

Tips for Demonstrating

Or, more precisely...

Tips for Woodturning Demonstrations

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In this article you'll find some tips for demonstrators of woodturning "out in the field" so to speak. I don't mean demonstrating at club meetings to other woodturners. I mean public demonstrations at malls, craft shows, fairs, businesses, out in the street and galleries. Mainly, this is a place where I, personally, can come to in order to remind myself of what are best practices and what I've learned either by my own experience or by listening (yes, actually listening kids!) to the great woodturning demonstrators that have come before me.

1) Be Prepared

Bring everything you need and more. If you're planning to do two demonstrations, bring enough for four of them. If you're planning to make spheres, bring the equipment and materials to make goblets too because your sphere jam chuck may break or something else may go wrong where you can't make spheres. Always have a backup project and materials.

2) Don't bring too much stuff

This often happens when you're new to demonstrating. You keep bringing more and more things "just in case" (see #1 above) and end up having 3 boxes full of wood and all of the chucks, centers, and tools you own. By the time you get everything to your demonstration space, you're too tired to do anything! Not to mention that it all just gets in the way.

3) Practice what you are going to do

Practice your "routine" down to the last detail. Spontaneity in woodturning is a basic right and privilege that not many woodworking related hobbies/professions have. But, this is a demonstration. They're not going to understand why you're sitting there staring at that piece of mesquite because there was a "design change (opportunity)" when you accidentally rolled that skew the wrong way and you have a huge chunk missing out of that weedpot neck now. Or maybe you accidentally got your only spindle gouge caught in the spur drive and tore it up beyond fixing at the demonstration. You better know how to go on with your demonstration project with another tool. Don't get caught doing something new at a demonstration. You're not there to learn THEY are. Know what you're doing and do it that way.

4) Slow Down

This is something else that new demonstrators and, especially, younger turners do. Unless your audience is just a bunch of woodturners that you are wanting to impress, slow down everything. That means the lathe speed, your actions, and how you prepare or mount the wood. People want to see the process as much as they want to see the final product. That's why you're there. Otherwise, you might as well just have a display of your woodturnings on display. Slow down, talk to the people and explain the process. You'll find that it's more enjoyable to turn this way as well. It also forces you to think about what you're doing and presenting it to the viewers in the best way possible.

5) Where are your viewers?

We often get into the habit of sanding, especially, in all sorts of positions (or maybe it's just me?). On some projects, mainly smaller ones, I like to sand on the opposite side of the lathe from me. But, this is where the viewers are going to be. They can't see much going on with your hands in the way. Now, I'm not saying that sanding is the most interesting part of woodturning but the thought is still the same. Know where your viewers are and play to them. Don't get in their way of seeing what you are doing. If you're going to be mounting a piece of wood on a scroll chuck or on a faceplate, do it in front of them and not back behind the lathe where nobody can see. Again, they want to see the process. If you turn away from them too much, they'll lose interest and walk away sooner. Don't give them the opportunity. Engage them with everything you do.

6) School is NOT in session.

I've split this into two sections and is a big pet peeve of mine...

A) Viewers

This often happens with other artists or demonstrators at a crafts fair, for example, but it also happens with just ordinary passersby too. They are so interested (or just bored) in what you are doing that they will constantly bug you about what you are doing and how you are doing it. You just know that they are wanting to step behind there with you and have you give them lessons in woodturning! There's a fine line between demonstrating, educating, explaining what you are doing and it turning into a turning class. Many times, I am just as much to blame because of my desire and passion about turning. But resist the temptation and their attempts to turn it into that class. It does a disservice to the other viewers and to that person as well. You can't effectively do both at the same time. Be ready to offer your turning education services to that person or direct them to a local woodturning club or other place where classes are offered. They'll appreciate it and you can get back to demonstrating.

B) Other Turners

I've seen this happen when a woodturning club does a public demonstration before. What will happen is that either a club member will be taking a break from turning or just be there "for support". He'll not retire to the background though. Oh, no! He's wanting to show you, the person turning now, and the viewers (which is more likely his intent) that he can teach it to a slob like you now. It's the ones that don't want to actually help out and turn for awhile themselves that really bug

me. But, oohhhhh, they can certainly stand there and teach you how it's done! <grin> Don't be one of these guys. It's great to have support from the other turners either morally or by helping you sharpen your tools or getting things ready for you but don't give a lesson to the guy turning during a demonstration. It's not the time or the place for it. If you're going to turn ... turn. If not, then get out of the way.

7) This isn't your club meeting.

This goes very much along the same lines as #6B above. Moral support from other turners, especially your club members, is great. But don't just hang around to be hanging around at a demonstration event. This isn't your club meeting. This is for the public at large to showcase what woodturning is all about and to advertise your club. Having half of your club standing in front of the lathe(s) blocking the public view of it isn't good at all. Get out of the way! If there's nobody viewing the demonstration, THEN maybe have a person or two stand out there in order to get people to stop and watch (the rubbernecking syndrome I guess). At that point, the club members should fade back and get out of the way. If you're scheduled to be demonstrating, show up a little early just in case you're needed earlier than scheduled and to get things ready but don't hang around all day long.

8) DON'T show me the money!

This one depends very heavily on where you are and the reason you are there demonstrating. For club demonstrations at local businesses such as malls, home centers, trade shows, symposia and many other events such as some fairs, you and your club is there as a non-profit organization most of the time. Don't try selling things. Sure, it can be tempting when you have a person drooling over your latest woodturning but don't give in to that urge. You'll only risk hurting the feelings of your fellow turners or making your host (the fair, mall, business, etc.) mad! This isn't to say you can't offer to meet those potential buyers after the event or give them your contact information so that they can buy on your own time. Remember, this is a time to "sell" the CLUB or organization and not yourself or your woodturnings. Of course, with some club events, selling is perfectly acceptable and encouraged. If in doubt, check with the organizer from your club AND the contact person of where you are demonstrating.

9) Freebies make the world go around

You're sure to draw a crowd ... and a happy one at that ... if you give stuff away. I'm not talking, necessarily, about a raffle or give-away item that people sign up for and you draw for it later (although those are good ideas if you can legally do that). I'm talking about making things before the spectators' very eyes that you can then give to them. Kids love it and so do the big kids (ie "Adults")! You'll get people lined up watching you and they'll go away with a little gift that was handmade and done right before them. It amazes people! So, what to make? Something quick and easy is usually best. Things like spinning tops (with various colors are favorites), whistles, snowmen, spurtles, garden dibbles, Bic pen-insert pens, and basic boxes. There's all kinds of things

