



# Moving Forward

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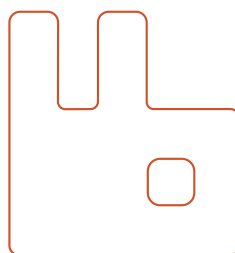
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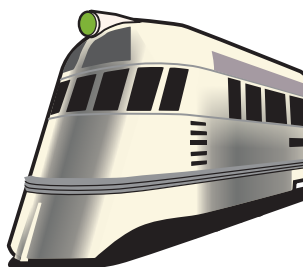
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# Getting the Most out of a Conference

*Cal Evans*



If you have never been to a PHP conference, **BUY YOUR TICKET NOW!** By the time this comes out the winter conference will have all opened their ticket sales and the spring conferences are right around the corner.

Last month, I wrote about how conference regulars, speakers, and organizers could make conferences friendlier to newcomers. But you don't have to wait for them to listen to me before going to your first one. The problem many first timers have is they don't know what to expect, or what to do. So, let me share with you what I've learned in ten years of being a professional conference attendee.



## Know What You Want to Accomplish by Attending

OK, I hear you hollering at me “Cal, **I want to learn!**” Yes, we all do. But **WHAT** do you want to learn? Is there a particular problem you are trying to solve? Is there a new technique or technology you want to know more about? Even if your boss just handed you a ticket and said, go, you should put some thought into what is important to you and how you can maximize the knowledge you bring home. Look at the technologies you are using already at work, but don't limit yourself to them! If you are interested in learning about functional programming, message queues, or a new framework—that knowledge will be useful months down the road.

## Review the Schedule and Select the Must See Sessions

Once you've identified what you want to learn, look at the schedule. Identify the sessions teaching what you want

to learn. Identify any secondary sessions you think might be interesting. Spend a little time before you get to the conference figuring out the sessions you want to see. If the conference has an app or mobile site, check it out to see if it'll be useful. Some conferences will let you build a schedule online and send you reminders when the sessions you selected are happening.

## Make a List of the People You Want to Meet

Are there speakers you want to meet or discuss a problem with? Make a list. Trust me; two days sounds like a lot of time, but it will go by fast. If you are not organized, time will slip away without you getting done what you want to get done. Speakers are usually friendly and approachable, but make sure you're not trying to meet them right before their talk. They'll appreciate a little time and space to finish preparing and getting mentally prepared to give their presentation.

## Do Not Make Plans for Every Session

It is a rookie mistake to plan out every session. Keep yourself flexible. Try to leave one session each morning and every afternoon empty. If you don't fill them, you can always go to a session. However, there will be times when you get involved in a discussion with someone, you meet someone on your list and they are answering your question, or you just need to sit and digest about what you've learned so far. Leave yourself some time to think.

## Don't Overdo the After Events

I get it; you paid for the ticket, and you want to squeeze every bit of goodness out of it. You want to do it all. Stop; be smart about this. There is the temptation to "go all night." Especially if you've met new people and made new friends. You want to talk, you want to share ideas, you want to keep the fun going. This feels great—until the next morning. Then, you are firing on six out of your eight cylinders. You aren't feeling your best and you aren't performing at your peak. Be reasonable, and most importantly, if there is alcohol involved, know your limits. Know these limits going into the evening, don't try and figure them out mid-way through. Know when you want to be back in your room so you can get a reasonable amount of sleep, and if you are drinking, know how many you can have before bad decisions start to sound like good ones.

## Take and Share Notes

Find a way to take notes that will be useful for you later. You should share these via a blog post, ideally. Your team back home might learn a thing or two from your notes, and just the act of explaining and teaching them what you learn will solidify your understanding. Finally, when it comes time to rate the talks (and speaker's really appreciate honest, constructive feedback) your notes can help you remember the talk and explain how it could be improved.

## Make Time for Yourself

Finally, make sure you are having a good time. Don't let the pressure of having to fill every minute, having to meet everyone on your list, or having to attend every after-hours event suck all the life out of the event for you. Part of what I get out of conferences is a chance to get away from it all while still being immersed in tech. I can focus on tech but still take the time to reflect on where I am, where my career is, and where things are going. Make time for self-inspection and reflection. To get the most out of the conference, you should come back informed and energized. It should be a time to recharge your batteries, as much as it is a time to get inspired by new technologies and new tools. And, depending on expectations back at work, you may need some time to answer emails from your boss and colleagues who are covering for you while you learn.

Conferences are great! If you have never been to one, make an effort to get to one next year. Your career will thank you.



## Past Events

### October

#### Bulgaria PHP 2016

October 7–9, Sofia, Bulgaria

<http://bgphp.org>

#### Brno PHP Conference 2016

October 15, Brno, Czech Republic

<https://www.brnophp.cz/conference-2016>

#### ZendCon 2016

October 18–21, Las Vegas, NV

<http://www.zendcon.com>

#### International PHP Conference 2016

October 23–27, Munich, Germany

<https://phpconference.com/en/>

#### DrupalSouth

October 27–28, Queensland, Australia

<https://goldcoast2016.drupal.org.au>

#### Forum PHP 2016

October 27–28, Beffroi de Montrouge, France

<http://event.afup.org>

#### ScotlandPHP 2016

October 29, Edinburgh, Scotland

<http://conference.scotlandphp.co.uk>

## Upcoming Events

### November

#### TrueNorthPHP

November 3–5, Toronto, Canada

<http://truenorthphp.ca>

#### php[world]

November 14–18, Washington D.C.

<https://world.phparch.com>

### December

#### SymfonyCon Berlin 2016

December 1–3, Berlin, Germany

<http://berlincon2016.symfony.com>

#### ConFoo Vancouver 2016

December 5–7, Vancouver, Canada

<https://confoo.ca/en/yvr2016>

#### PHP Conference Brazil 2016

December 7–11, Osasco, Brazil

<http://www.phpconference.com.br>

### January 2017

#### PHPBenelux Conference 2017

January 27–28, Antwerp, Belgium

<https://conference.phpbenelux.eu/2017/>

### February

#### SunshinePHP 2017

February 2–4, Miami, Florida

<http://sunshinephp.com>

#### PHP UK Conference 2017

February 16–17, London, U.K.

<http://phpconference.co.uk>

### March

#### ConFoo Montreal 2017

March 8–10, Montreal, Canada

<https://confoo.ca/en/yul2017/>

### April

#### DrupalCon 2016

April 24–28, Baltimore, MD

<https://events.drupal.org/baltimore2017>

### May

#### phpDay 2017

May 12–13, Verona, Italy

<http://2017.phpday.it>

#### php[tek] 2017

May 24–26, Atlanta, Georgia

<https://tek.phparch.com>

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*These days, when not working with PHP, Cal can be found working on a variety of projects like Nomad PHP. He speaks at conferences around the world on topics ranging from technical talks to motivational talks for developers @calevans.*

1 Eli White's Flickr account: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eliw/>





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