

Ten Questions to Ask to Treat a Guest Speaker Well

Those with little experience hosting guest speakers may be unaware of some of the courtesies their guests will appreciate. Because of my frequent travels as a guest speaker, I'm sometimes asked for tips on showing hospitality to other visiting speakers. Answering these questions will help you excel in this sort of hospitality.

- 1. If your guest is flying, have you asked whether he'd prefer for you to book the tickets or to make his own flight reservations?**

If your guest makes his own travel arrangements, offer to reimburse him as soon as he can send a copy of his receipt/itinerary to you. Since the tickets are a significant expense and usually made long before he is with you, waiting several weeks until the event for reimbursement can place him in a financial strain.

- 2. Have you reimbursed your speaker for all travel expenses, including incidental ones?**

In addition to airfare or car rental costs, your guest will likely incur out-of-pocket expenses for airport parking, tolls, food, tips, etc. It is appropriate to ask for receipts for these in order to provide reimbursement. If the speaker drives his own vehicle, reimburse him according to the current IRS per mile expense rate.

- 3. If you intend to give your guest an honorarium, have you arranged to do so before he leaves?**

Your guest will appreciate this much more than receiving the honorarium by mail. Besides, since getting the honorarium usually requires several steps in a process that's outside the daily routines of the pastor or church (such as the pastor's remembering to request it), there's much room for forgetfulness or error. Guest speakers know that when they are asked, "Do you mind if we just mail an honorarium to you?", there's a good chance that it will never arrive, or do so weeks later. When determining the amount of the honorarium, consider not only the preparation and delivery of the messages, but also the amount and value of the time you've asked your speaker to be away from home. Just a Friday night through Sunday morning conference, for example, usually requires that your speaker travel and be at your disposal some fifty to sixty hours.

- 4. Are you prepared to offer several restaurant options?**

Just about everyone has likes and dislikes. You may be planning on going to your favorite local seafood restaurant, for example, but not know that your guest doesn't like or is allergic to seafood. If you plan for your guest to eat a complimentary breakfast served in his hotel, ask if it is sufficient. The quality of these varies widely, and nearly all supply nothing but carbohydrates, something your guest may be trying to minimize.

5. If meals will be served in homes, have you asked about preferences, food allergies, etc.?

I have a diabetic friend who has an itinerant ministry and nearly died when served a meal he thought it would be rude to refuse.

6. Have you asked about *when* he'd prefer to eat?

Earlier in my ministry I preferred eating after the evening speaking engagement. Once I reached middle age it became problematic for me to eat so late.

7. Have you given your guest the option of staying in a hotel instead of a home?

Although some opt for the fellowship of the home environment, nearly all prefer the privacy of a hotel room. The hotel provides the seclusion to study, write, pray, prepare, send email and more easily rise or retire on his own schedule.

If he stays in a home, the most important consideration is a private bathroom. Show him where extra towels and washcloths are kept. Ask if he's accustomed to drinking coffee or tea as soon as he rises. Have several choices available, or ask in advance about favorites. Placing snacks in his room is a nice touch. A fruit basket is usually too much. A couple of bananas are okay, but few can eat that much fruit on a short trip, especially when eating every meal in a restaurant. And unless your guest came by car, the basket probably won't fit in his luggage. Breath mints, gum, and bottled water are useful, as are snacks he can eat now or take on his return trip.

8. Have you asked if he'd like to have a car made available while with you?

Rarely is this needed, and nearly always your guest will prefer for someone else to drive, but to ask is a courteous gesture.

9. Have you asked what he'd like to do during the times when he's not speaking?

He may prefer to rest or work, but might enjoy alternatives you suggest. Ask if there are any local sights he'd like to see, or whether he'd like to go to bookstores, or something else.

10. Have you remembered those left behind?

The most thoughtful hosts I've experienced arranged to have some "thank you for sharing your husband" remembrance (perhaps just a card) arrive at my home while I was away. Make sure, however, that the spouse will be at home. My wife once decided to visit her mother for several days during one of my longer trips.

She returned to find an arrangement of dead flowers on the doorstep! Sometimes a simple, tangible remembrance can be given to your guest to take to his wife. Just make sure he has room in his luggage. I should add that such extraordinary thoughtfulness, while impressive, is unnecessary.

Finally, because everyone is different, it's always a wise policy to ask your guest in advance, "Do you have any special requests?"

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