

Successful Tabling



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Introduction

One of the most important things your organization will do is “table”. Tabling is often the first impression an individual will get about your organization. If done correctly it will lend credibility and draw new members to your organization I am sure we all can think of one organization, fraternity, sorority, sports group or club that really stood out due to their tabling.

What we want is for that organization that stands out to be yours so that you can advance liberty in the most effective way. In short, tabling is an opportunity to shine or to be ignored, you can be remembered for years or quickly be forgotten. This short guide is designed to give you the tips and information you will need to make sure your organizational table is not only remembered, but remembered in a positive light.

Preparation and Set-Up

The first thing you need to ask yourself is “Why am I tabling?” There are many reasons to table, including introducing your group at an organization fair, distributing information at an event or holding a protest. Once you know what your purpose is you can more properly prepare for the type of tabling you are doing. This guide will focus on how to table at an organization fair where students will likely encounter your group for the first time. If you are interested in tabling for a protest, please check out the “Student Protests Handbook” put out by Students For Liberty and Bureaucrash, available at <http://studentsforliberty.org/college/publications/>.

The set-up begins days before the actual tabling event. First, you need people who are committed to work at the table. There will always be unexpected problems that arise that prevent people from showing up. You should have at least three people scheduled to work at a time, particularly during the transition times between classes. You should also make sure you call each volunteer the day of the event to reconfirm their attendance. An unmanned table will not get any attention; you need friendly people who are able to answer questions available. It may not always be possible to have three volunteers, in fact you may end up working a table by yourself for hours when starting a new group, but a successful tabling session will pay off in the long run for your organization.

After you have the people you need committed, you need to attain and organize your supplies. This should be done as soon as possible. Here is a basic list of supplies that you



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should have available. It is not all-inclusive but if possible have all of this ready to go several days before the tabling event takes place:

- Sign-up sheets that gather at least name and email address. This is the most important item you can have at your table. If you meet people and don't gather their contact information the chance you will connect with them later is very slim
- Table cloth, something clean and attractive to draw attention and distinguish your table from the rest. It can be bright but not overwhelming.
- Books, flyers and articles to fill up the table. The Students For Liberty tabling kit is great for this.
- An “eye-catcher”, this is something large that grabs people's attention. Having a colorful banner that asks an intriguing question, or displaying the political map from the Operation: Politically Homeless kit is ideal (the Operation: Politically Homeless kit is available for free at <http://studentsforliberty.org/college/groups/operation-politically-homeless/>). Some other ideas are games or a person in a costume.
- A camera to take photos with. If you have something interactive at your table like the Operation: Politically Homeless kit you may also want a small number of disposable cameras available for students to play around with and take photos of their friends using the interactive devices. This is similar to what some weddings do and will free up the people working at the table to talk with students when things get busy without sacrificing photo opportunities.



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Examples of Successful Tables

Pepperdine College Libertarians – Fall 2010

At the beginning of the Fall semester in 2010, the Pepperdine College Libertarians tabled at their university using supplies from Students From Liberty and the Operation: Politically Homeless kit. As you can see, the students used a large banner that simply asked, “Are you politically homeless?” with an intriguing diagram next to it. They also have a table filled with booklets, an attractive tablecloth and a sign-in sheet attached to a clipboard. This type of table will draw people over and encourage students to ask questions if they are interested but also provides a lot of reading material if students are more comfortable browsing.



Florida Liberty Summit – Summer 2010

In the summer of 2010, several students representing a variety of groups in Students For Liberty's network attended the Florida Liberty Summit. The table shows how just a small strip of cloth like a yellow banner can make the table stand out compared to other groups. While not everyone will have a custom cloth, anything that sets your table apart is beneficial. Many of the items on the table are available from Students For Liberty to help make the table look full and attractive. Again, the sign-up sheet attached to the clipboard is easily accessible.



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Student Discussions

During your time at the table you will be pulled into a variety of conversations about your group, what they stand for, and how they compare to other groups on campus. It is important to always remain calm and professional. You are there to sell your group, and the best way to do that is to find out about the students you are talking to. Each student is different and there are a variety of passions that libertarianism provides a strong moral and practical stance on. Once you find out what people are interested in, make sure you know the actual end they are pursuing.

For example, very few people see government run healthcare as a good in and of itself. They see it as a way to get affordable, quality healthcare for more people. The best way to discuss this is not to attack government run healthcare but to explain libertarians also want the highest quality healthcare possible for the most people and we think the market provides that more efficiently. Show them that our means are the best way to get to their ends. No individual will be able to know enough to answer everyone's questions and it is okay to admit that. It is better to tell someone that you don't know the answer but you would like to discuss the issue with them when you are more informed, or you would like to provide them with some readings, than to get aggressive or try to make something up.

You will likely face aggressive and skeptical people while tabling. Some of them will be openly hostile and unwilling to listen to you. That is not necessarily a bad thing. You may not convince them, but you can still convince the audience. First, if you and the hostile debater are directly in front of the table, move the conversation over to the side. That way you will not prevent other passersby from approaching the table. During the discussion let the other person come off as aggressive while you remain calm and collected. Be seen by the people watching and listening as the rational one who is willing to listen and discuss the issues honestly. Also, if you have the opportunity, read "Secrets of Libertarian Persuasion" by Michael Cloud. This book has over 70 chapters that are 2-3 pages each discussing how to talk about libertarian principles with people. Each chapter is short enough to read in a couple of minutes and the techniques can be practiced instantly. Of course, if a debate is dragging on and taking your valuable tabling time, don't be afraid to respectfully cut the conversation off by asking for the other person's contact information so you may continue the conversation later.

Finally, be friendly and proactive. Do not just sit behind the table and wait for people to



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come to you. Stand in front of it and greet students as they walk by. Be friendly, smile, and shake their hands when they approach. Your body language will go a long way to setting the stage for a good conversation and getting them interested in your group. Remember that you are selling the ideas of liberty and your organization, so you have to present a positive and welcoming face for the new people you make.

Follow-Up

After the event is over there is still some work to do. It is imperative that you get back to anyone who signed up on your sign-in sheet within 48 hours. Even if it is just a quick email thanking them for attending and telling them about an upcoming meeting this will keep you in their mind and refuel any interest they might have had in your group. Include in the email your contact information and an invitation to ask any questions they might have about your group. If you had a person ask a question that you didn't have an answer to this is the time to answer that question or direct them to some reading materials that better explain it. Use this follow-up opportunity to identify future leaders or passionate people and send them a personalized email explaining what your group has to offer and the exciting events that will be coming in the future at your school and in your region.

Finally, get more supplies and prepare for the next opportunity to table. Contact Students For Liberty and other libertarian organizations looking for supplies and advice. If you used SFL's Tabling Kit, any feedback would be appreciated so as to make these kits more beneficial in the future. Suggestions and feedback can be sent to info@studentsforliberty.org.