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Some Truths Revealed about Nametags

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

April

2000

The other day I took a break from sewing on the quilt we are making here at Energize from old conference tote bags and cleaned out my bottom desk drawer. When I tugged it open, hundreds of conference name badges sprung out at me like some crazy jack-in-the-box. In a flash, I realized that here was an unaddressed hot topic! It's time to be honest and open about these devilish plastic items:

- Nametags range in quality from those peel-off, stick-em-on, "Hello, my name is" cuties (which do not stick longer than ten minutes to any fabric out of which clothes are made) to those lightweight plastic jobs from which the paper insert flies to the floor, leaving an empty, useless shell flopping open on the wearer's chest. And is there no happy medium between flimsy safety pin backs that fall apart and those dragon-teethed clip fasteners that bite into your clothing so that even hurricane-force winds can't rip the nametag off?
- A delicate issue is placement. Attach it too high and it irritates our necks, but pin it too low and it elicits improper stares--a problem increasing in severity with the size of the wearer's bustline. Further, there's the raging debate over which is the politically-correct side for placement of the tag: left or right?
- To be sure, pins and clips are often by-passed today in favor of the neck string or lanyard. Of course, these are made somewhere by retired NBA players, the only explanation I can come up with for their length. Maybe the only thing more annoying than the nametag chest stare is the contortions a stranger must make to read a nametag at bellybutton level.
- Now let's be honest about what appears on the nametags. Perhaps conference organizers purposely print names tiny enough to foster intimacy between conferees peering closely at each other's tags. Some nametags are so filled with colored dots, stars, workshop codes, regional designations, and stickers for next year's conference city that the name of the person is totally obscured, making it necessary to go through introductions anyway.

- Then there's the matter of attachments. Ribbons to honor board members, presenters, exhibitors, recovering alcoholics, and other dignitaries bedeck chests everywhere in an attempt to impersonate 5-star generals. Some events go wild with those little sticky felt things in shapes like cactus or pineapples that crazed regional reps. slap on you as they run through the exhibit hall. Of course, it seems perfectly natural to wear this adorned name tag at the event, but when a waitress in the restaurant across town miraculously calls you by your first name and you realized you've worn the thing outside, you feel pretty silly.

Now don't get me wrong--I love nametags. In fact, I have practiced a long time to perfect the technique of pretending to be focused on someone's face while I stretch my peripheral vision to glance at the name on my colleague's tag. "Why you look mah-vel-ous, Mary...uh Maryanne...uh Marianna! How nice to see you again!" It's a little secret we conference presenters share.

Remember the famous Ms. Magazine cover in its inaugural year that showed a Lichtenstein-like cartoon image of a man and a woman? The man was saying: "Do you know the women's movement doesn't have a sense of humor?" And the woman replies: "No, but if you hum a few bars, I'll fake it." Well, happy April 1! Volunteer management needs to lighten up occasionally and humor was one of my resolutions (see January's hot topic)!

In response this month, can you add to the smiles? Any pet peeves (or true anecdotes) you'd like to share about those weddings-cum-recognition-banquets we plan annually? Or maybe you can tickle our funny bones on the trials and tribulations of creating a weekly volunteer schedule, dealing with unusual staff or volunteer personalities, or any other easily-recognizable, day-in-the-life story of a volunteer program manager. We can all use the break! :-)

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Posted 3 May 2007 by Terry Goodman, volunteer and calligrapher, Waco, Texas USA

Was an attorney at the Texas Attorney General's Office and attended the annual Christmas party. Name tags were prepared but the tag table was not at the very front door. There was room for people to gather and visit before they reached the tag table. My escort (this was in the 1960s) was wearing a handkerchief in his suit pocket decorated with "Merry Christmas." He was not a member of the staff, so no one knew him, and people started saying "Hi there, Merry Christmas!" (as if that were his name). It ruined his whole evening. and of course he removed the handkerchief. I am doing nametags for a dinner on October 11, 2007, and appreciated the idea of the nametag tent. I shall use them for the head table. Thank you so much.

Posted 11/15/2006 by Aarin, Marketing Manager, Name Tag, Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

My advice: Don't over clutter your name tag. Most people tend to think of their name tags as a resume and want to list anything and everything on it -- don't.

Some general pointers to keep in mind when you are designing your name tags:

1. Make sure it is legible from 5 to 10 feet away.
2. Try to limit your tag to include the essentials such as your name and company.
3. It is a common practice to wear your name tag on your left so when you shake hands with your right, you are not obscuring the tag.

Remember, a name tag is a tool, so be creative and use it to its fullest.

For more tips and/or to purchase name tags, visit www.nametag.com

Posted 10/24/2005 by Bill Kennedy, Altus Canada, Project Manager, Toronto, ON Canada

My advice: be creative with your name tag! I was at an English / French event and found that people were sticking to their own side. Wanting to meet the French people, I turned my name tag over and wrote "Guy Guelle de Bois" on it (rough English translation - Harry Hangover). It broke the ice and I met a bunch of people.

Posted 4/18/00

Submitted by Mary Kay Sandell, Volunteer Coordinator VNA, PA. U.S.A.

Recently a few of our Hospice nurses attended a very elegant seminar with many professional people. They were a little late and very quickly filled out their nametags and attached them. They entered the room and started talking to people around them. One of the nurses found many people staring at her and began to feel uncomfortable. She asked another nurse if something was the matter. In the middle of the seminar these nurses began laughing and couldn't stop. Soon others around them also began laughing. Patty one of the nurses had written Chicken on her nametag. This was her selection for dinner!!! We have gotten so much laughter from this incident.

Posted 4/18/00

Submitted by Martha Diaz, Community Relations, Guardian Ad Litem Program, Miami, Florida

More often than not, I have sat at "The NameTag Table" at an event, and almost always, someone will show up who insists they RSVP'd, but most likely didn't, or who somehow got overlooked by the mail merge or something. These people are devastated about not having a nametag, almost as if they had been bypassed for a life-saving organ transplant. Therefore, for the not-so-formal occasions, I make blank tags (for everyone so there are no distinctions), I arm myself with four or five Sharpies, and let them do it themselves. I have used pins, and got complaints because they make holes in clothes; I used Clips and was told that some people have nothing to clip them to. The string method messes up peoples' hair. Stickies are considered to be in poor taste. What I learned is: You can't please everybody, so don't try.

Posted by 4/18/00

Submitted by Marsha Riddle

Well, there was a time in the 1970's when a friend named Judy, M.J., and I were traveling from Atlanta and in our rush to get out of the the way of the afternoon traffic, we all forgot to take those

blooming name tags off. I don't remember the specific style of name tag, but I do remember the inquiry in the bar as we waited to be seated. The older gentleman peered curiously at the NCAVA and asking if we were members of the North Carolina African Violet Association. All the initials and labels we place as information about ourselves is really a lot to do about nothing. What I remember is the person, and at my age it is easier to remember one name.....so Susan is enough for me, in large enough letters to see. Just my thoughts.....Marsha

Posted 4/11/00

Submitted by Catherine Bickford-White, Volunteer Co-ordinator Government House Historical Society, Saskatchewan, Canada

When I started reading this article I thought that it was going to be about name tags for volunteers. I thought how timely as I had just set the wheels in motion for that this morning. I thought it would have some great info on the dos and don'ts, first names only? Proper letter size, for the visual effect? Anyway, I enjoyed the article. Unfortunately the only story I have is one of a warning. I was at a conference and our name tags had both our first and last names. Some of the women neglected to remove the tags before going into the public areas of the hotel. They then began to receive some not so pleasant phone calls in their rooms. One can never be too careful.

Posted 4/11/00

Submitted by Denise M. Kapsa, Manager, Volunteer Services: Saint Joseph's Regional Medical Center, Indiana

I just pulled up your web page and got a chuckle on the "name tag" issue. So true....It is not a big deal. I like to see us put the city that you are from to use it as an ice breaker. It works and everybody is busy sharing stories of their cities. Thank you for the article.

Posted 4/7/00

Submitted by Tammy H., Director of Volunteers, Kingsport

The nametag thing is a hoot. I personally hate dealing with them. Others here are constantly asking folks to wear them who see each other on a regular basis. It feels as though we are contributing to senility! However, if worse comes to worse, opt out for name tent cards for meetings and such. The participants don't have to wear anything, and they are a lot easier to read from a distance!

Posted 4/7/00

Submitted by Sue Alexander, Coordinator of Volunteers, Peoria Park District, Illinois

Regarding the necessary "evil" nametags, I long ago decided to give in and admit I couldn't remember names all that easily, even when I couldn't quite read the nametag. However, I desperately wanted to remember! So, when I meet someone new with a nametag, I introduce myself, look specifically at their tag, read the name out loud and then say hello to the person. I find the other person does the same with me. Also, what is worse is when I meet someone I've met before, I can't remember their name, and they are NOT wearing a nametag. I say hello, tell them my name, and say, "I know I know you, but I have to admit I can't remember your name." The look of relief comes over their face and they look at me and laugh and say, "You know, I couldn't remember yours either!" Immediately we

share a common problem, laugh, and have a delightful talk. The strange thing is that once I admit I can't remember the name, I remember it from then on!

Posted 4/5/00

Submitted by Robert Dehaan, Volunteer

I have nothing to add to your hilarious name-tag piece other than that I think the stickum kind should be plastered on the wearer's forehead. That places less demand on one's peripheral vision.

Posted 4/5/00

Submitted by Cindy Fairs, Consultant, Okanagan Volunteer Management Services, British Columbia, Canada

A great way to recycle those name tags is to throw them all into a box after the workshop and then draw a name for a prize. That way you get them all back again!

Posted 4/4/00

Submitted by Sally Coder-Martinez, Volunteer Services Program Director, Alternatives For Girls, MI, USA

Thanks, I needed that! As I read through the article I found myself wanting to laugh my way through but instead found myself obsessing about yet another detail in the day of my life--"Oh my gosh, do I have the 'right' nametags, should we really use them, etc., etc." This after a TOUGH day on tough subjects at the office--my plans to FINALLY get that volunteer evaluation process implemented. Talk about a room full of managers WAY to serious on life period! Walked out of that meeting feeling like I needed to put my body parts back on right and questioning my devotion to the field (of which I have been a part for 10 years). Now, had I started off our meeting today with my "cutsie" nametags and had everyone wear one right smack in the middle of their shirt I might have felt better just for the FUN of it.....Thanks for reminding me what gets me through--the humor in it all!

Posted 4/3/00

Submitted by Winnie Morgan, Trainer/Speaker, Volunteerism, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

I loved your "name tag thoughts". One suggestion on the plastic holders no matter how you feel about them---recycle them! In one service organization, there is a humorous rule that only the five ribbon folks can talk with other five ribbon folks! The attached ribbons can get out of control as far as creating a culture of "class and importance". I have found one beneficial use of "used" name tags(the paper part). If I have taken photos at that event, I stick the name tag in the photo album with the photos because it usually gives the dates and location of the event! Otherwise, I too have the "jack in the box" drawer! Love your humor---keep it coming!

Posted 4/3/00

Submitted by Priscilla Lorah, Research Associate, Chronicle Guidance Publications, Inc, NY, USA

Great! You have really said it all about nametags! You are certainly right about needing daily humor.

Posted 4/3/00

Submitted by Wally Elton, Program Director, Student Conservation Association, NH, USA

I have found that pinning the nametag on a head band works well. From a slight distance, you can't tell whether the other person is looking you in the eye or at the nametag.

Posted 4/3/00

Submitted by Wendy Fustino, RSVO Director, NY/USA

Started my Monday morning out with the nametag article - good chuckle!! Loved the wedding cum recognition line - probably since our recognition is next week, and I do feel like Fronk, the infamous wedding planner!!

Posted 4/3/00

Submitted by Joy Golliver , President Ignite The Community Spirit, Washington, USA

I ask that when we are talking about conferences, etc. to remember that there are many people who attend who do not "work" for the organization on their nametag. They are volunteers for that agency. There perhaps should be a way to tell who is staff and who is volunteer.

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