



MASTER THE CEREMONIES
The Emcee's Handbook for Excellence

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Introduction

Have you ever been called to the podium to receive an award or special recognition for your achievements and your name was mispronounced? Can you count the times that you patiently and politely kept your seat through a program that bored you as it dragged on? More important, were you the one who mispronounced the name or who was in charge of the disorganized program?

I have been a part of more than a thousand programs either as a member of the audience, as a recipient of an award, as a performer, as a guest speaker, or as the master of ceremonies. I have heard and seen much that can go wrong--jokes bombed, speakers rambled, performers did not appear, names were mispronounced, equipment failed, and the earth quaked. While the emcee was not responsible for the problem circumstances, he was largely responsible for the negative impact he had on the program.

When the matter is in your control, you can avoid problems by planning and preparing. With the same planning and preparation, you can avoid embarrassment and catastrophe from situations that are beyond your control.

This is more than a how-to book for being an emcee. It is a what-to-do handbook when the responsibility for the program or ceremony is on your shoulders. The admonitions and recommendations included here will help you master the ceremonies.

Precept # 7

Rehearse your introductions and other remarks.

It is commonly expected that performers and speakers will be prepared and rehearsed. The master (or mistress) of ceremonies should also exhibit that high level of preparation.

Prepare all remarks that you plan to make. Familiarize yourself with all introductions and biographies. Practice reading them so that your presentations will flow naturally. One sign of excellence is being rehearsed without sounding rehearsed.

Precept # 28

Save the announcement of additional distinguished guests to the end of the program.

There may be other persons that should be acknowledged as distinguished guests. Someone may come in after the program begins. Later in the program you may recognize a person in the audience and realize that she should have been included on your list of distinguished persons. Someone else may bring to your attention the name of a notable guest.

Save the announcement of these additional names to the end of the program to avoid having to continually add to the list throughout the program. Just before you conclude your duties as the emcee, you can acknowledge the additional individuals.

Example 28A: "It has been brought to my attention that we have some other guests who merit special acknowledgment. They are: Our own Regional Vice-president Felicia Scott and Lieutenant Governor of Marketing Steve Gutierrez. We are glad that you were able to join us."

Precept # 49

Acknowledge individual members when a group is the award recipient

If a single award is presented to a group of people, the group should be announced as the award recipient.

Example 49A: "The 2003 Team of Excellence is the Mail Room Division."

After the ovation for the group has subsided, the names of the team members should be read.

Example 49A (continued): "The Mail Room Division includes: Gayle Anderson, Carol Cole, Tom Davenport, Javier Morales, and Ken Peterson."

Sometimes a team that is to receive the award does not have a formal or official name. The members of the team will have to be called separately. If this will be the case, you should let the audience know how many names will be announced so that they will hold their applause until the entire team is named.

Example 49B: "The award for Best Humorous Skit goes to the trio of Faye Jones, Skip Jones, and Yvon Arutunyan."

If the audience begins its ovation before you complete the announcement of all names in the group, let the applause subside and then complete the list.

Example 49C: "The rest of the winning group includes Skip Jones and Yvon Arutunyan."

Precept # 72

Keep the volume of your voice up when announcing a speaker or winner.

When introducing a speaker or a person to receive an award, do not drop your voice on the announcement of the name. The announcement of the name is the climax and the audience's cue to applaud. The vigor of the ovation will depend on the enthusiasm that you generate with your voice.

If you drop your voice on the announcement of the name, thereby showing little enthusiasm or excitement, your audience will respond similarly.

An excited, enthusiastic, and energetic announcement might sound overly dramatic to you, but it will excite the audience about the person being recognized.

Precept # 93

Be professional in addressing the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen" is the common professional way to address your audience. You may, however, employ a reference to the specific organization or group, such as "Fellow Rotarians and guests," "fellow officers," or the like.

Precept # 114

Report the status of any interrupting emergency to the audience.

When you resume a ceremony or program that has been suspended due to an emergency, give the audience a report on the resolution or status of the matter. When you ease the minds of the attendees by answering the unasked questions, you will regain their attention and focus on the program.