



AHA Guide to EFFECTIVE TABLING



PRE-SHOW!

Logistics are an integral part of the tabling process. First and foremost, you have to find out some details about the actual event itself before you arrive:

- The who, what, why, how, and where are all important questions to ask throughout the process.
- What event are you tabling?
- Why are you tabling at this event - a.k.a., what is your purpose?
- How many people are expected to attend?
- Who is your audience? Who are your volunteers? Who is in charge?
- Where will you be tabling? Inside or outside? Where will your table be?

What event are you tabling? What should you bring?

- Is this a conference? A community event? A PRIDE festival? Understanding the event will help you tailor the experience for your audience. This will also help you prepare.
- People like to see colorful tables that are aesthetically appetizing. Suggestion: bring any and all materials you have so you're prepared for anything. Banners, tablecloths, buttons, pens, fliers, business cards, t-shirts, free promotional materials, etc.
- Bring a sign-up sheet. There may be people who are interested, but don't want to talk — accommodate them with a sign-up sheet so they can write and go.

- Get some raw numbers so you know how much stuff to bring. What's the demographic? What percentage of the attendees will be humanists? Members of the AHA? Really religious? Knowing what your audience make-up is will help you plan what to bring and how much of it to bring. If everyone attending your event is already a member of the AHA, you might not need a lot of brochures about humanism. More buttons would be needed in this instance - more shwag for them to wear their humanism loud and proud.
- Make sure you know if a table and chairs will be provided.
- Check ahead of time to see if there is wifi for a laptop, should you choose to bring one.
- **Water.** Bring water for you AND your volunteers. They're going to be talking a lot, so bring a jug of water if that is possible.

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- If you're going to be outside, bring sun-screen, a hat, an umbrella, anything like that!
- Bring snacks to munch on. Tabling is hard work, get your protein in!

Why are you tabling at this event? What's your purpose?

- Practice delivering the pitch before the event because you'll be giving it all day to both a receptive and unreceptive audience. Explain in about 30-60 seconds why you're at this event, for example: "I'm/we're here tabling at this event because... [insert reason here]."
- Once you have perfected your "pitch," you can tweak it towards your audience:

"Hi, we're here today representing the American Humanist Association. We're good without god and we want to show you how!" or, for local groups with a different name, "Hi! We're here today representing [insert group name here]. Our group is made up of non-religious folks in this community and we would love to talk to you about being good without god."



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION! Ask the event planner/person in charge of the event if you can have a space with **high traffic**. You want people to see you; be seen, be heard! Be punctual, but get to the event early as most hand out table space before the event starts on a first-come first-served basis. Check for lighting, make sure people can see you, and go for the space with the closest proximity to the main event - sometimes this can mean the front door or main staircase as well!

Who is your audience? Volunteers? Who's in charge?

- Find out who is in charge of the actual event. This may or may not be the event planner. You'll want to have their name/contact information on hand in case anything goes awry. Make friends with this person - if they're in charge of this event, they may be in charge of others - you'll want an invite to any and all events possible. Networking with leaders like this in the movement is a great way to integrate!
- Find out how many people are allowed to table at one time (meaning are multiple individuals included in the cost of a table)
- Learn who your audience is. Events and communities are somewhere on a spectrum of acceptance for organizations and their messages - you need to find out where this is on the spectrum. There are also ranges of the way people behave - some will run up to you smiling, exuberant because they found a like-minded person! Others may simply walk up to you and quietly express what they think; some may scoff at you; some may come up to you wanting an argument. Understanding your audience ahead of time will prepare you for all of these encounters!



Where is the event?

- First off, you're probably wondering: how do I figure out where to find events to table at? Good question!

- (a) Check the newspaper for upcoming events/conferences.
- (b) Google everything. Local calendars on the internet!
- (c) Stay up-to-date with Town Hall stuff so you're in the loop
- (d) Any event where other people are tabling, you can too!

- When you've found out where the event is, you can plan! Will you be inside or outside? Plan accordingly with your choice of clothing, and bring materials that can withstand the weather.

Volunteers

- Depending on how long the event is, you may need to have several volunteers on hand. You can separate them into shifts - normally 2-3 hours per person works best. Taxing your volunteers too much is never good!



1) You'll only want a maximum of 4 volunteers at your station - 2 for sitting behind the table and 2 for walking around the table. Having more than 4 volunteers can be 1) cumbersome and 2) off-putting to passersby. If you all look like you're having your own party, they'll feel like outsiders who don't want to butt-in!

2) Your minimum number of volunteers should be 2. If you're a one-person show, then you'll have to work it doubly well!

- Choose your volunteers well. Tabling can be arduous - enthusiasm is extremely important and having a positive attitude will get you through the experience with ease.

Now that you have your volunteers, here are some necessary preparations before the tabling event:

1) Sign up sheets. Once you've gathered the list of volunteers who will be working at the event, make a sign in sheet with their names and hours on it. This will keep everything neat and tidy. Additionally, you can have your volunteers fill out an "experience card" (these

are blank cards) where they can fill it out explaining what happened when they were "on duty"; what did they like/dislike about the experience, if they'd be willing to volunteer for something like this again, and what their worst/best stories are. Keep these cards, they will help you meet your volunteers' needs by learning what each one wants, as well as learning what your audience needs/wants.

3) SHOW UP! It may not be your time to run the table, but try to keep yourself free for the entire day so you can pop in to check up and make sure your volunteers are all settled, as well as be readily available to them.

4) REWARD THEM WELL! Your volunteers are working hard and are giving their time, energy, and love. On your "experience card," you could ask each of them what their favorite shop or restaurant is and then get them a gift card. If you have a small budget, you could ask what their favorite color is and get them a thank-you card decked out in that color. It may seem small, but taking the time to get to know them and appreciate them will keep your community active and happy.

ADVERTISE!

- Promote the event you will be tabling on any and all forms of social media. Example: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Meet-up, your website. They are the BEST spaces for advertising anything and will ensure a healthy on-line community where people can come and feel safe. You can get a head count for events, have dialog about what to do next, and have a sign-up sheet for volunteers.
- Advertise in the local newspaper, on-line community calendars, and put fliers up all over town. Your message can be simple, "Come and meet your friendly neighborhood atheist!" or "We're good without god, you can be too!"
- If you or a friend are speaking at the event, get them to plug your table while they're on stage and have the ear of the crowd.



SHOWTIME!



You've got your table, your volunteers, and your materials! Be the most effective tabler with these tips:

- Your table: must be aesthetically pleasing and presentable. Cover the table with relevant material and make sure it is neat and tidy. Hang your banner, put your tablecloth on it, and put plenty of materials on the table.
- Make your table look three dimensional. Brochure holders and magazine holders will really make a huge difference in the appearance of your table.
- HOT TIMES at the table! Most of your foot traffic will be in between event sessions and during lunchtime. Five minutes into an event, there will probably be crickets chirping. Make sure you're staffed during these hot times so you can get your message to more people!
- When tabling, remember that smiling is contagious not only for others- but yourself as well. Also remember to dress professionally and to not fold your arms (you are more inviting when your arms are not crossed).

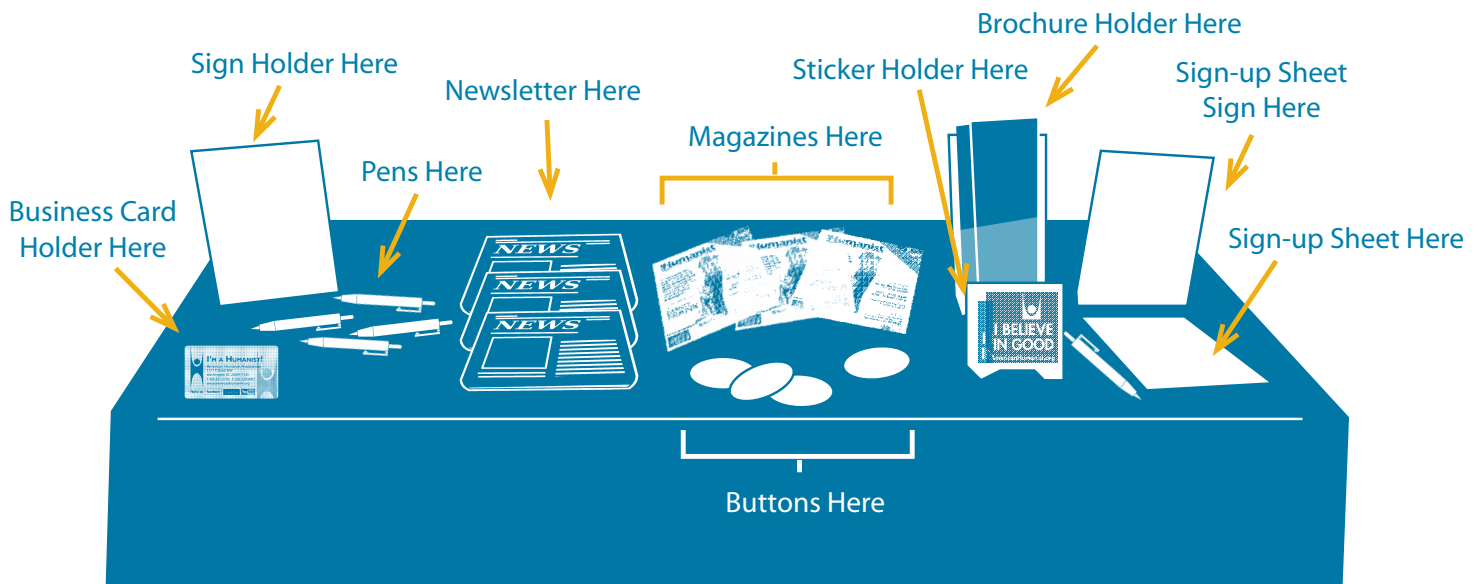
- Tweet about it, update the Facebook status, Instagram some photos — have that strong social media presence while you're at the event. Maybe some group members will stop by!
- Got your sign-up sheet (better if the sign-up sheet is on a clipboard)? Great, make sure there is at least one name already on the sheet. You'll want just the basics, name and email address. If you have a name already on the list, people will feel more comfortable signing it.
- Spinny wheels are a lot of fun and people want to spin them. It makes them feel like they're on the Price is Right. If you can buy or craft one, bring it to the event and put prizes on it. Spin the wheel, land on a free pen! Or spin the wheel, land on a free t-shirt! Have a catch, though. "Sign the sign-up sheet and spin the wheel!" or, "Join our group on Face-

book and get a spin!" It could be as basic or extravagant as you'd like. People will be drawn to your table - that's what you want!

- Try to have some Fun freebies such as pens, buttons, bookmarks and stickers!
- Have a concrete pitch - 30 to 60 seconds and use the KISS method (keep it surprisingly significant). The AHA, and any organization promoting the separation of church and state for that matter, does a lot of really great things. Pick something you feel a connection with and want to share with people. Use this in your 30-60 second pitch - focus it and share it with your audience. This may be different for everyone or it may be something you and the volunteers decide on before you walk in the door.
- Objections: Every event will have some objectors. Your best bet for dealing with these nay-sayers is to not engage (however rewarding arguing with them may seem), instead, politely ask them to sign-up on your sheet and welcome them to attend events

you host to learn more about humanism/atheism/etc. If they refuse to sign up on your sheet, they are wasting your time and just want to argue. Don't waste yours, be polite but firm. If things get rough, call your event planning pal - there should always be a contingency plan, fighting and arguing is not the answer.

- **I DON'T KNOW!** Say it! Say it! Say it again! Own it. You don't know everything, that's one of the things that makes us awesome. We know we don't know everything - remember that when someone asks you a question you're not sure of. Don't make up answers or guess, just say you don't know, have them sign up on your sheet, and have a separate "notes" column for the question they asked. Assure them that someone will get back to them.
- Wear it all on your sleeves. Really, if you can get t-shirts or hats letting your audience know who you represent or what you're there for, it's a great way to draw attention. Get some "good without god" shirts and wear them proudly!



AFTER-PARTY!

- **VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION!** This was touched on a little, but do something nice for your volunteers! Gift cards, coffee, anything you can think of. Personalizing it is best. Keep them happy and they'll want to volunteer for you again! Read those experience cards and see what they liked/disliked and tailor their next volunteer experience to that. Everyone really does want to help, they just need the right opportunities - you can find that for them and place them like shiny puzzle pieces to make your organization glow!
- Follow-up with everyone on your sign-up sheet. Send out a basic introduction email along with all your social media information. Try to have an event already planned within the next couple of weeks, like a meet-and-greet event to get the ice break-



ing! When people leave your table, you want them to feel like they got a contact high from you - ride that and they'll be more likely to attend an already-planned event!

Can't Get a Table Contingency Plan:

- If you are unable to obtain a table despite doing everything you need to do to get one, you can always hand out materials and talk to people outside the event. Find out exactly why you were unable to get a table and contact the necessary parties to remedy this so you're not left out again.
- If you know someone who has gotten a table for the event, you could ask them to support your cause by handing out materials for your organization. Maybe they only hand out one pamphlet, or maybe they dedicate half the table to your organization, either way is good publicity!
- Sometimes, events will have a "general information" table. For those who were unable to get a table, this is a great place to just drop some of your materials for people to peruse through and pick up as they wish.

PHOTO APPENDIX

SIGN UP SHEET EXAMPLE


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PHOTO APPENDIX

EXAMPLE OF GOOD TABLE LAYOUT





AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

1777 T Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009 • 800.837.3792

aha@americanhumanist.org

AmericanHumanist.org