

You can't roast a stranger. You can't poke fun at a college education you know nothing about.

Thus the Roast Master assembles this document on the guest of honor and provides it to the presenters.

The Roast Master does not limit him-self to just the guest of honor when gathering background information.

He also speaks to the guest of honor's spouse and several close friends and colleagues.

### **Structuring the Event**

Typically, each panelist is asked to do 8 to 10 minutes of material. Given no control at all, some people would do 5 minutes, others would ramble on for a half hour. But what the Roast Master is after is a tight 10 minutes, with two to four laughs per min-ute. Thus, for each panelist, our goal is to assemble 20 to 40 great opportunities for hearty laughter.

When speakers get nervous they speed up, and it is the wise Roast Master who has an extra speaker or two on hand in case the event becomes overly abbreviated. This is why rehearsals are critical -- the panelists need to see where they can expect big laughs.

### **Behind the Scenes Genius: Writing for the Roast**

Now that you have decided to have a roast, where will you find all those funny stories? The secret is in good writing. Before

speakers speak, writers must write. Some times the writers and presenters are the same people. If they are not, they must work closely with each other. A key tool in developing each presenter's few minutes of humor is the Roast Profile Worksheet.

So, how do we get funny words on all those blank sheets of paper? First, let's ask around about Gene. Who knows some funny incidents which happened to the guest of honor? Or could have happened to him? Or should have?

Topical material can be created by reading the news and applying a bit of zany imagination to it. "*Gene needs this roast like Imelda Marcos needs more shoes...*" etc. (Hey -- come on, those are just examples, no one said they had to be funny examples.)

The key is to find material that you find funny. You may need to try out your gags on a few small groups of friends to make sure they agree with you. But the humor that will work for you must be material that you like.

### **The Audience**

The audience should number at least 50, so that you gain the compounding effect of a large number of people laughing. Hundreds of people laughing is awfully funny in itself.

### **The Roast Committee**

Writers, presenters, organizers, news media specialists, and others are all needed. All must agree to follow instructions and meet deadlines.

## **HOW TO ROAST SOMEONE**

**YOU LOVE** : A behind-the-scenes look at a special type of speaking event for the pro-fessional speaker, by Gary Beals.

Every now and then organizations feature a most unusual and exciting event: A roast of someone the group knows and likes. We've all seen roasts on television, or perhaps attended one presented by a local organization. What makes a roast work? What goes on behind the scenes and in advance. This article has been prepared for you, the professional meeting planner, to give you a better understanding of what works-- and does not work --at a roast.

*"A roast is a humor-filled public event which honors the guest (or victim,) while offering real, imagined and always exaggerated comments on this person,"* explains San Diego Humorist Bob Ross.

Successful roast presenters must collect and polish material which is both funny and rele-vant. The event should not run longer than an hour and a half. Material must be blended into a series of presentations by several different people.

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*Gary Beals is president of Gary Beals Advertising & Public Relations Agency. Founded in 1973, the agency has served clients in such areas as industry, retail, real estate, food service, agriculture, medical and non-profit human care services.*

*Gary began his speaking and training career in 1975 and has presented hundreds of programs across the nation and overseas. He has more than 25 years of experience in the communication industry.*

Bob reminds us that humorous material for a roast has a bit of a bite to it, often called the *mild zinger*. These are not really insults, but parodies of insults. There will be an illusion of friction, but it is all in fun and intended only to entertain. The spirit of the event is always sassy but positive. As Roast Master Joey Adams said years ago, “*If you can’t say anything nice – let’s hear it!*”

The roast recognizes in an irreverent way that the guest of honor is noted for his accomplishments, and yet has a number of harmless foibles and eccentricities (real and imagined) which can be exaggerated for humorous effect.

### **The Guest of Honor**

The guest of honor must have a sense of humor. He or she must be genuinely liked by the many people in the audience. We know that, like any guest of honor, he will have grace under pressure, panache and tolerance.

The program’s climax is the guest’s comments. Thus it helps if a few retorts can be tossed back at the roasters on the panel during the rebuttal. This moment in the spotlight is 10 minutes of rebuttal and revenge.

Early in the planning process, the Roast Master, must meet with the guest of honor and get his OK. Surprise roasts fall into the same category as blind dates — the opportunities for disaster are great.

The guest of honor is provided the same comedy writing support as the presenters, although he does not go to the presenters rehearsal, he does not know what material they are going to cover. And, of course, panelists do not know what his come-back comments will be!

### **The Roast Master or Master of Ceremonies**

The event must be planned carefully from its inception and kept moving. It is the Roast Master who is also the Master of Ceremonies’ (or MC) job to keep the pace and keep hecklers from derailing the pro-gram. Ideally this person will have experience, and a delightful sense of humor.

### **Getting Ready for the Roast**

The selection process for the roast panel begins with a few informal interviews. The Roast Master keeps an open mind and a flexible approach at this point. The starting point is people who know your guest of honor the best. After a few interviews, the Roast Master can make his or her decision based upon an agreement with each panelist.

Some of the salty material used by comedians gets an embarrassed laugh, rather than the full hearty laugh of complete pleasure. The latter is preferred and recommended.

The use of incongruity and surprise are two ingredients of humor which serve even the most sober-sided of panel-ists. “*Gene was always an advanced communicator,*” one might note. “*Why, even while Gene was a college Freshman, professors referred to his work as sophomoric.*”

### **The Responsibilities of the Panelists**

Each panelist is asked to do several things:

**1. Provide an outline by an agreed upon date** of what they would like to say during their portion of the roast. By requiring the outline at least two or three months in advance of

the roast, the Roast Master allows time to help panelists with weak or non-existent material.

**2. Panelists must agree to follow the in-structions of the Roast Master and the rules established for the roast, as provided on the roast profile sheet.**

**3. Panelists must rehearse their material on their own and take part in at least one dress rehearsal** with the other panelists and the Roast Master. The Roast Master must be alert to the big shot who never quite finds time to make it to rehearsals.

### **The Roast Profile Sheet**

This vital tool is prepared and distributed to panelists by the Roast Master. It contains:

- Details on the guest of honor’s background, employment, hobbies, family and other interests.
- Advice for panelists on what subjects are out of bounds or inappropriate. For example, if a close family member of the guest of honor had recently died, any jokes on death or sickness would be omitted.
- ‘Details on the theme and scope of the event.