



The Importance of Puppet Team Record Keeping

By Tim Brown

Events occur that seem so significant at the time we think we'll never forget them. The problem is that all too often we do. We've had puppet meetings where my thought was "I'll always remember this." The thing is; years later, I don't.

That's taught me the value and importance of keeping accurate records. They not only help you remember significant events, but allow you to track your progress, keep record of your successes and failures, and give direction for your ministry or team.

During the years we traveled with our puppet ministry team, we logged hundreds of miles and conducted a lot of puppet shows. Most of that was before computers, so I kept records in a 3-ring binder. Unfortunately, in the process of time, those records have been lost.

What Information Should I Keep in My Records?

It's important to keep records, but what specifically is important to record?

- We kept track of each church, camp, or other venue including basic contact information, directions, travel time, and travel costs. With Google MapQuest and other similar sites, you can now print a sheet with all the travel information and keep it in a binder.
- We recorded each program, our specific program schedule, the amount of time we had, and the amount of time we used. That way, when we were asked back at a later time we wouldn't repeat a play and would better know how to plan.
- We recorded attendance figures as best as we could as well as any importance decisions or commitments audience members made.
- We also kept financial records: travel mileage, tolls, meals, gas, and honorariums.

Spreadsheets are a great way to track your team experiences today. Across the top row you can include the important information labels: Meeting Date, Venue, Type of Program, Program Time, Theme, Puppet Schedule, Meeting Expenses, Honorariums, etc.

Then in each column, list the programs as they occur. You can enter all the information into one basic spreadsheet which will mean multiple lines for each venue. You'll most likely have three to ten or more items in your schedule and would list each on its own line.

Another idea is to set up the first page of your spreadsheet as discussed and then use page two to record your programs. You could even list each play, what puppets you used, who worked what puppet, and any props needed. Then under the Puppet Schedule column, list the first item on your program and insert a hyper-link in it that goes to the full schedule on page two.

(If you go to the worksheet section of www.ExperiencePuppets.com, you'll find a sample reports in MS Excel, Lotus 123, and Open Office Calc.)

I've Recorded the Information; Now What?

Once you get the records set up and working, what do you do with them? Here are several ideas:

1. Review them before developing a new program. Look at previous themes and programs you did. Those that went well, you might want to redo as long as it's in a different venue.
2. When going to the same venue again, review the previous programs and mark off any plays you did so you don't repeat them. Occasionally, you may want to repeat a play if it is the best play that fits your theme and will add value to the presentation.
3. Review the spreadsheet several times a week and pray for the individuals who attended. Pray for those who made commitments—that they'll stick to them. Pray for the church or organization as they continue outreach in their community. Pray for additional opportunities to minister there in the future.
4. Use them to help gage your ministry. Ask questions such as:
 - How many meetings did we have last month? Was it enough? Too much?
 - How well did the programs go? Did we use our time wisely? Did we under plan and have to scramble to fill time? Did we have to cut a lot of items?
 - What impact did our message have on the audience?
 - What impact did our team have on the audience?
5. Use them as reminders of great things that happened. You may want to include a "Testimony" label where you give one or two highlights of the event. Then, during times of discouragement or frustration, you can review them and remind yourself why you do this in the first place.

Good record keeping is a great way to remember meaningful programs and performances, but it helps in other ways. I've listed a few in this article. I'm sure you can come up with more. The question is; what will you do about it? If your response is someday I'll get around to it, you most likely won't. Set a specific goal with a date to start or restart record keeping. It may seem tedious at the start, but it yields great dividends.