

Be an Effective Master of Ceremonies (emcee)

It's always a relief for people attending a meeting to have an emcee who keep things moving. With some advance planning, and the will to stay in control, you will keep your audience in their seats with their minds on the event at hand.

Try these simple steps to success:

1. Have an Agenda and Stick to it
2. Get off to a Strong Start
3. Recognize Special Guests
4. Conducting the Business
5. Introducing the Speaker
6. Close the Meeting Crisply

Have an Agenda and Stick to it

People will be more comfortable if they know what to expect. You should have a printed agenda or at least provide a verbal agenda at the outset. Start on time and end on time.

Get off to a Strong Start

Don't fumble for an opening. Have a detailed outline in front of you, something that includes more than just the agenda. Consider writing out an entire script so you don't miss anything, and you're not caught wondering what to do next.

Recognize Special Guests

This is risky. When we introduce people in the audience, we often overlook someone. So make sure this is really an important function of your meeting and give some serious thought to whom you need to introduce. Don't rely on a list of people who said they would attend. Assign someone to check that list to make sure it's still accurate once the meeting time arrives. Ask the audience to hold their applause until all special guests have been introduced, and then lead them in applause when you're done.

Conducting the Business

If this is a business meeting, use good parliamentary procedure, but keep things moving as simply and quickly as possible. Remember, you may have guests in the audience who won't care about this portion of the meeting. On the other hand, your members do. Work to reach a balance for both groups.

Introducing the Guest Speaker

Talk with guest speakers before the meeting to let them know how and when you will be introducing them. Gently remind them how long you expect them to talk, and stress the importance of staying on schedule.

Don't make the mistake of thinking the speaker doesn't need an introduction. But don't read the speaker's entire bio. Pick and choose items you think will help the audience understand why this person has been invited to speak.

Rehearse the introduction several times. You may want to mention in the introduction how long the speech will last and whether or not questions will be taken at the end.

If you have a panel of speakers, each introduction must be handled the same way. Provide appropriate information and treat each panelist equally.

Close the Meeting Crisply

Don't allow the meeting to just taper off, trying to make last minute statements while people's minds have already left, even if their bodies haven't. Praise volunteers who organized the meeting and thank everyone for attending.