



# How to overhaul your chapter guest night

**M**y favorite show is a Discovery Channel series called "Overhaulin'." The premise is that some guy's wife, brother, mother, calls the show, and the "Overhaulin'" folks come steal the guy's classic car. In one week, his once-great bucket-o' bolts receives thousands of dollars in upgrades—custom paint, new wheels, new or refurbished engine, upholstery, stereo—until it's a masterpiece.

Many of our chapters need to be overhauled—they are like a once-great vehicle that can and should be restored to its original luster. Preparing some second-to-none guest nights is not only fun and a great recruiting tool, but your preparations can help bring some "overhaul" benefits that last long after such a night is over.

In many trips to districts and many hours of round-tables, I have come up with what I call the hook factor, a way of making sure the guest experiences a dynamite, fun time and gets his "singing jones" on.

## 1. Set your house in order, figuratively and literally.

Get the place taken care of physically. You wouldn't have guests over to your house and expect them to "understand" your stuff piled in the corner. Clean the place up; work hard to make your meeting hall the most appealing and warm place for the guest to feel welcome. Is the rehearsal spot easy to find? Is it appropriately signed for visitors? Do you have guest books? Are all the songs in the book? Are they legal copies? Does the book look good and is it easy to navigate? Are the chairs comfortable? Are your members' attitudes accommodating?

You also need to get your house in order figuratively. What do we offer our guests when they walk in the door? What environment, what culture does the guest experience within three minutes of his arrival? When the guest walks through the door late, is the director's back to him? If so, is there a welcoming committee that makes him feel welcome with a handshake and a smile? I suggest that the environment needs to be full of all the things you're trying to attract. Camarade-

rie, fellowship, fun, and music need to be at the core of what you do on guest nights.

This is by far the hardest of the steps, and that's why I have it listed first. It means having established goals, a direction for the chapter to move and to show its best face. You will have to analyze and plan

how to create the electric environment of enthusiasm that is paramount to having effective guest nights. Otherwise, you might as well invite guys to join you to play cards.

***It means having established goals, a direction for the chapter to move and to show its best face. Otherwise, you might as well invite guys to join you to play cards.***

## 2. Pull out all the stops. Make guest nights a party for everyone.

Show young, cool barbershop as well as smooth, classic barbershop—blow away any preconceptions they may have brought with them. If you have access to an exciting live quartet (inside or outside the chapter), invite them to perform a short set. If no such quartet is available and

your chapter quartets are more average, show a Top 20 Chorus and/or Quartet contest video. At some point in the evening, show the great Society-published DVD, *Singing is Life*. (The way you introduce this video is key. Be sure they know there is plenty of room in your chapter for men of lesser talent and more time constraints than the men featured on the video!)

Some more activities for a party environment:

- **Tag-time.** Teach *simple* but ringer tags so that every man will enjoy these great instant success opportunities.
- **Get guests in quartets.** Not simply push-out quartets, or put a guest book of music in his hands. Take the guy by the arm (figuratively!) and put him in a quartet, unless he objects! Show your support and the fact that you'll be there for any notes he doesn't know or if he needs help in any way. His personal experience of barbershop is what will hook him.

- **Food.** We all love snack time. It has to be social time as well!

- **A music plan.** Set up by the music team and/or director. Easy, fun-to-sing things that the guest will enjoy singing with the chapter. Provide an experience that is musically satisfying to guests who have more of



**Drew Ellis**  
Manager of  
Membership  
Services



a musical background, without being too daunting to those with less experience.

- **Err on the side of fun, not militaristic scheduling.** Unfortunately, most chapters do the opposite. The key is atmosphere. You can move forward without feeling rushed. You can add variety without making it seem like the objective is to complete a checklist. (This should be true of every chapter meeting!)

**3. Create a hook factor: Get 'em in quartets.** Quartetting exponentially improves the chances you'll hook a guest. Taking the initiative to get the guy a quartet shows that you care, and it shows that you want him to have fun. In addition, if they are three singers who really know their stuff, then the chance is more likely that he will have a ball right from the start. Teach him a simple but ear-bending tag that will give him the unforgettable experience of "lock and ring" with his own voice contributing to the overtones. If he's not entirely confident at first, have another member fifth-wheel on his part.

We want our men hooked—they need to finish the evening wanting more. If you can't create a hook factor with tagging, find another way! Perhaps his hook is camaraderie. Show the fellowship he can experience! Perhaps the hook is directing, or teaching, or coaching; but show the guy how he

can have his barbershop toast buttered.

**4. Follow-up.** This is the most neglected step in attracting guests because we know when the guest night is done, it's done. Not so! When the guest night is done, then the heat gets turned up! We call the guy, e-mail him, send him a letter or contact him however possible, and ask him what he enjoyed the most about the evening. Make sure he knows that we had a blast with him there, and want him to come back. Doing this isn't pestering him—it's making sure he understands that he's wanted and needed. After all, in addition to wanting an outlet for his music, he wants a place where everybody knows his name.

Have you noticed that most of the elements of a good guest night are the needed elements of every chapter meeting? What your guests need to see is the same thing your chapter members want! Use everything you learned at your guest night and apply it every week!

There are many tools on the Society's website under [www.barbershop.org/Tools](http://www.barbershop.org/Tools) > *Membership* > *Show All* that can help you take your chapter to the next level. ■

## Low-hanging fruit

If you plan to send a mailing that invites people to your guest night, Society HQ can provide addresses of former members. I asked for former members within a 75-mile radius of our home base and got a listing of 697 names and addresses! (Of course, not all addresses were current. The more years that had passed since a man was active, the more likely his address had changed or he had passed away.) Several of our veteran members whittled that list down to 420. A 5 percent response to a mailing is considered excellent, and that's about what we got. Some have already returned as members. Others we're still working on.

Another source for potential members is *ebiz.barbershop.org*. The roster for the Frank Thorne at-large chapter is a list, by district, of barbershoppers not currently involved with an active chapter. These people have chosen to continue their membership in the Society and just might be ready to enjoy the many benefits of being in an active chapter. We've recently "resurrected" two outstanding barbershoppers and we're working on a few more. It's certainly worth a try.

— Sam Tweedy, Central Texas Corridor (Heart of Texas Chorus)

**Your Society membership offers you special pricing with Hertz!**

**Hertz®**

For details, visit [www.barbershop.org/hertz](http://www.barbershop.org/hertz)

**PASADENA MIDWINTER CONVENTION**

WHERE ELSE CAN YOU SEE THE

**TOP FIVE**

MEDALISTS PERFORM IN A SHOW SETTING?

**PASADENA**

Midwinter 2009

January 25 - February 1, 2009

[www.barbershop.org/midwinter](http://www.barbershop.org/midwinter)

[events@barbershop.org](mailto:events@barbershop.org) (800) 876-SING


