

CONQUERORS GUIDE TO SERVING AS TABLE TOPIC MASTER

Before the Meeting:

1. Confirm your attendance at meeting when you receive email/phone call from General Evaluator
2. Prepare an introduction to give to the Toastmaster. If possible, incorporate meeting theme.
3. Prepare a set of table topic questions. If possible, incorporate meeting theme.

Considerations in preparing table topics questions:

1. Consult with the Toastmaster on a meeting theme. If there is one, make your questions related to the theme.
2. Prepare enough questions for a large meeting—15 at least, better to have 20. It's much easier not to use a pre-prepared question than it is to make up a new question at the meeting when you run out.
3. Best to avoid questions with a right or wrong answer. You're not testing the participant's general knowledge—you're testing his or her ability to respond to an impromptu question.
 - a. Possible exception: if you're using obscure or foreign words no one would know, and the obvious point of the questions is for people to have fun making up pretend meanings. But make that clear in the intro.
4. Keep your theme simple and your questions short. The longer your questions and statement of theme, the fewer meeting participants get to answer a table topics question, or the later the meeting ends.
 - a. You should be able to state your theme at the beginning in 15 to 45 seconds.
 - b. Likewise, each question should generally only take about 15 to 30 seconds to ask. After all, the responder only gets one minute to respond!
5. Avoid parenthetical phrases. The more there are, the harder to comprehend and respond to the question.
6. Avoid multiple or compound questions: For example, "Do you think property taxes are too high? Would you be in favor of reducing property taxes?", would be better expressed as "Should property taxes be reduced?" or "What impact have high property taxes had on you?"
7. Questions that ask for opinions on subjects of general interest, or ask a person to relate a personal experience related to a common issue or situation, are generally good questions. The more open-ended the better.
8. Do not draft questions designed to embarrass people, no matter how long you have known them or how well you think they can take a joke. Remember, guests and new members are listening too, and may be imagining how they would feel if such a question were asked of them. For the same reasons, do not draft questions asking for highly private information, or about situations that would be obviously emotionally painful.
9. IN SHORT: SIMPLE, SHORT, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS THAT DO NOT HAVE A RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER.

Monday Before Leaving For the Meeting:

1. Assemble the following:
 - a. Your set of questions.
 - b. Writing paper.
 - c. A pen or pencil (take a spare).
 - d. Your prepared introduction to give to the Toastmaster.
2. Take all this with you to the meeting.

Monday shortly before the meeting, during the initial meeting part, and during dinner:

1. Arrive by 6:20 so the Toastmaster knows he or she does not have to substitute for you.
2. Your job does not start at the meeting only when the Toastmasters calls upon you. You must be active from the very beginning of the meeting!
2. On your writing paper, and using the meeting agenda, and if necessary using the assistance of members who know the other members better than you do, prepare the following lists:
 - a. A list of people serving as a speaker, evaluator, Toastmaster, or General Evaluator. These people you will NOT call upon.
 - b. A list of the functionaries (Timer, Ah Counter, and Grammarian.) You will call on these people only if all members not having a speaking role get a chance to do a table topic and there is sufficient time to give table topics to the functionaries.
 - c. A list of all club members who are not serving as a speaker, evaluator, Toastmaster, General Evaluator, or functionary. This is the list of people that you must call upon—ALL OF THEM—unless timing issues make that absolutely impossible. The need to call on ALL OF THEM is part of the reason that you keep your introduction and questions brief.
 1. This list may include visiting Toastmasters, including visiting dignitaries. You can identify these people by the announcements of the Club President when welcoming dignitaries and guests
 2. This list may NOT include non-Toastmaster guests unless you have specifically asked the guest if he or she is willing to participate, and the guest agrees (do the asking during dinner). Do not surprise a guest with an unanticipated question. Do not put the guest on the spot by asking her or him in front of the whole group during Table Topics whether he or she wants a question. Don't call on a guest if it will prevent you from calling on a member who does not have another speaking role in the meeting.
3. As the Club President introduces guests, write down their names. These are the people you may ask during dinner if they want to take a table topic question. Don't press if they decline, and make sure they know it's completely voluntary on their part.
4. If the Club President or Toastmaster announces any changes to the printed agenda, note that in your lists. You will often need to transfer people between your various lists based on these announcements.

5. You should be especially active during dinner making sure you know who everyone eligible for a question is. Ask them during dinner if you don't know. You should not be deciding who to give a question, or trying to figure out who someone is, only after you've already gone to the lectern!
6. Absolute top priority to get a question: a fairly new member who has yet given very few speeches. The reason: the sooner they get some speaking experiences under their belt, the sooner they start feeling more comfortable about public speaking.
7. Once you have your lists, go ahead and assign the people, on your list of people to be called upon, to specific questions. Using the principles discussed below, figure out the order you want to ask the questions, and keep track of this by assigning numbers to each question (note: functionaries and club president should be the last numbers, unless you are absolutely sure that you have time to call upon them and everybody else too).
 - a. You don't have to ask the questions in the order you wrote them. You can write in new numbers to change the order after you've assigned people to each question.
8. You will be sitting at the head table to the left side of the lectern (left if you're at the lectern), next to the General Evaluator. Look alive and interested during the meeting. You may be able to tie a question to something that happens during the meeting.

When called upon by the Toastmaster:

1. Go to the lectern, taking your list of questions, with people assigned to the questions, with you.
2. Shake the hand of the Toastmaster.
3. Provide an intro something like the following:
The Table Topics portion of the meeting is designed to ensure that all members have a chance to speak. Participants will be asked to give a one-minute response to an impromptu question. The question will first be asked, then I will call upon a participant. All participants should listen to each question closely, as it is not proper procedure to repeat the question after a participant's name has been called. Tonight, the theme for table topics is: [state briefly].
4. Then ask your questions. In doing so, follow these procedures:
 - a. Best to start and finish with an experienced, skilled member. This helps keep the energy level high.
 - b. State the question first, then state the name of the person to answer the question. This forces everyone to listen to the question.
 - c. The most difficult issue is when a participant asks for the question to be repeated. It's not really fair for some participants to have to respond on the spot, and for other participants to have the benefit of a repeated question which gives them more time to prepare their response. Hopefully the announcement of this procedural issue at the beginning will cut down on this situation. If it occurs, possible ways to handle are:
 1. Decline to repeat the question with a polite and encouraging "You can do it, take your best shot at it."
 2. Immediately hand this question off to another person and come back to the participant later with a different question.
 3. Give them a very short summary of the question that does not give them much extra time to prepare a response.
 4. If it's obvious that the person has issues with the question because of language problems, or that you asked the question poorly, go ahead and repeat. You should avoid this issue by making sure that you enunciate your questions clearly and at a reasonable speed.
 5. If the person insists upon a repeat of the question, repeat the question. Not worth making this an issue and holding up the meeting.
 - d. Call upon the functionaries only if there is sufficient time to include them without excluding any member who does not otherwise have a speaking role. Same with calling upon the Club President or other officer presiding over the meeting.
 - e. Don't call on a speaker, evaluator, the Toastmaster, or the General Evaluator—no matter how perfect you think a particular question might be for them. These people already have an ample chance to speak, and a chance to compete for meeting awards. Give the other members their fair shot.
 1. If you accidentally call upon one of these people, accept their statement that they are in one of these roles and immediately assign the question to someone else. Don't let this situation give anyone else who eventually gets the question a lot more time than most participants to formulate a response.
5. Once your questions are completed:
 - a. Call upon the Timer for a Timer's report.
 1. Avoid questions such as "*Could we have a timer's report?*" or "*May we have a timer's report?*".
 2. Avoid subjective tense statements such as "*I would like to call upon the Timer for a Timer's report.*"
 3. Better: a positive statement such as "*We will now have a Timer's report on the Table Topics from our Timer, _____,*" or "*I now call upon our Timer _____ for the Table Topics timing report.*" Also acceptable: a polite directive such as "*Timer _____, please provide the Table Topics timing report for the Table Topics.*"
 - b. Make sure the Timer announces who qualified and who did not. Then, ask the meeting to vote for Best Table Topic, something like the following:
Please mark your ballots for Best Table Topic and give them to the Vote Counter as he/she comes around. Guests are eligible and welcome to vote for Best Table Topic.
 - c. Turn control of the meeting back over to the Toastmasters. As with asking for the Timer's report, avoid questions and subjective tense statements. Good possible statements: *I now return control of the meeting to our Toastmaster, _____* " or "*Please welcome back to the lectern our Toastmaster, _____*."

- d. Shake the Toastmaster's hand and sit down. You're done, other than looking interested and involved through the rest of the meeting.