Deb's Page

There's No Credential Like Show Credential

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Abstract

In this column, the author takes a humorous look at conference attendees' name tags.

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What a great Lamaze International conference last fall in Pittsburgh! Kudos to everyone involved in planning the event, from filing the continuing education units to ordering the chicken breasts. So many details are involved that it's like watching an elaborate wedding go off smoothly—a yearly wedding at that! If you weren't able to attend, you can order some fabulous sessions on tape (call Lamaze International at 800-368-4404).

A little convention detail that I get a special kick out of is how various groups acknowledge important designations within the organization. This typically occurs in some form on the name badge. In the case of Lamaze International, an adhesive-backed, preprinted ribbon is added to the bottom edge of the badge. Additional ribbons are attached for each designation until the exhibit halls and ballrooms are awash in colorful, cascading credentials. Why, I have real concerns that some members have so many titles that their badges may dip into the toilet water or, at the very least, become inadvertently zipped into their britches!

This brings me to my own credentials, for which a preprinted ribbon does not seem available: Deb Gauldin, RN, PMS. I can't begin to tell you how many people ponder the meaning of PMS. They make some interesting assumptions and creative conjectures such as "Perinatal Medical Specialist" or "Prenatal Management Specialist."

Sorry folks, PMS stands for the far less glamorous "Premenstrual Syndrome"—a comedic license I took following a conversation with a rather stuffy meeting plan-

ner. That particular morning I was having one of those classic PMS days. My period was frighteningly overdue. It was 9:00 a.m. and I had already eaten 63 Weight Watchers® points worth of pure chocolate, when a surly sounding woman telephoned and requested my credentials for a brochure she was typing.

When I told her I was a registered nurse, she responded, “Just an RN?” Throwing all therapy out the window, I found myself feeling defensive and suppressing a need to explain what a good nurse I am, how I served hard time on the PTA, and how I’m generally a worthwhile human being. Instead, I didn’t say a thing. I decided I would collect my thoughts and give her a call later to gently “educate” her about how her comment made me feel.

When I called back, I cheerfully asked her to add PMS after my name. I thought this would start some dialogue and maybe a few laughs. She replied, “Very well,” and hung up. I shrugged her off as probably overextended and possibly humor impaired.

Months after I had forgotten about the incident, the conference materials came out and there appeared “PMS” on everything from the conference booklet to my name tag! It seemed the perfect designation for someone who writes “hormone-affirming music and humor” and has been introduced as “the strolling menstrual singer.” I have used the designation ever since.

However, there is one exception. Even though I am clearly representing myself as a humorist, the National Speakers Association will not print the PMS credential because I must be able to prove every designation claimed. All anyone needs to do is pay me a strategic visit during “that time of the month” or speak with my family to determine that I am completely certifiable!

PS: My favorite experience with name badges occurred at a conference in St. Louis where every person working at the registration area had the letters “NCW” inscribed after their name. It stood for “No Credentials Whatever.”