



Better
Banquet

Better Banquets

The Greeks probably had a word for it.

The Romans before Nero fiddled the city away, wasted little time on definitions. They lounged in their togas, stuffed themselves with food and drank to the point of becoming overcome.

The Americans are folksier; they tag the definition "banquet" to those special occasion dinners. And throw in oratory for good measure.

They base that and rightly on the theory that good food and talk make for fellowship understanding and recognition.

These banquet programs fall roughly into two categories.

The first is run on schedule, like a crack train and clicks its way down the oratorical track with admirable speech and precision.

The other sort makes a pause at every whistle stop, backs up frequently to take on passengers and tries to compensate with much whistling and puffing for what it lacks in purpose and direction. When its destination is reached late in the evening almost everyone is exhausted except the engineer.

There's nothing confidential about running a successful banquet, it won't run itself. Actually some of you may be better at engineering a banquet than you suspect. Beginners can always learn. Just keep the following tips in mind.

Pre-Banquet Planning

The successful banquet meeting is simply a matter of combining: COMMON SENSE, COURTESY, GOOD TIMING

These three points are interwoven through the following outline of banquet suggestions.

Get approval of the membership for the banquet

Appoint a banquet committee

A state regional banquet is not necessarily a one-man job but the responsibility for planning such an affair is best centralized. If possible one person should have charge of co-coordinating all the work.

Don't underestimate the job

The president will describe it airily as "just making a few arrangements." If you consult former banquet chairmen, they will say, "Nothing to it. The hotel will take care of everything." Don't believe it!

Pick three alternate dates

Someone is bound to object to each one of them. The only objections you have to worry about are those of choice, the hotel will fit you in.

What to eat

While the dollar isn't worth as much as it used to be, 25 of them will be a lot more than your members and guests will want to spend for a dinner.

Say you've decided on the \$3.50 chicken dinner. Then figure another 10% for members and 15% for others for gratuities plus whatever sales tax you may have in your state, or a minimum of \$4.00 per plate.

If you plan to serve cocktail beforehand, add another \$1.00 for members to \$1.50 for others. Some hotels want you to buy a flat number of gallons, which the bartender will split up for you into four or five kinds of cocktails.

A gallon generally yields 40 drinks and costs around \$24.00 to \$32.00 and up in larger Aeries. Other hotels will serve cocktails for a specified time and charge only for the number of fifths of liquor used.

Be sure to provide tomato juice and soft drinks for the non drinkers.

Other cost

A public address system, if one is needed, will run \$10.00 to \$25.00 and up per microphone.

There will be the cost of printing the tickets, programs and promotional material and incidentals like taxes and stamps to be considered.

Then there are the dead heads, the honored guest who get in free. Better keep them to a minimum.

Many organizations get around the entertainment problem by hiring an orchestra and having dancing after the dinner. Unless your treasury is in a mighty solvent state, remember that entertainment costs run high. Use good amateur entertainment if at all possible. You will, of course, have to feed them.

How Many

The hotel will want to know how many will attend your banquet. Give the manager or maitre de the best estimate you can, well in advance. Do not give any firm guarantee, in writing or otherwise, until you have to preferably 48 to 72 hours before the dinner. It's good to be a bit conservative, especially if your committee is inexperienced. On the other hand, keep in mind that if more show up than you estimate, there probably won't be enough tables or waiters and everyone will complain about the service.

There is one excellent way to handle the guarantee. At least you can try. That is having 90% of the tickets sold and paid for a week in advance. Start your planning early.

Timing

Write down an outline, with an eye to timing the event:

<u>Banquet</u>	<u>Time</u>
Cocktails	6:00 - 6:50
Guest Seated	6:30 - 7:00
Guest of Honor Seated	6:50
Dinner Served	7:00 - 7:45
Introductions	7:45 - 8:00
Main Speech	8:00 - 8:15
Second Speech	8:15 - 8:25
Questions	8:25 - 9:00
Adjournment	9:15

Give copies of your time schedule to everyone who shares the responsibility for making it work, the chairman, the speakers, the hotel management, etc.

Keep in mind, most people find that two or two and half hours is long enough to sit in one place. Unless you are assured of a remarkably patient audience or are going to provide some sort of physical activity for your guest, it is not wise to have a banquet meeting last longer than two and one half hours.

Your Speakers

Give them full advance details on time and place of meeting, topics and length of speech (this is especially important for State Regional Banquets where various leaders will give reports on membership, activities, publicity, etc.); names of other speakers (if any) and what their talks will cover.

Ask for advance copies or summary of speech, biographical data and pictures for newspaper publicity.

Arrange for transportation of speaker(s) to meeting, hotel and any entertainment for your speaker. Your first duty to your speaker is to give him enough time to go the job you have asked him to do. If you overcrowd your program, one speaker is apt to be highlighted at the expense of others.

Send every speaker some concise material on the purpose of the banquet meeting (if this is merely a strictly social affair, such material will not be necessary.) He will have to know the names of the others on the program, approximately what points they are going to cover and what you expect him to accomplish in his talk.

If your speaker is out of town, meet him at the train. You can help him feel at ease with his audience and to judge their special interest more accurately by having him talk before the meeting with people who are familiar with the local situation.

Toastmaster

If in your group, there is a traditional toastmaster who always gets the job well and good. If you have to pick an unknown, beware of the quiet, minds-his-own-business type who seems to get jobs done with efficiency and dispatch. When he gets up in front of an audience, he will suddenly turn into a would-be Will Rogers. What you need is that rare person who will stand up, introduce the speaker and sit down. The affair is going to last long enough as it is without having an ambitious joke man gum up the works.

Where do we go?

Provide signs or place cards if banquet room is not on the main floor just off the lobby. A nice touch is to have an Aerie member standing at the elevator to greet guests and direct them. Provide also for flowers (a must at the speakers table); a flag, if necessary place to check wraps, guide for late comers. If printed material will be used for illustrative purposes or will be passed out later, provide a table for such material and/or publications.

Who sits where?

Keeping people happy is one of the saddest chores of the banquet committee. Everybody wants a good seat. Your defense may well be to assign seats in the order in which you get the money. Of course, certain big wheels will wait till the last minute and then calmly ask for good seats. To be ready for such a possibility, hold out a few seats.

Why not make out: place cards as you receive the money for each ticket? Number your tables. As you sell each ticket, consult seating chart, put person's name in square indicating table 12, for example, and on back of ticket. Write down number of table, if there is to be a large speakers table, arrange a seating plan for the guests of honor. You might drop them a note inviting them to gather in a small reception room beforehand, where a member of the committee will greet them. This serves to make the occasion a congenial one, avoids their advancing in lonely twos and threes and prevents the undignified confusion of "musical chairs" as they hunt for their places at the table.

Let's get going

Close the bar promptly (if cocktails are being served) at the appointed time. If dinner is at seven, the bar can be open from 6:00 - 6:50 without harm. Then be sure it shuts down. To let it stay open too long is the sign of an inexperienced committee. The results could be embarrassing.

Committee members should be in the dining room one-half hour before serving to help people get seated. There are always some early comers.

Timing

A chairman, who starts a banquet meeting promptly, keeps it moving and ends it before the audience becomes restless, makes history. Keep your time schedule before you. One theme competently handled makes for a more successful meeting than a dozen glossed over.

Introductions are not eulogies, keep them to a name and title, in all, one minutes worth.

Some people would rather contact typhus than stand up and ask a question in public. To make sure your question period gets a smooth start, write a few pertinent questions and plant them in your audience. Once the ice is broken, other questions will follow.

For your community singing, old stand byes please. Perhaps a quartet to start things off, the audience can join the chorus.

Whether you want your audience to give time or money, form a committee, pass a resolution or sign a petition, build up your entire meeting to that point. Don't chance an anti-climax, or change of mood which will lessen the effect of the final appeal.

Aftermath

Even if you have every right to feel it's been a job well done, don't bolt out immediately afterwards. There's always at least one person who will have lost his hat and coat and the speaker who may have to catch a train but is being held off by a couple of the boys who want to tell him how much they enjoyed his speech. You can calm the owner of the lost coat and get the machinery going that will rectify the error. And you can tactfully extricate the speaker from his new found friends.

Have your man covering publicity; add a quote from the speech of the evening to the who-when-what-why-where material he is sending to the newspaper. It should be called in or mailed in to the newspaper the night of the banquet.

A word of thanks to everyone who helped make the banquet meeting a success will be well received.

Use reprints of your speaker's talks or quotes in the State Aerie bulletin or your local bulletin.

No need to pack the memory of your banquet in moth balls.

Keep alive the renewed friendships, the purposes resolved.