

When Disaster Strikes Your In-Store Event

by **Stephanie Bond**

You've planned for weeks, maybe months, for a big author event in your store—you've called in favors from the media, sent out countless postcards and e-mail reminders, double-checked every last detail, then...sure enough, Murphy's Law strikes. The night of your big event, a blizzard blows in, an author's plane is delayed, or—*gulp*—the books haven't arrived! How can you salvage your event without stepping on too many toes?

The Weather Factor

Relax—an author doesn't expect you to control Mother Nature. If a storm (or threat of one) deters customers, offer your apologies and ask the author to sign his/her stock with a no-strip guarantee. Offer a cup of coffee or tea and ask if there's anything in your store that the author would like to read to pass the time between customers, or invite the author to leave early if it's clear that readers aren't going to show. Then the next few days, send a follow-up postcard to readers offering a "Blizzard Blitz" or "Monsoon Sale"—a small discount on the autographed books. Don't forget to send a note to the author to let him/her know that you've hand-sold the stock they autographed.

Author Missing in Action

The readers show, but the author is nowhere to be found! If you planned ahead and you have the author's en route contact information, call to ascertain the delay. If he/she is stuck in traffic/at the airport and is going to be very late for the event, maybe he/she could call you back on a speakerphone and address the crowd gathered. Alternately, you might ask the author if he/she would be willing to talk on the phone to each reader for a set amount of time—say, a minute. That kind of personal contact would be a treat for a reader and ensure they reserve a copy of the book the author will eventually arrive to autograph. If circumstances dictate that the author miss the event entirely, contact the publishing house/publicist to see if the publisher would be willing to foot the bill for mailing reserved copies of the book to and from the author for signing. At the very least, ask the author if he/she will send you autographed bookplates ASAP.

If you can't contact the author, tell customers the truth—that you don't know where he/she is—and be willing to offer a gift to those who showed up: a coupon? refreshments? notecards? If you still haven't heard from the author the next day, contact the publisher—there might be an emergency that the author wasn't able to convey. Use your judgment when deciding to reschedule.

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Books Waylaid

A bookseller's (and author's) nightmare is a line of readers waiting to buy books that haven't arrived! First, call the shipping company and send out an employee to find the truck, if necessary. Also, let the author know ASAP—he/she might have extra inventory they can bring. Meanwhile, have other employees call retail book outlets in your area and ask if they have copies of the book you need, then send employees on a search mission for those copies. The author would prefer to sell the current release, but backlist is better than absolutely nothing. If you're still empty-handed, ask the author if he/she will host a Q&A session about the book, and take reservations for the books from customers. Then arrange for either the books to be mailed to the author for signing and back to the store, or get signed bookplates from the author.

Unforeseen Circumstances

There are times when things happen that you simply can't foresee: electricity outages, major competing events, security shut-downs. In those situations, authors and customers will take their cues from you—apologies and an appropriate sense of humor is usually the best policy. If you have to reschedule the event, for instance, dub it a “RE-autographing” or “Second Chance Signing.” Be sure to play up the fact that the author is worth coming back for! ~**S**Bond

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