

Ideas for a Successful Lodge Social

Sons of Norway Convention 2026

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Red bracketed lines are stage directions — not read aloud.

Opening

God ettermiddag, og velkommen!

[Pause. Smile. Let the Norwegian land.]

My name is Randall Sundeen, the current Vice President of the Norrøna Lodge of Van Nuys in Southern California. I have a quick confession to make— just like a lot of you here, the only reason I came to this convention is for the notorious Norwegian cookies.

[Pause for the laugh.]

Everything else is just a bonus. But since I'm already up here, as a real Viking worth his horns, I might as well make myself useful.

You see, I have belonged to more clubs, lodges, boards, and committees than I can count. I have served in my local Kiwanis Club for 28 years, long enough to once serve as its Club President. And I have been a member of Sons of Norway for well over a decade. And I'm still waiting for my loyalty pin.

I have sat through more meetings than any one human being should be asked to survive. Some of them were wonderful. And many of them — there simply aren't enough cookies to make me stay.

Here's how I earned my very informed opinions. I spent forty years as a family lawyer. Forty years — four decades in rooms full of people who could not agree on a single thing. So, believe me, I know a little something about running a difficult meeting.

And when I look back on all of it, I realize I basically spent my whole working life in just two kinds of rooms: courtrooms and meeting rooms.

[Beat.]

And I'll tell you the honest truth — the meeting rooms were harder. In a courtroom, at least there's a judge with a gavel, and sooner or later somebody says, "we are adjourned," and you get to go home. In a meeting room? You are entirely on your own to make it work.

So, I've learned what makes a gathering work the hard way — one bad meeting at a time. And my hope this afternoon is simple. I want you to walk out of this room with a handful of practical ideas you can carry straight back to your own lodge — ideas to make your meetings and your socials more productive, more welcoming, and more enjoyable — even without Krumkake.

Productive. Welcoming. Enjoyable. If you remember nothing else, I say, remember those three.

And I promise to practice what I preach. We will start on time — we just did. We will end on time. And I will keep it moving. So, let's get to work.

Part One — Before Anyone Arrives

Remember that any event starts long before the doors open. First, promotion. Put it in the newsletter. Send an email blast. Get the word out on social media.

One quick question. Who among you here has a Facebook account? See, so Facebook is a fine place to start.

But here is the secret weapon, the one that costs nothing and works better than all the rest combined: personal phone calls. Especially to the members you haven't seen in a while.

Let me tell you about one of those calls. We had a member we hadn't seen in nearly a year. I picked up the phone, fully expecting an excuse. Instead, there was this long pause, and he said, "I didn't think anyone noticed I was gone." He'd been waiting — waiting for someone to ask. He came to the next social, and he never left again. That's a whole membership saved by one three-minute phone call.

Second, signage. A lodge should be easy to find. Put a sign out front and another out by the street. Fly the Norwegian flags — we do at Norrøna, and people slow down just to look. You can order a customized sign online for about twenty dollars.

Twenty dollars. That's less than the silent auction is going to pry out of you later this afternoon — so consider it a sound investment.

Part Two — At the Door

Now somebody has actually shown up. The next ninety seconds decide whether they ever come back.

You need a greeter — and listen closely, because this is the part lodges get wrong. A greeter is not the check-in table. The check-in table takes your money. A greeter takes

your coat and your nervousness. The greeter's only job is to make a human being feel like they walked into the right place.

Name badges. Temporary ones at the door for newcomers and guests — here, I brought one to show you.

[Hold up a sample name badge.]

And permanent badges for the regulars. And please — print them. We've all squinted at a badge where someone wrote their name in handwriting that looks like a seismograph during an earthquake. If I can't read "HELLO, MY NAME IS," it's not really helping anyone, is it?

Then — and this is the warm part — introduce newcomers to other people. Walk them over. And give them a seat. Never, ever let a newcomer stand alone in a doorway, scanning the room like they're looking for the nearest exit. Walk them in, sit them down, hand them to a friendly face.

Part Three — Running It Well

Organization. Start on time, and — just as important — end on time. Have a plan, the way a good teacher has a lesson plan. People can feel the difference between a meeting that's being led and one that's merely happening to everyone in the room.

If you must hold a business meeting alongside the social, keep it brief, and let people come late or slip out early. Respect their time and they'll keep giving it to you. Hold them hostage and they'll find somewhere else to be. And speaking of business meetings — hold that thought. I'm saving the most important lesson of the whole morning for a little later.

Part Four — The Heart of It

Now we get to the part that makes us a Sons of Norway lodge and not just any old club that happens to meet on weekends.

Begin the social itself with a table prayer in Norwegian, and teach it so everyone can join in — there's real magic in a whole room saying the same old words together. Many lodges use the simple grace, "I Jesu navn går vi til bords." Add songs, a pledge, a brief inspirational moment. It only takes two minutes, and it sets the tone for everything after.

When you have guests, do your homework. Find out their names beforehand, and learn their connection to the lodge — whose cousin, whose neighbor, which heritage. There is

no sweeter sound to a newcomer than their own name, said correctly, by someone who clearly expected them.

Then the meal. Prepared or potluck, both work — but always, always thank the cooks, and thank them by name. The people who feed a lodge are the ones who hold it together, and they should hear it out loud. They should wear that honor with pride.

And in the summer, take the meal somewhere new — a park, a member's garden, the lake. A change of scenery does a lodge a world of good.

Build in a cultural moment. You can print something straight from the Sons of Norway website — a story, a recipe, a bit of history. Or, even better, ask members to bring in an heirloom or teach a traditional craft.

I once watched a quiet eighty-six-year-old woman bring in her grandmother's butter mold from the old country. She'd barely spoken at a meeting in years. That night, she talked for ten minutes, and not one of us wanted her to stop. Everybody in your lodge is carrying a story like that. Your job is just to ask.

Part Five — Make People Feel Seen

People come back to places where they feel known. So, celebrate them.

Birthdays — bring them up to the front. Ask on the day, or go by the month. And sing to them in Norwegian. Let's try the first line right now, together; it goes, "Hurra for deg som fyller ditt år."

[Lead the line once, slowly. Let them try it. Laugh with them — this should be fun, not a test.]

We make a fuss for everyone, but for the milestone birthdays — eighty and up — we make a real production of it. By then you've earned the right to be sung to in two languages, and frankly, you've earned the cake too.

And let me tell you, we are blessed. At least three members of our own lodge are ninety years old or older. One of them honored us by being right here with us at this convention this weekend — our own Bomme Helga Österreich. Bomme Helga, would you take a bow?

[Gesture warmly to Helga. Lead the applause. Wait for it to settle before going on.]

Anniversaries — keep track of the big ones and celebrate them properly. Just recently, I had the honor of presenting certificates to two members of the Norseman Lodge over in Thousand Oaks — each of them marking sixty years of membership. Sixty years in this fellowship. When you see dedication like that, you make a real occasion of it: a

certificate in a nice folder, a pin, and a mention in the next newsletter or social media, so the whole lodge can share in it.

Recognition that lands twice is recognition people would never forget.

Part Six — Keep It Moving, Keep It Fun

A little fundraising keeps the lights on — a 50/50 raffle, some seasonal items, a silent auction now and then. All good. One rule only: keep the meeting moving. The fastest way to kill a fun evening is to let the raffle drawing turn into a forty-minute search for the lost ticket stub.

And the program itself — here is where I'll put my one big star. Give them something to discuss, something cultural, and above all, something entertaining. Make it interactive when you can; people remember what they take part in far longer than what they merely sat and watched. But — keep it on track. Interactive does not mean we wander off into the weeds for an hour. A good host is part cheerleader and part traffic cop.

Part Seven — The One Lesson

Now — I promised you the most important lesson of the morning, and here it is.

Not long ago I visited another Scandinavian lodge — a sister organization, good people. I went twice, because I believe in giving things a fair shake. The first hour was a business meeting. A full hour. Minutes, motions, old business, new business, the whole parade. And then — potluck. That was the social. That was the whole evening.

[Pause. Let it sit.]

I tried it twice, and I did not go back. Even if, admittedly, the potlucks were delicious. And here is exactly why that matters to every person in this room: a social is not a business meeting with food at the end. If people wanted a business meeting, they would go to work — they get paid for those. People come to a social for fellowship. For warmth, for belonging, for one good evening among friends. Never, ever lose sight of the difference. The business is the price of admission. The fellowship is the show.

Closing the Evening — and a Few Reminders

So how do you end a night well? Before anyone reaches for their coat, tell them about the next event — always send people home with a reason to return. Then everyone pitches in on clean-up; many hands turn a chore into the last laugh of the night. And close together with our words: “May peace and harmony prevail within our lodge.” It's a

small thing that quietly does a large thing — it reminds us we are one purpose, one fellowship.

And don't forget the follow-up. Get your guests' names and numbers, and — this is the part most lodges skip — actually call them. A note or a call after a visit says, "We meant it. Come back."

Let me leave you with a quick handful of reminders, rapid-fire. Mix it up — change the format so it never goes stale. Keep it moving. Hold a real induction for new members, and then give every new member a job. The folks who run twelve-step meetings understand this better than anyone: a person with a role is a person who belongs, and a job is the fastest cure there is for feeling like an outsider. Schedule group activities. Adopt a cause or a charity and invite them right into your social. Build a yearly calendar so nobody is ever scrambling at the last minute. And get everyone involved — rotate the greeters, share the set-up, let different people lead the songs. A lodge where everybody has a hand in it is a lodge nobody wants to leave. And of course, save your best cookies for the sweetest finish.

The Big Finish

Remember what we are really here for. Yes, there's some business. But Sons of Norway has always been about something larger — our culture, our community, and above everything, our fellowship. Our Order's motto is Freedom, Fraternity, and Progress, and our emblem is the North Star — the one star that always points the same direction, so that no matter how far any of us has wandered, we always know the way home. That's what a good lodge is. It's the North Star for the people in it.

So, here's my take, borne out of years in testy boardrooms, stressful family reunions, or even the most exciting lodge events, boiled down to one sentence. Run your lodge the way you'd run a home you're proud of: open the door wide, learn their names, feed them well, sing a little, and send them off already looking forward to next time.

Do that, and you will never again have to beg people to join — they will recruit each other. Remember: Productive. Welcoming. Enjoyable. Three words to put in your pocket, carry home, and bring to your next lodge meeting. But, please, don't forget those cookies!

Tusen takk. And to my Norweigan sisters and brothers, Skål! God bless the Sons of Norway, and God bless your lodges.

Now, let's bring out those cookies!

[Raise an imaginary glass on "Skål." Smile. Sit down on time.]