



Paintertainment



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WHEN GUEST COUNTS GROW

by Gretchen Fleener

“I was hired to paint 12 kids, but when I got there, there were 25! What do I do?” This question has been asked so many times on social media, I thought I’d dedicate a newsletter to it. It’s a situation that you will encounter at some point if you haven’t already, and the sooner you can get some strategies under your belt, the better you can avoid being taken advantage of!

Whether the client is as suprised as you are with how many kids showed up, or they were being sneaky and trying to slip more kids under your radar on purpose, neither were within your own control or warrant you giving your time, talent and materials away for free, so start by not making that an option.

I have found that the very best way to manage these situations is to manage your clients’ expectations BEFORE the party date. This should be done through conversations, but also documented in your contract.

The first step is to make it very clear how many guests you can realistically reach per hour or in the timeframe they’ve requested you to be there, verbally and in writing. Make sure the party planner is taking into account siblings, cousins, kids who said they couldn’t come but later can, etc. Don’t allow them to count on some not showing up or some not wanting your services!

Many new painters stop there, and that’s where they go wrong. Your next and equally important step is to make sure they are clear what will happen if more guests show up.

You may think that these conversations are hard to have, but trust me, they are MUCH harder to have at the party when it’s time to pack up and get to the next party, and you have 6 more kids in line! If you have to leave late, you want to set it up so you leave late feeling compensated, not resentful.

How these conversations turn out is all in how you deliver the message. We don’t want to

come across as party entertainers who are trying to squeeze every last dime out of our clients or nickle & dime them, but we have real expenses and we don’t work for free. Make sure that you stress that your goal is to ensure everyone at the party has a great time, that things go smoothly, and that everyone is talking the next day about how much fun the party was, not the fun they missed out on because the painter left before they could get painted. By having these conversations early and setting clear expectations, you are helping them have a great experience.

So what DOES happen when more kids show up? I put the number of kids I expect to reach and timeframe in my contract that they sign. I also put it in my contract that if I should be asked to stay later to reach more kids, my price is \$50.00 per 15 minutes or fraction thereof. (Yes, that means 15 minutes costs \$50, and 16-30 minutes costs \$100) But wait...isn’t that more than my regular hourly rate? Yes! It is very important that this rate be MORE than your regular hourly rate. After all, if they can add more time the day-of, why should they plan ahead in the first place? Adding time later adds more work for you in additional invoicing, tracking down payments, and sometimes paying your other artists again, not to mention throws off the rest of your day which may be booked back to back.

If this is a corporate event and they refuse to hire enough hours or artists to cover their crowd, I say “Okay, we can do that! The only thing I require if you under-book the entertainment for your crowd size is that you provide me with a line manager who will be stationed with the line throughout the event, help kids choose their design, and cut the line off at the agreed upon time.”

I put this all in writing, ask them to read everything carefully, and make sure they understand this policy. But I don’t stop there. I don’t want to leave ANY room for “but I

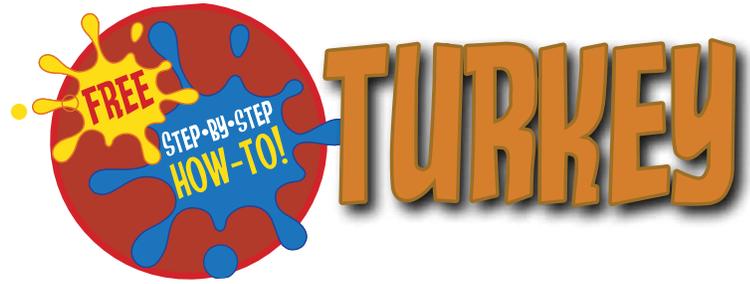
didn’t know...” So, I contact them a day or two before the party, just checking in to make sure we are still on, and to get a more accurate guest count. If it’s less than they expected, great, I offer more detailed designs! If it’s more, I *help them save money* by suggesting that I just send a Paypal invoice now for the additional time needed. That way they can avoid the more expensive add-on rate. And, they can pay immediately and not waste time or money on postage and printing. See how helpful I’m being? Wink wink. If it’s one of those under-booked corporate parties, I ask for the name of the line manager they will be providing so I can find them when I arrive. Even if they don’t have a name yet, the question serves as a reminder that I really meant it!

So, what happens if you’ve done your due dilligence, the client is well educated and has agreed to your terms, and you still end up with way more kids than they told you? (*Keep in mind, I’m talking like 25%-30% + more kids... if there’s 1 or 2 at a birthday I’ll squeeze them in and can adjust my detail level if needed.*) If it’s a birthday party you’ll likely know when you arrive by looking around if their estimate was bogus. If this is the case, you can have a conversation before you even start. “I noticed you have X% more kids than we talked about. Would you like me to stay until everyone is painted and bill you afterwards for the extra time, or would you like to choose which 12 kids are painted?” (or for a big corporate event, check in with the client at a point where the # of kids in line matches up with the amount of time you have left and ask, “would you like to end the line for me or have me stay and bill you for the extra time?”) Notice that there are no options in there that include me working for free!

Define your policy, make it clear to your client ahead of time, stay confident and stick to your guns. When you’re your own boss, you have nobody to blame but yourself for not looking out for your best interests! Value and respect your own time, and your clients will too. 



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