

By Lindy Sinclair, DTM

Hosting a Club Open House

One of the best ways to boost membership in your Toastmasters club is by hosting an Open House. This is a party given by a club with the goal of drawing guests who will become members.

I have broken down the planning process into a general timeline of specific steps – covering approximately five weeks, including the day of the event. There isn't enough space here to give the full extent of steps and suggestions, so I'll be hitting the highlights.

The Suggestion Stage – Day 1

You are the person with the idea. Make an announcement at a meeting suggesting that your club hold an Open House. If – and only if – you have the support of the club, ask for someone to be the lead person for the event. (It may end up being you.)

The supervisor asks members to select three potential dates about five weeks away, and to choose a location. Ask for a volunteer to be facility coordinator; that person will make the reservation within the next few days for the earliest of your three dates that is available at the chosen location.

Choose an audio/visual coordinator and have them order these items from Toastmaster International's Web site (www.toastmasters.org): the DVD "Welcome to Toastmasters!" (which will be played for the Open House guests), the free pamphlets "Find Your Voice" and "Confidence: The Voice of Leadership," and a pad of membership applications.



Everybody Has a Role – Day 8

- The group decides whether to invite a guest speaker or someone from within the club to give a speech illuminating the benefits of joining your club.
- Choose a refreshments coordinator, decorations coordinator and set-up crew.
- An advertising coordinator volunteers to write a one-paragraph press release describing the event. That person sends the release to a local newspaper and places it on the craigslist.com Web site every week until the event.
- Someone offers to design a flier and coordinate flier distribution by all club members.
- The agenda is discussed: how much time will be given to each segment of the event (e.g. Table Topics, speeches).
- A volunteer is chosen to design and print the Open House program.

Now We're Really Rolling – Day 15

- Refreshments coordinator leads discussion about what kind of food you will serve (catered, purchased or potluck) and whether you will need plates, flatware, cups, etc. What is the budget for the food?
- The coordinator asks for three or four members to volunteer to give one- to two-minute speeches about what Toastmasters means to them.

Just Two Weeks to Go! – Day 22

- Assign greeters to make the Open House guests feel welcome.
- Select a volunteer to bring name tags (if you

want them) and to write a name tag as each guest arrives.

- You may also want to prepare a guest book.


The Home Stretch – Day 29

- Members each report how many of their guests are coming.
- Based on that number, doubled, the refreshments coordinator makes a shopping list (remember the plates!).
- Supervisor schedules decorations coordinator, refreshments coordinator and set-up crew to arrive an hour before the guests.

The Day of the Open House – Day 36

- A/V Coordinator arrives an hour early to check that equipment and DVD player work. (Have back-up plan in case they don't.)
- After guests arrive, follow your program (DVD, guest speaker, Table Topics or whatever you choose). President or supervisor asks guests for feedback.
- After a 10-minute refreshment break, meeting is reconvened.
- The "What Toastmasters Means to Me" speeches are given.
- At the end, thank guests for coming and let them know that, whether they joined that day or not, they are welcome at your regular meetings.

Aftermath

Club members bask in the glow of a successful event! 

Lindy Sinclair, DTM, founded Watergate Toastmasters in Emeryville, California, in 2002. She is the principal of www.EmotionsandMoney.com.