

# TED<sup>x</sup> Charlotte

x = independently organized TED event

Workshop

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How to be an emcee

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If you have ever been introduced by an ineffective emcee, you know how important this position is to the success of a program. When you accept the position of emcee, you will want to not only present the others on the program professionally, you will want to orchestrate the occasion in a fashion that reflects the appropriate mood, pace and intent of the program. Following are some of my thoughts on being an effective emcee.

**Be aware of what your role is.** Yes, you will be the host and facilitator for the program. And your job is to warm the audience and prepare them for the speaker(s). Your part is extremely important to the overall flow of the day, but you must remember that you are not the "show." You should not tell a joke, as I have heard many emcees attempt to do, or give a mini-presentation. **It is your goal to make the speaker(s) look good.** And, this leads us to the next topic of introductions.

**Smooth introductions that are succinct work in everyone's favor. DO you hear me SUCCINCT.** Many professional speakers will bring you and/or send you a written introduction. Take time to read it over (aloud in private is an excellent idea) and check with the speaker on the pronunciation of any of the words that are unfamiliar to you – making notes on the pronunciation. If the speaker(s) you will be introducing hasn't handed you an introduction, conduct a mini-interview and write down what you plan to say. Just "winging it" or going on and on about how long you've known old Joe and what a good guy he is, will start him out at a disadvantage. I e-mail and call all speakers as soon as possible to discuss them, their presentation and make notes on their introduction.

**The word "succinct" is incredibly important (see above).** The energy in the room will take a huge dive if you drone on and on about the group, about the speaker, and other information that was uninteresting to everyone. HONESTLY-most people have boring

prepared introductions, and if you do not ensure that their introduction actually speaks to the audience and the theme of the event you have started them, the speaker, off at a disadvantage. I normally modify (with the speakers knowledge) all introductions I receive, if they insist I read them word for word- but with my own take- again it is your job to set the tone.

**Smooth transitions are a necessity.** A proficient emcee realizes the importance of transitions and handles them with ease. When there are two or more speakers and/or other parts included in the program, the emcee must work to keep the mood on an even keel. For example, if the first speaker ended his or her presentation on a moving and emotional note, the emcee needs to bring the audience back to a neutral frame of mind before the next presenter, otherwise the next speaker will start at a disadvantage. Transitions don't need to be lengthy. They can consist of a positive comment, a quote (have many ready), a short story that relates, or if the program is long, a chance for everyone to stand up and stretch. I always create connections for the audience between speakers as a way of ensuring the audience understands the theme of the TEDx event and the themes/ideas of the speakers. Relating and reminding the audience about topics/intent is just as vital communicating breaks/lunch/cell phone use.

**It is the emcee's job to keep the program moving on time.** Even though the speaker(s) have been given a time schedule, not every presenter stays within the limit (shocking I know). It will be your responsibility as the emcee to keep everyone on time. Before you start, tell them that they will be given a signal when they have five, three and one minute left, and stress that the time schedule is important for the success of the program. If they start going way past their time without paying any attention, you might have to gracefully take to the stage – not pleasant, but everyone in the audience will thank you. And, as the emcee, keep your comments as short as possible.

**Preparation is key:** be involved early and often, I sat in and participated in reviewing speakers and attended all the rehearsals. This provides you with an advantage – you can proactively plan and research the person and the topic. I gained as much information as possible about their work and their topic so I felt comfortable talking with them prior to the event and so I felt comfortable on stage introducing them, and lastly, the research allowed me to solidify connecting points between topics and speakers.

**Be flexible: (I do yoga),** if you prepare, and imagine all possible scenarios, good and bad, you can anticipate and be ready for ALMOST anything. When, and it will happen, something unprepared happens, you are the solution, remaining flexible in response to any situation, allows you to keep everything on track. Be in constant communication with the stage manager and the event manager, discuss any issues briefly, be decisive, and keep the audience in the loop in relation to anything different from the planned/scripted program.

**Remember that being asked to be the emcee is an honor.** Yours is probably the most important function of the program (my opinion, again shocking) – keeping every part moving smoothly. Take it seriously, prepare well, and be proud of the part you’ve played, and you will be asked again and again.

**As Hank Snow sang: “A good gal is hard to find, you always get the other kind” well a good emcee is hard to find, don’t settle for the other kind.**

**Thanks, Mike Watson  
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