

Best Practice #038, Show and Tell Sessions

Heading: Meetings

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“Show and Tell” sessions have become the highlight of our meetings. The reason? Members generally only bring items for public display and comment that they are proud to show off. As a result, at every meeting we exhibit a wide range of objects that provoke thoughtful responses and genuine appreciation – not to mention giving people new ideas to carry back to their shops.

Our usual routine is to assemble all the Show and Tell items on a large tabletop as people arrive at the meeting. This gives folks a chance to preview the collection and spurs interest and anticipation. We generally wait until all our business agenda has been completed before we begin the Show and Tell portion of the program. This is no hard and fast rule, but it just seems to fit best at that time – after the business meeting but before the demonstration.

At Show and Tell, one member picks items at random and holds each one up for everyone to get a good look. The member who made the object tells what he found challenging, instructive, or unique about the turning. The turners may talk about how they came up with an idea, or discuss the finishing technique, the design, the woods used, or anything else that they find useful. Sometimes the audience will ask a question or two about a technique or finish, but we generally take less than a minute per item in order to keep things moving and allow all the objects to be seen. If someone wants to discuss any items in more detail with the turners, they can have separate conversations after all the objects have been presented.

One key rule: Don’t allow members to do negative critiques of the work of others during Show and Tell. Everyone should be made to feel that his or her work won’t be held up to “juried” standards. It also should be understood that a variety of items will be shown, ranging from the work of beginners to veteran turners. Moreover, some items may be deemed less tasteful, elegant, or artistic than others – but sharing such opinions should be strongly discouraged. The whole point of Show and Tell is to get positive feedback and to encourage members to advance in the craft.

On the other hand, if people want to criticize something, they should feel free to bring in their own work as examples. Members who consider something a flop and want to discuss what went wrong can often generate a very useful exchange. They can tell what they don’t like about the work, or a particular wood, or the design or finish. That way, members can learn from the mistakes of others, and they still won’t feel discouraged to show their own work. If someone has the nerve to pooh-pooh someone else’s results, it’s best to quickly and diplomatically defuse the comment by pointing out something good and moving on. It’s useful to recall that old saying, “There’s no accounting for taste.” Everyone has produced items that they hated, and they turned out to be the first ones sold. That’s worth remembering.

One other possibility: Some clubs set up lighted display areas where each item can be digitally photographed and loaded on the club website or reprinted in the newsletter. Often that provides members with professional-looking photos that they can use to build their portfolios.

Submitted by: Gary Gronborg, Show Me Woodturners, Festus, MO
garywoodturner@yahoo.com