

Open House Club Meeting Basics

Open Houses are effective means of membership building and are recommended to be held routinely 1 to 2 times a year. They can be used to celebrate the Club Charter Date Anniversary, a national or local holiday, club, or civic event.

1. The Open House Meeting needs to be well organized, with an Open House Team and Coordinator. The Coordinator can use this as a High Performance Leadership Project (HPL).
2. PR materials should be finalized and distributed at least 4 weeks and preferably 6 weeks in advance. Include as many different types of PR media as possible.
3. Have a printed agenda for the meeting. Suggest that TM designations and leadership titles not be listed on the agenda as they take valuable time to explain and can be explained at the next meeting for return guests. See sample Open House agenda.
4. Have the Open House Meeting location and time consistent with regular club meetings, to promote attendance at future club meetings.
5. If possible, have light refreshments, at the Open House Meeting.
6. Have *enthusiastic* Toastmasters as meeting participants!
7. Keep the meeting roles basic – it's not necessary to have every meeting role that would normally be a part of a regular club meeting, just the key roles (Toastmaster, Speaker, Table Topics Master, Timer, Evaluator, and General Evaluator).
8. Have a mix of new and experienced Toastmasters as part of the team – this will give prospective members a glimpse of what is possible for them to achieve (via the experienced speaker) but not intimidate them by presenting only an example they feel may not be realistic for them to emulate (via having a relatively less experienced speaker on the team).
9. Have the Club Coaches, if the club is eligible for Club Coaches, at for the Open House Meeting, club officers and the Area Governor present if possible.
10. Good topic for a speech at an Open House Meeting is one that promotes Toastmasters, and explains the benefits of membership, and include personal success stories of how Toastmasters has changed your life. See the Personal and Professional Benefits of TM handout.
11. Select appropriate roles for your team members at the meeting, roles the members are familiar with and excel in.
12. An abundance of Toastmasters promotional materials should be present at the meeting – including back issues of Toastmasters Magazine (free from TM International), District and/or Club newsletters, and brochures from Toastmasters International.

13. State the objectives of Toastmasters at the beginning of the meeting, and also suggest reading the Mission of the Club.
14. Involve guests by explaining the meeting roles, as each role comes into play. Explain aspects of the meeting and the Toastmasters program in simple terms.
15. Allow enough time (at least 10-15 minutes) for a Question-and-Answer session after the main portion of the meeting. Take 45 minutes or less for the standard meeting so that that this additional time is available. Total Open House Meeting time is recommended at 1 hour.
16. It may be advantageous to have any members of the District Top 3 who are present at the meeting to stay in the background until later in the meeting.
17. Even if more than one speech at the meeting is presented, it is best to have just one evaluation and suggested that this evaluation be of the less experienced speaker. The evaluation should be a good one and not a “whitewash”, emphasizing both positives and areas of possible improvement.
18. Don't have difficult Table Topics – use them to demonstrate the possibilities of extemporaneous self-expression, not as a “test” of arcane or specialized knowledge or as a way to “stump” prospective members with “off-the-wall” questions. Good TT questions are “Who is your best friend and why?” or “What was your favorite vacation and why?” or “Congratulations, you just won 60 million dollars in the State Lotto, how will you spend it?!”
19. While having 5 or more prospective members present at the Open House Meeting is desirable; however go ahead and start the meeting even if only 1 or 2 guests are in attendance.
20. Don't focus on mistakes made during the Open House Meeting. Usually the guests don't notice the mistakes, only the regular TM members do. If there is an action that does need to be addressed, please do it in a helpful considerate way, with a “we are helping each other to learn, grow and achieve” attitude!
21. Get a commitment as soon as possible from guests/prospective members to join, and to write checks for their new membership fee, or at least sign a list pledging to join!
22. Mention that members are not expected to come to all meetings but are expected to attend as many meetings as possible. Also mention that we encourage mentoring of new members.

These responses were collected at Mid-Year Training for Top 3 Leaders during a session on Demo Meeting Basics conducted by Alfred Herzing, DTM, PIP. Lois Sicking has revised this document to include Open House Mtgs. September 2007