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Starting Toastmasters Clubs

Successful Actions

As International Director, Lee Holiday always use to say, "Starting clubs is EASY! All you need is a room and 20 people. We can do the rest." And that is SO TRUE.

I think if I could impress upon anyone who is just starting out to start a club, my advice would be to realize it really is easy, and don't make it any more complicated.

Step 1: Set up a kick off meeting.

Have the group, company, or corporation, etc. arrange having at least 20, hopefully a lot more, people attend a 1 hour meeting. Sometimes it takes going to a preliminary meeting and pitching the idea of Toastmasters to that group and get them to pull the group together for the kickoff meeting.

Kick-off Meeting Philosophy

The key to the meeting is to get everyone involved. We have found overwhelmingly that everyone who gets a chance to participate in some way in the kickoff meeting wants to join.

They need to have a WIN on getting up and speaking. We want them to realize that this is something they can do and there is something here worth learning.

The trick is "How do you do this?"

Step 2: Kickoff meeting.

Agenda:

In a 1 hour meeting we run a mini Toastmasters meeting taking about ½ hour. We would introduce Toastmasters for the first 10-15 minutes, and lead into the Mini meeting. Afterward we would use those 15-20 minutes to answer questions and sign people up.

Mini Toastmasters meeting: We simply follow Toastmasters suggestion of having 1 speaker, Table Topics, 1 evaluator and a TAG team.

However we do things a bit differently.

Speaker:

This has always been a tossup on whether to have a relatively new speaker that they can relate to as far as ability and nervousness, or to have an excellent inspiring Speaker. We have found that having an Excellent speaker is much more effective and it positions Toastmasters as not only a Professional Organization, but the attendees look up to and aspire to be better speaker themselves.

Evaluation:

We actually have the audience participate in the evaluation. We let them know before the speak starts that we will be asking them for their feedback on what they think about the speech. We give them ideas on what to look for, ie. Their beginning, the conclusion, were they drawn in, eye contact, body movement, did the speaker really connect with them, etc.

The Evaluator is more of a facilitator, urging the audience through their feedback. This actually gives them the realization that there is something to a speech besides just someone speaking and that ***they can have an opinion.***

We have the evaluation directly following the speech so it is fresh in their minds.

Table Topics:

This is where we really have fun. The most successful action we have done was to have a long table topics, and include as many new people as possible. However we do something unique that really works.

The problem with most new people with table topics is they get a question they can't answer and are too intimidated to speak.

The solution is to have them talk about something they know and are excited about.

Here is what we do:

Each person who comes to the meeting is given a 3 X 5 card when they arrive and asked to write on it " Something about themselves that is very interesting, or adventurous, or that they are proud of, that no body in the audience knows about." We collect the cards and everyone forgets about it.

Then when it comes time for Table Topics, we explain about impromptu speaking and tell them we will be playing a game. We will be reading one of the cards out loud to the group and then asking the group to try and guess who that person is. We say,

“On the count of 3 everyone point to the person they think it is.” Really get them to point it out and try to guess. Then we say: “Will the real ... please stand up”.

The person stands up and usually get’s a roar from the crowd and an applause, since most of them have been fooled. **Now the table Topics master simply asks the person; “ Tell us about that”**. The person finds themselves proud that they stumped every one and excited to tell the story they have told a thousand times to friends.

They take a win on getting up in front of everyone. And the purpose of this is to have them overcome the fear and actually get up in front of their peers and speak. It works wonderfully.

The other amazing result is that the audience members create a bond with their fellow workers who they have been working with for some time, but never got to see “That Side of Them” before.

We will have 10 – 15 table topics if we can.

TAG team:

Timer: We have 2 volunteers work with the Timer. They learn about the timing. One runs the clock and the other takes down the times and gives the report to the group.

Ahs Counter: We have 2 volunteers count Ahs and ums and then compare their count to the member. It is usually an eye opener.

Grammarian: have at least 1 person work with the grammarian focusing on great use of words or phrases. Put attention on the positive.

The Close:

We hand out applications to everyone in the room. They are asked to fill it out as we walk them through what to fill out and we answer any questions. If it is a corporation we have already worked out what responsibility the corporation will financially take and have their representative explain that to them. (Possibly paying for the charter fee, or their dues, or materials or all 3.)

Value / Scarcity:

We make a big deal about Charter Members being the charter member for the rest of time in that company. We build it up as having great value. Even mention that at

some clubs their names are on the Charter Plaque hanging on the Corporate wall for 50 years.

Then we tell them that we can only have 20 charter members and that the first 20 applications we receive, (Even if they don't have the money right at hand) will be our charter members. We usually collect the needed 20 and then some. We have had the group get upset about there being more than 20 who want to join right now. We have responded that we will make an exception this time, and anyone who turns in a membership application TODAY can be a Charter Member. (In July, of last year, we did a kickoff meeting at HSBC with 120 in attendance. At the end of the hour we collected 100 applications for charter membership and started 3 clubs that day.)

Leave nothing to chance:

The biggest mistake I have seen in starting a club is to "Ask" people what they would like.

YOU are the authority in public speaking. They are looking to you for the answers to their problems. Whenever you ask them to make a decision about something, you put a STOP right there. No one wants to have the responsibility of making a decision with out knowing all the facts. They have to study it. They have to understand it. But before they can understand it they have to learn everything about it. This takes time and often kills the sale.

JUST TELL THEM WHAT TO DO. Whether it is the cost, or the officer list, or all the decisions they have to make about the charter paperwork. We never even mention there is any other option than meeting weekly.

We sit down with the person starting the club for the company and we help them fill out all the paperwork . We collect all the monies. Make sure everything is in order. We have them make a copy of all the paperwork and we take the application and send it to TI ourselves.

Follow up

At the Kickoff meeting we like to have the future Area Governor for this club along with 2 potential mentors present. They are introduced to the club members and then we set a date for the first club meeting (Usually the following week). At that meeting we do an orientation of what will be happening in meetings along with table topics.

If you start the club out with good mentors who spend the time to really educate and train the new members on Toastmasters procedures and make it a fun, “Not a Serious” experience, the clubs will win.

Mentors.

We highly suggest World Champion of Public Speaking, Lance Miller’s CD “Building a Championship Club” as a training tool for all club Mentors and Club coaches. We have found it to be invaluable. We have purchased almost 300 copies for our District over the past few years. All Division and Area Governors receive one and play it for their club presidents and officers.

Summary

“IF IT ISN’T FUN ... IT ISN’T TOASTMASTERS” – Rick Furbush

This is our mantra. We want to take the scariest activity on the planet and make it less serious... make it FUN! That is usually what the problem is for most people ... they take it too seriously. Make it fun and light. That is the winning ticket.

Good luck

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