

Program/Speaker Suggestions for Club Presidents

by PDG 7080 Douglas W. Vincent, for the ROTI Institute

Promoting membership and retention in Rotary is largely influenced by the quality of programs and speakers your club has each week. Everyone has a busy schedule with several things to do and places to go, so it is important to give members good reason to attend club meetings and make Rotary a priority.

You can educate, inform and get members involved through promoting attendance with a variety of timely topics and well made presentations that are properly organized, interesting and enjoyable. Use these 50 opportunities each year to make a positive impact.

In addition to the guidance material already printed in the R.I. Manual of Procedure (MOP), here are some other suggestions to help you and your program committee conduct excellent meetings and programs:

Advance Planning:

- It is a good idea for someone to send the speaker a confirming letter of the meeting details in advance. Include the location (directions), date, time, details and expectations, etc. Establish the length of presentation desired and then try to run the meeting with this goal in mind.
- A follow-up phone call is recommended a few days prior to the meeting. This will be a reminder for the speaker and reconfirm meeting arrangements.
- Determine any special needs required (i.e.: projector, screen, props, etc.). Be



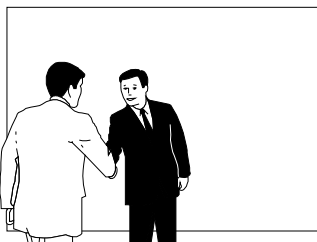
sure the room can be darkened for audiovisual use if necessary.

- Normally speakers are not paid however possible fees or expense reimbursement should be settled in advance and have appropriate club approval. If the speaker is travelling from a distance, consider if home hosting or a hotel room needed? This factor is becoming more important as early morning breakfast meetings grow in popularity.
- Obtain a brief outline of the speaker or his presentation and publish it in the club bulletin as an advance promotion of the meeting. Encourage membership attendance by marketing the program and invite members to bring out guests who may be interested in the upcoming speaker(s) or topic(s). This can be a good way to recruit new membership prospects.
- Make sure the public relations committee has advised and local media and other interested parties are invited to attend, when appropriate. Meeting coverage can be a good way to gain Rotary exposure in the community and also prospect for new members. Have a convenient way for interested people to contact your club regarding potential membership or meeting attendance.

NOTE: *It is always a good idea to have a back-up program available on short notice in the event of a mix-up or cancellation at the last minute. Plan for an RI video, club member or director to be "on deck" with a report or classification talk. Try to stay flexible, since it is almost certain that some last minute changes will occur during the year.*

Arrival and Greeting:

- Have the chairman or a greeter available to meet, orient and assist the speaker to prepare, set up &/or distribute handouts, etc. Be ready to welcome other guests that the speaker may bring or invite. Ensure people at the sign-in table know who the speaker is and do not charge them for the meal(s).
- The speaker should be welcomed by the President and briefed on any special club activities or projects that might influence his presentation. Indicate appropriate comments he might make to compliment other club programs or information. If you expect the media, brief the speaker on your club activities so he/she can include them in any interview comments.
- Follow-up to ensure the introducer has adequate notice and information regarding the speaker and his presentation topic. Having the introducer sit with the speaker during the meal provides a good opportunity to learn more about the person.



Meeting Structure:

- The meeting chairman should ensure the allotted time is made available for the speaker. If a meeting runs late, consider eliminating the fine session, sing song or non time-sensitive announcements, if necessary.
- For introduction and thank you comments, try to select members who have an association with, interest in, or some kind of personal knowledge about the speaker or his topic. This usually results in warmer and higher quality introduction and thank you comments.
- It is only common courtesy for members to remain quiet and attentive during the

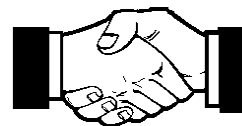


program. No talking or distractions should be permitted during the presentation. Often members may find the speaker points to opportunities for club service never considered before.

- Generally, after the appropriate person has thanked the speaker, it is not necessary for the President to do it a second time. This may be perceived as a "put down" to the thanking job that has just been done. In some circumstances the President might comment briefly, showing appreciation to the speaker when he concludes the meeting.
- Try to discourage members from leaving the meeting early. In some clubs it is customary (and good manners) for members to express regrets to the speaker in advance, if they have to leave before conclusion of the meeting. Meetings should always begin and end on time to avoid members having to leave before the conclusion of a presentation.

Thanks and Appreciation:

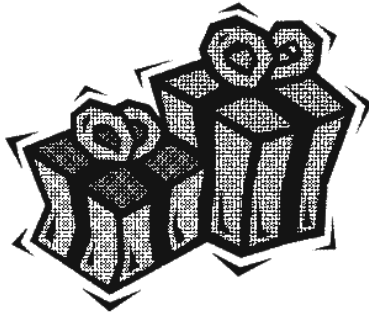
- All clubs have different ways of showing appreciation and unfortunately some clubs have no way of doing this . . . not even appropriate Thank You comments!
- If we are to acquire top notched presentations, a genuine expression of appreciation is important. Encourage members to give their own personal greetings or thanks following the meeting, especially when the program has been particularly good. A thank you card or personal letter is appropriate with specific reference to the presentation. You may also consider including a picture that was taken or a club bulletin reporting on the meeting.
- Some clubs present token gifts to all speakers. Some never give gifts or forget them and others only present these to non-Rotarian speakers. Appreciation can be shown in various gift or financial forms and may be as simple as flowers to a lady or a nice appreciation certificate.



Gift Consideration:

Consider the following factors when expressing appreciation to a speaker:

- How often is the speaker doing Rotary presentations? The good ones usually get additional requests at each one they do. A club may assume that theirs is the only meeting but often there are several others, particularly if the speaker is good. This can add up to significant time and personal expense.
- Did the speaker travel from out of town? If so, at who's expense? In some cases a speaker may drive for 1 or 2 hours, to arrive an hour early and set up for a 7 am breakfast meeting. Even if the speaker is local, they may have traveled from an out of town event, then have to return back again.
- In some cases members feel Rotarians should donate their services and not expect anything in return, or that their company may absorb the expense. This may be a valid point within the member's home club or while on Rotary committee work. However it may not always apply, especially when travelling to other clubs. In most cases a good speaker, regularly taking time away from his business, is making a significant sacrifice. You might consider arranging a tax receipt to reflect the donation of his personal expenses being absorbed.
- Many of the good speakers already have their collection of Rotary pen sets, memo pads, books and memorabilia, etc. since they have been to several clubs. Try to be creative and choose a gift that reflects the club or geographic area. You might consider an appreciation plaque, certificate or item made by a local craftsman.

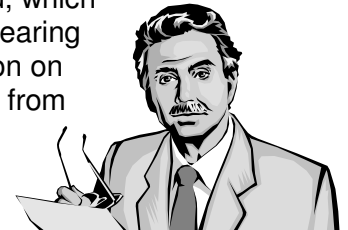


Where appropriate, have club members autograph the item as a special token. Some clubs donate to Polio Plus or similar cause and provide a certificate outlining the number of children being immunized. Is the tax receipt passed on from that donation?

- An expensive gift is not usually necessary. A small token or gift certificate is generally adequate... or consider a donation to Rotary Foundation in the speaker's name. This would be recognition and he/she would also receive a tax receipt . . . and likely the club is putting money into the Foundation anyway. A club in Sweden presents an artistic "Deed of Gift" certificate to visitors, in lieu of a banner exchange. It has a painting with club information on the back and states that a Rotary Foundation contribution has been made in the recipient's honor.

Speakers Bureau:

- Consider developing a file of good speakers or program contacts that have been referred to you from other groups or clubs. Some districts actually coordinate a speaker's bureau, which acts as a central clearing house of information on excellent speakers from previous events.
- Evaluate presentations by surveying the club members regarding their response to programs. Generate input and ideas of what they liked or disliked and use this for future program ideas and planning.



Rotary clubs depend on good speakers and programs to motivate and retain members, plus build group enthusiasm and enjoyment. Let's make sure we plan and organize our meetings to treat these special guests well. Who knows, they may also be a new member prospect. ●

*The **ROTI Institute** is an educational concept for sharing suggestions and ideas with Rotarians On The Internet. The author and Past International Chairman, PDG Douglas W. Vincent, can be reached at: rotary@teamvincent.com*