

The Toastmaster Role

Prior To The Meeting

As “The Toastmaster” you drive the organization prior to the meeting and act as the “master of ceremonies” (emcee) during the night of meeting. In many Toastmaster chapters the VP of Education assigns each of the pre-scheduled roles. The method used at Westside differs in that our scheduling system is voluntary. This has ramifications both good and bad.

On the upside for voluntary signups for roles, each individual knows their schedule and availability best. In theory there should be fewer people dropping out each week due to a tighter alignment of personal schedule to the club schedule. On the other hand the argument could be made that more half-hearted commitment is being encouraged with a voluntary system.

Regardless, the Toastmaster is ultimately responsible for pinning down the scheduled roles since it is his / her show. Our club’s online schedule which the VP of Education is riding shotgun on is a good place to start in understanding how the coming week’s meeting is shaping up. The VP of Education should continue to watch your back as a primary or backup resource in ensuring a full (or close to) schedule is developed. The Toastmaster or VP of Education can send out broadcast email via our Westside Yahoo Group as one avenue in soliciting members to fill out holes in the schedule.

We expect also that members that have signed up for roles and then have to back out (work, family, whatever) within several days prior to the meeting, make a “good faith” effort to find a replacement. At a minimum they should send out an email to club members requesting someone to step into their role, taking part of the burden off the Toastmaster’s shoulders.

The Toastmaster should use whatever is a convenient means of communication to confirm all of the scheduled roles. Once you are reasonably confident the scheduled roles are solid you have the foundation for generating a printable agenda, the mark of a well-prepared Toastmaster.

Another consideration potentially is a theme for the meeting. Having a theme is in no way a necessity, merely one of those nice touches that can lighten the mood of a meeting or make it more interesting. Furthermore, the Toastmaster may want to collaborate with the Table Topics Master on the definition of the theme, enabling the Topics Master to have questions in the same general vein as said theme.

Keep the General Evaluator apprised of changes in prepared speaker lineup. The General Evaluator is responsible for making Evaluator assignments to the prepared speakers. The Evaluators should know those assignments if at all possible prior to the day of the meeting.

Leading During The Night Of The Meeting

On the evening of the meeting we recommend showing up early, at least 15 minutes prior to the meeting. Having a printed agenda that can be distributed around the room is strongly encouraged so the players, like the Timer and Table Topics Master know how to fulfill their roles during the evening.

Last minute surprises are always possible – the better to be on top of them with at least a small window to rectify them. Adaptation to circumstances is a constant in the Toastmaster experience. Remember, as the director, you're responsible for ensuring all of the meeting's players know their parts and hit their marks.

You will need to have an understanding of any physical changes required in the room during the course of the meeting. The lectern may need to be shifted around for a speaker or a flip chart put in place as examples.

Due in part to the above the Toastmaster should have quick access to the front of the room, sitting as close to the front as possible. Avoid a five or 10 second walk to the front of the room when speakers or section leaders are returning control of the meeting back to you as the emcee. Part of good meeting etiquette is passing control of a meeting from the front of the room, normally via a handshake.

Be sure to have your introductory material nailed down by the beginning of the meeting. If you have not obtained it all in the few days prior to the meeting, use the pre-meeting time to gather any last minute details from people in roles you introduce. For prepared speeches based on the manuals be sure to know which speech projects speakers are targeting, their title, and applicable timing constraints.

After the meeting is opened by the Sergeant-At-Arms (SAA), the club President will conduct the front-end section pertaining to club business. As the club President introduces you during your approach to the front of the room you will want to begin establishing your presence and provide context for the audience as to how the meeting will flow. Usually our club has a number of guests in the room. Early on you will want to explain the overall format of the meeting to the guests.

You may have a topical theme that underlies the meeting which you will explain. This thematic material may be used as a "wrapper" around other parts of the meeting or when there are blank spots to fill; perhaps the setup for a speaker is taking longer than anticipated or votes are still being counted.

Commonly, the Toastmaster will introduce the functionaries to explain their supporting roles. These would be the Timer, Grammarian / WordMaster, and the Filler Word Counter. At Westside Toastmasters we also tend to have a JokeMaster on the schedule that you might next introduce.

After these preliminaries the meeting progresses into Table Topics where you will introduce the Table Topics Masters to conduct that session. Depending on the lineup of prepared speakers the length of this portion of the meeting can be adjusted to keep the evening's proceedings ending on time. If we do not have a full number of prepared speakers then this section can extend somewhat longer. Should a couple of the prepared speakers have longer than average advanced speeches then the Topics Master will want to keep a tighter rein on length of his / her section of the meeting.

After the Table Topics session has concluded we typically have a meeting break. Then we start the prepared speaking part of the program. Introduce each speaker in turn. Once the speaker has finished their presentation the Toastmaster would call upon members to provide written feedback on the evaluation forms that have been distributed around the room.

At the conclusion of the prepared speaking program the Toastmaster calls on the Timer for their report and subsequently asks for members to vote for "Best Speaker" among the qualifying speakers. The SAA will come around the room and collect the votes.

The next section of the meeting, Evaluations, would then ensue. The Toastmaster, would introduce the General Evaluator who is in charge of that portion of the meeting. The General Evaluator introduces each of the Evaluators assigned to prepared speakers in succession. Then the General Evaluator asks for the Grammarian / Wordmaster and Filler Word Counter reports, followed by the delivery of their own overall meeting evaluation. Control then is returned back to the Toastmaster.

At this point the Toastmaster will be presenting award ribbons for Best Table Topics, Best Evaluator, and Best Speaker. The Sergeant-At-Arms will have tallied the votes for the three major sections of the meeting and communicated them to you as Toastmaster. Take this opportunity to distribute any other awards (e.g. such as ribbons for completion of the CC manual), make closing comments, and return meeting control to the club's President.