

# TOASTMASTER®

January 2008

**The Art of Speechwriting**  
Advice from leading experts.

**Acceptable Humor:**  
Navigating the minefield  
of good and bad taste.

**What *Not* to Talk About**

**Visualize Success —  
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The value of setting specific,  
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## Are You Where You Want to Be?



🕒 Mid-year already! How can this be? It seems we've only just begun the Toastmasters year, and already we're looking at the home stretch! At the start of the Toastmasters year last July, we were full of anticipation and optimism and enthusiasm. I sincerely hope that is still the case for all of you at the start of this 2008 calendar year. Now is the time to take stock of where you had planned to be – in your personal development as a Toastmaster, in your club's progress in the Distinguished Club Program, and at district level in the Distinguished District Program – and where you are now.

Measuring progress in Toastmasters is like measuring progress in anything else we do in life. We would not think of embarking on a long trip without some way of being able to measure progress toward our destination. Working toward an educational degree or diploma? For sure you'd want to track progress to ensure you achieve your goal. If you're saving for your retirement years, wouldn't you want to know that your wealth is accumulating according to plan? How about running a marathon? When I ran my first marathon in Amsterdam a few years ago, I tracked my progress continuously. When I reached the mid-point of my estimated time and realized I still had more than half the course to complete, I had to do some serious evaluation of progress versus goal. Hmmm...I thought I was in better shape than that!

We set goals because we know that by achieving them we will satisfy some needs that are important to us. Look back six months. When you made a commitment that you would achieve your CC this year, or your ALB or your DTM, you did so because this goal had meaning for you. Likewise, when your club officers decided this was the year to earn that Distinguished Club ribbon that may have been just out of reach in recent years, they did so for the good of the club. And the same applies at district level: District officers set goals because they realize that if the district is to succeed in achieving its mission, there must be some specific and measurable goals to guide activities during the year.

At half-time, are you at least 50 percent of the way to your goal? If yes, great! If not, what sort of reshaping do you need to do to get you, your club or your district back on track? As Vince Lombardi (coach of the Green Bay Packers football team in the 1960s) once said: "If you settle for nothing less than your best, you will be amazed at what you can accomplish in your life." At half-time, these are challenging and inspiring words for all of us!

To all my fellow Toastmasters around the world, Happy Mid-Year, and Happy New Year!

Chris K. Ford, DTM  
International President

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## ARTICLES & DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Viewpoint: Are You Where You Want to Be?**  
*By International President Chris Ford, DTM*

- 6 Letters to the Editor**

- 7 My Turn: Facing the Fear and Finding ... a Daredevil Speaker!**  
That's what Toastmasters can do for you!  
*By David Dawson*

- 8 Profile: Hector Manuel Ortiz – From Immigrant to Mayor**  
How this Toastmaster reached for the moon and made it.  
*By Julie Bawden Davis*

- 14 What *Not* to Talk About**  
Be careful not to pick the wrong topic.  
*By William Daisak, CTM*

- 27 How To: The Joy of Journaling**  
Write things down and change your life!  
*By Joy Lardner, DTM*

- 30 Hall of Fame**

## FEATURES

### The Art of Speechwriting

How good speechwriters find ideas that shine.

*By David Zielinski*

PAGE 10



### Acceptable Humor: The Mark of a Professional

Navigating the minefield of good and bad taste.

*By John Kinde, DTM, AS*

PAGE 18



### Visualize Success – And It Can Be Yours!

The value of setting specific, measurable goals.

*By Judy M. Bailey*

PAGE 24



#### The Toastmasters Vision:

Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change.

#### The Toastmasters Mission:

Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.

Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.

It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

*Do you have something to say? Write it in 200 words or less, sign it with your name, address and club affiliation and send it to [letters@toastmasters.org](mailto:letters@toastmasters.org).*

### Amazing Toastmaster Transformation

When the LibORATORS Club began forming at the Tecumseh (Nebraska) State Correctional Institution, there was a lot of curiosity about Toastmasters. One of the curious was Reko Mitchell, who said he was really good at writing words, but not very comfortable speaking those words in front of people. I told him that Toastmasters could help him become a public speaker so he would be able to share his words with a listening audience. Reko joined and became the club's first sergeant at arms.

Reko gave his first speech and while his words were eloquent and well thought out, his fear of public speaking was evident. He stood stone still while sweat poured from his brow. By his third speech, his finely crafted words were infused with humor and he was not only delivering a good speech, he was entertaining people! The transformation was the biggest I've seen in 17 years of being a Toastmaster.

Sadly, he was involved in an altercation that cost him his life. Who knows where Toastmasters could have taken this man with such a gift for words?

Ralph Brown, ATM-G • LibORATORS 986233-24 • Tecumseh, Nebraska

### Quiet Leadership With a French Accent

I always enjoy the articles in the *Toastmaster*. When I saw "Sounding Good in English" on the cover of the August issue, I was looking forward to picking up some new tips and tricks to help me with my second language.

I found the article interesting but was disappointed that the author chose to make recommendations

that would apply to any second language. Don't get me wrong, these are valid and useful topics. It's just that there's very little in the article that is specific to English. There are some interesting tidbits about English word origins. I am reminded of David Rock's point on interesting versus useful information, in his book *Quiet Leadership*.

Thank you for an excellent magazine. It could only be surpassed by being translated to French. Keep up the good work.

Stéphane Parent • Premiere Toastmasters 2738-45  
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada

### Less is More

I found the My Turn article "From Tragedy to Triumph" by Darcy Keith, in the November issue both inspiring and disturbing. I found inspiration in her ability to get her life back on track after suffering critical injuries in an automobile accident. I found disturbance in her decision to use her Toastmasters skills to expand the intrusion of government into our lives still further with more paternalistic seat belt laws.

I joined Toastmasters in part because I advocate less, not more, intrusion of government into our lives. Sadly, government usually invites "testimony" from those who support its growth rather than its reduction. I hope Ms. Keith will reconsider her position as it stands squarely at odds with a foundational concept of a free society, namely self-responsibility.

Luther Setzer, ATM-B • Islander Toastmasters Club 5547-47  
Kennedy Space Center, Florida

### Conquering the Jitters

I enjoyed reading Judi Bailey's "Beauty and the Beast" article in the December 2007 issue. She really

brought out some key points I have read previously in other magazines. She's correct in stating that even famous actors "suffered from apprehension prior to their performances."

I still feel those apprehensive jitters even when I present, but I use that energy as a positive for my speech. A nice technique I learned from a former member is to breathe – inhale and exhale slowly – before going up to the lectern to present. I suggest having a cool beverage handy to help keep the palate nice and moist. Good article!

Martha Moore, DTM • GVSU Club 4380-62 • Allendale, Michigan

### Feeling Better? Write a Letter!

I recently received my Competent Communicator award by giving my 10th speech titled "Dear Editor." The purpose was to inspire my fellow Toastmasters to write a letter to this magazine, by keeping it short and to the point. During the speech I asked each member to complete the following statement: "Toastmasters has given me..." They wrote their ideas down and I promised I would send them to you to publish. Here are the responses:

Toastmasters has given me...

*"An opportunity I never got before to learn public speaking."*

*"Hope that I can speak in small or large groups anxiety free."*

*"Open-mindedness about people I may not otherwise have met, and lots of laughter."*

*"An opportunity to not only practice my speaking skills but also to become an effective listener."*

*"Confidence, courage and opportunity to share opinions."*

*"The ability to achieve goals and meet new people."*

Simmi Fisher and members of Landmark Toastmasters Club  
New Berlin, Wisconsin

## Facing the Fear and Finding... a Daredevil Speaker!

I have always been a bit of a daredevil. In terms of physical adventures, I've tried just about everything from skydiving to deep-sea diving. So the notion of being afraid of an inherently safe activity such as speaking in front of an audience was inconceivable to me – until I started doing it. A series of events that went from bad to worse drove me into an unrelenting fear of public speaking that, thanks to Toastmasters, I've been able to overcome.

It all started after my military service. I went back to college ready to learn the subjects that, just a few years earlier, had made military service an attractive option. Ready to face anything, I volunteered to present a team project during my first year. This presentation went terribly bad. Not even five seconds into it, my mind went blank and I forgot the name of one of my teammates. I was so stuck that I could not find a way out. My teammate finally shouted his name from the back of the room, but I was already doomed. I forgot key words, and worse yet, my notes became blurry and worthless. My performance let everyone down.

The following year, the death of a friend again put me in front of a crowd. I was asked by his family to speak at the funeral. It never crossed my mind that I'd have to do anything like this, but I wanted to pay tribute to his life. Leery about my own abilities, I decided not to write a full speech, but just to reminisce and offer a few anecdotes. If underestimating the value of writing the speech was a dangerous mistake, not rehearsing it led to a complete debacle. The sadness of the occasion


was not enough to inhibit my fears. I forgot most of what I was going to say, the words didn't come right, and in the silence of the church, the sound of my voice echoed awkwardly and incoherently. I ended up deeply disappointed with myself. I could do better than that. I just didn't know how.

It wasn't until I started working as an engineer that I found hope. I was terrified of giving presentations, feeling sick to my stomach and hating the tremor in my voice. Speaking in meetings was exhausting. "Whatever happened to the daredevil guy who was ready to face anything?" I wondered. Then, I found the Naval R&D Toastmasters club. This club was mentored by Helen Blanchard, DTM, the first female Toastmaster to become an International President. From day one, I realized I had found what I needed. Nonetheless, I didn't pursue my Toastmasters goals diligently. It took me a long time to get my Competent Communicator certification. So the day I became one, I didn't realize the profound changes that had quietly taken place in me. "No big deal. It's just another useless certificate," I thought.

I finished my CC manual with the "Research Your Topic" project, and for this speech, I used a presentation that I was to deliver at work earlier the same day. This proposal was important to me and I was concerned about it, given my disastrous experiences. So practicing it as a Toastmasters' manual speech really helped to put the experience in proper perspective. As I waited for my turn to present it to a real

panel of judges, I observed another speaker being grilled with questions. These panelists weren't the friendly Toastmasters crowd I'd grown used to – it was more like an inquisition! Just a year earlier, I would have been sweating through a panic attack. Instead, I remained calm.

I entered the room confidently, greeting everyone and presenting myself to the panel. The introduction went well, no tremor in my voice. The body of the speech was technical but I kept everyone engaged – so much so that they assailed me with questions. I replied to every concern and stuck to my organization. I was even able to count ah's. I managed to recover from all interruptions, compressing the speech and concluding with a summary of the main points. I left the room feeling good, and afterward, I delivered the same speech to a less technical audience in our Toastmasters meeting. It went great!

Later that day, while reflecting on both speeches, I realized that my presentation skills had truly improved. I managed to improvise, rephrase and compress with ease, and finish speaking right on time. I still have more to learn, but my fear of speaking in public is gone. I'm ready to face anything again. I told Helen Blanchard about it, and she replied simply, "That's what Toastmaster's will do for you." How true! 

**David Dawson** is an electrical engineer working for the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center in San Diego, California. He is currently serving as president of the Naval R&D Toastmasters Club.

**How this Toastmaster  
reached for the  
moon and made it.**

**Hector Manuel Ortiz:**

# From Immigrant to Mayor

Looking into the mirror one morning, Hector Manuel Ortiz saw how much Toastmasters had helped him. The once hesitant, self-conscious Mexican immigrant hardly recognized the man gazing back at him.

"The shy, timid person I once saw had left," says Ortiz, who just finished a term as mayor in the city of Irwindale, California. "I always knew that I had leadership potential, and it was finally coming through. I saw a whole new me."

Born into poverty in a small town outside Guadalajara, Mexico, Ortiz sought a better life and an education when he came to the United States in 1970. He was 17.

"It was a scary decision to leave my home for a land where the main language was English," says Ortiz, who remembers being in awe his first few days in California. "My older brother, Henry, already lived here with my aunt and uncle, so he took me out to dinner in a very nice restaurant when I arrived. The experience felt like a dream," he says. "I didn't know that such places existed."

Unable to speak any English, Ortiz immediately signed up for classes. Determined to learn the language quickly, he attended school regularly, listened to English on the radio, watched television and read books.

Over the years, Ortiz worked in construction and then became a certified electrician. He thought he

had mastered the English language, but then one day his superiors asked him to speak during a meeting at the gas company where he worked.

"I joined the safety committee and they wanted me to give a presentation," says Ortiz. "I stood in front of a room full of people and froze, unable to say one word. Someone took over for me, and I went to the back of the room, very embarrassed."

After that experience Ortiz tried to speak at a city council meeting and found himself tongue-tied once again. "That time was even more embarrassing," he recalls. "Someone in the audience offered to translate because they thought I would do better speaking in Spanish," he says. Following the second humiliating incident, his brother suggested he attend a Toastmasters meeting, which he promptly did.

At his first meeting, Ortiz found out how badly he needed Toastmasters. "When they asked me where I heard about the organization, my reply made no sense at all, and it became very apparent that my heavy accent was also hindering me," he says. "During the meeting, they asked if I was interested in becoming a member, and I told them to sign me up immediately."

Ortiz joined the West Winds club in 1995 but has since moved to the Speak-E-Z club in West Covina, California. He was presi-

dent of the former club and has participated in various speech contests, placing second at the district level. Now with 12 years of Toastmasters experience, Ortiz has seen remarkable changes in his speaking skills, leadership ability and overall self-confidence.

"I never imagined how far Toastmasters would take me," he says. "Joining gave me the courage to participate in other organizations, such as my church, where I became president of my parish council. When I first joined and began speaking to groups of 20 people, I was really pleased. Now I feel the same confidence standing in front of an audience of 3,000."

Even at a young age, Ortiz felt he had dormant leadership skills trying to emerge, and he credits Toastmasters with awakening this desire to become a leader. During his tenure as a Toastmaster, he became a planning commissioner for the city of Irwindale in 1997 and a youth group director in his church. By 2003 he stepped it up a notch and ran for a seat on the city council. Though he lost that election by just one vote, he tried again in 2005 and won.

When he became a city council member, Ortiz thought he had made it. But he hit a new high on December 6, 2006, when the council unanimously appointed him mayor of Irwindale. "That night was a



**Hector Manuel Ortiz,**  
Mayor of Irwindale, California

memorable experience," says Ortiz. "My wife, Sheryl, and my five children were there for the ceremony."

Former Irwindale council member Julian Miranda remembers being very impressed with Ortiz's leadership ability during his time in office. "Hector received a lot of positive comments while he was mayor, and for good reason," says Miranda. "He is really good at uniting people and leading them, and he is accessible and easy to talk to. His ability to speak with confidence and his desire to help the community make people admire and trust him."

Fellow Toastmaster Joseph Tweini, a member of the West Winds club, agrees. "Hector is an example of a great leader," he says. "Watching him, I became inspired to become president of the club and to accomplish much more than I ever thought possible."

Considering his humble start, Ortiz is especially proud that his

leadership position has made him a good role model for other Latinos.

"Since I started my career in politics, many Latinos congratulate me and say how

Latinos with a positive message is important.

"Because of lack of education that spans many generations and limited financial resources, many Latinos don't see a very bright future," says Henry Otriz. If you educate people at a young age, however, using examples of Latinos in leadership like Hector, they will

**"If other Latinos can do as I have and learn to speak well, they will become more confident. The more fluent one is, the more doors open."**

proud they are to see that someone with my roots has attained such a position," says Ortiz. "As Latinos, we carry a lot on our backs in

terms of negative images. This stems from the language barrier and inability to communicate effectively and express ourselves. If other Latinos can do as I have and learn to speak well, they will become more confident. The more fluent one is, the more doors open."

Ortiz is especially interested in reaching young people. He regularly speaks at high schools and youth organizations, encouraging students to pursue their dreams.

"It's important that young Latinos know that leadership opportunities are within us," he says. "Sometimes we just need someone to tell us how far we can get and the direction we should take. It's all a matter of pulling out our potential, and Toastmasters does a great job with that."

Ortiz's brother, Henry Ortiz, is a former Toastmaster and motivational speaker based in Whittier, California. He agrees that reaching young

have a chance at success in life."

"Since joining Toastmasters, I've seen Hector make dramatic improvements in his life, especially in terms of leadership skills. And I think this is just the beginning for him. If he keeps up the momentum, he is on the road to even higher political offices."

Leadership positions with more authority are definitely in Ortiz's plans. After he finishes his four-year term with the Irwindale City Council in November 2009, he plans to run for re-election. He has also set his sites on the race for the California Assembly in 2010.

"Some time ago I heard a phrase that I really like and always focus on," says Ortiz. "Always shoot for the moon; even if you miss you will land among the stars." **T**

**Julie Bawden Davis** is a freelance writer and longtime contributor to this magazine. She lives in Southern California. Reach her at [Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com](mailto:Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com).

**Editor's Note:** Do you have an inspiring story of how the Toastmasters program has helped you? Tell us at [letters@toastmasters.org](mailto:letters@toastmasters.org).

# The Art of Speechwriting

By David Zielinski

How good speechwriters find  
ideas that shine.



*Just because you are a good speaker doesn't mean you are a good speechwriter. The advent of PowerPoint software has made the fully scripted paragraph an endangered species, replacing it with bulleted lists, catchy headlines and whiz-bang special effects. But good writing remains at the heart of good speechmaking, particularly when the intent is to inspire or motivate audiences. If you're among the fortunate few, you may have staff speechwriters or communications experts to help you craft that spellbinding speech. But most of us aren't that lucky, which means having to face down the terror of the blank computer screen on our own.*

So what's the key to writing a memorable speech that doesn't lean heavily on PowerPoint for speaker support? We talked to some of the best speechwriters in the business – who between them have written speeches for U.S. presidents, cabinet members and CEOs of some of the world's largest companies – about what it takes to write a speech that is music to the audience's ears.

### **The Research Process**

One thing these pros agree on is this: A speech is only as good as the quality of research and reflection put into it. To that end, Ken Askew, a freelance speechwriter who has written speeches for luminaries like President George H. W. Bush and Lee Iacocca, is constantly on the prowl for ideas to use in speeches, whether his writing assignment is next week or next year.

Askew's low-tech idea file consists of a large box into which he throws notes jotted on napkins, offbeat news stories emblematic of broader trends, intriguing studies or statistics and clever advertisements. This work usually pays off handsomely down the road. For example, he stumbled across a statistic mentioning the highway with the lowest average speed in the world: the Autobahn in Germany, which most would associate with having the fastest speed. Although people sometimes drive at speeds exceeding 150 mph, when there is an accident on the Autobahn – of which there are many – traffic is backed up and idling for hours, making for the lowest average speed.

"I tore that out and threw it in a box, thinking I might be able to use it down the road for a speech on the necessity of regulation," Askew says. "Good speechwriters need to be idea sponges. You can't be too critical when you spot something interesting. If it hooks your imagination, there's a reason for it, and who knows how you might be able to apply it in the future."

Hal Gordon, a former speechwriter for Colin Powell

and the Reagan White House, is of the same mind regarding research. "Always collect more information than you can possibly use," Gordon says. "It's far better to have a mass of information and try to boil it down to 30 minutes than to not have enough and figure out how to pad the speech. If you have more information than you can use, then it follows that you are selecting the very best of that material."

Culling only the best data, anecdotes or humor – using only one sparkling example to support a point when you're tempted to use two, for example – is a key to brevity, the hallmark of good speeches. "Have you ever heard a speech that was too short?" asks Jane Tully, president of New York-based Tully Communications, an executive speechwriting company, in an article written for her web site. "I doubt it. But we've all squirmed through presentations that droned on well beyond the allotted time – and our most vivid memories of those occasions have little to do with the speaker's message."

If you want audiences to stay on the edge of their seats, says Tully, take a hint from mystery writer Elmore Leonard, known for his spare but gripping prose. How does he do it? According to Leonard, "I leave out the parts people skip."

### **One Word After Another**

While elite speechwriters have varied writing habits, there is a recurring theme: Most suggest getting your core thoughts and ideas down in some form before putting your critic's hat on. The key is not to edit yourself too early in the process, lest you get stuck at the starting gate.

Askew writes his first drafts in the form of a relational database. Basic ideas and concepts are written on large Post-It notes, placed on a whiteboard and then connected with circles or lines. "I move the Post-its around as I think through the speech," Askew says. "I always include

# 3 Rules for Capturing Audience Interest

**D**avid Green, president of Uncommon Knowledge, an executive speechwriting company in New Jersey, offers three rules for virtually any speaking challenge – rules he says will help any audience sit up and take notice, for the right reasons.

## **Rule 1: Counter-program**

The audience has expectations. If they've heard you before, they think they know what to expect. If they haven't heard you, they group you with other keynoters or speakers they've heard from your industry. Green says you have to break through their preconceptions. If everyone else is using text-heavy PowerPoint support, consider using dramatic photos. If everyone else is forecasting the future of your industry, focus on eye-opening lessons from the past. If your public persona is fire-breathing, use a more "fireside" style.

## **Rule 2: Speaker support should only support**

You've seen them all. Text-flooded PowerPoint slides that look like pages of a book. Charts dense with information, with typeface reduced to barely readable size so it all fits on a slide.

Every time a new slide comes up, the audience stops listening to the speaker while reading the slide. Then there are those presenters who speak straight from their slides, adding few ad-libs or spontaneous thoughts.

People can either read the slides or listen to the speaker, but they cannot do both simultaneously. If you are simply parroting your slides, you've essentially made yourself superfluous, maybe even a nuisance. Hal Gordon, a former speechwriter for U.S. General Colin Powell, recounts the story of Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, attending a PowerPoint presentation given by a GE staff member. The speaker was reading directly from each slide, and finally Welch, fed up, called out, "Look, I can read as well as you can. If this is your presentation, why don't you just hand me your slides and we can be done with it."

If you must use PowerPoint, use it as an outline only to prompt your memory and give your audience a roadmap. After all, it's not your software giving the speech – it's you!

## **Rule 3: Play the Audience**

A speech is live theater. You don't have to entertain, but you do have to tell a compelling story. The audience is not out to get you...usually. But they won't hang on your every word either, unless you lure them in.

So know your audience – and your speaking environment. The audience will expect something different from you as a conference keynote speaker than if you are leading a panel or having a face-to-face discussion with them. Then use your best sense of what they want from you – and give them something more, or something different, or something that bends their perspective.

far more than I can fit in a speech by design, which makes editing a challenge. I usually end up pulling about 80 percent of the notes off the board."

Like many professional speechwriters, Askew often squirms when asked by clients to provide an outline before writing a speech. He prefers to write a one-page speech summary, what's known in the field as a "destination" document. "It communicates the gestalt of the main point, the feel, tone and what it is you are trying to achieve with the speech, or the central metaphor you want to use," Askew says.

David Green, president of Uncommon Knowledge, an executive speechwriting firm in Haworth, New Jersey, compares a client asking a speechwriter for an outline to a book publisher requesting a detailed roadmap from a novelist. "Novelists I talk to often say they start out intending for their story to go in one direction, but their characters wouldn't let them go there, so they had to go

a different way," says Green. "In the course of writing a speech, I often take it in directions I didn't expect."

Although many professionals opt for a more free-flowing, stream-of-consciousness approach in writing a first draft, some won't move forward until they've honed their first page or two to near perfection. Capture the audience early, this thinking goes, or prepare to lose them quickly.

"I am tortuous about the first page, super tortuous about the first paragraph and insanely tortuous about the first sentence or two of every speech I write," says Askew.

Green prefers to write out an entire speech, then reduce it to a series of talking points. He takes a cue from speech coaches, who believe speakers should start by creating six or so summary-type sentences – essentially one-liners – each with a compelling central point and story. Those statements can then be threaded together into a 30-minute speech. "Good speakers are good storytellers, and that doesn't just mean having good stories or

anecdotes,” Green says. “It also means having a rhythm and sense of pace in the presentation, all of which comes from good writing.”

When crafting speeches for executive clients, Marilyn Mobley, a senior vice president for Edelman, a public relations firm in Atlanta, also writes out her entire script word for word before creating summary statements. “The benefit is it allows the speaker to see the whole rhythm of the speech and the flow of it,” Mobley says. “That overview helps the speaker use the bullet points to better capture the intended pacing and timing.”

Mobley uses a color-coding method to help ensure she has the right mix of content in her speeches. Once she finishes an early draft, she marks each line with a different colored marker – red might be for facts and figures, green for anecdotes, and yellow for humor. She then spreads out the whole speech on the floor or tapes it to a wall to allow her to scan for wide swatches of red, green or yellow. “I’m not necessarily looking to achieve equal balance between the different types of information, but rather to determine whether I am going a long time just providing data or humor, for example,” Mobley says. “I might rearrange some things, add in some more humor, look for other ways to explain data.”

Don’t think the terror of confronting a blank computer screen is limited to amateur or part-time speechwriters, says Green. Even veterans like himself experience writers’ block. One key to overcoming it, he believes, is to simply get started, letting the first draft “pour out like cheap champagne” without being overly critical of what’s appearing on screen. “When I first began writing, I had to make every sentence perfect before moving on to the next,” he says. “It took me years to be able to write in a more organic, freestyle method.” If a thought or idea occurs to you, Green suggests getting it up on the screen somewhere, even partially formed, with the knowledge that it will eventually get incorporated and revised in a way that makes sense.

Green also believes a change of scenery can do wonders for freeing up mental log-jams. “When I worked for an advertising agency in New York City, New York, I used to tell my boss, ‘you should pay me to walk back and forth from the subway to the office, because that’s where some of my best ideas come from.’”

### Writing for the Ear

Mobley believes one of the biggest mistakes that novice speechwriters make is writing for the eye rather than the

*Continued on page 23*



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# What *Not* to Talk About

**Be careful not to pick the wrong topic.**

**By William Daisak, CTM**

*“Good speaker, mediocre speech.”*

**E**ver heard that comment? One of the first things a novice Toastmaster has to learn is the fine art of selecting a good speech topic. We’ve all heard wonderful speech topics that impressed us with the speaker’s cleverness. We’ve also heard some topics that might have worked better in the hands of a more experienced speaker, and some topics that

probably would have been difficult even for a professional. The Competent Communication manual contains extremely helpful guidance for your first 10 speeches, but of course in the end it’s up to the speaker to come up with the right material. Knowing what *not* to talk about can be a key element in a successful presentation.

I’m a charter member of a brand new Toastmasters club. Being part of a startup has given all of us

charter members a chance to learn from each other’s experiences. In a way, it also relieves some pressure. When you’re a novice in a club full of novices, you seldom have to worry about being followed by another member with the skills of a Winston Churchill, making you look bad by comparison. More likely, the next speaker has the skills of a Lucy Ricardo performing at Ricky’s nightclub. But learning together is part of the fun.

A truly gifted speaker could probably do a great speech on the topic of doghouse roof shingles, but few of us start off with that level of competence. The selection of a speech topic can get you going with a bang, or it can set up steep hurdles that will impede you. Hopefully we all know to tread carefully around subjects dealing with race, religion and sexuality. (Speakers who are not careful with those topics do generate memorable speech horror stories, however). Beginners may be prone to some more subtle speech selection pitfalls. Below are a few areas that I've seen give trouble to beginning speakers.

■ **My Nerdy Hobby** – Wait a minute. I shouldn't talk about my hobby? It's a topic I know well and have a lot of enthusiasm about, so isn't it a great thing to speak about? It might or might not. If your hobby is something like mountaineering or scuba diving, you probably have some very dramatic stories to tell that will work great ("The rescue boat came just as the Great White was upon me..."). If your hobby is something more prosaic like crocheting, you might have a harder job ("I had only moments to choose the right needle for the next stitch...").

Before I'm accused of being unfair to crocheters, allow me to mention that I'm a stamp collector, something unfortunately seen by many as a nerdy hobby. Hey, I'm a very macho guy (I could show you my stamp tongue scars). Early in my Toastmasters progression I decided to do a speech about my hobby. I could have done a technical presentation about how stamps are printed, the types of perforations on stamps, and the types of watermarks on stamps, but I quickly realized this would be the long-sought after non-addictive sleep

inducer. Instead, I took a different slant and used stamps from my collection to illustrate the course of World War II. I showed stamps that illustrated the rise of totalitarian governments during the 1930s in Europe, stamps that showed how nations were overrun and occupied by aggressors, and stamps that showed the destruction wrought by the war.

**"The selection of a speech topic can get you going with a bang, or it can set up steep hurdles that will impede you."**

This approach worked better than how I think my original approach would have worked, but I still had trouble getting my audience enthused. The lesson here is to carefully consider your hobby and come up with a way to convey your enthusiasm to your audience. If you're not quite up to that challenge yet, save your hobby for a speech later on.

■ **Climb Every Mountain** – We've all been moved by great speakers describing how they beat a serious illness or overcame obstacles in their lives. Speeches like this can be truly memorable. However, without sounding cold-hearted, this type of topic can come across as maudlin or preachy if not handled with a deft touch.

You'll note that in the Toastmasters recommended progression through the Competent Communication manual, an inspirational speech is put off until speech number 10. This is a wise choice because this type of material really needs a little more experience to pull off well. Hopefully, your inspiring challenge will be overcome in time to give a great number 10 speech about it.

■ **What I Did On My Vacation** –

Sounds like a boring subject you had to write about in grade school after returning from summer vacation? It's surprising the number of times I've heard speeches about a vacation trip, with pictures. Some of these have been really fun and informative. But some have gone like this: "Here's a picture of the beach."

Click "Here's a picture of a sunset." Click "Here's a picture of a monkey." You wouldn't do this to guests in your home (or you won't do it to them more than once), so why do it to your beloved fellow Toastmasters? See the problem?

This isn't a speech, it's a slideshow. A speech about a vacation trip can work, but be sure you present it as a speech with a *theme*. "I'd like to describe some exciting moments in the history of Spain, with some pictures from my trip" or "Madagascar has some amazing plants and animals, as I'll show you" or "Hoboken has some incredible delicatessen." With this type of approach your pictures support your speech, instead of replacing it. Don't subject your audience to something you'd hate to sit through on a visit to your friend's house, after they got back from New Jersey (being from New York, it's my birthright to pick on New Jersey).

■ **Passing Out** – No, not a drinking problem, a visual aid problem. This happens if you bring an interesting object to discuss and

pass around the audience. At first the use of a visual object seems like a refreshing idea, but there is a hidden danger here: The person or persons handling your object will be paying attention to the object you passed out, and they will stop paying attention to your speech.

**“Be sure to avoid topics that just can’t fit in the allotted time.”**

Distributing the object after your talk is risky, too, because you then detract attention from the next speaker. In most cases it’s better if you keep the object up front with you and show it from there.

■ **Everybody’s Talking** – We had a time period in our club where three different speakers spoke on the subject of negotiating strategies, all in the space of about six weeks. All the speakers did a good job, but by the third speaker, the audience was hearing essentially the same material for the third time and just wasn’t with the speaker. The lesson here is obvious: Give tired subjects a rest.

■ **A Brief History of** – We had a speaker who set out to talk about the Big Bang Theory of the Universe in a seven-minute speech. Although the Big Bang took place in about a zillionth of a second, seven minutes wasn’t enough time to describe it. All the speaker had

time to do was whet our interest in this complex topic. Be sure to avoid topics that just can’t fit in the allotted time. If it’s a topic you still want to talk about, try to find some subset of it that can be reasonably covered in a short speech.

■ **“Please Listen with an Open Mind ...”** – There’s a popular story circulating about a new member who joined a club in an area where hunting is popular. He gave a speech about gun control and endorsed restrictions on gun purchases. After his speech, the Toastmaster stood up and said, “I’m sure that I speak for all of

us in suggesting that we cancel the rest of our scheduled events for this meeting and spend the time refuting the things our last speaker said.” While a gifted, highly experienced speaker might relish the challenge of persuading a highly hostile audience, it’s probably not the best route for a novice. Also, being tarred and feathered can be discouraging to a beginner.

We all want to grow and succeed in Toastmasters, and taking on challenges is part of the learning process. However, beginning speakers need all the help they can get developing those skills. Picking the wrong topic can set a difficult initial hurdle that most beginners are better off without. Be sure that uphill struggle is part of your exciting speech about mountain climbing, not the result of a poor topic choice. **T**

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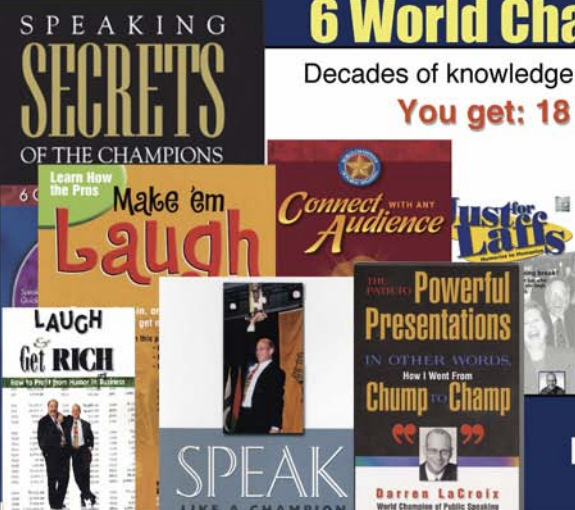
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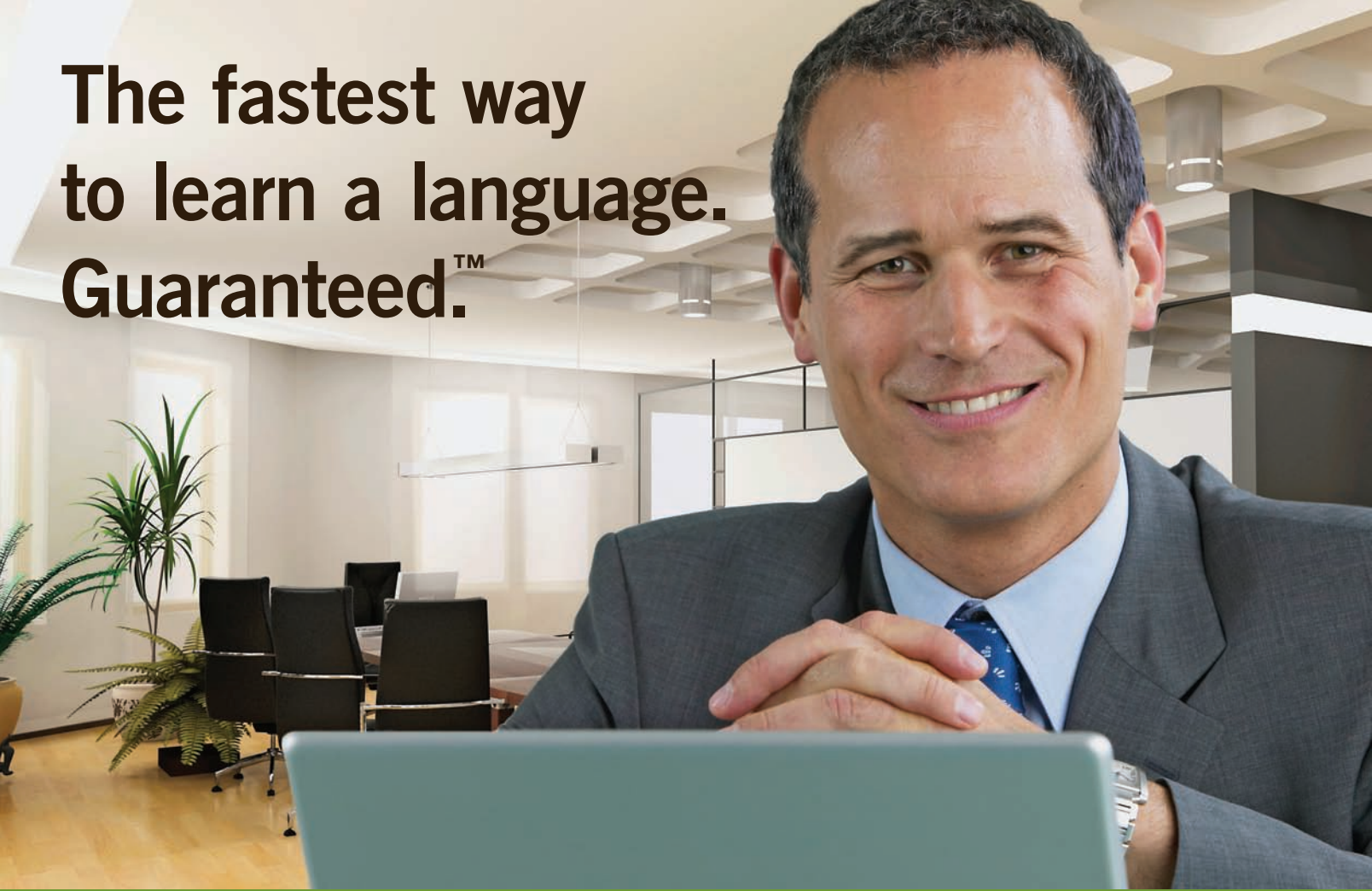
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# Acceptable Humor:

By John Kinde, DTM, AS

## The Mark of a Professional

How to navigate the minefield of good and bad taste.

*At a recent Table Topics session, our Topicsmaster quoted a news clipping about someone who grafted an ear to his forehead in the name of art. A member responded: "We were asked if an ear grafted to the forehead was art. Technically, it's called Forehead Art . . . or F-ART. Which gives you my answer to whether or not it's art."*

Oops. That joke crossed the invisible line separating appropriate humor from the inappropriate. Did I talk to the person who presented the joke? Well...No. I thought it would look strange if I were talking to myself. After I delivered the punchline, I decided I should have crossed the joke off my list. I had other things to say and I certainly didn't need one more joke.

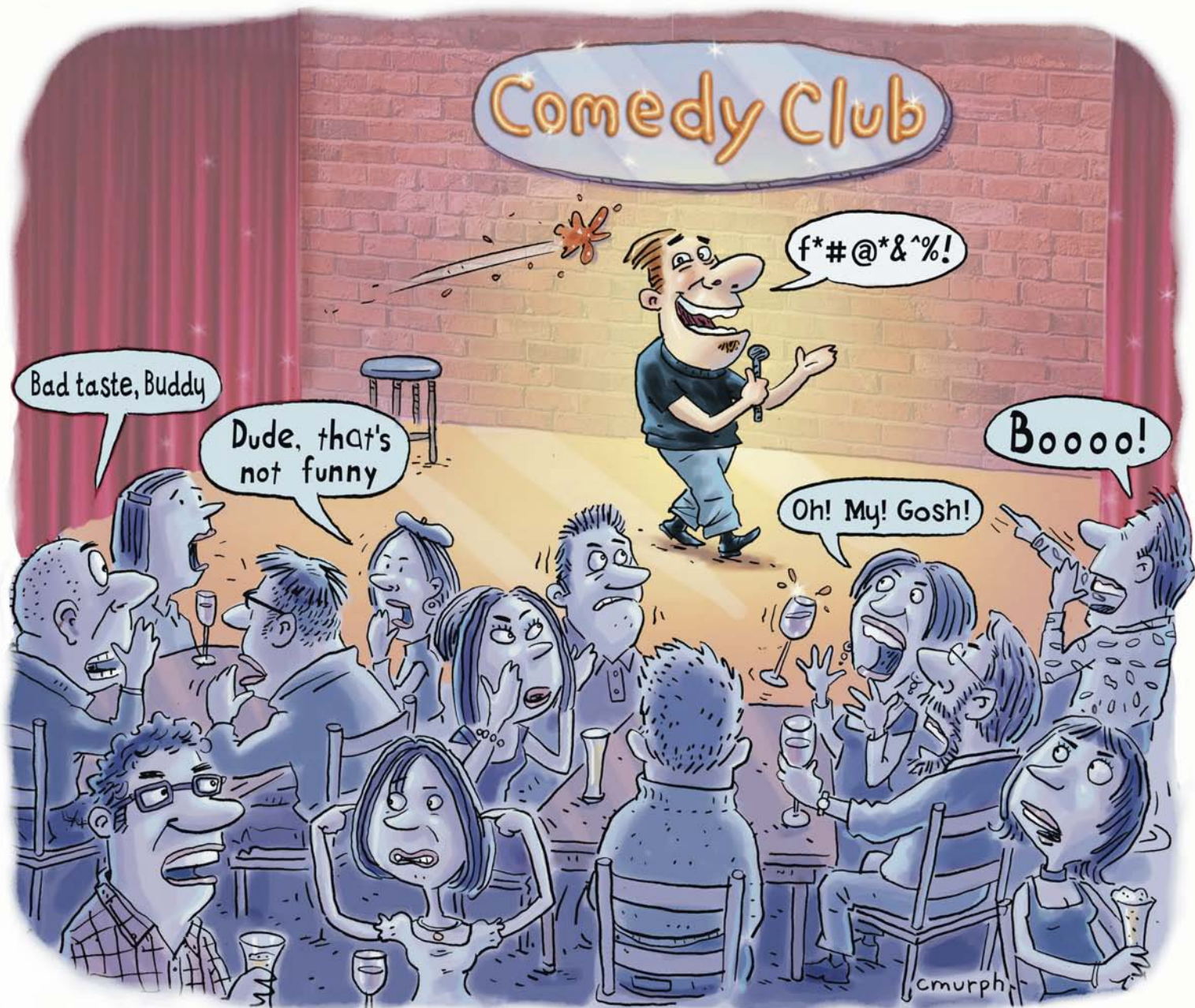
But once it leaves the lips, there's no calling it back. Of course the joke wasn't gross or obscene. I didn't *say* the word; I only spelled it. The audience laughed. It's not really a joke about bodily functions. It made a point in a subtle and light-hearted way. It had great humor structure; a solid joke followed with two toppers (punchlines riding on the wave of the first joke). I'm really good at rationalizing and justifying. Most of us are. If only I had asked the right question, it would have saved me from crossing the line.

Here is the question that would have helped me self-censor that joke: "Would I use this joke if I were delivering it at a corporate event where I was paid a

substantial fee as the guest speaker?" This is one litmus test I could use to arrive at a "No" answer for the forehead-art joke. Other relevant questions would disqualify the joke as well, but the "corporate test" is a good measure of appropriateness. Humor presented at a Toastmasters meeting should meet the professional mark of the corporate-test question.

I learn by doing and by making mistakes. I can't think of a better place to stumble than at a Toastmasters meeting! When it comes to humor, the older I get, the more conservative I become. This growth and learning is not a function of age, it's a result of experience. Let me share some lessons I've learned along the way. You'll benefit because the best way to learn is from other people's mistakes...even if they're mine.

Let's look at some critical questions. These will help guide you through the minefield of good and bad taste. Some questions lead you to making the right choice. Some questions take you down the wrong path.



■ **Are there humor danger zones?** The riskiest areas for humor include sexual references, bodily functions, body parts and classic four-letter words. These should be off limits at any Toastmasters functions, including humorous speech contests. Danger zones also dance around humor in the areas of race, religion and politics. And let's add gun control, gay marriage and doctor-assisted suicide. We could add more.

It's possible to safely cross the line in these areas, but it takes a higher level of skill and awareness, and I would normally recommend not taking the chance. Am I saying you can't speak on doctor-assisted suicide? No, I'm suggesting not presenting those topics in a humorous speech... unless you have the bomb squad standing by. Make choices to avoid bombing.

■ **Are there some audience members who just wait to have their hot buttons pushed?** Yes. Sometimes it's one of those red-flag words that will strike someone the wrong way. Sometimes it's the listener's personality that makes him or her easily offended. I received an e-mail from a Toastmaster who reads my newsletter. He said, "I was delivering a speech and I had the audience in a great state until I said the word 'prostitution.'" Sometimes just one word will do it.

■ **So what's the problem?** Here is the inner dialogue we have when we pose that question: "The joke wasn't that bad. People shouldn't be so sensitive. It was *only* a word. Only a person with issues would have been offended." Just because you don't have *their* issues, that doesn't make it open season on disregarding other

people's sensitivities. As best you can, *you need to be in touch with the yardstick the audience uses to measure good taste*. Sometimes it's a line drawn in the sand – identifying it is more art than science.

■ **How many people need to be offended for it to be too many?** This question will not help you pin down the appropriateness of a joke. What if only one person was offended? Is that too many? What if the person offended is just waiting to be offended? There are some people who will always find something in your speech that is inappropriate...because it's their job. You could change your speech, but that won't necessarily be the answer for the one offended. I don't lose sleep worrying about that rare person.

On the other hand, there are times when offending one person is definitely one too many. I attended a program, as an audience member, where a speaker handled sensitive humor very skillfully. With two speakers on the program, the first was a woman who talked about the challenges of being a large woman in a thin society. She was a very funny speaker and skillfully poked fun at herself. Near the end of her program she sang a song. The second speaker, referred to the women's speech this way: "Her program was so wonderful, I never wanted it to end. I felt really bad when she started singing. Because as we all know, it's over when the fat lady sings." Then he added, "I asked her if it was OK to say that."

Two things were involved here. First, he had the good sense to check with the other speaker to see if she was comfortable with the joke. Based on the humor in her speech, it was a good bet that she wouldn't have a problem with his line. But it would have been a big mistake to assume that since she poked fun at herself, it would be okay for someone else to do it. Second, it let the audience know that the first speaker was "in on the joke" and not simply the butt of the joke. This helped make the joke more acceptable to the woman who was the subject of the joke. When a joke is coordinated with someone ahead of time, usually they love it even more because they feel they were part of the process that created the joke. To my knowledge, no one was offended.

**"As best you can,  
you need to be in touch with  
the yardstick the audience uses  
to measure good taste."**

Who is the ultimate judge? I remember a regular performer at a comedy club in Montgomery, Alabama, where I often performed on Open-Mike Night in the early 1980s. One night, after a bad set, the comic confided in me: "The audience bombed!" Not exactly. Although he was normally funny, on that night, *he* bombed. Don't be too fast to blame the audience. If a joke book falls open in the woods and nobody is there – is it funny? No. It takes an audience for something to be funny. And it takes an audience for something to be offensive. They're also the primary judge of good taste. We're not talking about a majority vote here. *If only 10 percent of the audience thinks your humor is inappropriate, the judge and jury have spoken and you have a problem.*

■ **Did the audience laugh?** This is never a measure of appropriateness of a joke. Surprisingly, it's not even a measure of its comic value. An inappropriate joke can often get laughs simply for its shock value. One reason people laugh is to relieve tension. If a joke causes them to be uncomfortable, they laugh as a result of the tension. You'll sometimes hear laughter when a joke is not appropriate and not funny. You could get laughs and never be asked back to speak just *because* they laughed.

■ **What do other people do?** Comedy club performers often fall victims to Monkey-See-Monkey-Do. They see other comics using obscene material and they follow their example. We can fall into that trap at a Toastmasters meeting. It's possible for a club meeting to drift just a bit over the line of good taste. People make the mistaken conclusion that slightly crossing the line of good taste is perfectly okay. Before you know it, things can go from bad to worse. Just because something becomes common practice does not make it a measure of what's right.

■ **Isn't innuendo acceptable?** If you hint at or insinuate something, that's OK only if saying the same thing clearly and directly is also all right. At a recent club meeting, one of our members asked that cell phones be turned off or set to vibrate. And then he added: "If anything other than a cell phone is vibrating, we don't want to know about it." To most people, this would be sexual innuendo. Would it be acceptable, at a professional meeting, to specifically say what he was inferring? Clearly not. Innuendo is not acceptable when it's used to suggest something that would normally be off limits to say directly. Cloaking

the unacceptable in subtle wording is no defense.

■ **Am I trying too hard?** A person who tries too hard to be funny is often tempted to cross the line of good taste. The rule of less is more applies to humor. Develop the ability to censor your humor ideas to eliminate the not-so-funny and the not-so-appropriate. You want to develop the reputation of someone who is funny and clean *every* time he or she speaks. That's the target. The alternative is being someone who is funny part of the time. Or someone who uses clean humor some of the time. Not good. Set your goal high. Although you may occasionally and inadvertently miss the target, the fact is that high standards are the foundation for your professional reputation.

■ **How should you practice?** A California comedy improv troupe, where I occasionally played as a guest, had the habit of using a warm-up game called R-Rated Limericks. Although their goal was to produce a totally clean show for their audiences, they felt they could get the off-color jokes out of their systems during rehearsal warm-ups. I personally don't think that is a good idea. You should practice the way you play. I've been directing my own improv troupe for 12 years. At our weekly workshop we try to keep everything as clean as though it were a public performance. In the same spirit, we should strive to keep every Toastmasters meeting in good taste. It builds the right kind of habits.

■ **What is the opinion of people you respect?** Get feedback from the Toastmasters you admire. My club, Powerhouse Pros in Las Vegas, Nevada, has many members who give insightful feedback. We have an observational humor segment in our meeting which potentially produces borderline jokes as speakers offer a variety of comments on everyday life. Whenever you are creating fresh, untested humor, you run the risk of unintentionally crossing the line of good taste. To help us stay on top of that issue, we design the meeting so that the observational humor part of the meeting comes before the general evaluator's closing remarks. We expect the general evaluator to critique the appropriateness of the humor.

Recently, we had a meeting where three of the jokes were a bit over the line – not obscene, but enough to make a few people uncomfortable. I sensed the president's discomfort when he called for guest comments at the very end of the meeting. No one spoke up about the questionable humor. As the next meeting's agenda was

**“An inappropriate joke  
can often get laughs simply  
for its shock value.”**

prepared, I asked for five minutes on the program to talk about the previous meeting's humor. We need to actively seek feedback and give feedback to help keep us on track.

Do speech contests have different standards from club meetings? No. Sometimes we see competitors cross the line of good taste. This creates the illusion that it might be acceptable to do that in a contest. Remember Monkey-See-Monkey-Do? Don't let the risky contest behavior of others lead you to think that the standards are different from a regular club meeting. They are not.

One reason people push the limits in a speech contest is that presenting five-to-seven minutes of humor is a greater challenge than just getting a laugh or two at a regular meeting. In an effort to fill a speech with humor, some speakers take the easy road, using borderline humor.

Another reason people might push the limits in a contest: If you can skillfully master the challenge of walking the tightrope, it will probably be very funny. Let me share two contest speeches where I pushed the edge:

The first speech was a winner in a District Humorous Speech Contest. The speech had a 33 percent response rate. For every minute I was in front of the audience, they laughed for 20 seconds. That's funny. I had sprinkled sexual innuendo throughout the speech. I never said anything directly, but hinted at lots of things that wouldn't have been acceptable to say directly. After winning the district contest, I included that speech as part of my professional performances, and concluded that it just wasn't a fit for a business audience. I didn't know in 1983 what I now understand about innuendo failing the corporate-test question. It was great (even tame) material for a comedy club, but inappropriate for a Toastmasters or business audience.

The second speech – fast-forward about two decades – was on another edgy topic. The theme was: How To Succeed In Business by Going To Work Naked. Some Toastmasters would insist that such a topic could never win a Toastmasters speech competition. I won the district contest. Here was the challenge: Write a speech about going to work naked and never mention sex, body parts, or bodily functions. And no innuendo. What's left? A funny 7-minute speech. The challenge was going beyond the cheap and easy laughs and working hard to construct a speech based on truly funny relationships. I avoided jokes used simply for the shock value. I'll have to admit, my favorite line was one I couldn't use. But

even when you're keeping it totally clean, there's the risk that a small number of people in the audience who, upon just hearing the word *naked*, will have steam coming out their ears and will stop listening. And some of them might be judges. That's the risk.

The reward is that I had a speech that was considered funny and in good taste by nearly everyone else in the room. The line is never clearly and firmly drawn. If you're going to dance near the line, you'll need to work really hard to keep the material funny for the right reasons. For me it's a challenge and a rewarding growth experience. Do I recommend that you push the limits? Only if you also have more than 20 years experience as a professional humor performer. Otherwise, I recommend that you curb what will disturb.

■ **How do I sharpen my skills to create good humor?** First, practice at your club meetings. Try to use one piece of humor at every meeting. Second, become a lifelong student of humor. Study books that focus on creating and delivering funny lines. Analyze joke books that provide good, clean humor. I recommend you use joke books primarily as a source of inspiration to help you create your own original humor lines. We grow in baby steps and you won't be a headliner at a comedy club tomorrow. But with the right focus and practice you'll start to earn the reputation of a speaker who is funny.

**Here are some resources:**


- ▶ *Comedy Writing Secrets* by Melvin Helitzer
- ▶ *The Comedy Bible* by Judy Carter

- ▶ *Comedy Writing Workbook* by Gene Perret
- ▶ *2100 Laughs for All Occasions* by Robert Orben
- ▶ *Milton Berle's Private Joke File* by Milton Berle
- ▶ **Museumofhumor.com** by Malcolm Kushner

■ **What if I'm not sure if something crosses the line?**

When in doubt, leave it out. Period.

Often it's a fine line between keeping it clean and being offensive. Sometimes it's just a question of good judgment. I've been studying and using humor from the platform for 30 years. As each year passes, I believe more strongly that keeping your humor clean is the way to go. I've made the mistake in the past, more than once, of assuming that I can take more liberties with "this audience" – and have normally been wrong. I know that some speakers like the challenge of staying in good taste while still pushing it close to the edge. Depending on your experience level, you may find taking that risk is like flying on a trapeze without a safety net.

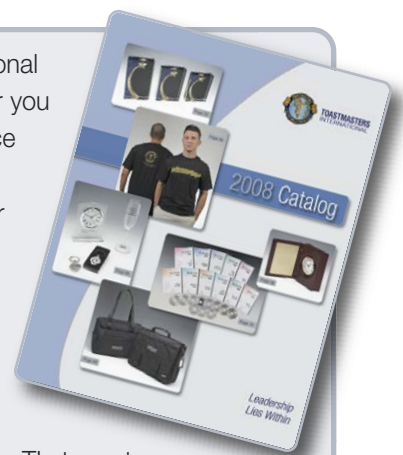
Always avoid going for the easy and cheap laugh. Work on your craft and become funny not because of your censor-worthy content, but because of your comedic craft. Be funny not because you shock, but because you shine. Be funny for the right reasons and you'll stand out as a pro. 

Accredited Speaker **John Kinde, DTM**, is a member of Powerhouse Pros club in Las Vegas, Nevada. He is a humor specialist and keynote speaker. Visit him at **[www.HumorPower.com](http://www.HumorPower.com)**.

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## The Art of Speechwriting

Continued from page 13

ear. She suggests reading out loud everything you write, since it not only helps refine rhythm but can unearth hidden problems. Mobley, for example, once wrote a speech that used the phrase “in an ironic twist.” Upon speaking the line, however, she found it something of a tongue twister. “On paper it looked fine, but once I tried saying it, it was a different story, so I dropped it rather than risk stumbling over it.”

In a blog written for the web site of Ragan Communications, Gordon stressed the importance of drawing pictures with your words. “The ear processes words more slowly than the eye,” he says. “Accordingly, drawing a picture with words will often help the audience grasp the message that the speaker is trying to convey.” For example, Gordon cites a famous remark associated with President Franklin Roosevelt: “I hate war.” While the quotation is accurate, it has diminished impact as a sound bite removed from its context. Roosevelt’s full statement read this way:

*“I have seen war. I have seen war on land and sea. I have seen blood running from the wounded. I have seen men coughing out their gassed lungs. I have seen the dead in the mud. I have seen cities destroyed. I have seen children starving. I have seen the agony of mothers and wives. I hate war.”*

Says Gordon: “Simply saying ‘I hate war’ would have only been a catch phrase. After the word picture Roosevelt drew from his own experience, no one could doubt that his assertion, ‘I hate war,’ came from the depths of his heart.”

Writing for the ear means capturing the way audiences speak, not how they write, Mobley stresses. In everyday conversation, people typically use contractions; when they write they usually don’t. “Using contractions may not be proper writing, but it is plain speaking,” Mobley says. “We should write like we speak.”

The key, says Laura Lee, president of OverViews, an executive speechwriting company near Detroit, Michigan, is not to “create grandiloquent rhetoric, but to express your own personality, passions and perspectives in ways that those who know you best will say, ‘Yes, that’s him.’”

### Avoiding the PowerPoint Trap

It’s easy to fall into the trap of using PowerPoint, the omnipresent and user-friendly presentation design software, in a way many speakers do today: with bulleted lists and text-heavy slides serving as the centerpiece of a presentation. Yet because that’s what many audiences have come to expect – speakers leaning heavily on PowerPoint as a crutch by “reading from the screen” –

it also represents a missed opportunity. Green, for one, promotes more creative uses of speaker support as a way to help his clients’ messages stand out from the pack.

In one 40-slide speech Green developed for a client on the value of innovation, some 60 percent of the slides featured one-liners making a provocative statement or question, and the rest contained optical illusions that enforced the idea of looking at things from different perspectives. “It allowed the speaker to create a break in the flow of his comments and create a sense of ‘chapters’ by having these interesting visuals,” says Green.

In another speech, Green’s mission was to highlight the difference between simplicity and complexity in product features. Rather than spelling out the distinction in a series of snooze-inducing bullet points, Green used the paintings of Jackson Pollack to represent complexity and those of Mark Rothko to represent simplicity. “You want your audience to have some kind of takeaway, and they’re not going to be able to take away an entire 30-minute speech,” Green says. “What they’re most likely to take away is one or two compelling ideas or good lines.”

In the Summer 2007 issue of the *Claremont Review of Books*, Diana Schaub, chairman of the political science department at Loyola College in Maryland, argued that use of bullet points has undermined the quality of speechmaking in the U.S. “Hierarchy may be antithetical to democracy, but it is essential to logic,” she wrote. “The replacement of paragraphs with bullet points indicates the democratization of logic. But the equality of all sentences destroys the connectedness of thought. The scattershot technique of contemporary speechmaking can bowl you over if the speaker has sufficient force of personality, but it can’t pierce your mind or heart, and it certainly can’t do it as written rather than spoken.”

Adds Mobley to the debate over the much-used software: “There’s a reason you never see PowerPoint used during a eulogy.”

### The Golden Rule

Whatever process you choose to research, write or revise a speech, it pays to remember a golden rule of speechwriting: Audiences don’t want to know how much you know, they want to know what *they can do* with the knowledge you’ve accumulated.

“The really great writers and speakers give us insight, not just ideas,” says Mobley. “A good idea makes the audience say, ‘I never thought of that.’ But insight makes them say, I never thought of it *that way*.” ■

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**Dave Zielinski** is a freelance writer who divides his time between Wisconsin and South Carolina.

# Visualize Success — And It Can Be Yours!

By Judy M. Bailey

The value of setting specific, measurable goals.



**A**t one point in my life I had a horrible case of the “why bothers.” I couldn’t get my engine running, let alone rolling to its destination. Then I ran into an old friend, Chad, who told me to set some goals.

“You’re not *listening*,” I informed him. “Goals won’t help – I have no energy! I can’t do anything.”

Chad promised that committing goals to paper would supply me with plenty of energy and enthusiasm to reach my objectives.

“Just try it,” he said.

This is the time of year when resolutions are made and broken. But don’t sell the practice short. Experts in motivation and achievement claim that setting a goal, imagining how it would look and feel to reach that goal, then putting a plan into action to reach that goal – are the three hottest tickets to your success.

## Setting Goals

“A goal is something that a person wishes to achieve,” says Gary Glasscock, authority in goal-setting and

visualization techniques and owner of a life coaching business called Manifesting Your Life. “What you hold your focus on is what you will receive, especially if you look at that goal as already achieved. It will draw the goal to you.”

Glasscock has seen this principle at work in his life as an increase in income, client base and referrals. Plus he has seen clients establish a great deal of success.

“Life does not go according to plan if you don’t have a plan,” says Gary Blair, the Goals Guy and President of the GoalsGuy Learning Systems in Tampa, Florida. “A goal is created three times. First as a mental picture.



Second, when written down to add clarity and dimension. And third, when you take action toward its achievement.”

Richard E. Williams, a former member of the Positive Picker Toastmasters Club near Cleveland, Ohio, agrees. As a business professional, he sets financial, physical and career goals.

“I thought I was already a very accomplished presenter before joining Toastmasters,” he says. “I was surprised to learn that I had some serious refining to do to reach the professional presenter level. I achieved my presentation goals due to the goal-setting work I had done up to that point.”

As a result, Williams became an advisor for presentation skills with the national governing body for the sport of bowling and helped start a Toastmasters club at the organization’s headquarters.

A goal is an objective; it’s something to aim for. There’s a saying that you won’t hit the target until you know what you’re shooting at. Goals drive us in the direction of the dream that most often occupies our thinking.

Bill Brown, President of the Rancho Speech Masters club in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, uses goals to win speaking competitions. His preparation includes learning what is expected at each level of competition. For instance, one of his objectives was to listen to a member who would compete against him.

He uses feedback from others to fine-tune his speech, constantly changing it to meet the demands of higher-level contests. “I ask myself how I can be more expressive, use body language to better make a point and use greater vocal variety,” he says. And as a result of his diligence, Brown won both the division and district contests.

There are as many different ways to approach setting goals as there are people who make them. But certain points are central to most of these techniques:

- **Be clear and specific.** Beware of vague goals, like “to become a better person” or “lose weight.” Both are good objectives but offer little direction; they don’t answer the question, How?
- **Make them measurable.** Lose how much weight and by when?
- **Set a time limit.** “You must hold yourself accountable to deadlines and adjust tasks accordingly,” says Blair. “Slipping deadlines is a symptom of poor execution and a lack of discipline.”
- **Break projects down into small, more manageable units.** Rather than setting a goal of losing 30 pounds, make one for losing five pounds this month.
- **Establish stepping-stone goals.** In order to lose five pounds, you can aim for walking 20 minutes three times a week or eating five helpings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- **Write them down.** Most experts consider this a crucial step. Writing your ambitions down makes them real and keeps them in your mind longer. Plus it establishes a commitment to yourself.
- **Post goals around the house.** Experts suggest displaying Post-it notes or other signs around the house – perhaps on your computer monitor or on the bathroom mirror.

### Practicing Visualization

It’s been said that golfer Jack Nicklaus never took a shot before first picturing it in his mind. This technique brought him six green jackets for his (six) wins at the Masters Tournament, one of the most prestigious golf events.

Visualization is being used more and more in competitive sports. For example, Olympic gymnasts spend hours each day visualizing their perfect performances.

This practice involves picturing the outcome, emotion or object that you desire. It enhances motivation, direction and commitment. On a neurological level, the brain doesn’t differentiate between an actual and an imagined experience. Picturing images causes some level of physical sensation, leading to muscular responses. It’s not only the brain that has a memory; the muscles do as well.

A principle of energy is that energy of a certain quality or vibration tends to attract energy of a similar quality or vibration. This is why successful thoughts manifest success in our lives. According to books such as *Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain, and *The Secret* by Ronda Byrne, we attract into our lives whatever we think about the most, believe in fiercely, expect to occur and envision most vividly.

So when a golfer visualizes making a putt from the rough, the muscles and nervous system react to the mental images of correct golf technique. Toastmaster Richard Williams applies the same techniques to coaching bowling. "Using visualization prior to performance in a sports activity allows the athlete to practice in his mind. I encourage the athletes to surround themselves with the cues of the competition environment; to take in sights, sounds and smell to experience a deeper, more effective visualization than trying to do it in a surrounding that is nothing like competition."

A bowler might visualize feeling confident and comfortable, excited about an upcoming win, feeling his fingers gripping the dense material of the ball lying cool in his hands, balls thundering down the alleys next to him, taking his regular number of steps to the line and allowing the ball to glide off his fingers, humming down the lane and mowing down all of the pins.

"This is *process visualization*," Williams says, "and is essential to continued success, as it builds muscle memory that is necessary for consistent physical performance. I also encourage the use of *outcome visualization*. It serves as a motivator to work hard to achieve the outcome that is important to them."

Outcomes can include a sun-bleached beach after spending months completing a project, the warm feeling of satisfaction from a job well done, or a celebratory lunch.

**"As long as you are willing to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes, no one will be able to prevent you from reaching your goal."**

"For years we have been hearing how important visualization is from trainers and motivational speakers," Glasscock says. Now we know how it works. It keeps us focused, in-tune with what we hope for. There's an old saying, Where attention goes, energy flows."

When you first begin to practice mental imaging, you may feel somewhat awkward and silly – and likely to disbelieve in its benefits. But it can be considered a mild form of practice in which you work out problems by thinking through to their solutions. Keep in mind what international motivational speaker Denis Waitley says, "If you get it right in drill; you'll get it right in life."

Imaging positive outcomes is one way to reach success.

Here are some steps to visualization:

- **Close your eyes and picture the mental images of your goal** vividly and precisely.
- **Use the senses** to engulf yourself in the visualization
  - ▶ **Sight** – What do you see around you? What colors are present? Which grab and hold your attention?

- ▶ **Hearing** – What sounds are you hearing? Are there sounds that appear suddenly, others appearing later? Are these sounds appealing or not?
- ▶ **Smell** – Are there smells that strike you, pleasant or unpleasant? How do the odors affect you?
- ▶ **Taste** – Is there anything to taste? Are you eating or drinking? Do you have some lingering taste in your mouth?
- ▶ **Feel** – What do things feel like? How do the clothes you're wearing feel on your skin? What does the air feel like? Is it cool, dry, breezy?
- **Picture movement** – your movements, things outside of you in motion. Quick motion is better, although subtle movements might catch attention.
- **Employ your emotions.**
  - ▶ In your mind celebrate how you would feel reaching this goal.
  - ▶ Allow yourself to experience the completion of your victories – picture joyful elation, wide smiling and perhaps, jumping up and down.

## Taking Action

Goals and visualizations fade away without action.

"In order to receive a victorious outcome, perseverance is the only option," Blair says. "As long as you are willing to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes, no one will be able to prevent you from reaching your goal."

After Chad taught me to set goals, I considered the outcomes of his goals. What I learned from his experience convinced me that the process of goal-setting and visualization might work for me, too.

Later I learned that Chad came from an alcoholic home where he was either ignored – or punished severely. He saw the future as a way to get out of the house. When it happened, he didn't know what to do or where to go. He moved from one friend's house to another, at times begging on the streets.

Sitting on the stoop of a liquor store one morning, Chad met a clean-cut stranger who sat down with him. Just before Chad got up to move, this man told him about goals.

"I looked at him as quizzically as you looked at me when I mentioned goals," Chad said. "I thought, *me*? Set goals? But I set one – to graduate from high school. Then I set another, to get a job. Then I really got down to this goal business; I even added visualization.

Today Chad owns a string of print shops, has three happy and healthy kids and a model marriage. He says he owes his success to the skill of goal-setting and the practice of visualization. **T**

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**Judi Bailey** is a writer in Lakewood, Ohio, and a frequent contributor to this magazine. Reach her at [author48@cox.net](mailto:author48@cox.net).

Write things down  
and change your life!

# The Joy of Journaling

**W**rite things down and change your life! When you embrace the joy of journaling, astonishing things begin to happen.

A few years ago, I competed in our club's International speech contest against Asma, a Toastmaster friend. My speech was titled, "Perfect Peace;" Asma's was called, "Write It Down." I thought my speech was awesome, but Asma's speech touched more hearts, mine included.

Asma took her speech and went on to win at higher competitive levels. Through her words, she addressed the importance of recording one's goals on paper to bring them to fruition.

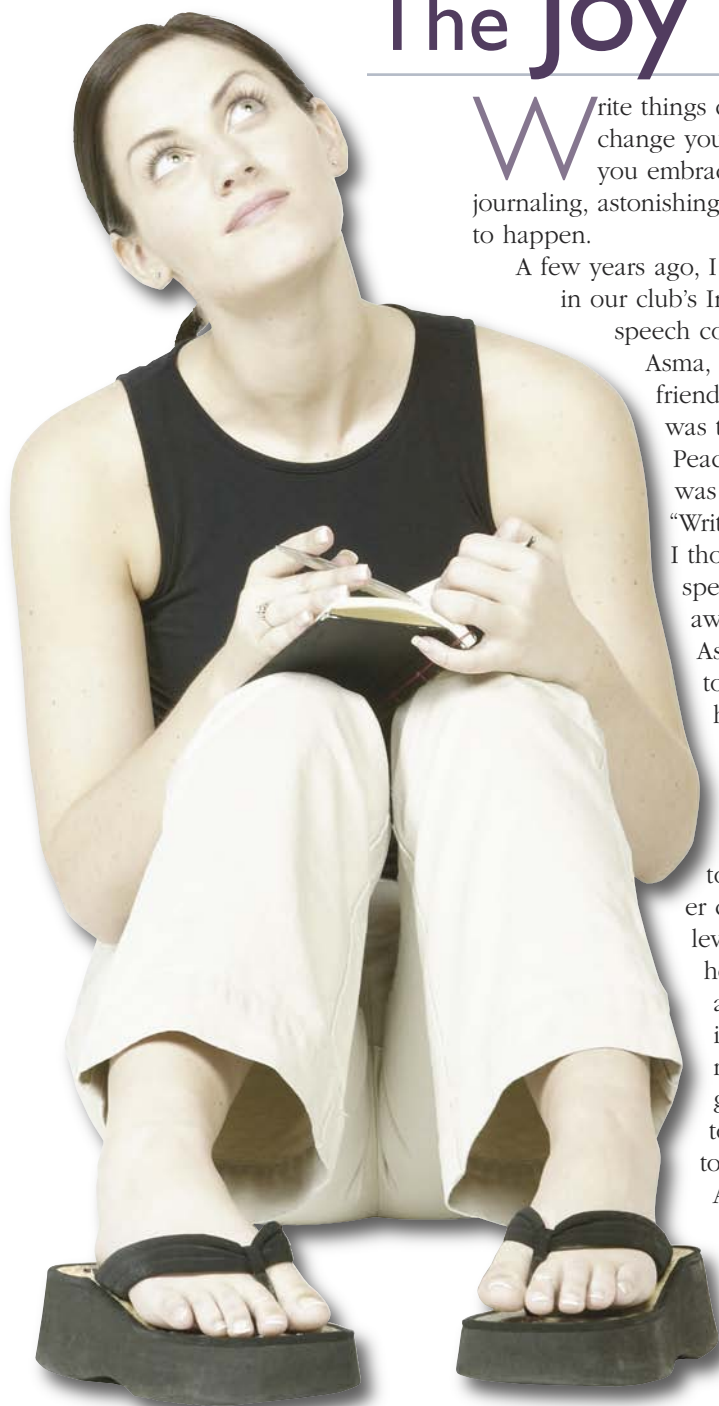
Asma told a spellbound audience about her sister Uzma, who had been dis-

owned by their parents for marrying against their wishes. Desperately desiring family acceptance, Uzma recorded her 50 lifetime goals on paper, placing the goal of reuniting with her parents first on her list.

Uzma converted those lifetime goals into a computer screensaver that she could read every day. That year, Uzma achieved 25 percent of her lifetime goals, simply by writing them down. And yes... shortly thereafter, after innumerable futile attempts, she reunited with her family.

As I followed my friend Asma through the various levels of Toastmasters competition, watching her win again and again, hearing her message over and over, I realized that somehow I never seemed to tire of it. That's because Asma's message was one to which I have always subscribed. I have always believed in the power of writing things down, yet had grown away from that practice. It was time to return to something I enthusiastically endorsed: keeping a journal. It was time to come back to my love of writing. It was time for me to come home.

I started keeping a journal around age 10. I toted a little orange notebook around in which I recorded my insights on life... as much insight as a 10-year old could muster. I thought I was worldly with much to record, and my journal indulged me by being a silent listener.



I continued to keep a journal throughout my teenage years, recording every puerile teenage angst I felt. Trivial upsets that I now handle with grace and ease seemed so serious at the time! Yet, the very act of writing things down was my form of emotional release, my catharsis. It was like confiding in a dear friend, and indeed, my journal was a very dear friend.

The act of writing things down and logically weighing both sides is a necessary first step to reaching decisions. When making conclusions, however, I allow my intuition to take over.

### **Draw Your Dreams to You**

The single most important reason for writing down your dreams and goals is this: A dream carried

pop into my head. I then retrieve my little notebook and jot down such ideas for later conversion into something more permanent. How do you capture your creativity when it cries out for attention?

**T**ry the power of journaling in your life by writing down 10 things you like about yourself, five good things that happened today, five goals you are working on, and 10 things that bring you ease.

**“The single most important reason for writing down your dreams and goals is this:  
A dream carried around in your head remains a dream until you take action.”**

In my mid-20s, my writing grew up: Fewer petty insights and more positive acceptance and reflection on what is. Again, my journal had helped me to grow. Today, I continue the valuable practice of journaling.

I believe journaling is a tool of the soul. Writing things down quickly connects us to our inner being. Journaling is a life-long, life-changing activity.

So, how does writing things down work?

### **Make Decisions/Find Solutions**

Your journal is a *concrete decision-making tool*, a place to reflect and analyze a situation. To this day, when faced with a difficult decision, I reach for blank paper, draw a line down the center, and immediately record the strengths and weaknesses of the challenge at hand. This helps me evaluate my options through a combination of logic and gut feeling.

Seeing things in black and white provides some objectivity, but I make a final decision based on gut feeling. Why heavy reliance on intuition after such logical analysis?

around in your head remains a dream until you take action. The physical, purposeful act of writing down your dreams, wishes and aspirations in black and white demonstrates a commitment to yourself and the universe that you mean business – that you expect your dreams to manifest outward and are prepared to make it happen.

For example, create a top-10 list of what you want to do in your life and refer to it daily. Revise the list as you achieve objectives. Think constantly of what you want, keep reading your list, and your mind will work toward achieving it.

### **Spark Your Creativity**

Journaling sparks our creativity. Our intuitive talents are always alert and we don't want to miss out on those bright, life-changing ideas. When inspiration knocks we want to be ready.

Often, when I am riding home on the subway, completely relaxed and observing the world rolling by, an idea for a speech, poem, seminar or article for publication will

#### **■ Ten things you like about yourself:**

This exercise will help to expand your self-esteem. It's a reminder of how much there is to love and appreciate about ourselves, exactly as we are. I love an analogy about how we sometimes walk through life like light bulbs covered with masking tape. Learning to appreciate ourselves is like pulling the masking tape off of the light bulb and allowing our true brightness, our natural light, to shine through.

**■ Five good things that happened today,** or even this week, trains us to focus on the positive in our lives. Whenever we count our blessings and adopt an attitude of gratitude for the wonderful things the universe has bestowed upon us, we attract even more positive energy and increase the flow of wonderful things coming our way.

#### **■ Five goals you are working on:**

Recording them helps you develop future-oriented thinking and moves you closer to those goals. Remember Uzma? Demonstrate commitment to what you want from life. We cannot achieve our goals if we don't know what they are. Not only must you write down your goals, you must post the written words in a visible place where you can read them every day. As the saying goes:

If we don't know where we are going, any road will take us there.

■ **Ten things that put you at ease** lifts your spirits and creates something to which you can refer when you need an emotional boost. Your list could include: enjoying a warm bath or a cup of tea, spending time with family or taking long walks.

### Always and Nevers


To benefit from journaling:

- Always tote around a pen and a small notebook.
- Write whenever inspiration strikes.
- Avoid recording your gripes. Stay away from victim mode. Gripping comes easily to most of us; it's human nature to obsess on what's not working in our lives.

By giving attention to our problems, we allow them to run our lives. We set ourselves up for misery when we put our lives on hold until things are fixed. By doing so, we miss out on all the happiness there is to be had.

Some aspects of our lives will always be less than perfect. The key to happiness is awareness of this fact, and a firm resolve to ask ourselves, 'What would I be doing if this problem didn't exist? Where would I focus my energy if this annoying person, place or event were not in my life?' Once you know the answer to exactly how you would behave if the problem were non-existent, you can go about and behave as if it were so. Your journal will help you. We

expend much energy training ourselves to be positive, why jeopardize our efforts through negative thinking? It is too easy to adopt victim mode. Let's not do that. Keep your journal positive and you will attract the positive.

The simple act of writing things down will improve your life. Simply observe the people you consider to be happy and successful and ask them if they carry around an "idea" or "insight" notebook. I'm betting the answer is yes. Write things down and change your life! 

**Joy Lardner, DTM**, is a charter member of the CU at Noon Toastmasters Club in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. In 2003 she published her first book of poetry titled, *Quietly Knowing, Warmth for the Soul*.

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 Yves Prevost 9895-6, Thunder Bay, ON, Canada  
 Datta Groover 5840-7, Medford, Oregon  
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 Ralph Wallace 4357-23, Albuquerque, New Mexico  
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 Barbara B. Morgan 6040-25, Wichita Falls, Texas  
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 Dodi D. Foster 9595-25, Fort Worth, Texas  
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 Francis Ng 8141-51, Kuala Lumpur, WP, Malaysia  
 Muhendaran Suppiah 8773-51, Kuala Lumpur, WP, Malaysia  
 John P. H. Lau 708110-51, Kuching, SAR, Malaysia  
 Marvin Cross 606146-53, Trumbull, Connecticut  
 Lupe Roy 959372-55, San Antonio, Texas  
 Jill Moffitt 505-56, Houston, Texas  
 Diane Nino 5698-56, Houston, Texas  
 Thomas Skipwith 851701-59, Zurich, Switzerland  
 Nena M. Nera 6236-61, Ottawa, ON, Canada  
 Horace E. Crozier 692750-61, Ottawa, ON, Canada  
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Elaine Mary McLoon 622756-70, Central Coast, NSW, Australia  
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 Shaun Goodbrand 4500-74, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa  
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 Chai Tun Yeo 8046-80, Singapore, Singapore  
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## 60 Year

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 Aerospace 401-01, El Segundo, California  
 Dynamic Speakers 457-05, San Diego, California  
 Business & Community 1216-11, Indianapolis, Indiana  
 Frederick 1082-18, Frederick, Maryland  
 Garland 1207-50, Garland, Texas  
 Lincoln-Douglas 1196-54, Canton, Illinois  
 Lake Charles 1225-68, Lake Charles, Louisiana

## 50 Year

Century City 2681-01, Los Angeles, California  
 Cariboo 786-21, Prince George, BC, Canada  
 Hays 2609-22, Hays, Kansas  
 Spectacle City 2602-35, Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
 West Shore 227-38, New Cumberland, Pennsylvania  
 Algoma 2648-60, Sault Ste Marie, ON, Canada  
 Susquehanna 2644-65, Owego, New York  
 West End 2661-66, Richmond, Virginia  
 Taipei 1890-67, Taipei, Taiwan, Taiwan

## 45 Year

Downey Space 513-F, Downey, California  
 Myrtlewood Hootowlers 158-07, Bandon, Oregon  
 Capital Mexicana 3493-34, Mexico City, DF, Mexico  
 Mainland-FAA 1107-38, Atlantic City, New Jersey  
 Picatinny 3547-46, Picatinny Arsenal, New Jersey  
 Toronto Business 3568-60, Toronto, ON, Canada  
 Mikasa 1727-76, Yokosuka Kanagawa, Japan

## 40 Year

New Providence Branch 3596-47, Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas  
 Strowger 3848-54, Genoa, Illinois  
 Table Bay 2232-74, Cape Town, W Cape, South Africa  
 Sunrises 2269-78, Billings, Montana

## 30 Year

Mound 3255-40, Miamisburg, Ohio  
 Suncoast 1667-47, Tampa, Florida  
 Black Walnut 3320-60, Kitchener-Waterloo, ON, Canada  
 City 1324-74, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

## 25 Year

Brecksville - Nordonia Hills Gaveliers 912-10, Brecksville, Ohio  
 Downtown Detroit 5043-28, Detroit, Michigan  
 Pahrump 1970-33, Pahrump, Nevada  
 Hawthorn 5028-73, Hawthorn, VIC, Australia  
 Siam 5040-80, Bangkok, Thailand, Thailand

## 20 Year

Graceful Communicators 6792-03, Tempe, Arizona  
 The Hill Speakers 4415-06, Arden Hills, Minnesota  
 Randallstown Network 6805-18, Pikesville, Maryland  
 Roman Forum 6806-24, Omaha, Nebraska  
 Bell Helicopter 6810-25, Hurst, Texas  
 Toledo 6801-28, Toledo, Ohio  
 Unity 6803-28, Berkley, Michigan  
 Harry Hoffman Advanced 3202-39, Stockton, California  
 Ashland Chemical 6802-40, Dublin, Ohio  
 PATC 6798-46, Jersey City, New Jersey  
 Cable Beach West 6796-47, Nassau, N.P., Bahamas

## Anniversaries

January 2008

## 70 Year

Waterloo 101-19, Waterloo, Iowa

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