

Best Practices

Things are called best practices when they have been proven over time to be superior to any other practices. Debate tournaments mix teenagers and competitive coaches and baffled parents and over-eager college students and all other manner of humanity. Best practices are those that make all of these people as happy as possible.

One thing to keep in mind about tournament attendees is, like just about everyone else in the universe, they do not like change. Like just about everyone else in the universe, they especially do not like change that is not to their benefit, while if change can be demonstrated to, in fact, be to their benefit—making their life easier or better—they will quickly embrace it.

Keeping your tournament customers happy mostly means adjusting to a user-based mentality, doing not what you think is best but what your customers think is best. If you're going to do something different from other tournaments, even if you know empirically that it's better for your customers, the question you have to ask is whether your customers will know this and understand it and embrace it. If your tournament is the one with Unique Procedure #72, which you know makes for a better tournament but which no other tournament embraces and which means getting your customers to do things differently than they've done them at every other tournament, you might want to reconsider.

It's probably worth noting that, while the debate community is conservative in many ways—in the rounds themselves, in the material presented, in the styles of presentation, in everything from the minute people walk into the room to the minute they walk out—all conservative bets are off. In debate, change is dynamic and exciting and demanding, and it's intrinsic to the activity. High school students studying complex new ideas in a world where

new ideas are presented every day leads to nonstop evolution. The LD and Policy and even the PF of today is almost unrecognizable compared to the same events 5 or 10 years ago. This is a good thing. It is also not much in the Tournament Director's control. Perhaps this environment of dynamic change makes it even more important that the structures of a tournament are fixed and maximized. A round taking place in a custodian's closet is a bad idea today, and it was a bad idea 5 or 10 years ago. Some things don't change. Some things do. A good Tournament Director can distinguish among them, and act accordingly.