Good speakers make great impressions: Tips for selecting speakers for club meetings

Many club meetings include some sort of featured speaker. While speakers range from sports heroes to business owners to educators, they also can range from great to, well, not so much. Great speakers can make club meetings worthwhile experiences for members and pique prospective members’ interest. Poor speakers can leave a lasting negative impression.

So how do you make sure your speakers are tops?

Begin by asking questions of proposed speakers, and always start with: Our club’s mission is to build youth and adult leaders and serve the children in our community. How do you or your organization build youth and adult leaders or serve the children in our community?

Help him or her find the angle that will bring the most meaning to your members. Then, it’s time to ask two additional critical questions of the proposed speaker:

- What is the overall summary of your program, and how will it relate to the members?
- How can we partner to streamline efforts and resources to provide maximum impact to our community?

Once you’ve established a good fit between the speaker and your club, follow these five tips:

- **Avoid surprises.** Provide the speaker with specific directions to your location, what time they should arrive, and how long they will be speaking. If your club pays for their meal, let them know ahead of time. Also, find out early if he or she will need special audiovisual equipment.
- **Plan for Q and A.** If the members enjoy having time for questions and answers, let the speaker know ahead of time to plan an extra five minutes into the presentation.
- **Keep introductions brief and relevant.** Introduce members to the topic, and inform them why it’s important to hear the message. Then tell them the speaker’s name. Avoid lengthy introductions and laundry lists of past Kiwanis titles.
- **Check the A/V.** Double check the audiovisual equipment before the meeting begins. If available, encourage speakers to use a microphone.
- **Get handouts out of the way.** Place agendas (if your club uses them) and the speaker’s handouts on the tables before the meeting begins.

If you have difficulty finding a speaker, consider these key community leaders: local principals and/or superintendents, community hospital personnel, and religious leaders of all faiths.