



This private newsletter is for my clients who lead change. All content is based on my real-world experience working with world-class leaders. I stand ready to make a contribution to your efforts. Email Seth@SethKahan.com or call my office, 301/229-2221

THE CELEBRATION OF CULTURES

I love bringing people together to celebrate the diversity of human spirit and our ability to collectively achieve extraordinary results. It all began for me in the late 1970s when I started doing street theater. My work has evolved over the years, and today I create events for over 15,000 professionals every year.

One of my favorites in a corporate setting was at the World Bank when they faced the challenge of office Christmas parties. On one hand, the annual celebrations were a time-honored way for staff to join together in good cheer and joy, signatures of the Christmas spirit. On the other, so many people turned toward their own distinct traditions, Hanukah, Ramadan, Kwanzaa, and a myriad of others.

We decided to create a "Celebration of Cultures," and open up participation to staff members and their families, all ages. Like other large-scale gatherings, it would be hosted in the atrium where about 3,500 could gather, and video-stream to all offices around the world.

The Celebration of Cultures event was to be the culmination of a series of smaller Celebration events that began earlier in the year. We did this so we could sift through all of the people who wanted to contribute, selecting those that were most appropriate for a large all-staff gathering. Simultaneously, we provided a stage for everyone to showcase their talents without any screening whatsoever.

Our series of smaller Celebrations were each dedicated to a geographic region. Anyone could perform. We accepted songs, poetry, skits, dances, and anything else staff and their families had to offer. We had a panel of judges who rated each performance based on a variety of indicators, designed to select a cross-cultural variety of performers that showcased our diversity, our families, our passions, and our spiritual expressions.

Those who were selected made up the grand performance at our all-staff gathering which represented cultures around the globe. The final event was just under an hour in length, held at the end of the workday adjacent to the winter holidays. We kept it under an hour so our audience, which was standing, could enjoy the show rather than worry about their feet!

We rented a stage from the Kennedy Center, and brought in sound and light crews. I produced the first event, working closely with the entire Internal Communications team and a particularly dedicated staff member whose enthusiasm was both passionate and infectious. I also ran rehearsals, and emceed the big show. All of this put me very close to the performers, allowing me to structure the event so that it brought out the best of everyone.

The talent demonstrated by staff members was over the top, showcasing amazing skill and joyful ebullience! President Jim Wolfensohn crowned the event with a short speech and gave each of the performers a rose. When it was over, everyone was high. The Celebration of Cultures has become a tradition at the World Bank and still exists today.

The most powerful moment for me was when an Indian woman sang a Hindu gatha (hymn) to Krishna. She sat by herself on the floor of the stage, dressed beautifully. The lights were low. Her enchanting voice filled our 13-story atrium with divine worship. Chills ran down my spine and tears swelled in my eyes. We had brought the world together, even for just 55 minutes.

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