

Introduce A Receiving Line

When you are hosting 60 or more people, a receiving line is the most gracious (and fair) way to ensure that guests of honor and invited guests have the chance to properly meet and greet one another. It lends an air of significance to your event and helps prevent the honoree from feeling monopolized, overwhelmed, or isolated. Receiving lines are also excellent tools for facilitating introductions when the university president is new or is hosting a function for guests he or she may not know. Here are some guidelines for properly managing a receiving line at an official event:

- Select an appropriate location. The line should form near the event entrance but should not obstruct the doorway or block access to food, the bar, or otherwise create a traffic jam.
- Keep it short. For a business function, keep the number of people who compose the line to a minimum. They should include the guest or guests of honor and the hosts. Regardless of whether the guest of honor or the university officials are male or female, spouses do not need to be included. The exception is when the honored guest is from out of town or from another country. In this case, the spouse can be included, and if so, protocol dictates the spouse of the host must also stand in line. Beyond this, the number of people who compose the line is up to you. Consider adding a few key people who are associated with the occasion such as a dean or vice president. But remember that increasing the number adds to the likelihood that the line will bog down.
- If there are multiple hosts and the event is large, it is acceptable to rotate those who stand in the receiving line.
- Make it go smoothly. A protocol officer, special events staffer, or someone else who is good with names and knows the guest list well serves as the introducer. This person stands at the beginning of the receiving line and greets each guest. The guest either says his or her name or gives the introducer a small card on which it has been clearly written. The introducer then guides the guest to the host who is the first person in line and makes an introduction. The introducer then returns to his or her place to greet the next guest. Simultaneously, the host introduces the people who have just been presented to the guest of honor who will be stationed on the host's right. After a very brief hello, the guests then continue down the line on their own introducing themselves and shaking hands with each person.
- There are specific rules for the arrangement of receiving lines when heads of state or other government officials are present. A good resource for handling this situation is, *Protocol*, by Mary Jane McCaffree and Pauline Innis.
- Keep it moving. Assign staff assistants to help move people along. Duties include encouraging talkative guests to continue through the line to the next person and preventing people from congregating at the end of the line and thus creating a traffic jam. Station a staff member at the

end of the line to "pull" people into the room by directing them to bars or hors d'oeuvres, and the like.

- Have staffers keep an eye on the length of the waiting line. If things are moving too slowly, these helpers should relay a prearranged, subtle signal to speed up.
- Because it is not proper to eat, drink, or smoke in a receiving line, locate tables or waiters with trays nearby so that guests can deposit plates, cups, or smoking materials before they reach the introducer.
- If the floor is not carpeted and you are concerned about people slipping, lay a skid-proof floor mat or carpet runner. Also, if many of your guests are older persons, consider providing seating by placing a small sofa or two in the area.
- Never assume a celebrity will stand in a receiving line. Such participation must be negotiated as part of his or her contract. If a celebrity does agree to take part, guests should not be permitted to ask for autographs as they go through the line.