



How to have Great Programs in your Rotary Club

These are the ideas of 72 Rotarians who participated in a lively discussion session at the September 29, 2005 meeting of the Sonoma County Association of Rotary Clubs



Hosted by the Rotary Club of Windsor.
Facilitated by President Leslie Lewis and Past President Maureen Merrill
Thanks to our energetic flip chart note-takers: Chris Parr Feldman, President Santa Rosa West, and George Wagner, President of Petaluma Sunrise

What are the main purposes of having an excellent Program program?

- Great meetings that members don't want to miss
- Inform & educate
- Energize
- Inspire
- Entertain
- Build sense of team and togetherness
- Promote membership retention
- Create environment in which members want to bring guests
- Have fun
- Create meetings that are relevant to Rotarians' concerns

What are the elements, qualities and characteristics of a great "Program Program" in a Rotary Club?

- Variety
- Energy
- Emotional appeal (touches hearts)
- New ideas, subjects, food for thought
- Laughter
- Inspiration
- Interactivity
- Creativity (bringing in the unexpected topic or speaker)
- Fun
- Logistics in place, e.g., audible, equipment working, timing issues managed
- Evaluation afterward
- Have program committee or members in general "rate" or comment on speakers
- Equipment is prepared and tested; have backups or backup plans
- Make sure speaker has equipment needed
- On time start
- Excellent introduction; often should obtain one from the speaker

- Note: the main purpose of an introduction is to set up the speaker to be listened to with interest and credibility
- Notify members in ADVANCE of speakers; this improves attendance and encourages people to bring guests
- High quality of presentation (avoid inexperienced and inept speakers)
Book only speakers that are known to be interesting and good presenters
Suggestions for times when dealing with a knowledgeable but inexperienced or inept speaker is unavoidable:
 - Set up an “interview” format and give speaker the questions in advance; also, let members ask questions and make comments to which the speaker can respond.
 - Prepare club/”plant” questions for speaker’s q & a

Controversial or Political Subjects:

- Remind speaker (and members if necessary) that Rotary is a non-political, non-religious organization; we don’t take stands or make political endorsements
- Respect the speaker
- Be sure to have both sides of controversial issues or ballot items
- It is OK to invite a sitting public office holder as long as the presentation isn’t a campaign appearance; ditto a candidate.
- Also OK to hold a debate or panel that offers differing points of view about important social, civic or political issues.
- Don’t shy away from issues of critical importance to the community or to society in general; simply manage their presentation in the Rotary environment

Sources/Ideas for finding speakers:

- The District 5130 website “Program Corner” at www.rotary5130.org
- Newspapers
- Members
- Attend other meetings
- Hold a “feature” day inviting leaders from a local industry (including Rotary Club members); the program may consist of several minutes from each guest.
- Do an entire program consisting of four or five 5- to 7-minute Member Craft Talks

What are things to avoid?

- Overload of non-Rotary charitable organizations
 - Tip: Often we get requests from local organizations to present to our club and ask for funds or other support. These should be referred to the appropriate committee. Requesters can be informed that the club will be happy to hear from them if the committee or board does decide to participate with their program.
- Nickel-and-diming members. Don’t let members be “hit up” even for small donations, even from members or members’ kids; the Rotary meeting should be a safe haven from all that.

- Inexperienced or inept speakers, boring or over-exposed topics. It is OK to say “no” to anyone requesting to speak. We can diplomatically explain that the proposed presentation does not fit in to our program plan.
- Unnecessary noise. Have the Sergeant-at-Arms be responsible to set up the room for comfort and sound. Do not allow noisy intrusions.
- Too much Rotary business. Avoid Board or Committee work at meetings except for Club Assemblies.
- Holding the raffle after speaker. This is anticlimactic and distracting. Close with simple “thought for the day” at the most.
- “Joke of the Month” . . . if you have them, watch for taste and appropriateness
- Empty chairs in front of room. Have Sergeant-at-Arms come up with a way to seat people up front.

Practicalities in dealing with speakers:

- Confirm details ahead of time with a letter
- Keep a calendar that is several weeks ahead so that members know what programs are upcoming
- Inform speaker about Rotary’s purposes and your own club’s recent accomplishments
- Get an introduction
- Explain time, place, protocol, etc. so that speaker knows what to expect
- Be creative with your Speaker’s Gift
- Send a thank you note.