

QUALITY CLUB MEETINGS

The Club meeting is the "**product**" that Toastmasters is selling. Because of this, only quality club meetings will keep "**customers**" coming back. Thus the running of quality club meetings is the key to both member **recruitment** and **retention**.

The quality of club meetings in turn depends on the **quality of their preparation**, the **quality of their programming** and the **quality of the culture** established in the club.

QUALITY PREPARATION

Steps to follow in preparing to run quality meetings include,

Member Interest Surveys

Conduct at least two per year to find out what the members **want** and **need**, the prelude to providing customer satisfaction. Either use the TI form or even better design your own to suit your club situation.

A Club calendar

Prepare a calendar for the club term showing when all key events such as speech contests, elections, theme meetings, education sessions, social events, etc. will be held. Also include relevant Area, Division and District events.

Forward agendas

Agendas need to be prepared and circulated for two meetings in advance. Whatever the distribution method, it is vital that members missing a meeting are not deprived of receiving timely advance program information to ensure adequate preparation.

A prior contact system

All the above will not produce a quality result without a strong system of follow up to ensure key assignees and speakers are contacted in the week before the meeting. The system used can vary, but must include a norm of the Toastmaster contacting each speaker and each programmed evaluator also contacting their nominated speaker. After setting speaker/evaluator pairings two meetings in advance, they should never be changed provided both are present at the meeting. This keeps faith with the contact system, whereas indiscriminate program changes can soon destroy all motivation for prior preparation.

SKE on time

A meeting that **Starts** on Time, **Keeps** on Time and **Ends** on Time has everyone leaving satisfied and keen to return. Of these, the start is the most important and is a reflection of the preparation for the meeting by both officers and members.

QUALITY PROGRAMMING

The quality of the educational programming provided is another key to "customer satisfaction and includes

Programming to meet member needs

Having found out what the members **want** and **need**, the programs provided must reflect this. In particular, experienced members must be continually challenged to keep them involved in the club and to provide role models. All members must make a contribution at every meeting, since someone who does not participate will never see a meeting as a quality one.

Theme meetings

Study "Patterns in Programming" and my handout "Put Excitement into Your Meetings" to see a range of different and challenging Theme Meetings. Include some of these in the calendar to provide some **variety in meeting formats**. Share the work and keep older members involved by delegating the task of organizing and presenting a special theme meeting to a pair of members. Make it their big day!

Education sessions

These should include major presentations from the Success/Leadership series as well as shorter items from the Successful Club series, the Better Speaker series and the Leadership Excellence series of modules. Programming four of the small modules each year can help the club achieve two Competent Leadership awards as well. Short educational topics can also be covered in special manual speeches.

Manual speeches only

The importance of only manual speeches cannot be over emphasized. These are the primary purpose of Toastmasters. Non-manual speeches set a bad example to other members and blunt their resolve and subsequent desire to perform. So keep all speeches and evaluations focused on the great range of Communication & Leadership manual projects.

Recognition and awards

Recognition takes many forms, starting with words of faith and encouragement from club officers and experienced members. Indeed many members need constant affirmation that they are making progress and achieving success. In evaluation we can help everyone learn and maintain club standards by reinforcing the positive, highlighting **what** was good and **why**, not being negative or talking of failure. Successes must be acknowledged and complimented. All achievements both in and outside the club should be highlighted and people fully honored, including formal presentation of CTM/ATM certificates and badges. Remember that Toastmasters is a **recognition driven** organization, this being the main way we motivate members and leaders to achieve.

QUALITY CULTURE

When all the preparation and programming is in place, the quality of the meetings is finally dependent on the culture established in the club. This needs to include,

Excellence in assignment preparation and performance

Impromptu or casual assignments do not help anyone. Part of the learning process is seeing and hearing examples of excellence from other members. These stimulate the club and members to reach a higher standard. Here the **example must be set** by the club's leaders aiming to lift the club's standards by their own diligence.

Effective evaluations

These guarantee worthwhile speeches which in turn make for quality meetings. Evaluations must be constructive, analyzing **why** aspects of the presentation were effective or not as well as showing **how** they could have been improved. It is vital that all evaluations focus on **helping** speakers and encourage them to come back and speak again. Evaluation training should be included at least once in each year's calendar.

Creative Table Topics

Table topics can be humorous, dramatic, entertaining, persuasive, enlightening or have many other attributes. Refer to "Patterns in Programming", "Table Topics Handbook" and my handout "Table Topics Unlimited" for ideas of the many different types of sessions that can be presented. Always have a clear idea of the attributes or objectives required. Keep the introductions and questions short and start with some experienced speakers to set an initial standard.

Short Business Sessions

Business Sessions need to be short, sharp and snappy. This requires the Chairman and club officers to be well prepared and organized. Only business relevant to the club should be handled. Remaining matters should be kept for Executive meetings, including all contentious items. (That is, don't air any club problems in front of visitors.).

A strong element of fun

Remember Ralph Smedley's words that "We learn best in moments of enjoyment". Fun meetings have lots of noise, excitement, interjections and display a strong spirit of camaraderie. At the same time they are caring meetings, with members aiming to share themselves and work towards **helping** each other learn and enjoy.