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- the only way to schedule your meetings -

Ideas for Table Topics

This page contains a selection of ideas for Table Topics collected (to quote Dave Schneider - one of my many sources) "off the internet from Toastmasters from everywhere". The credit for the ideas must go to the Toastmasters and clubs from which they originated. My task was merely to gather them together and make them accessible. I have, wherever possible, identified the person who posted them before me (mostly to alt.org.toastmasters). I have also made minor changes to fix the odd error. If anybody feels their copyright is being violated, please let me know and I will remove the offending post. Please feel free to send me additional ideas to add to the list and point out any spelling or other errors. Other comments and recommendations are also welcome.

Anthony Shipley

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A recent Table Topic at our club was one of the best we've ever seen - our member handed out small plastic containers with cotton wool soaked in a scent - dettol, perfume, etc. and asked the participants what memories this scent evoked. One member said the dettol reminded him of boot camp!

A really worthwhile Table Topics and well worth a try.

Sandy Scott

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In a workshop on table topics I had attended a few years back, suggestions come to mind:

1. Have memorized ahead of time some appropriate quotes which can be applied to almost any situation. Using them effectively will not only start your table topics speech off on a reasonable strong note, but it will also give you some time to think and develop your topic more fully.
2. Don't feel that you need to start speaking as soon as you're introduced. (If you do, it automatically starts the clock and you're committed). It's perfectly OK to wait a few seconds (some say as much as 10 or so) to collect your thoughts before responding.
3. Remember that strong delivery and gestures can make the difference, particularly in higher level contests. I'd suggest that you continually volunteer to participate in table topics at each meeting when preparing for a contest, and even ask your friends to toss you some table topics questions outside of meetings to practice responding. Good luck!

Don Cogan

Clear Lake Toastmasters

I am a member of the recently chartered TechOrater Toastmaster Club (located in Columbia, South Carolina) and our past two meetings have been wonderful. Let me explain in further detail our past meetings.

- In one meeting, held the week when the Olympic torch was to pass through our city, our table topics master created a paper/cardboard Olympic torch. In place of the flames, paper "flames" were made containing different subjects about the Olympics. These ranged from the economic impact the Games would have on our city to why frog jumping should be an Olympic sport.
- Our next meeting was a "beach party." It ranged from name tags made out of paper in the shape and artwork of watermelon, Beach Boys music being played before and after the meeting and beach paraphernalia ranging from beach towels, balls and water guns spread across the whole room.

For the Table Topics, the Table Topics Master used the beach materials in the room as well as sea shells with subject labels ranging from surfing to nude beach colonies.

Well, these are two great ideas we have used. Hope this helps someone.

James Ellisor

TechOraters

One time, I used some threads from a few newsgroups - the clean ones :-). I read a posted message, a response post, then asked the hapless speaker to assume the role of the first person and answer the response.

I don't remember the exact topics - one was about censoring the Internet. The ".activism" groups offer a wealth of interesting discussions. Maybe the recent discussion here on DTM requirements would prove to be stimulating.

Jane Jude

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One idea someone else suggested during a discussion from a recent officer training I attended was to have the speaker pick a fortune cookie and use the "fortune" as the topic to talk about. Afterwards the speaker can eat the cookie!

Vincent Li

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We have a kind of gift exchange. A member picks a wrapped gift from under the 'tree' (last time it was a couch), or steals one from another member. Then the member has to explain why he (she) thinks this is the most wonderful gift in the world.

John Fleming, CTM

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On small slips of paper write out some unusual or very descriptive colors (day-glo orange, pea green, flamingo pink etc), make a list of questions along the lines of:

- Tell us why you plan to paint your house this color
- Explain why all your clothes this summer will be in this color
- Tell the person to your right why he/she should buy a car in this color.

Ask a Table Topics respondent to pick a slip and ask them the next question on the list. You never know what you'll get.

Hint: It helps to call on someone who is known to have a wild imagination for the first response. After that people will get the idea that anything goes on this theme!

Chris Copeland, ATM

Our Area Governor last year introduced our club to "Just 3 Minutes" to fill in time before the contest winner was announced. I'm not sure of the origins of this game. Perhaps other Toastmasters know and can also share interesting and entertaining fillers for when the judges are "out".

Rules for Just 3 Minutes

Two teams of three players are pitted against each other. The topic which they are to talk about is chosen by the Just 3 Minutes Master.

The team which is the first to speak is chosen by lot. The teams shall nominate the first, second and third speaker.

Teams continue to use this order until the time has been used up.

The winner of the contest is the team which is still speaking when the allotted three minutes has run out.

The team which is NOT speaking can challenge the speaker for various faults. When a challenge has been made by a team member, the clock will be stopped until the challenge is adjudicated by the J3M-Master. If the challenge is successful, the next speaker for the challenging team takes over the subject; otherwise, the challenged team continues.

Faults include -

- Hesitations - ums and ahs, etc
- Pauses - which are too long or too frequent
- Repetitions - of words or phrases
- Tautologies - saying of the same thing using different words - such as 'myself' or 'Next, following 'that.'
- Changing the topic- including not speaking closely enough to the topic.

If a player challenges unsuccessfully 6 times, that player cannot speak or challenge again, and the other members must continue without them.

We had a lot of fun with Just 3 minutes. At times I stopped dead when I realized I had repeated myself and was waiting for a challenge!

Judy Murphy

Lilydale Toastmasters, Melbourne Australia

In Rooster Rousers, the Toastmaster picks a theme the week before, and the Table Topic Master simply tosses out questions that relate to the theme.

So, to invent an example, if the Toastmaster chose the Edmonton Transit System as a theme, all table topic questions would relate to the public transportation system in Edmonton, i.e., a typical question might be 'What would you do to improve the Sunday bus service?'

The number of times a request for table topics ideas is an indication to me that a large number of clubs do not approach table topics the same way that we at Rooster Rousers do.

John Fleming, CTM

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Cut pictures from the newspaper or magazines. Have the table topics respondent come up and pick one and tell the club what is happening in the picture. (Of course, no captions are attached to the pictures.)

Norma Whetzel

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Table topics respondents are given an unusual object and asked to tell everyone what it is and how it is used. As an alternate, they might be asked to sell the object to the club.

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Have an object in a bag that the respondent has to feel and describe to the club. The club then guesses what was described. Alternatively, the respondent may look at the object before describing it.

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One of my favorites is to have slips of paper with a saying or quote. The respondent has to explain what the saying or quote means to him.

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Give each person a "Dear Abby" question and have them give their advice. These could be made up by the Table Topics Master or real ones clipped from the advice columns.

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Have a book swap. Have members bring a book that they "sell" to the rest of the club by telling them why they like the book. After all members have had their chance. Each member bargains for the book that he or she liked best from the explanation. Everyone gets a chance to speak and to get a new book.

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Hold an auction. Have each member bring a "white elephant" from home to sell or come prepared to offer a service. Each member auctions off his or her item/service. This raises money for the club, as well as serving as a fun table topics session.

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Toastmasters has table topics materials in the catalog, including 2 sets of questions/materials for table topics. You might want to check it out.

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If there are people in your club born in different areas (and/or different countries), try this: "What do people think they know about your birthplace that isn't true?"

Dan Goodman
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If not, you're missing out on a great resource for new members - Ed.

"Suppose you could go back in time and talk to yourself at the age of ten. What advice would you give yourself?"

Dan Goodman
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Read a paragraph from different letters to the editor of your local paper and have the members respond with their opinions.

Doug Woodall
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We have a theme for each of our meetings, so one technique is simply to start thinking about the theme as soon as you arrive at the meeting.

Remember that a TT response does not have to be accurate, or even truthful in any way! It doesn't even have to be an answer to the question asked, although this should only be used as a last resort if you really are at a loss.

Another technique that's fun is to expound at length about you have no idea how to answer the question. You might try explaining why you were really hoping you wouldn't be called upon or what your fears were about answering the question.

Believe it or not, another thing that can work is simply don't worry about it. Don't over think or prepare; just relax, and if you're called on, stand up and start talking. This may sound ridiculous, but sometimes worrying about it is counterproductive.

Joe San Filippo
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We had been having trouble doing proper introductions of speakers: they were getting **so** boring.

So I asked the Table Topics Master to make up enough topics for the entire club and write each one on a card. I did an educational session on introductions and had each person write information about herself on a card. Then the Table Topics Master handed out her table topics, and each person passed her card with her bio information to the person on her right. Then, in turn, each person introduced the person to her left and her table topic, using the cards. Everyone got a turn to give a table topic and to introduce another person.

wordsupply@aol.com (WordSupply)

I ran a twenty-questions table topics session on Monday. Went down really well.

I chose five "answers" - A Pen, A cellular telephone, Encyclopedia Britannica, a computer, Information Technology. I put each answer into a separate envelope marked 1 to 5.

I asked the first speaker to open his envelope.

Then we played 20 questions.

When the meeting guessed the answer in the envelope, the speaker had to give an impromptu on the topic.

The topic was thematic, in that Information Technology is the concept that ties the four previous items together.

How to play 20 questions:

1. Elect a questionmaster (the TT master)
2. The Questionmaster (QM) has in his/her mind, a word or more than one word.
3. The QM tells the meeting how many words are in his mind. Also tells meeting whether it's animal, vegetable or mineral or abstract, and if the words contain the definite or indefinite article.
4. The meeting may confer with each other, and ask questions of the QM.
5. The QM only answers yes or no.
6. The meeting has 20 questions to guess the object.

Example:

The pen: mineral, two words, contains the definite article.

Encyclopedia Britannica: two words, abstract or vegetable and mineral. (the paper is vegetable, the ink, mineral).

Information Technology: Abstract, two words.

Erich Viedge
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A couple of ideas we've tried in our club which went over quite well.

1. The Table topics master has each participant pick out a fortune cookie out of a jar, and provide an impromptu response on the fortune they selected.
2. The Table topics master provides each participant with a very obscure (but actual) word from the dictionary, and the participant comes up with a convincing definition.

Don Cogan
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Another Table Topic approach I like is a variation of Win, Lose, or Draw.

1. Write a down a thing, idea, phrase, or whatever for each of your table topics questions.
2. Call up one person, show them the thing and give them one minute (or less) to try to draw something that represents that thing.
3. Then call a second person to speak for 1 to 2 minutes on what was drawn (they don't know what the thing you wrote down was).
4. If you wish you can have the audience guess what the thing was.

This is a fun way to add a twist on to Table Topics.

Victor Peters
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Table topics are my favorite contest, but it can also be a nerve wrecker because you never know what kind of question you're going to get. Here's one way to practice table topics and it works just as well for regular meetings as it does for contests:

Pick a topic out of the newspaper or something you hear on the radio (it may even be an idle thought that passes through your head) and create an instant table topic response. Make it a point to practice this on a daily basis.

You'll be amazed at how good you can get at it. And you'll have a backlog of material to draw on the next time you get called on! You may also find that you start to catalogue material in your mind to "save" for table topics.

One final piece of advice: make a point of reading the newspaper closely. There's nothing worse than being hit with a newsy table topic and you don't know what they're talking about!

Chris Copeland ATM
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Our club meets at a nursing home that does not charge us anything for the room rental. To show our appreciation to the nursing home, we occasionally collect money from our members for a donation. For example, last Christmas season, the club held two "auctions".

Members brought in an item from home - baked goods, small toys, handcrafted gifts, or whatever - and as part of table topics each member who brought things gave a pitch for their item. Then other members bid on the items and the money collected was donated to the nursing home.

This was a great way to collect money and show our appreciation - and it was gave a fun twist to a couple of meetings.

Nancie Ryan
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We had a situation today where the Topicmaster didn't show. I suggested we try a group story. We started at one end of the room and progressed to the other end.

It was a lot of fun. If you ever get stuck, give it a try.

Rick Davis ATM
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The Topics Master at our last meeting introduced some Zen-like topics, i.e.

- What is the difference between a stream, a creek and a river?

- Why is the deer on the deer-crossing sign along the highway always facing left?
- (And the all-time favorite) What is the significance of life?
- Why are we here?

Our club had great fun with these.

Sillamint

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My club has recently done a few unique table topics, and here they are.

- The first one came from the Toastmaster Magazine. A member brought in a box of about 15 items. When each person was called on to do their topic, they chose an item, and gave their topic about the item.
- One of our newer members came up with a really fun idea. She started by telling us she was in charge of Marketing at a new corporation, and was hiring sales people. She asked everyone called upon to demonstrate their sales techniques, and 'sell' the produce to the audience. She then handed them an envelope with an item in it. A few of the items were a pocket knife, a needle threader, and a 'Great Job' pin.
- At another meeting, we tied the table topic in with the educational program. The educational program was about how to answer table topics by rewording the question, not answering the question but asking your own, or taking the opposite side than you was asked. Each person who did table topics after this portion had to do one of the above. It was a great learning experience for everyone, and opened our eyes to new ways of answering table topics.

Sharon

Last Word Toastmasters

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Write words on small pieces of paper. Have each speaker pick four pieces of paper and make up a story using all 4 words. (You can also require using the "word of the day".) Variations of the word are ok (If the word is "microscope", then "microscopic" may be used in the story).

Dave Schneider

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FOOD

- Most memorable meal
- Favorite food
- Least favorite food
- Strangest food ever eaten
- Worst meal
- Strangest place ever eaten

Dave Schneider

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Spend a minute or so reviewing basic introductions. Then bring up each speaker and have them pull an object out of a bag, and have them introduce what they have extracted. (Vegetables work well...."It's MR. CARROT!!!! Please introduce Mr. Carrot as our next speaker." Not only do people get practice with introductions, but they get to take home a part of a salad.)

Dave Schneider

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One person speaks and another stands next to the speaker and performs all gestures.

- Working on street repair.
- The joy of dancing.
- Wrestling a bear at the State Fair.
- Demonstrating Tupperware.
- Rock Climbing.

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Discuss a weird place to live and defend the place as a nice place to live.

- Next to a nuclear power plant.
- In a swamp.
- Bottom of the Grand Canyon.
- Top of the Matterhorn.

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Use questions only while telling a story.

- Describe your first job interview.
- Your best vacation.
- The three little pigs.
- Goldilocks and the three bears.
- Washington crossing the Delaware.

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Start each sentence with a word that begins with a specific letter (first "a", then "b", etc.), then next person says sentence with next letter.

- Apples are my favorite fruit.
- Bananas are better.
- Can you believe what we are talking about?
- Don't you think it would be better if we spoke about Politics?

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Everyone writes down a secret about themselves that no one knows about. Each speaker takes one of the notes, reads it, and states who they think wrote the note and why.

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Put everyday stuff into a bag and let each speaker select an item to discuss. However, the year is 2525 and the speaker is an archeologist. They will explain their opinion as to what the item was back in the 20th. century and how it was used.

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The speaker picks a really bad movie they have seen. They then must persuade the audience to see it.

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Each speaker tells about a time (real or imagined, but preferably real) when they ran into a celebrity.

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Check out the TV listings to see what the current topics are on OPRAH or PHIL. Each speaker discusses the topic.

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*Editor's Note (For anybody in the **world** who might not know): The names are that of TVtalk show hosts :-)*

Interesting pictures are selected from magazines. Each speaker picks one at random and discusses what is going on in the picture. eg. A man is sitting at a desk reading, while another person is looking out the window.

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Each speaker picks a cookie, reads the message, and discusses how it applies to them.

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Take interesting articles from the weekly tabloids (Weekly World News is especially good). Each speaker is required to discuss and/or defend and/or explain the amazing things reported (Man finds green glob in closet...and it eats his dog)!

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Each speaker is required to tell an amazing story about themselves. The members then vote for each speaker as having told the truth or not. The speaker who fooled the most people either way, wins topics.

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Bring a camcorder to the meeting and pick members at random. Have each stand up, and, under the glare of the camera lights, grill the member about the "terrible" thing he or she did. Interview each member for 1 minute, then play back the tape.

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Have each member write down on a piece of paper, the job that **they** would consider the best job in the world for **them**. Then pass the papers to the person on the left. Call on members to stand and explain why the job on the paper in front of them is the best job in the world.

Dave Schneider
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Or the worst - Ed.

List a number of educational classes on a board. Each speaker picks one of the classes and explains why that class is the most important class to take to round out an education. Once used, the class is "removed" from the board.

Dave Schneider
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Make a list of "accomplishments" (best underwater basketweaver, best nuclear power plant designer, best TV remote control switcher, etc.) and print them on pieces of paper. A speaker selects the award and must "award" it to another member. That member must get up and "accept" the award.

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Collect some products off the grocery shelf or hardware store. Each TT speaker selects one of the items out of a bag and has to do a TV commercial on that product.

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We're all toastmasters. Select an appropriate setting for each speaker, then let them make an appropriate toast for the occasion. eg.

- You're at your high school reunion. You are asked to give a toast to one of your favorite teachers who is now deceased.
- You are at a political meeting in town. A visiting US Senator from your party is at the meeting and you are asked to make a toast to the Senator.
- Your next door neighbors are celebrating their 25th Wedding Anniversary. You are asked to make a toast to them.

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Each person would be given one line and would have to weave a story from it. Here are a dozen different story lines to use:

The Impromptu Murders

- It was a dark and stormy night as lightning flashed through the window pane.....
- When the guests heard the noise they stumbled down the hallway only to discover....
- The police arrived and asked everyone to....
- Fearing for my own safety I told the Police, "I couldn't have done it because I....."
- Seeing that now was the right time, the butler stepped forward and declared.....
- Old Mrs. Marple didn't think anyone knew about her relationship with the deceased. I then stood up and told the group.....
- Gasping for breath and holding her throat, the maid stumbled into the drawing room....
- It was then that the front door burst open and who should step in but....
- "No!", I cried. "It was I who did it, for you see the dead man was my....."
- Surprising everyone, the dead man picked himself up off of the floor, looked around at the gathering and said.....
- Just when all had felt the mystery solved, the light went out.....
- The policeman then stepped forward and announced to the guests, with a big smile on his face....

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The meeting closest to Valentines Day: The Topics Master brought red carnations. Pairs of people were asked to participate instead of individuals. The first man was asked to play the role of Ceasar and give the carnation to 'Cleopatra' along with a suitable declaration of love. 'Cleopatra' then had to reciprocate and present a carnation to him. Other pairs were 3rd graders who constantly tormented each other, but secretly liked each other. A couple just celebrating their 50th valentine's day together, a father to his very young daughter, etc.

Dave Schneider
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Another meeting, the Topics Master asked everyone to sit on the floor in the center of the room, or on chairs brought to the center. All the lights were turned off and a flashlight was used to simulate a campfire. The Topics Master gave the titles and participants told campfire stories.

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Presumably to get practice at closings, participants were asked to give the closing of a speech, briefly described by the Topics Master.

Dave Schneider
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We had an interesting time with a table topic based on those little round disks called "POGS". I picked out several of them with distinctive pictures, and said that each participant would be from a planet or country with a distinctive coinage. They were to tell us the story about why that particular image was inscribed on the coin. (i.e. famous character in history, notable landmark, etc.)

Dave Schneider
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We usually tie our table topics to the evening's theme. Last week our clubs theme was "Dealing with it." I pasted situations on the back of playing cards which ended with the phrase "Deal with it." For example: You enter a room and reach in to turn on the light switch. Suddenly your arm is grabbed by a six fingered furry hand which you realize isn't human. Deal with it.

Dave Schneider
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This week our theme was the "X Files" We had to discuss a scenario which was "bizarre"
For example: God has an infomercial on channel one.

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Once I gave each person a sheet of paper on which children had drawn weird pictures. Toastmasters were One Minute Art Critics and had to discuss the significance of the work.

Dave Schneider
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One of our good Table Topics was bringing in a bag of pennies and you had to talk about something that happened in the year that was stamped on the penny, or something you were doing during that year. Lots of fun

Dave Schneider
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