

Starting Toastmasters Clubs

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 that 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.

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, 1 evaluator, Table Topics, and a TAG team.

The key to the meeting is 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.

Speaker

There are two schools of thought on this. One, to have a relatively inexperienced, new speaker that would make the audience feel as if they could relate to them and "do this", OR Have an experienced dynamic speaker give the presentation.

My feeling is that it should be the latter, a more dynamic speaker. The reason for this is that we want to excite the audience and let them get the idea that this is a worthwhile goal to be a better speaker.

Evaluation

We have an evaluator come up and lead a "Round Robin" evaluation by the audience. This is VERY SUCCESSFUL. We want the audience members to realize that there is more

to a speech than just listening. We want them to know they can have an opinion and think for themselves what makes a speech interesting to them.

Before the introduction of the Speaker, the Toastmaster would mention the concept of evaluation, and that we want all of them to listen with a discerning ear. That we will be asking for their opinion of the speech, what they liked about the speech, the eye contact, gestures, and possibly what they could do to make it a better speech.

Then when the Evaluator get's up he explains how a typical evaluation would be done, and then asks for feedback from the audience. Sometimes he would have to coax the audience with leading questions.

This makes it real to the group that there is more to a speech and that they can discern a good speech from a bad one.

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.

Solution is to have them talk about something they know and are excited about. Our goal is to give everyone a WIN at getting up and speaking.

Here is what we do:

Each person who comes to the meeting, when they arrive, is given a 3 X 5 card and asked to write on it " Something about themselves that is very interesting, 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.

TAG Team

We explain about the TAG team and coax other members to "help out" with the timing and Ahs, however, since our real goal is to give everyone a WIN at speaking and excited about creating a club, we don't stress this during the meeting, but just report on it at the end of the meeting.

Step # 3: 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 answer 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. 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, 2011, 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.)

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, Rick Furbush, DTM, Region 8 Advisor, rickfurbush@mac.com, 727-643-8664

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 without 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 mention or consider any other option than the club meets WEEKLY. We start every club on a weekly meeting basis.

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.