

Education gap looms in event industry

 By [Glenn van Eck](#)

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The events industry in South Africa is heading for a knowledge gap within five years. So, how does the sector help those studying the subject realise just what is required when they start out?

My concern is that there is currently a generation of event professionals, with over 30-years experience, that will be retiring within 5 to 10 years. When this happens it will create a vacuum, so there is need to upskill the emerging talent and draw on the vast knowledge and practical experience that currently exists in the industry.

The education gap is what exists between theory-based learning in tertiary education and the practical situations that happen in the event industry. Many situations and challenges happen in events, which cannot be taught in a classroom. This includes how to react in an emergency and the skills of how to handle event hiccups without guests being aware of them. How young event professionals handle themselves in such situations requires a certain amount of practical experience and the confidence to manage and execute challenging situations.

This concern about this looming knowledge gap has prompted the formation of the Council of Event Professionals Africa (CEP Africa) to promote and uphold industry standards and fast-track the development of individuals. Focusing on practical skills is a positive move for the industry, as the young event professionals can now have a career path mapped out by a professional body that will support them every step of the way.



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Academia needs to engage with business and professional bodies, to allow experienced professionals to give back to education at schools and universities. What is needed is an understanding of the practical skills needed by new entrants. This includes clearly understanding the realities of the industry at entry level, the broad spectrum of event and live communication genres, and a clearly defined aptitude needed to succeed in these diverse areas of the industry.

The industry is currently experiencing a shortage of AV skills and this is an opportunity for students to specialise. Other focus areas include lighting, sound, infrastructure and event marketing. By working with other event bodies, and universities, CEP Africa can identify courses that are practically more relevant to the industry, and pre-empt skills shortages through training skills that are needed.

The newly formed body which is waiting for its registration as a Professional Body from SAQA is made up of three organisations: EXSA, IFEA Africa and SAACI. Shortly the visionary collaboration of these organisations will see CEP Africa provide its first three professional certifications for event co-ordinators, event managers and event directors. These valuable endorsements will be awarded once students have fulfilled the relevant practical requirements that are desired by the events industry.

As with any professional certification, CEP Africa professionals will require a maintenance of 60 continual professional development points to retain their status. This is aimed at ensuring continuous learning, maintaining involvement in the space that the business and events businesses operate, as well as being involved in industry forums that achieve knowledge sharing.

As one of the founders of CEP Africa, I believe that the event industry is a victim of its own success. High-profile events result in students believing that the industry is all glamour and moments of fame. The reality is that most of our time is about the grind and repetitive behind-the-scene actions that make others look good. CEP Africa is committed to a vision of giving students a realistic view of the events industry and then assisting them in developing the relevant skills that current professionals have developed and are keen to share.

ABOUT GLENN VAN ECK

Glenn is a true entrepreneur. From the age of 16, he has been involved with Magnetic Storm, initially by assisting his brother with the setting up and de-rigging of AV equipment and thereafter maintenance of equipment; and at 25 years of age Glenn purchased Magnetic Storm. Fast forward to 2016 and Glenn is still at the helm of the business, and has grown a two-man disco to a full-service events and tech company with offices in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, servicing the entire country.

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