

THE VOICE OF AIPC

# Why Embracing Disruptive Leadership is Necessary for Success

We know that audience demands are always changing. With new developments and emerging technologies, convention leaders know that they must constantly pay attention in order to keep up.

*Words Greg O'Dell*



As the President and Chief Executive Officer of Events DC, the official Convention and Sports Authority for the District of Columbia, I realize that these changes also present great opportunity for us to improve and embrace new ‘outside of the box’ tactics. Events DC aims to break from the normal traditional quasi-government structure by making investments and taking risks in the development of new venues and services. For instance, a Strategic Initiatives Division was implemented that positions Events DC for future growth while also enhancing the ability to create premier event experiences that help achieve our mission to drive economic and community benefits for residents and businesses of the District of Columbia.

Only through a “disruptive leadership” mindset and embracing the need to shake things up – to innovate, ideate, and execute – can we achieve the results we need.

## INNOVATE

Many of us host hundreds of events with millions of attendees each year. Each event comes with the challenge to outdo its predecessor, finding better ways to engage audiences – often by incorporating new technologies including mobile apps, crowd-sourcing, or social media tools – and turn them from passive attendees to active participants. Events are becoming more dynamic and interactive, and venues will have to keep evolving their strategies to meet these needs. It is important for leaders to keep pushing innovation forward, even when they are already currently seeing success.

For example, our Walter E. Washington Convention Center in DC has over 200 digital signage displays and is the largest signage network of its kind in the United States. Despite already leading the industry, over the past two years we significantly expanded this program by adding new LED video-walls to key locations that allow meeting planners to better implement new interactive technologies and engage their audiences. Our push to continue innovating has resulted in a tremendous amount of excitement among our customers who have fully embraced this technology at the majority of shows and led to numerous accolades regarding their experiences. Our Center will also undergo a face lift aimed at optimizing the public spaces by making them more flexible and user-friendly. We’re adding new seating, furniture and play areas to promote “communities” to actively gather and socialize during an event.

## IDEATE

As convention leaders consider our future in an ever-changing and competitive marketplace, we must continue to ideate with cutting-edge and forward thinking. Strategic planning requires that we place emphasis on repurposing our existing assets, while simultaneously examining new opportunities. How can we extend our business and our brand beyond our venue? This is a question I often ask myself, while also considering how we can best “pay it forward” – an adage I believe all leaders should live and work by.

For instance, we recently broke away from the norm and set our sights on new market segments like esports. We even sponsored a team – the first city to do so – to let the world know that esports events, gamers and the community are welcomed to our nation’s capital.

Additionally, we have strived to find ways to create greater community and economic benefits for the city and our partners. Since opening the doors to our Convention Center, the neighborhood has benefitted with additional consumer traffic and an explosion of new restaurants and retail. As a strategy to not only give back, but also further extend our brand, we have developed a “streetscape plan” to transform the exterior facade of the Convention Center through lighting, signage, canopies and furniture that will help activate and enrich the sidewalks throughout the surrounding neighborhood.

## EXECUTE

When executing any plan, it is important to recall the core qualities of the hospitality industry and provide a service to our clients that is helpful, trustworthy, courteous and kind. We must always acknowledge our audience’s presence, making each person feel recognized. Good leaders know that to accomplish this, we need to dare ourselves to break from the norms, to forge unprecedented collaborations and to invest in innovation, new ideas and initiatives.

We must become “disruptive” leaders who place an intentional focus on thinking beyond our traditional operations. We must embrace innovation, develop bold ideas, and execute these new strategies. In leading by example, we also challenge others to develop their own ideas and engage in knowledge sharing. Together, this ultimately leads to further actions and initiatives that will drive your organization to greater success.

In addition to his role as AIPC Vice President, Greg O'Dell is President and CEO at Walter E. Washington Convention Center and Events DC // AIPC represents a global network of over 185 leading centres in 60 countries with the active involvement of more than 900 management-level professionals worldwide  
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