

Community Comment  
April 26, 2016

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

I had the opportunity to attend an out-of-county Chamber event in Petaluma a few weeks ago. The premise was much like our Humboldt County Chamber events—honoring businesses and individuals for their service to the community.

Unlike our local events, they had food and drink upstairs before the awards.

The awards followed downstairs in the big ballroom and seating was theater style. There were about 9 awards being given—starting with Best Customer Service (a gal from a local coffee drive through place) and ending with Citizen of the Year. I was there to see the Citizen of the Year Award as he is a fellow Rotarian.

Each award had a presenter who gave background on the winner. The winners were notified in advance, and they had a chance to prepare remarks.

After the first two awards, it became apparent that the speakers were asked to keep their comments to 2 minutes. Without fail, speakers—both those doing introductions as well as the winners--said “I know I had 2 minutes, but I have more than that to say.” Or, “I have my 2 minutes of comments but the others took longer than 2 minutes so I’m going to say a little bit more.”

Mid-way through the presentations it was already past the time we were told the awards would end. And, as I mentioned, I was there to see the last award.

One of the most flagrant offenders of the time limit, was a woman who did a very lengthy introduction and pretty much told us, the two minute time limit wasn't going to stop her from going on. And on.

Then, with five awards still to go, that very presenter got up and left the event. While the rest of us, who were there late in part because of her ignoring the time limit, were stuck. Her blatant disregard for the requested time limit was disrespectful to everyone in that room.

It's a different feel when you go out of town to an awards event and you don't know the recipients—or the presenters. I didn't have the good-natured thoughts of “well, yes, Cindy went over, but that's just Cindy.”

I've had people attend the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce awards dinner in the past and say it ran too long—and I brushed it off as someone who needed to relax and enjoy the celebration of our local businesses—that the focus was on businesses that night and it was their day to shine, and don't be a grouch.

Here I am now—the grouchy one. And this is what I took away from the event:

If you are asked to keep your time to two minutes—please keep your time to two minutes. Be concise and practice what you are going to say—don't say “um” so many times it adds an additional minute.

Event planners, have a way to graciously end the speaker's talk. Tell them in advance what's going to happen if they go over their time limit. At the Oscars the music starts to swell. It's so they can end at 11 p.m. and the last award winner still gets their due.

This has been Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce.