

Getting the Most out of the ABCT's 51st Annual Convention

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For many professionals the annual Convention of their preferred organization is the major opportunity in their busy schedules for advanced training and networking. For many therapists, professional life involves some combination of direct clinical service (giving or getting, administrative, teaching, and meetings). Continuing education, a requirement for many of us, is generally left to our own time. Of course, our own time is often complicated with commuting, family, sleeping, and other self priorities.

Many of the ideas discussed below were developed by Dana Cassell to help maximize the Convention experience for writers. With some small adaptations and enlargements, they serve equally well for therapists. They were originally published in the State Convention Report of the Florida Freelance Writers Association, Volume 10, May 14–17, 1992. Ms. Cassell's permission to use this material is appreciated. Dr. Freeman's article first appeared in *the Behavior Therapist*, Volume 15, No. 9, October 1992. The ideas and suggestions were sound and now that we have entered a new era of technology, we have added the "new school" approach to maximizing your convention experience.

Before the Convention

Visit the ABCT website frequently and download the ABCT Convention App

All ABCT convention offerings are posted on our website. Registering early will ensure your entry to the ticketed special continuing education sessions. Reserve your hotel accommodations. The rooms at our headquarters hotel always sell out. Renew or join ABCT to get the lowest convention fees.

Use your time well: Review the program

Before the convention, read the program to familiarize yourself with the available topics and speakers.

Download the Convention APP or access the online convention itinerary planner to maximize your time during the convention.

At ABCT THERE ARE MANY HIGH-QUALITY EVENTS COMPETING FOR YOUR TIME. The program committee has spent hundreds of hours in deciding which topics and speaker to invite and in reviewing the submissions.

What we see in the final program is, ideally, the distillation of the best of the best. By carefully reviewing the program and identifying the particular speakers and topics of greatest interest to you, you can begin to structure the best use of your time, efforts, and money. Take a look at the Convention Itinerary Planner, located on the convention page by clicking on the "Itinerary Planner". Planning your time in San Diego can go fast and be fun using the Itinerary Planner or APP. Plan for time conflicts and arrange a realistic schedule. Also remember to include social hours, business meetings, special interest group meetings, Poster Sessions, the Awards Ceremony, the Annual Meeting of Members, the four incredible Invited Speakers, and, of course, the Presidential Address. Schedule time to visit the exhibit hall and time to meet with friends.

Prior to the Convention, review suggested readings, scan articles, books, etc., written by your selected speaker(s) so that you can ask specific questions of those speakers about how they handle particular research, clinical, or theoretical issues.

This will be your chance to find out how a particular speaker handled an interesting problem. Speakers generally are pleased that members of the audience are familiar with their work and are interested in obtaining further information about some specific issue. If your question is not relevant to the larger audience, be sure to ask it privately at the end of the session.

Either “new school” on your smartphone, tablet, or laptop, or “old school” on 3 x 5 cards, write down a minimum of three questions that you would want answered on each topic you plan to hear. Doing so encourages your direct participation in the program.

Don’t trust your memory. It is very aggravating to be on your way home and suddenly to remember what you wanted to ask someone. The time taken to write down your questions (whatever the method) will not only jog your memory but will help you to ask precisely the questions that you would like answered.

Plan for your continuing education credits

Prior to the Convention, it is a good idea to check your licensure renewal status. Most Conventions provide you with an excellent opportunity to earn continuing education credits and ABCT has multiple ways for you to stay current.

It’s easiest if you preregister for your continuing education credits but you can always purchase this option on-site as well. Attendance at each continuing education session, in its entirety, is required to receive credit. For ticketed events attendees must scan your badge in and scan out and complete and return an individual evaluation form. For general sessions, attendees must scan in and scan out and answer particular questions in the CE booklet regarding each session attended. The booklets must be handed in to ABCT at the end of the convention. Personalized certificates of continuing education credit are sent approximately 8 weeks after the convention.

What to bring

Don't completely fill the suitcase you're packing for the convention. Remember to leave room for handouts, books, T-shirts, gifts for family and friends, and other purchases. Also, check the sizes of liquids you can carry on the plane. You can pack full-size containers of contact lens solution, toothpaste, etc., if you check your luggage.

Book publishers spend a great deal of time and money preparing their exhibits. They often spend a day setting up their displays, but at the end of the Convention would like to get home quickly. They are sometimes willing to sell exhibit copies of books at more than the standard Convention discount. This usually means that you pay for the book, put your name in it, and pick it up at the end of the Convention. Even if there is no additional discount, you can take the book home with you and avoid the shipping and handling fees.

Many hotels have business centers that can ship items to your institution or home if you don't want to carry a lot of books or paper. If you have an account with an overnight carrier, bring a shipping form with you that already has your account number and address printed on it for billing.

Take along a file of ideas and outlines. Editors and publishers' representatives attend Conventions looking for new ideas, new authors, or new work. Editors are glad to discuss ideas and projects in various stages of development. If you have an idea for a project, type it out and bring along multiple copies. Editors often will ask, "What are you working on?" or, "What is your area of interest?" Tell them, "I've been working with _____ patients for the past _____ years. I've seen very little written about working with _____. Is this something that you might be interested in exploring?" To coin a phrase, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." A proposal should be brief (2-3 pages). Include in it an introduction, an explanation of the need for this project, the value of the project, the proposed audience, a mention of similar published work, a proposed table of contents, and your c.v.

Bring lots of business cards with you. Or download a business card app.

Nothing is worse than running out of cards midway through the Convention and having to write down your name and contact information on a scrap of paper. Right now, put a rubber band around 100 cards and pack them in your suitcase. Bundle another 100 for your briefcase or bag. Going to a convention with fewer than 100 cards means that you are planning to meet fewer than 100 new friends and colleagues. Aim to distribute all of your cards.

Students, be sure to make your own cards for distribution. Most office supply stores have paper stock for this purpose. Keep it simple by including your name, affiliation, address, cell phone, and email address. Be sure to use a font and type size that “seasoned colleagues” can easily read without a 100-watt bulb!

Go green

- Download the Convention APP
- Use the on-line itinerary planner and download it to your laptop or pda.
- Download available handouts when possible.
- Bring a reusable water bottle than you can refill throughout the Convention.
- Use your smartphones, tablets, or laptop, for note taking.
- Use rechargeable batteries.
- Turn off the lights and air-conditioner when you leave your hotel room.
- Reuse your towels.
- Use pens that require refills.
- Remember to pack all those chargers!

During the Convention

Arrive at the hotel early. This will give you time to become familiar with the hotel layout and the area surrounding the hotel, and to purchase that one item you forgot to pack. Look for eating establishments near the hotel. Hotel food prices can be high and finding alternative restaurants can save you a great deal of money, especially on breakfasts and lunches. It is usually helpful, too, to find a large pharmacy near the hotel to purchase last-minute items. The Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel meeting space is available by escalator and elevator.

Pack a box of protein bars or a bag of nuts. Now that the airlines don't offer free food, it is wise to have a mini-meal available at all times!

Come to the attendee orientation if this is your first time attending, or if it has been awhile since you attended an ABCT convention.

Early on Friday (8:00 a.m.) an orientation session will be run by members of the ABCT membership leadership and staff to help you get the most out of the ABCT convention. They will give you insights on how to use that very large and imposing program booklet, provide tips on navigating the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel, explain the ABCT lingo, and give you your first networking opportunity! Plus, be on the lookout for members wearing the "Ambassador" ribbons. They can answer any questions you may have about the convention or ABCT in general.

Take notes

Have information in your smartphone or our convention app with your specific time plan for your stay in San Diego on a day-by-day basis. Carry a digital recorder or a small tape recorder at all times. It's great for instant note-taking and will be an invaluable memory jogger when you return home.

Find a quiet spot immediately after a session to record a summary of what you have learned from the session. The brief summary will be far more valuable than the 3 to 6 hours of recordings of an entire workshop. The

summary will be important, especially if a speaker requests that taping not be done. Always ask before the session!

If using a recorder, a directional microphone with a battery booster aimed at the speaker will eliminate most of the ambient sound (paper shuffling or air-conditioning) that will be picked up by the recorder's built-in condenser microphone.

Choose a seat near the speaker. Do not presume that the speaker welcomes or will allow your placing your recorder on the lectern or the speaker's table. Test your equipment prior to the session and be sure to record the name of the speaker, the title of the talk, and the date and time of the session for future reference. **DO THIS BEFORE ENTERING THE ROOM.** It is distracting to others to have an attendee fussing with their machine. Also be sure to pack your computer cable if you plan on transferring the talk from your digital recorder to your laptop or tablet.

Offer to buy a speaker a cup of coffee or a drink

This will help to build a network and may be an opportunity to get more of your questions answered. Don't be shy; the speaker can always say no. If he or she agrees, use the opportunity. Speakers are also often interested in building a network, especially with like-minded people.

Take notes

Good notes ensure that the key points will be recorded. Have a page for ideas you can use in your lab or office when you get home. It is also important to keep track of Convention expenses. Travel costs, tips, meals, professional materials, etc., may all be deductions come April 15.

Dress appropriately

It's impossible to keep meeting-room temperatures satisfactory for everyone. Smaller and larger audiences in smaller and larger rooms will affect room temperatures throughout the day. Prepare for this by wearing lightweight clothing and keeping a sweater or jacket with you. Check the weather in San Diego before leaving home. Eyewitness weather (that observed by looking out your hotel window) may help you dress for that particular city's weather.

Plan your meals

Try to schedule your heavier eating. Lighter meals during the day make it easier to stay up through the sessions (at hotel prices, it is also considerably cheaper).

Be sure to visit the ABCT Local Arrangements table located in the ABCT registration area. They have lots of information and recommendations on where you can dine that would be compatible with your budget.

Often they offer a program, "Dine with a San Diegan," to help you meet new colleagues over a meal. They also have information on local activities.

Exercise!

Jog, swim, walk, do sit-ups, or, better yet, dance at the ABCT Saturday-night party! With all the sitting eating, sitting, eating during a Convention, it's essential to get the body moving.

Check the convention hotel's website prior to the meeting to see if it offers gym, facilities, an indoor or outdoor running track, or swimming pool. The Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel offers a fitness room that is accessible to all guests staying at the hotel. Your room key gets you into the fitness room. We also will be offering an early-morning session for those of you who practice yoga.

Arrive at each session early enough to get the seat of your choice

You may want a good seat close to the speaker (note: We have never had a report of a speaker biting or otherwise injuring people in the front row). You may, however, have to leave early, and arriving early assures a seat near the exit so that your leaving will not disturb others.

While waiting for the session to begin, look through any handout materials and highlight anything you want to hear more about. Reread the three questions you brought. By knowing what to listen for, you will listen more intently.

Program your networking

Arrange meetings with 3 to 4 people simultaneously. Attend ABCT SIG meetings. Be sure to include the Annual Meeting of Members, Awards Ceremony, Invited Speakers, Presidential Address, and social functions on your calendar. Being with people with similar interests really gets that network growing and going!

Check the program addendum

Often there are unforeseen speaker changes, additions, or room changes. Be sure to check the on-site program addendum when organizing your day. All the SIG poster sessions are listed in the addendum too.

Ask for business cards or contact information

Remember those business cards we talked about earlier? As soon as you are given someone's card, immediately write down on the back of the card something distinctive about the person you've just met. This will give the card some meaning when you empty your pocket or bag at the end of the day.

Start conversations

Don't be shy! Be bold enough to play the game "Behavioral Geography." This game begins when you speak to someone wearing a convention badge at a session, in the corridors, riding the elevators, or at a party. The

opening line is, “Where do you come from/go to school/do your training, or who do you know?” These questions require more than a yes/no answer and is a good way to start the ball rolling.

Check your room at regular intervals during the day

Check messages, empty your pockets or bag, get more tissues, wash your face, stretch that body. Eight a.m. to 12 midnight need not be done in one stretch without one or more mini-breaks. Call home; check your voice mail; call the office to find out if you have a job when you return!

Don't assume that your colleagues know your email address or cell phone number. Or that they have a wireless connection or remembered to bring their charger. It's still a good idea to leave a message on their hotel room phone if you need to reach them.

Turn in your evaluation form from each session

It is important to be honest and straightforward in your evaluations. The program committee needs your input, as do the speakers. If a speaker or program was good, say so. If you would like to hear more on a topic, say so. If you would like to hear more from that speaker, say so. If a session was not what you expected based on the program description, say so. Help to make the next Convention even better.

Complete the overall convention evaluation form on-line

This will take only a few minutes and will complete your convention experience. Those members who are responsible for the convention and continuing education events really want to know what you think.

Make several trips to the exhibit area

Scout the exhibit hall. By going through several times you can be sure to see it all. Look for the newest books; often there is prepublication information available about books to be published within the next few

months. Take the information or place an advance order. Early orders are sometimes less expensive. If you are teaching a course, you may be able to get a preview copy free!

Be social

Go to the various social activities at the convention. Cocktail parties, dances, SIG meetings, the Internship or Postdoctoral Overview panels are all good occasions for networking. Attend the early-morning orientation session if you are new to the ABCT convention. Be sure to attend the Annual Meeting of Members if you are a member. It is a good way to meet the current leadership of the association.

Plan your departure

With hundreds of conferees checking out at the same time, checkout can be hectic. Ask for a copy of your charges the evening before your departure so that you can review it in your room and solve problems leisurely. Use the e-z check out system. ABCT always arranges an extra large check-out area with the bell stand knowing that most of you depart Sunday early afternoon. Buy your shuttle ticket to the airport in advance and confirm your seat for the return trip.

After the Convention

Make use of the Convention material and learn from it

Read or listen to your notes on the way home. Select at least one promising idea and try it right away. Set up a schedule to try other ideas at a later date. Mark your calendar for 30 days after you return and reread your notes at that time. Organize the business cards you collected and enter them into your electronic address book.

Send thank-you notes or emails

What better way to connect with speakers whose work you are now incorporating into your practice, research, or studies than a short and specific thank-you note. It makes you stand out in the crowd and is very reinforcing to the speaker! Short follow-up notes to newly made friends can result in life-long professional relationships.

Enjoy!

And be sure to mark your calendar for the 2018 Call for Nominations, Call for Awards, Call for Papers, and the 52nd Annual Convention in Washington, DC!