

Why Autocrats Have to be Flexible

OR...You never knew you could deal with this, but you can...

by Vivien NicUldoon

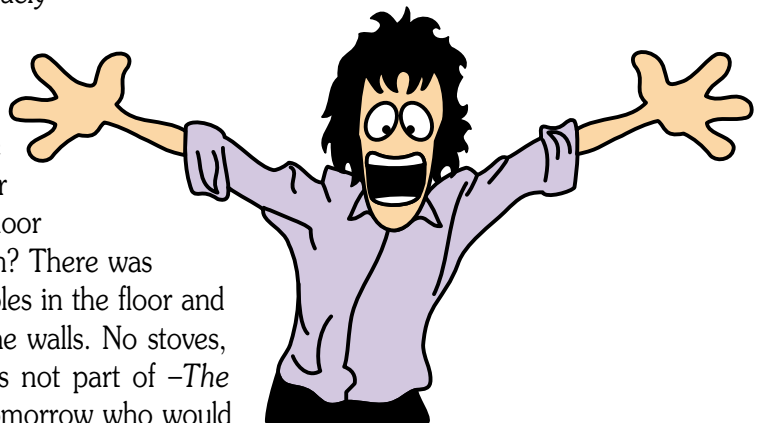
Here you are about to autocrat your first event and you think you have planned for everything that could possibly happen. You've planned to the last detail, you're not trying to do it all yourself and you've designated duties to the responsible people helping you. Everything is going to go exactly the way you planned. Here's a true story about two brand new autocrats and the things they never could have planned for.

Our two intrepid autocrats were filled with youthful enthusiasm for their first event. Planning started eight months in advance. The menu was completely period and the kitchen had been inspected so they knew they had the facilities to cook the menu. The prizes and thank you gifts were all finished and the site copy was printed. Labels for the cabins were ready to be put up so all the weary travelers could find their beds, and the site tokens were made by the fire with care. Everything was happening right on time before the event.

Thursday night, our enthusiastic autocrats went to the stores and bought all the food on their categorically sorted shopping list (no, I'm not kidding). Then they picked up their lords, who of course had been drafted into service, and proceeded to the site. The grand scheme, you see, was to unload everything so that Friday morning everything could be set up and the kitchen would be filled with wonderful smells before any travelers arrived. It was a good plan, a well thought out plan....

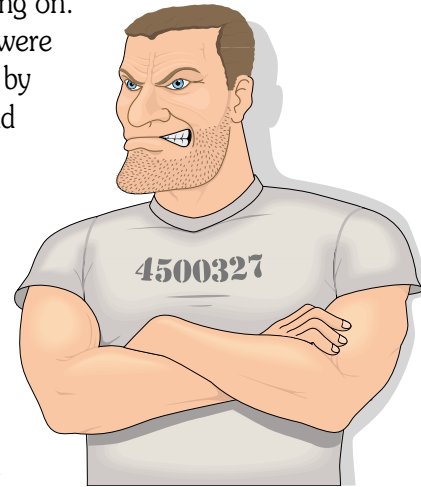
On arriving at the site, the ranger at the gate gave them a very strange look, but she let them past and told them she would be down later. Confident in their grand plan, the new autocrats continued a little way down the road to the lodge and cabins picturesquely

nestled in the trees. Everything looked fine, maybe there was some little thing that had been damaged over the winter – they were after all the first people to use the site since last fall. They all stretched after the long drive and walked in the kitchen door of the main lodge. Where was the kitchen? There was nothing in that room but a floor, some holes in the floor and the walk-in fridge mounted into one of the walls. No stoves, no sinks, no counters, nothing. This was not part of *-The Plan* – there were 200 people arriving tomorrow who would



want to eat! There needs to be a kitchen for that! Our autocrats wobbled a little and were kept from falling by their kind lords. Well, the walk-in fridge was still there and the food in the car had to be refrigerated, so our dazed autocrats unloaded all of the food into the walk-in fridge – which didn't have any power. Well, it was early spring, and quite cold out, so nothing should go bad overnight.

Then the ranger arrived to give them the run down of what was going on. Apparently the repairs and improvements that were being done were behind schedule. The kitchen would be put back together tomorrow by early afternoon. Just stay off site until the convicts had finished and gotten back on their bus. Convicts. Working kitchen eight hours after they had planned to start cooking. This was not part of *The Plan*, but better than no kitchen at all. The now very dazed autocrats thought that they should unload their own gear and get some dinner and rest.



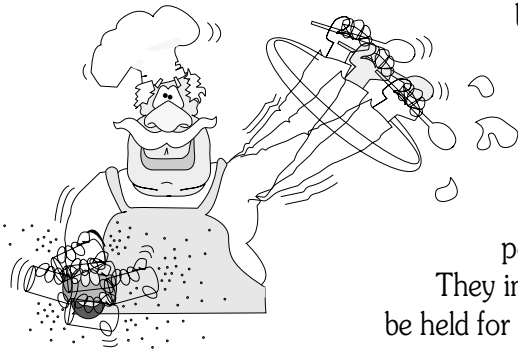
They had taken autocrat's privilege and reserved a little cabin with a wood stove and a bathroom in it for themselves – one of two with such luxuries on site. On carrying their gear to their much anticipated cabin, they found that it didn't have a floor. Just a three foot drop from the door to the dirt. No cabin. They wondered briefly if the convicts would fix the floor tomorrow then moved to the other luxury cabin for the night. The other cabin had a floor and mice but no seat for the toilet. After a very restless night, our bleary eyed autocrats took unheated showers and decided that touring the site thoroughly in the morning light might be a good addition to *The Plan*. There was only one working fireplace in the hall, a missing window in the hall and the only handicapped bathroom was disassembled, but thankfully, all the other cabins were more or less intact. They packed all their gear back into the car (since the one intact luxury cabin was reserved for people with pointy hats) and went out to breakfast. After all, they could not stay on site while the convict work crew was putting everything back the way it should have been. *The Plan* was revised greatly during breakfast, with many contingency plans for the kitchen being in various states of not-working order. Then there was a tense time of sitting still (which our frantic autocrats did not do well) while waiting through the hours until they were allowed back on site.

Once back on site, the autocrats found the now filthy kitchen mostly intact, but nothing else had been changed. Still no handicapped bathroom, still no second fireplace, still no cabin to sleep in. Now in a frenzy to set up before all the weary travelers arrived, they posted signs and did necessary duct tape repairs on the kitchen. Cooking began (after scrubbing the kitchen) just as people began to arrive. One good gentle contrived a guard for the working fireplace, covered the broken window and unloaded most of the firewood for the weekend.

The lady in charge of the bed assignments arrived and informed the autocrats that, yes, all the beds on site were still accounted for and there were no extras for them to sleep in. Such details seem minor when the relief of a working kitchen is topmost in the mind. Newly arrived people heard about the kitchen incident and began to volunteer to help in the kitchen – so many people that they had to turn them away for lack of space. Dinner was served on time through the help of many hands and in spite of one oven and one burner still not working. Now with all the set up done and everyone fed, the weary autocrats began the quest for a place to sleep. All the cabins were full, so where else was there? At gate, there was a storage closet that was mostly empty and it had a locking door and glass over the windows. Not luxurious, but preferable to the kitchen floor. After setting up the bedding, the autocrats were too worried to sleep and returned to the kitchen to do the chopping and packing for breakfast. Far into the night, the autocrats finally gave in and went to sleep.

Breakfast was quiet, and all the food was eaten. Time to send one of the conscripted lords to town for re-supply. *The Plan* was for 200 people and by any count, there were more than that at breakfast. Time to adjust *The Plan* again. Additional supplies were requested for lunch and dinner on the re-supply run. That good gentle made three runs to the local grocers to supply and re-supply food for the additional people who came only for the day.

According to *The Plan*, the fighting should start soon, but no Marshal was to be seen. No marshal had checked in at gate. The marshal hadn't come! No need to panic, the local marshal can do it – he's on site! The local marshal refused to run fighting. After a frantic time, another senior marshal was found on site and he discovered that there was nothing to set up the eric with – the marshal who was supposed to come on site was going to bring the eric. The senior marshal jury-rigged a suitable eric and the fighting began slightly behind schedule. *The Plan* had room for these small deviations. Everything would be fine.



Dinner was scheduled for 5:00 so that it would be complete before court was scheduled to start. The head cook for the feast flew into the kitchen when lunch was finished to begin the feast. On checking his supplies, he decided to send someone on a store run for 50 more apples for the feast and began cooking. Again due to many hands, the feast was ready exactly on time. No small feat. The vaunted people with pointy hats, however, were not ready for the feast.

They informed the now shell-shocked autocrats that the food must be held for an hour until they were ready to sit at the high table. One of our autocrats announced to the crowd of 200 hungry feast guests that their dinner would be served in an hour and scrupulously avoided telling them why. The feast was eventually served in perfect condition due to the head cook and his many very weary helpers.

Court was an uneventful blur through the glazed eyes of the autocrats. Following court, the autocrats performed their favorite duty of the event. The giving of thank you gifts to the many people who had worked so hard for them. There were garnet bracelets for the kitchen workers, tea for the tavern keeper and many other goodies given with great smiles and many thanks. Saying thank you was somehow more fun than being thanked.

Late that night after court our autocrats sorted through the kitchen and began preparation for breakfast the next morning. Since breakfast was to be partially made from leftovers, the un-served food from the feast was looked at. Fifty extra baked apples were found and the autocrats smiled quietly that something on *The Plan* had been exactly correct. After chopping and grating for a very long time, the autocrats once again retired to their converted storage closet.

Early the next morning, after breakfast had been cooked and cleaned up, the still bleary-eyed autocrats checked *The Plan* for things that must be done before leaving site. The cleaning began in earnest with a very few very worthy gentles helping. Inexplicably, all things on site had to be clean enough for the next group to be able to use it immediately – even though it had been turned over to the now exhausted autocrats uncleaned and dust covered from recent construction. After much scrubbing and collecting of garbage and packing, all the cabins and lodges and kitchen were clean enough for anyone to use. The last duty on site was to check out with the ranger and pay for the site. After much haggling and pointing to many things broken on arrival, the hard eyed autocrats and somehow still smiling exchequer settled on a price slightly less than the original. The very last thing on *The Plan* was returning all the supplies to the baronial shed. That done, the very giggly, sleep deprived autocrats returned home and went directly to sleep.

What did our autocrats learn from this event? Plan for everything you can think of. Clear planning ahead of time for everything that could be anticipated kept the event going even when the completely unexpected happened. Don't become dependant on *The Plan* for everything – convicts and missing kitchens are never part of the plan. Being flexible and changing *The Plan* whenever necessary keeps things running.

And was it worth it? How many people do you know who can tell a story like this and have every word be true?

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