

An Etiquette That Honors

“A Ministry Protocol with Guest Speakers” by *Chris Ball*

Over the past 20 years I have had some wonderful experiences, both as a guest speaker and as a host to guest speakers. I’ve had the pleasure of these experiences in the local church and the broader arena, when hosting large conferences.

There is nothing like the joy of celebrating the work of the Lord when the guest speaker flows in the Spirit, leaving a deposit from God and then returns home, having felt that he or she was cared for and had received a blessing, both spiritually and financially, for the time spent in ministry. Stories like this do not happen automatically. In fact, too often, I have heard about negative experiences from either the host or the guest speaker, primarily due to poor planning and/or an attitude which exhibits dishonor rather than honor.



The Bible speaks a lot about honor: honoring the Lord with all your possessions ([Proverbs 3:9](#)), honoring your mother and father ([Exodus 20:12](#)), honoring those who seem to lack honor ([1 Corinthians 12:24](#)), giving double honor for those who labor in the Word or doctrine ([1 Timothy 5:17](#)), etc.

I take a risk of being misunderstood by writing an article about an etiquette that brings honor when co-laboring with guest speakers. As one who is invited out to speak, this may seem self-serving. It is my heart, as you read the following material that it will serve to bring glory to God and His Church as we strive to operate with excellence.

Honor is reflected when the following three essentials are functioning:

- **Communication**
The key to an atmosphere of honor is communication. Long before the ministry takes place, both the guest speaker and the host should discuss all details so that every possible area is addressed. This builds an environment where great ministry can take place, because both the host and guest are made aware of their individual responsibilities. The more questions asked and the more details discussed, the more it will serve to eliminate misunderstandings.
- **Cooperation**
Both the host and the guest should look for ways to bring honor to the ministry. Guests should always look to minister under the authority of the host leader. They should be considerate of time and dress code, come with a spirit to serve and bless, and always remember that they are only a guest. The host should look for ways to

be a blessing, making life as comfortable as possible for the guest who, most often, is away from home and family. If the spirit of honor is in the minds and actions of both parties, they will be well on their way to a powerful time of ministry that glorifies God.

- **Compensation**

While every minister should be willing to serve with honor regardless of financial compensation, we cannot dismiss the fact that Paul challenged us to show double honor to those who labor in Word and doctrine. Paul is clearly speaking of compensation. Too many times I have heard stories of men and women who have traveled far and wide, left family, and given their utmost to ministry, only to discover that their compensation was far from honorable; in fact, it was dishonoring.

Every host must consider blessing their guest by paying their expenses (*including housing, miles, and meals*) and compensating them for their labor. Discussion should take place before the event is finalized regarding all the details involving compensation. It is much better to know the details on the front end than being surprised after the event is completed. In short, if a host is unable to compensate a guest, let them know early so they have the opportunity to say yes or no to the opportunity to minister.

You may be saying, *“I have a small church or ministry. When I look at these guidelines, I can’t begin to see how I will ever have enough compensation to invite a guest.”* Remember, everything begins with ‘communication’. However, be careful not to be passive with these guidelines. There are several ways to work towards having a guest ministry.

If you are leading a small work, consider the following...

1. Focus on fewer events throughout the year. Work hard to make one event successful, rather than falling short on hosting multiple events.
2. Consider partnering with a couple of other area ministries to host an event.
3. Consider fundraising ahead of time so you will be able to store up enough income to provide for the event/ministry.
4. Don’t be afraid to charge a registration fee for some events in addition to receiving a free-will offering.
5. In your communications you may be able to arrange a package that will work out with your guest ministry, but remember – this should be agreed upon before the commitment is final.

Someone once said to me, *“Whatever happened to serving and trusting God for His provision? Shouldn’t that be the attitude of the guest?”* Most guest ministries I know approach ministry with this attitude, and it should be the attitude of all who minister. However, I often caution that this should not give place to poor planning or be an excuse to

disregard God's call for host ministries to show honor to their guests. This article is intended to serve both the host ministry and the guest ministry. Following these etiquette guidelines will bring honor to all parties involved, and ultimately honor God. Let's remember the essentials: Communication, Cooperation, and Compensation.

Following are some guidelines that will serve to help you in your journey to honor. You may want to consider setting up an event coordinator to handle the details. No matter the size of our ministries, we can all function with excellence.

Guidelines to Help with an Etiquette that Honors

Thoughtful, considerate hospitality extended to a guest speaker can greatly enhance your ministry event. Inasmuch as he/she will bless your audience with their message, you can bless them by facilitating an environment conducive to ministry.

Demonstrate Hospitality

Find out what your guest likes, such as snacks (*candy bars, crackers, cheese, etc.*), drinks, mints, etc. Have a welcome basket made for them and placed in the hotel room prior to their arrival. If your guest speaker's spouse is traveling with him/her, be sure to include a special gift for their spouse. If the guest is staying in someone's home, arrange with the host to assist with meals.

Simple acts of hospitality can refresh a guest speaker and contribute to the success of your event. Here are a few more suggestions to consider as he or she arrives at your services/event:

- Meet the speaker at the door of your facility or assign someone to meet him/her.
- Be available or designate someone to help carry ministry materials from the speaker's vehicle.
- Place a table in a prominent place for ministry materials or displays.
- Show your guest where the restroom is located.
- Go over details of the service and provide a copy of the program agenda, schedule of activities, registration packet, etc.
- Show your guest where he/she will sit, the path to the podium, where the sound system is located, where audiovisual screens are located, where electrical outlets are located, where light switches are located and where you will be sitting.

- Designate which microphones the speaker will use. Introduce your guest to the sound and lighting technicians.
- Be prepared to introduce your guest properly and to promote his/her ministry materials.
- Discuss timing of a special offering (usually at the close of the service) and who will receive it (normally the pastor).
- Provide bottled water and mints at the speaker's podium and at the table/seat where he/she will be sitting.
- Obtain permission from your guest before recording (audio or video) your guest's messages/performances.
- Provide complimentary audio and/or videotapes of the entire event to your guest.

The honorarium is intended to bless the guest speaker above and beyond the expenses he/she has incurred to come and minister.

Consider the following as you determine the speaker's compensation:

- Is this ministry my guest's livelihood?
- How far will my guest travel for this event?
- How much time away from family will this event require of my guest?
- What type of ministry (*speaking, music, teaching, etc.*) will my guest present?
- Experts claim that the best presentations require 1 hour of preparation per minute of presentation.
- How many times will my guest be expected to minister?
- Cover your guest's expenses (*meals, travel, and lodging*).
- Reimburse the guest's mileage (*use the current Internal Revenue Service's allowance for mileage when an automobile is used*).
- Inform your guest in advance of financial arrangements (*fee, offering, both*).
- Pay your guest speaker before they leave your event. "Check is in the mail" is not serving with excellence.

Treat a Guest Speaker Well by Asking Ten Questions

Those with little experience hosting guest speakers may be unaware of some of the courtesies their guests will appreciate:

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.*
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?** *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.*
4. **Are you prepared to offer several restaurant options?** *Just about everyone has likes and dislikes. If meals will be served in homes, have you asked about preferences, food allergies, etc.?*
5. **Have you asked about when your guest would prefer to eat?**
6. **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 according to his/her personal schedule. If your guest stays in a home, the most important consideration is a private bathroom. Be sure to show him/her where extra towels and washcloths are kept.*
7. **Have you asked if your guest would 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.*
8. **Have you asked what your guest would like to do during the times when he/she is not speaking?** *Your guest may prefer to rest or work, but might enjoy alternatives you suggest. Ask if there are any local sights he/she would like to see, whether bookstores are of interest, or something else.*
9. **Have you remembered those left behind?** *Arrange to have a "Thank you for sharing your husband/wife" (perhaps just a card). Sometimes a simple, tangible remembrance can be given to your guest to take to their spouse. Just make sure they have room in their luggage.*

10. **Finally, because everyone is different, it's always a wise policy to ask all of your guests in advance, "Do you have any special requests?"**

What can a church expect from a guest speaker?

1. A guest speaker must come to the host church with the mindset to leave a deposit. It's better to give than receive.
2. A guest speaker must always submit to the leadership of the host church.
3. All times of ministry should be flowing in the same spirit as that of the host church.
4. A guest speaker should be sensitive to time and schedule. Be on time and ask when ministry should begin and conclude.
5. A guest should dress appropriately. Ask, never presume or assume.
6. Inform the host church of audio/visual needs, if applicable.
7. Seek to connect to the leadership, not just blow in and blow out.
8. Inform the host church of your needs ahead of time so they can be aware and prepared for your visit.
9. Send a thank you note after returning home.
10. Be willing to go the extra mile.