Being President of Tech Squares

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Job of President

The President functions as a club manager, always assigning tasks, following up, and filling in where needed. It can be a big job if you attempt to do it alone. Fortunately, this is a wonderful group of people and they want to help. This means people will often ask you: “Is <task> being handled?”, “Has anyone volunteered to do <job>?”, and “I wonder if we should do <good idea>?”. Again, these people want to help. Assign them tasks, ask them to follow up with the appropriate officer, or put it on the agenda for the next officer meeting. And remember to thank them for their help!

This office is a great opportunity to get to know more club members. Some like to organize, some are good at being enthusiastic, some tend to fill in at the last minute, some generate good ideas, . . . and the list goes on. As president you get to work with them all to continue to keep this club running smoothly, so we can all do what we enjoy most about the club . . . dance!

1.2 Overview of the Responsibilities

The primary responsibilities of the President are to:

- Chair club meetings
- Organize and run officer meetings
- Delegate tasks to run the club
- Keep the club informed of happenings
- Appoint Caller/Cuer Liaison

2 After the Election, Before Taking Office

Congratulations! You have been elected President and are in charge of keeping the club running smoothly for the next year.

Even before you officially take office there are things to do!

2.1 Officers’ Email List

One of the first things that will happen after elections is you and the other elected officers will be added to the officers’ mailing list. This will allow you to get up to speed in the coming month or two before you actually take office. The outgoing President will make sure this happens.

2.2 Officer Description Documents

Each officer should read the officer description document for their own office. You should ensure that each new officer is aware that an officer description is available for their office. You are reading the one for your office and should at
least browse through the sections, but you are also welcome to look at the ones for the other positions. These documents should contain at least the highlights of what each position entails.

2.3 Presidential Successor

You need to appoint a successor from among the other elected officers. Since this club doesn’t have a Vice-President position, this is how the issue of succession is resolved. Your successor will take your place as President in the event you are no longer willing/able to hold the office. This person will be in charge until a new election can be held and will also most likely run the election for your replacement. This person could also be asked to fill in during your absence (if you were on vacation, for example), so it is important to choose the officer you feel will make the best decisions for the club in your absence.

You can appoint this person on election night if you want, or you can wait until you actually take office, but you should wait no longer than that.

Announce your appointment to the officers’ mailing list.

2.4 Appointed Officers

The appointed officers, in addition to the elected officers, should be encouraged to participate in officers meetings and the general running of the club. Although they don’t get to vote during officer meetings, they should be encouraged to attend, voice opinions, and join in the discussions.

Unlike elected officers, who usually don’t stay in office for more than a year, appointed officers often hold the same position for several years. This means they can offer continuity to the group of officers. When filling the appointed officer positions, it’s considered a courtesy to ask the currently appointed officers if they are interested in continuing in the position.

The officer continuity is important, but needs to be balanced against officer burn-out. Some of the appointed positions are held by the same people for many years. Sometimes this is due to lack of someone qualified to take over the position. Be sensitive to this and consider pairing a less-experienced but willing volunteer with an experienced but burnt-out officer.

The elected officers, i.e., the Executive Committee, need to appoint people to the following positions. (Please see the Bylaws Article III for a description of duties.)

- Booking Director
- Rooming Director
- Banner Raids Director
- Archivist/Historian
- Members-at-Large

The Members-at-Large positions are special. They can (and probably should) be appointed for only a semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer). This is a great opportunity to get six different people involved in running the club.
2.5 Club Constitution and Bylaws

Announce the appointments to the officers’ mailing list.

There may be other appointed positions that serve as assistants to one of the elected officers, but they are appointed by the individual elected officers.

2.5 Club Constitution and Bylaws

The most up-to-date version of these can always be found on the club’s web site, http://www.mit.edu/activities/tech-squares/bylaws/. You are encouraged to read and reference them whenever you are unsure about club rules and procedures.

2.6 Other Details

Please be sure to get a copy of Tech Squares—Club Confidential from Stephen Gildea. It contains other details you’ll want to know and things you’ll need to do, like access codes, account numbers, caller/cuer fees and how to change the phone message.

2.7 Help the Transition

The months before and after the officers transition are the hardest time for everyone. The outgoing officers might be burnt out and the incoming officers are not yet sure quite what to do. You can help this by starting to get involved before taking office. Offer to organize weekly jobs or a Saturday dance, make a point of attending officer meetings, and, in general, attempt to understand how the club runs by helping out. The outgoing officers will appreciate the added enthusiasm/help and it will encourage people to see the President-elect pitching in with the work.

2.8 Thank the Outgoing Officers

The outgoing officers have worked hard to pass on to you a club that runs smoothly. Consider showing your appreciation of this at graduation night or before with a small token gift, card, or certificate of appreciation.

2.9 Get to Know the New Officers

The elected officers are the heart of the organization. You need to rely on each other’s strengths and accept each other’s weaknesses. Share contact info and talk about how best to reach each other. Some people are on email all the time, others only occasionally. Find out who tends to pass through the Student Center during the day and also when people are going to be away, especially during the Summer and Winter breaks. Encourage each officer to do their job, but remind them they are allowed to delegate and that you and others are always there for help and support.
3 Transition Meeting

This is one of the last officers meetings run by the outgoing officers. As such, it will be organized and chaired by the outgoing President. It tends to be a long meeting even with only transition items on the agenda.

The goal of the meeting is to cover “transition” items. This primarily means transferring information and access to the new officers.

Please see the Officers Transition Meeting document for more details.

4 When Taking Office

You and the other officers officially take office the week after Spring Crash Course graduation or June 1st, whichever is sooner.

4.1 Officers Meeting

Probably one of the first actions you should take is to have an officers meeting! (see 5.4 Running Officers Meetings later in this document)

You should address all the open issues identified at the Transition Meeting.

4.2 Review Membership of the officers’ mailing list

The officers’ transition is a good time to review the membership of the officers mailing list. You want the list to contain enough people to handle the weekly tasks without burning out the officers, but not so many that sensitive discussions can’t be held there.

After you take office, you are encouraged to send out a message of Who’s Who on the officers’ mailing list. This should include each person’s email address and reason for being on this list. This lets everybody on the list know who the messages are going to and who might be willing to help in a pinch. It also forces you to justify why each person is on the list. All the officers, both elected and appointed, should be included by default. If someone is not an officer, you should make sure they are interested in being actively involved with club business. If someone doesn’t regularly dance at our weekly dances, attend officers meetings, and volunteer their help and advice, you should consider asking that person to leave the list. You might remind people that being on this mailing list means we expect you to be active and help out a fair amount. Keeping the list to twenty people or less is desirable, if not always practical.

4.3 Caller/Cuer Contracts

As President, you will need to ensure the new contracts for the club caller and cuer are renewed. The contracts typically renew in May. See Tech Squares—Club Confidential for more details.
4.4 Locker Clean-out

Around officer transition time is a great time for the annual locker clean out. Some small group of organized people should look at the club locker with an eye to efficiently using our space. Make sure you have at least one person who has been in the club for a while participating and even then consider carefully anything you want to throw out.

During the Great Locker Reorg of 2003, shelf tags were added, which seems to have helped the setup and breakdown people keep the locker neat. In general, labels are a Good Thing.

4.5 Small, Yet Important Tasks

You need to assign someone to each of the following tasks:

- **Club Mail**
  The secretary should process the club’s paper mail, but you can help by making sure someone is appointed to pick it up periodically.

- **Weekly Announcements Sheet**
  Each week, someone needs to print out the weekly announcement email that is sent to club mailing list and bring it to the dance.
  We use this sheet as the basis for doing announcements during the weekly dance.
  It’s recommended that several people do this task. Having two announcement sheets is much preferable to having none.

5 While in Office—Presidential Duties

Great, you made it past the transition! Here are the duties the club expect you to perform for the next twelve months.

5.1 Keep the Club Running

The club’s first priority is to have a weekly dance. That means a room, a caller, and a cuer. Everything else is secondary. As president you need to gather information and delegate responsibilities in a way that keep things running smooth. Note that includes not over-using individual volunteers to the point where they burn out.

5.2 Communication

Communicating is the single most important part of being President of Tech Squares. You need to keep everyone informed and be available for feedback.

Keeping the general club membership informed is a big part of that communication. The more people know what is going on and have input, the more they feel like they have control of the club’s direction and feel ownership. The
5.3 Liaison to the Caller and Cuer

more ownership they have, the more willing they are to contribute. This club belongs to its members. Encourage them to help and give input, but most of all make sure they know what the officers are doing with their club and why.

There are several effective ways to communicate with the club. Email reaches the most people and the club has several lists to accommodate the variety of interest levels of our membership. Announcements during the weekly dances often more effectively reaches the “regulars.” And lastly, never underestimate the power of talking one-on-one or in small groups of people. You will be amazed at how much good feedback and how many clever ideas these conversations will generate.

Please read the section on Club Communication in the Officers Handbook and most especially read the section on Email Tips. Although that section applies to all the officers, it is most especially applicable to the President.

5.3 Liaison to the Caller and Cuer

You are officially the club’s liaison to the callers and cuers, however, you can delegate the task to someone else. The liaison should check in with them to see how they are doing and let them know they are appreciated. Establishing a good line of communication early will be helpful if problems arise later.

One of the best ways to open up this communication is to give them contact information. The caller and cuers all have email, but they may not read it every day, so in addition to email contact, the liaison should exchange phone numbers with them, preferably cell phone numbers. The phone numbers will be especially useful for last-minute changes and questions.

The liaison acts as the contact point for the club. The caller and cuers can raise issues about the club and vice versa. The liaison is also the person who gets called when a caller or cuer can’t make it on a given night.

If you delegate this task, you should be sure to check in with the liaison periodically to be sure everything is going smoothly.

5.4 Running Officers Meetings

Much of the running of the club is handled over email these days. It is still nice to get together for live discussions and updates periodically. Depending on the officers, this may mean meeting once a month or once a semester.

Pick a Date

You need to decide when to hold the meeting. You should try to choose a date when the most officers, both elected and appointed, can make it. Often it is simplest to propose a series of dates and times and let people tell you on which they can come. Then you just choose the date that allows the most people to attend.
5.5 Running Club Meetings

Book a Room

Once you choose a date, you should ask the Booking Director to book a room on campus for you. The Private Dining Rooms (PDRs) on the third floor of the Student Center are usually well-suited for these meetings. To encourage member participation, meetings should be held on campus, although a nearby, easy-to-get-to house can often feel more friendly and social. You can also try the Coffeehouse on the third floor of the Student Center.

Announce the Meeting

It is written in the Bylaws that the meeting must be announced to the officers at least 24 hours in advance. When at all possible, announce the time and place of the officers meeting to the club at large during weekly announcements and by email on the club mailing list. Make sure people know that all club members are welcome to attend. If there are particularly sensitive discussions, all but the officers may be asked to leave during the discussion, but this is rare.

Agenda

Plan your agenda by requesting meeting items from the officers’ email list plus items identified at the last meeting. You should create a plain text version of the agenda and send it out to the officers’ list a bit in advance of the meeting. The advance agenda reminds people of last-minute items to add plus it encourages everyone to come. You should provide paper copies of the agenda at the meeting.

Consider the meeting flow when you set your agenda. Include quick status updates first, followed by the hard, important issues. Leave the less important issues at the end where they can be deferred to a future meeting.

Running the Meeting

As President, you are expected to chair the officers meetings. You are encouraged to run a tight meeting. Stick to your agenda. It’s fine to encourage discussions and brainstorming, but curb gossip, rants, and off-topic conversations.

As a final note, you may encourage people to bring snacks, but avoid planning a group meal during the meeting. The shuffling of food is often distracting and makes the meeting take longer. You can always get together before or after the meeting for a social meal.

5.5 Running Club Meetings

Club meeting are held to discuss important issues, vote on large club expenditures, revise the constitution and bylaws, and to elect new officers. According the constitution there should be one held during both the Fall and Spring semesters (Art VI, Sec 2).
5.6 Hiring Replacement Callers/Cuers

The club meeting must be announced to the general club membership at least two weeks in advance (Bylaws, Art V, Sec 3). It is open to all club members regardless of whether or not they are voting members. Non-voting members are still encouraged to participate in the discussion.

Please see the document titled How to Run a Club Meeting at Tech Squares for detailed instructions on what the Chair (usually the President) should do and say.

5.6 Hiring Replacement Callers/Cuers

Sometime during your presidency, you will be notified that either the caller or cuer will not be able to make it a particular week. They are professionals and make an effort to be reliable, so often you will get quite a bit of notice, but not always.

You should first call the Booking Director to ask for help and advice. You or the Booking Director should start placing phone calls to find a replacement as soon as you can. Often there is an obvious substitute who should be contacted. For example, a few of our club members are professional callers/cuers; they often fill in. We typically pay the substitute caller/cuer what we pay our regular caller/cuer.

Since the pool of cuers is much smaller, we sometimes have to do without a live cuer. In these cases we use a “cuer in a box.” That is to say, we play recordings of one of our favorite cuers during rounds. For each night we use recordings, we pay the recorded cuer a small fee.

Assuming a substitute has been hired, you should notify everyone as soon as you can. You should send email to the officers’ mailing list (if you haven’t already) letting people know a bit about what happened and mentioning whether the substitute will need any help. Then you or one of the officers should email the club mailing list about the change. Someone should also update the phone line and the spotlight web page.

5.7 Last-Minute Room Changes

Occasionally MIT needs to relocate our dances at the last minute. These changes will probably be handled by the Rooming Director.

Once the room reservation has been confirmed, you or the Rooming Director should notify everyone as soon as you can. Start with the caller and cuer, who may not read email as regularly as most of our members. A quick phone call to them is usually considered a nice courtesy. Next, you should send email to the officers’ mailing list (if you haven’t already) letting people know a bit about what happened and if anything special needs to be done. Then you or one of the officers should email the club mailing list about the change. Someone should also update the phone line and the spotlight web page. (See the Officers Handbook for how to do this) And lastly, signs should be placed on the doors to the original room to point our dancers to the new location.
6 Preparing to Leave Office—Elections

After the Fall class graduates is the time to start thinking about elections, or, more specifically, candidates for elections. There are approximately two months to identify promising candidates and encourage them to run.

Here’s a sample election time line:

- **last week in February (two weeks prior to club meeting)**
  By now, the election meeting date must be announced to the general membership.

- **second week in March (two months prior to officer transition)**
  Election meeting

- **first week in May (Spring graduation)**
  Last week for outgoing officers.

- **second week in May (one week after Spring graduation)**
  Newly elected officers take office.

6.1 Identify Candidates

This is the time to think about those people who have shown a willingness to help and offered intelligent advice/opinions. We prefer students who already dance with us regularly.

As a courtesy, it’s nice to ask the current elected officers if they are interested in holding the office another year. The exception to this are officers who have held the same office for two consecutive years, or held any set of offices for three consecutive years. These officers should be encouraged to take a break for at least a year.

Concurrently, you should announce to the club that elections are less than six weeks away and the officers are looking for people interested in running for office. The number of people who respond to a general announcement like this tends to be small, but it starts people talking and thinking about running for office.

At this point, club members may step forward and express interest in running or at least want to know more what is involved in holding a specific office. You should be encouraging! Have the current officer talk to them, point them to the officer descriptions on our web site, and offer to answer any questions or concerns they may have. Often this does not happen for every position, so it’s up to the officers to seek out interested members.

Our current approach for identifying potential candidates is rather informal. Usually the officers sit down with the Fall attendance sheet and consider each person. The officers are discouraged from considering the very recently graduated Fall Class. In a pinch, however, many of them have made fine, if inexperienced, officers.

Once you have a list of potential candidates, as well as possibly offices you think they might be suited for, people should be assigned to talk to each potential candidate to assess their interest. And gradually a slate of interested candidates will form.
6.2 Choose the Election Date

Ideally, one or two of the candidates will have previously been officers. This is good for continuity but is not essential.

A week or so before the elections you should post the list of people interested in running to the club email list. In this email you should remind everyone that nominations officially happen on election night and at that time, any club member may be nominated and, yes, you may nominate yourself.

6.2 Choose the Election Date

The date should be as close as possible to two months before the new officers will take office (Bylaws, Art IX, Sec 1). This probably means mid-March sometime. Although it might be tempting to have elections coincide with an MIT vacation, so as to not interfere with the class teaching, we don’t do it because too many students travel during breaks.

Remember that you must announce the date at least two weeks in advance of the actual meeting just like any regular club meeting. And announcing it earlier is even better.

6.3 Election Night

Election Night is both an exciting and hectic night. We want the election process to be fair and to allow enough time for discussions, however, we don’t want to detract too much from the on-going class. This is officially a club meeting, but we try to not have any other club business to address during this meeting in order to keep it as short as possible. The membership will want to spend some of their night dancing.

Since this is a class night, you are encouraged to hold the meeting out in the hall or other space, so the class can continue to learn during the meeting, albeit without angels. Since the class members are not yet club members, they do not need to participate in the meeting.

For details of how to actually run an election, please see the document named How to Run an Election at Tech Squares. It can be found on the club’s web site, http://www.mit.edu/activities/tech-squares/howto/.

7 After Elections, Before Leaving Office

Your year is almost over, but it’s not yet time to rest on your laurels. You need to make sure the club leadership is ready to be handed over and to make sure the newly-elected officers are ready for the hand-off.

7.1 Helping the Newly Elected Officers

Send an email message to the officers’ mailing “-request” list asking that all new officers be added to the officers’ mailing list. Having the elected officers aware of club happenings prior to taking office helps the transition when it happens.
7.2 Update the President’s Officer Description

In addition, help to get them more involved in the final two months. They should be encouraged to attend the remaining officers meetings and help with jobs.

Think back on what advice you wished someone had told you and share it with the new President-elect. You’ve been in charge for almost a year now and probably have most of the details figured out. Help the new President learn from your experiences.

7.2 Update the President’s Officer Description

Take some time to think about what worked and what didn’t work during your presidency. Try to capture that knowledge in updates to this document.

Remember this document will be around for many years to come, so phrases like “until recently” or “for the last two years” will not stay accurate for long. Try to reference time by giving the semester and year like “starting in the Spring of 2003.”

Send your edits to Stephen Gildea as early and as often as you have them.

7.3 Transition Meeting

See Section 3, Transition Meeting, on page 6. The only difference is this time you’re the outgoing President and thus are organizing and chairing the meeting.

7.4 Graduation Night

As president you have only one official job that night. When it is time for the class to actually graduate you should form a receiving line with the caller, cuers, yourself and the other officers to welcome the new members to the club.

8 Things I Learned

This section contains “lessons learned” from past officers.

8.1 Encouraging Help

Remember that recognition is a wonderful thing. It acknowledges people’s hard work and shows you appreciate it. In addition, it reminds others that the club doesn’t run itself.

8.2 Getting Email Answered

Some people are good about answering email no matter what, but most people answer easy email first and save long responses until later.

Here are some simple things that make your email more likely to be answered:

• Be concise.
8.2 Getting Email Answered

- Make the Subject line meaningful, but not too long.
- Summarize at the top. You can add details at the end.
- Limit the message to one topic.
- Keep the message under 50 lines long.

Here are different types of emails and how I get the responses I’m looking for:

Information Gathering
Provide a brief amount of background and ask as many questions as are useful. If people have the information at their fingertips, they will usually answer right away. Other information will probably require a follow-up message from you.

Volunteers
Explain what needs to be done and make it sound simple and easy. If no one responds in a day or two, write personal email to a few people who might be able to do it. Or better yet, after sending out the email, ask around on Tuesday night.

Consensus building
Include a paragraph explaining the point of view you think everyone is going to agree on. Ask people to respond if they don’t agree. Give them a deadline if it’s important. Usually two to three days later it will be clear if there is consensus.

Not sure which of point of view is the right one? Pick one anyway. Unless it’s a hot issue, most people will appreciate your making a choice. For example, “I’m going to ask Sue to get the plain banner for our dance rather than the pink one with ruffles. Does that sound okay?”

Scheduling
Provide a list of dates and times you can make it and ask for a response from everyone. If you don’t get responses from all of the elected officers, follow up with them individually with email or in person.
9 Annual Time Table

Here is an approximate timeline of the important officer events.
This is a list of tasks that need to be done, but **not by you**. Often the officer responsible is listed. Please check that people are on top of the task and, if not, find a volunteer.

**March - second week**
- You are elected

**March - third week**
- All new officers added to the officers’ mailing list

**May - first week**
- Spring graduation
- Officer Transition meeting

**May - second week**
- You (and the other new officers) take office
- Membership of the officers’ mailing list reduced
- Schedule Officers Meeting (for incoming officers)

**May - third week**
- Renew caller and cuer contracts
- Officers meeting
- Figure Fall class schedule (Pres/CC/Caller)

**May - fourth week**
- Begin Summer postcard (Pub)
- Officer contact info to caller/cuer and the officers’ mailing list

**June - fourth week**
- Finish booking Banner Raids/Retrievals (Banner)

**July - first week**
- Get out Summer postcard (Pub)
- Begin promoting Amateur night

**August - first week**
- Start planning “end of summer” Officers meeting
- Fall class posters should be ready (Pub)
- Figure out Fall subscriptions (Treas)
- Find rooms for end of August (Rooming)

**August - second week**
- Start offering Fall subscriptions
- Poster campus prior to blackout period (Pub)

**August - third week**
- Officer’s meeting preparing for Fall
- Prepare for Activities Midway (includes recruiting club members) (CC/Pub)

**September - first week**
- Fall class begins

**September - second week**
- Rooms must be reserved for the following year (Rooming)
September - third week
- Begin Fall newsletter (Pub)

October - first week
- Booking Saturday dances for 2–3 years from now (Booking)

November - first week
- Fall newsletter should go out (Pub)

November - fourth week
- Figure Spring class schedule
- Figure out Winter/Spring subscriptions

December - first week
- Start offering Winter/Spring subscriptions

December - second week
- Fall graduation
- New class grads added to club email list (CC)

December - fourth week
- Start identifying potential candidates for elections

January - third week
- Start offering Spring subscriptions
- Start collecting annual dues

February - fourth week
- Announce election meeting

March - first week
- Spring class begins

March - second week
- Club meeting for elections

March - third week
- Add New officers to officers mailing list
- Schedule Officers Transition meeting

April - third week
- Figure out Summer subscriptions (Treas)
- Start thinking about Firstyear Summer Mailing (Pub)

April - fourth week
- Start offering Summer subscriptions

May - first week
- Spring graduation
- New class grads added to club email list (CC)
- Officer Transition meeting

May - second week
- New officers take office
- Your term is over!