"**

James: U-shape set ups have been popular in the past but they are going away since they end up being overly big and are now replaced with classroom style events or hollow square. Smaller round tables vs larger. For clients with healthy budgets larger seating / bringing in outside furniture options is preferred when possible however with added technology costs most of the meetings we are seeing want to use hotel standard furniture. Classroom still has to be 1 per 6 foot until social distancing goes away.

**"We discussed the skills that planners might come out of this with. Other than learning how to run a virtual meeting, have you seen new skills develop in event organizers? Or any of the technology we talked about be embraced?"**

Aurora: It seems a lot of planners are still in a holding pattern, waiting for larger events to come back, and it can feel like they can't "embrace" what they're learning. So I have been encouraging people to plan hypothetical events through the lens of sustainability. Take plans from a past event or plans that were put on hold for a 2020 event and reimagine it. For anyone who is furloughed or laid off this gives you talking points for a LinkedIn blog post or at interviews. Do the sustainability and innovation research, design, and communication plans you normally claim not to have time for. This is an excellent way to practice, much like an athlete would practice and practice so that when the competition happens the optimal performance is second nature. Being able to talk intelligently and practically, rather than generically, about sustainability is a skill that will stand out in the future so why not prepare now?

**"You have both continued to present on this topic over the summer, is there anything else you would like to add as our clients think about the return to live events?"**

James: It is really important to have a plan A, B and C. The rules are changing so fast planners need to plan for the worst and expect the best.

Aurora: There has continued to be interest in sustainability. It seems those who had already had a taste and were growing in their awareness have used this time to go deeper and have taken advantage of the many great online resources and courses on sustainability. What I notice, though, is there is a sentiment that people want to move past COVID and talk about something else; however, most of the Q&A is still about COVID. I would also say a lot of the content and effort I see seems to be answering the question "Will I feel safe?" but we need to start thinking about how we are going to answer the question "Will I thrive?"

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