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Club Meetings: **Break Away From the Ordinary**

Welcome to 2021! As 2020 was drawing to a close, I was looking forward to the start of the new year through an optimist's lens. The global pandemic would be subsiding, the organization would be experiencing a resurgence in both member and club growth, and meetings would be moving back to in person. Unfortunately, the pandemic has not subsided, and a vast majority of our clubs are still meeting online.

Yet, despite these challenges, clubs are managing to keep current members engaged while finding ways to attract new members. The past few months while virtually visiting clubs around the world, I have also noticed that in addition to providing a positive and supportive environment, clubs are placing an emphasis on having fun.

When the Toastmasters Club of Paris conducted a meeting celebrating its 45th anniversary, a majority of members dressed for a party, and at the end of the meeting they each lit a candle and sang "Happy Birthday!" Theme-style meetings also seem to be on the rise, with themes ranging from Carnival to the Mediterranean and even a Nobel Prize gala. Our meetings are designed to have a purpose, but they also need to have a level of fun and excitement. As our founder, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, stated, "We learn best in moments of enjoyment."

> Our meetings are designed to have a purpose, but they also need to have a level of fun and excitement.

Clubs are meant to be a safe environment, a "learning laboratory" as Past International President Balraj Arunasalam, DTM, would say, to try new things. This applies not only to speakers trying new techniques and gaining new skills but also for clubs to explore new meeting styles and look for new ways to keep members engaged.

Living in the virtual world for hours on end, day after day, can have an emotional impact on people and Zoom fatigue can set in. Finding new ways to keep our meetings fun and enjoyable will keep our current members engaged and encourage new members to join, while still supporting the Club Mission to empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.

After all, who wouldn't want to be a member of a club that is fun? The Toastmasters organization thrives in part due to the grassroots efforts of you, our members, and your dedication to helping others. Your creativity, your imagination, and your "we got this" attitude show your commitment to one another. Thank you!

Richard E. Peck, DTM
International President

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Clubs hit milestones in 2020.

Nagpur Toastmasters Club of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, celebrates its 150th meeting with a picnic and a "get outdoors"-themed meeting, prior to the pandemic.

Toastmasters at the Square Club of Marietta, Georgia, pose for a photo to commemorate the club's 20th anniversary in early 2020.

Members of Utthishta Toastmasters of Bangalore, Karnataka, India, celebrate the club's 300th meeting with a Humorous Speech Contest and gala dinner in January 2020.

Send your fun club photos to photos@toastmasters.org. *Include a description and your club name, number, and location. Photos must be in jpeg format with a resolution of at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) and size of at least 1 MB (megabyte). Out-of-focus images* cannot *be accepted. It is not necessary to include the* Toastmaster *magazine or other branded materials in your photos, but if Toastmasters materials are displayed, they must reflect the current brand.*

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TUNE IN

Hear the latest episodes from The Toastmasters Podcast.

Listen to additional tips from the author of the Toastmasters Toolbox.

Catch up on the recent webinar series on public speaking.

Curious About Podcasts?

Whether you're a host, an interview subject, or an avid listener, podcasts can be a gold mine for communication. Learn and listen for advice on how to get started.

Photo Contest

Attention photographers! Send us a creative photo of something that represents what Toastmasters means to you. Our favorite pics will appear in an upcoming issue.

New Accredited Speaker

Discover more about Mohamed Ali Shukri, DTM, the latest Toastmaster to earn the Accredited Speaker designation. Watch his speech and listen to a podcast interview.

ICE BREAKER BEGIN

LEVEL 1 PROJECT

Why do we break the ice in every Pathways project? Find out how it can help and watch a video to learn tricks on giving your first speech again and again.

MEMBER MOMENT

Advocating for the Benefit of Others

Safety expert achieves Accredited Speaker designation with passionate presentation.

BY STEPHANIE DARLING

Mohamed Ali Shukri

Mohamed Ali Shukri, DTM, Toastmasters' newest Accredited Speaker (AS), has this advice for those who might want to follow in his professional oratorical path: "If you love to speak, speak. Speak because you know your message will benefit others."

Shukri, who received the prestigious AS designation at the 2020 International Convention last August, is a member of Vision Advanced Toastmasters and Y-Access Toastmasters clubs in Manama, in the Kingdom of Bahrain. He is CEO and founder of Y Access Training Solutions and an expert in the field of occupational health and safety management.

"I considered going through my speaking career without this accolade but then I heard other designees talk about it as a life-changing experience," Shukri says of the AS designation. "When I achieved it, I felt gratitude as a person and pride as a Toastmaster that our organization provides a world-class level of accreditation that people can look up to."

Described as an "ardent achiever" by admirers, Shukri is no stranger to the highest levels of competitive speaking: He advanced to the World Championship of Public Speaking® in 2006 and was an International Speech Contest semifinalist in 2007.

Shukri, who studied electrical engineering at the University of Bahrain, united his love of public speaking with what has become a decades-long crusade for workplace safety. As a former industrial superintendent, he was moved to advocacy by seeing on-the-job accidents—the kind that kill or injure millions of workers around the world each year. He was determined to motivate industries and employees to change their safety behaviors and attitudes.

Wearing a hard hat and safety goggles for part of his speech, "A Safe Shortcut to Safety Culture," Shukri demonstrated his expertise and eloquence—yet the virtual stage was a challenge. He wasn't sure his presentation measured up.

"I'm not a virtual presenter—I'm a live, physical trainer and speaker. I'm grateful the judges were able to detect the energy, message, structure, and content that I bring to live audiences."

Shukri admits to being an unabashed "go-to speaker" from an early age. He was regularly tapped to speak at large family and community events, a role traditionally filled by fathers or other leaders. He was so engaging that less willing speakers gladly relinquished the role to him.

"This is when my family wants me, when they are challenged," he jokes. Yet becoming a highly respected and sought-after speaker only deepened his love of language and expression, which were sharpened through Toastmasters. "Speaking is not about the mechanics, it's about the story, the emotion, the heart," he says. However, he notes, good speakers employ tangible Toastmasters techniques to pursue the "intangible joy" of speaking.

Shukri urges Toastmasters to proactively accept speaking opportunities outside their club and within their professions. The ability to impart occupational expertise and motivate peer audiences allows a talented speaker to stand out in a niche industry, he explains. Toastmasters, he adds, "must serve the world outside with our voices.

"If you are a Toastmaster and a professional, please do not disconnect the two," he advises. "You have no idea the benefits you'll receive and how outstanding you'll become by speaking in your field. With the help of Toastmasters, I was able to become a catalyst for safety changes in my company. I wasn't alone in doing this but I was instrumental in helping spread the word."

Shukri also says that any Toastmaster can benefit from emulating the AS program's rigors. "Take the kind of measures this program requires. Adopt those habits of hard work and excellence and apply them to whatever speaking level you want to attain. It will sharpen your skills and add a unique pressure you don't normally face—use that to excel in your performance."

Toastmasters Accredited Speaker Program

The Accredited Speaker Program is designed for professional speakers and signifies the highest level of subject matter expertise and public speaking mastery recognized by Toastmasters International. In order to pass Level 1, candidates are required to submit an application, references, and a video of their professional presentation before at least 25 non-Toastmasters audiences. Successful candidates advance to Level 2, a live presentation at the Toastmasters International Convention.

The program is demanding; only 88 speakers have earned the designation since the program began in 1981. However, the designation can help you attain status, visibility, and credibility as a speaker.

Toastmasters invites you to review the application process.

Stephanie Darling *is a senior editor for the* Toastmaster *magazine.*

TOASTMASTERS NEWS

LinkedIn Ad Guide

Is your club or District ready to start advertising on social media? Use this how-to tutorial on running an ad on LinkedIn for brand awareness, lead engagement, and more! In Section One, find detailed instruction on creating a LinkedIn ad. In Section Two, access suggested headlines, ad copy, and images. In Section Three, get tips from Toastmasters.

Check Out the Corporate Clubs Infographic

Would it surprise you to know that more than 1,000 corporate Toastmasters clubs have been chartered during the past 18 months? That fact and more can be found in Toastmasters' Corporate Clubs Infographic, which includes the latest workforce data on how employers of all sizes are recognizing the value of chartering corporate clubs. Please share the knowledge with members of your club and District, prospective clubs, and media!

2021 International Convention

It's already time to start thinking about this year's convention! Save the date for August 25-28, 2021, at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Stay tuned for details.

Free Webinar Series Continues

Mark your calendar for the next Toastmasters International webinar, taking place on February 3 and 4. This two-part session will help you define and demonstrate humor.

Send Us Your Story Ideas!

Do you have an article idea or topic that you want to read about, but not write yourself? Whether you're looking for more tips on writing a speech, navigating your Pathways journey, or how to give an online presentation—we want to hear from you! Simply fill out this form and submit it to the magazine team. No idea is too big or too small!

Leader Survey Cites the Pros and Cons of Online Meetings

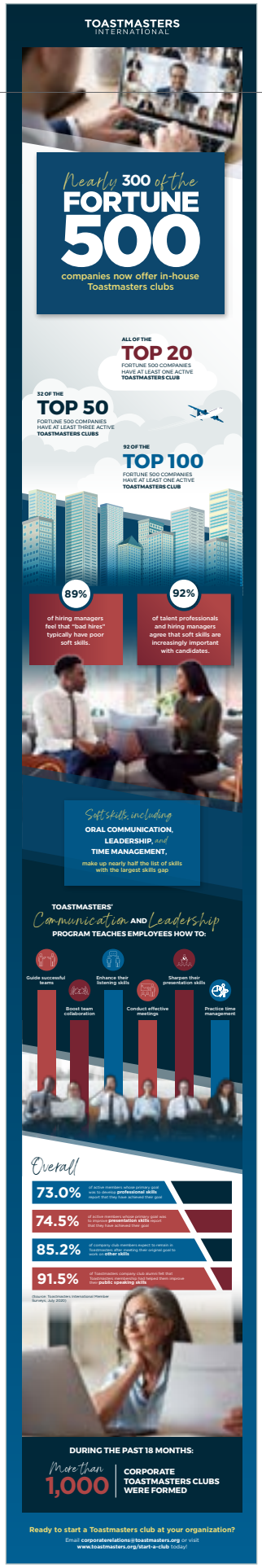
Most Toastmasters clubs have been meeting online for nearly a year. It's been a necessary yet extreme experiment, a radical departure from the 96-year-old classic in-person meeting format.

Club Presidents and District leaders recently responded to a World Headquarters survey to gauge the impact of the pandemic on clubs and members. Their answers reflected both the benefits and challenges of the online shift. On the positive side, club meetings have continued amid the pandemic, and members are expanding their ability to communicate in online settings. Not surprisingly, top challenges in the virtual world include lower meeting attendance, many members' pronounced preference for in-person meetings, and technology expertise and costs.

Club Presidents responded to questions about the impact of COVID-19 on technology access, club quality, membership building, meeting management, leadership assistance, and other key topics. Among the findings:

- Top benefits: preserving club meetings, learning new competencies in virtual speaking and online meeting management, and saving time and money by not renting meeting space or traveling to meetings.
- Online meeting promotion: 90% of clubs sought the impact of social media to publicize meetings; Facebook, email, and club websites were the top platforms.
- Half of the clubs reported a drop in regular attendance at online meetings, yet 94% reported hosting some or many *guests* at their online meetings.
- 76% of District leaders surveyed said District events drew more attendees when held online.
- 60% of Districts held virtual demonstration meetings for prospective clubs.

This Corporate Clubs Infographic (right) shows companies and their employees the benefits of Toastmasters.



SNAPSHOT

A few members of GREAT2B Toastmasters and Farlim Toastmasters, of Penang, Malaysia, attend a digital marketing course and promote Toastmasters to course participants.

SPEECH CONTESTS

Aim for More Virtual Victories in 2021!

When Mike Carr won Toastmasters' first-ever virtual World Championship of Public Speaking® last year, his creativity with the online format was a highlight of his championship speech.

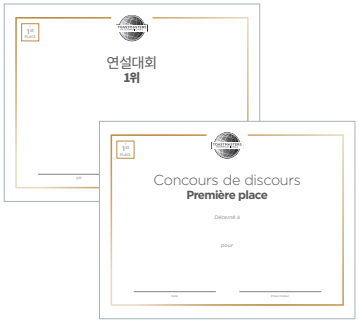
Among other things, Carr used the camera frame to evoke a malfunctioning video projector. "I thought, why not play with (the format) and do something interesting and maybe I could project a message I want to give to the world," Carr explained in a *Toastmaster* magazine article.

So the next time you participate in an online speech contest, don't be afraid to take chances on the virtual stage and have some fun with the format. You'll have plenty of opportunities, since speech contests will continue to be held primarily online for now. Because of coronavirus health restrictions, most Toastmasters contests have been virtual since April 2020. All contests at the Area, Division, and District levels must be held online for the 2020–2021 speech contest cycle.

Here are some resources to help with this year's online contests.

- For tips on competing in an online speech contest, watch these videos made by Aaron Beverly, Toastmasters' 2019 World Champion of Public Speaking.
- If you are organizing an online contest, this document offers best practices.
- The *Speech Contest Rulebook* is a key resource for all Toastmasters speech contests.
- Visit the Speech Contests webpage for more resources and information.

Free Contest Certificates Now in 10 Languages



Honor your intrepid speech contest winners and participants with a special certificate, available for free download in all 10 supported languages. The certificates, in the Resource Library, are suitable for use with club, Area, Division, District, and region participants.

The certificates were translated and formatted solely by member volunteer translation reviewers and World Headquarters staff.

GET CREATIVE! Traveling *Toastmaster* wants to highlight creativity in quarantine! Take a picture in your home or socially distancing with your magazine or other Toastmasters memorabilia. Send your fun photos to photos@toastmasters.org.

1 | **KEITH YEUNG** *of Markham, Ontario, Canada, travels with his trailer to safely enjoy the Killbear Provincial Park near Nobel, Ontario, Canada.*

2 | **CRISTINA SÖDERBERG, DTM,** *of Tungelsta, Sweden, takes advantage of being at home to virtually visit clubs in New Zealand and Botswana.*

3 | **CHAMIL MADUSANKA** *(left) and* **CHIRANTHA SIRIKUMARA**, *of Veyangoda, Sri Lanka, visit Bangalore Palace—now one of the oldest colleges in India—in Bangalore, Karnataka, India, in December 2019.*

4 | **SHEILA ULRICH** *of Hartington, Nebraska, takes a "trip" to her backyard during quarantine.*

View additional Traveling *Toastmaster* photos in the online magazine for some extra inspiration.

What Does 143 Mean to You?

My journey to experience the dazzling diversity within our truly global organization.

BY SINDHUJA NANDURI, DTM

In April 2020, India fell prey to COVID-19. Life witnessed a paradigm shift, with adversity in full swing.

With the spirit of Toastmasters engraved in me, I decided to envision the opportunity in that adversity. I asked my mentor if Toastmasters is indeed present in 143 countries across the world and if most clubs now meet online because of quarantine restrictions. The moment he answered yes, I made up my mind.

I had been pondering what to do for my Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) project. It had to challenge me. It had to be something that I would remember, not for a day or even a year, but something I would smile about decades later. Thus, I began Project 143—an attempt to attend club meetings in every country where our truly global organization is present.

With a digital Toastmasters passport and the resolve to expand my horizons of thought, I began my journey in the Kingdom of Bahrain and ended it in Curaçao, a Caribbean island. I didn't visit clubs that conducted meetings in their native language or were not meeting online. I *did* visit 127 countries, across 24 time zones, in exactly 127 days.

During that time, I learned that Toastmasters is a platform not only for improving communication but also for making meaningful connections with other members through actions of integrity, respect, service, and excellence. That was my deepest connection of all—with our core values.

The biggest region to cover was Europe, the Middle East, and Africa; I visited 71 countries in those parts of the world. The most challenging region was the Caribbean, because of the time difference. I attended meetings there as late as 2:30 a.m. and as early as 4 a.m.

One of my most emotional moments was listening to the story behind the

Sindhuja Nanduri

Emancipation Day, when slavery was abolished in the British Colonies, including Trinidad and Tobago. When I visited MDA Toastmasters, in Valsayn, Trinidad and Tobago, one member spoke about that event. I could feel the pain; I could only imagine the adversity their people had to endure.

> I asked my mentor if Toastmasters is indeed present in 143 countries … the moment he said yes, I made up my mind.

I also managed to fast-forward my own journey as a speaker—from fumbling in Table Topics® to winning the Best Table Topics Speaker in almost 30 countries.

I experienced a gazillion memorable moments in my online adventure. The funniest part was seeing people attempting to pronounce my Indian name as best they could. It went from Sindhooya to Sandhuja, Cynthia, Toastmaster Zinnov, and finally, Chelsea. (It's actually pronounced Sin-dhoo-jah.)

Two other moments were highlights. Most people want to hear from that one esteemed person in our lives, the person who validates everything we have done so far and raises the bar on our future. I received that call in August 2020, from then-International President Deepak Menon, DTM. I was completely overwhelmed to see how a leader of that stature can be so humble. That is the beauty of Toastmasters. We spoke for over 30 minutes; I was visiting my 120th country and he gave me the push to tread the final path.

The second moment was during the 2020 International Convention, my first ever. I was honored when the International President's report made mention of my Project 143.

At every meeting I visited, the club's members and I wore different styles of clothing, ate different food, and represented different heritages and cultures. But we were bound by the Toastmasters spirit.

It's been said that if you have not traveled, you have read just one page of the book. As the world stood still battling the pandemic, I am proud and humbled that I took the opportunity to travel digitally, immersing myself in this project and developing as a person holistically.

Being in Toastmasters the last two years has truly helped me discover an identity of my own. Project 143 is my way of thanking our mammoth organization. For me, 143 means I love Toastmasters International. What does it mean to you? T

SINDHUJA NANDURI, DTM, *is the President of a corporate club within Zinnov, a boutique management consulting company in Karnataka, Bangalore, India, where she works as a consultant. She is also a member of Spoken Word Toastmasters, also in Bangalore. She describes herself as a violinist by training, an engineer by education, and a Toastmaster at heart.*

Oh, No! I'm Giving My First Evaluation

How to prepare and what to look for as a new evaluator.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

The two most daunting tasks in Toastmasters are giving your first speech and giving your first evaluation.

The Toastmasters program gives you an Ice Breaker project to ease you into speaking. But the first evaluation is like jumping into the deep end of the pool. I'll try to make that easier for both the new evaluator and the growing Toastmaster.

I see the evaluation as having three objectives. First, encourage the speaker. That is key. Second, highlight what the speaker does well and the progress that he or she has made. And third, give them direction on what they need to work on next.

If you are preparing to give your first several evaluations, you might be thinking, *What can I tell the speaker? I don't know much.* Don't worry, the evaluation form for the speaker's project will tell you all you need to know.

First, there is a chart that lists a few criteria. You just have to circle the number, between one and five, that best signifies how they did. As a new evaluator, you might not have a good gauge on what to circle. Just give your best judgment.

Before the speech, you should review the overall project objectives listed in Pathways. The speaker should give you a copy or send you a link. Feel free to reach out to your speaker before the meeting. Ask if they want to improve on any specific skills, like banishing a filler word or using more gestures. The more time you have to prepare, the better.

Each project has its own set of objectives. Some have more than others. I found, as a new evaluator, that I could only focus on, at most, three criteria. Decide what you are going to look for before the speech begins. And then concentrate on these.

While there are several ways to structure an evaluation, I suggest that you use the following approach. That way it is easy for you to prepare and deliver.

Start with the positives that you see. Everyone does some things well. Discuss them up front. Next, give suggestions on where to improve. One is fine. If you see two or three areas, that is good too. I wouldn't go beyond that. Finally, finish with an encouraging statement.

> Encourage the speaker. That is key.

Don't worry if you don't see an area for improvement. Report on what you do see and hear. One of the best evaluations that I ever received was from a newer evaluator. She noticed a quirk I had that no one else had ever mentioned but was quite distracting—I fidgeted with the flap on the side pocket of my suit. I still remember her feedback 10 years later.

As you grow as a Toastmaster, your evaluations will get stronger. You will find that, when you look at the circle-the-number chart, you are more comfortable in your assessment of each criterion. That is growth.

You may also see that there are two or three areas of speaking that you notice more than others. For me, that is primarily speech delivery, especially vocal variety. I also notice the openings and the speech structure. There are other areas where I am not as observant—like eye contact.

When I give an evaluation, I concentrate on those three areas. That is where I can provide the greatest benefit to the speaker. And that is why it is important for a speaker, over time, to be evaluated by different evaluators. Each one notices different things, thus giving a broader picture.

One evaluation technique that I use is one that I rarely hear from other evaluators, yet I have found it to be valuable to the speaker. When I give an observation and recommendation, I don't just give a general comment, like "you need to use more vocal variety." I give examples. I repeat what they said and then give them a suggestion on how they could have done it differently. That way, they have a before-and-after comparison so that they can hear the difference that it makes.

I had a club member pull me aside after a meeting where I had evaluated him. He said, "Thanks for the examples. I now know what I was doing."

You might want to try this technique yourself.

The evaluation is a key element in the Toastmasters system. But it is also a skill that develops over time. You may not be a top evaluator right away, but that is fine. After all, you just might see something that no one else has ever noticed. That is a big benefit to the speaker. And you can certainly encourage them. They will appreciate it. T

Bill Brown, DTM, *is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of two clubs, Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette and Ahead of the Curve Toastmasters in Las Vegas. Learn more at* www.billbrownspeechcoach.com.

The Impact of a **Strong Speaker Introduction**

Tell the audience who you are and why your words matter.

BY GREG LEWIS, DTM

I suspect most Toastmasters would agree on the three main components of a speech: an opening, a body, and a close. Yet many of us miss a fourth element: the speaker introduction.

That's right, the speaker introduction is a vital part of every speech, yet its value is often underplayed. Whether you're writing your own introduction for a club or community speech, or preparing one to introduce another speaker, these tips may help.

The Pathways Piece

When you're giving a club speech in Pathways, your evaluator should note the path and level you're working on, as well as any personal or speech objectives. For instance, is there something you are trying to improve that you would like feedback on, such as vocal variety or speech structure? Or do you have a specific objective, something you want your audience to think, feel, or do as a result of your speech?

An introduction is also an excellent opportunity to convey information to your audience that otherwise would take up valuable speaking time during your actual speech.

"I once delivered a speech that involved a fairly lengthy explanation of the role the audience would be playing," explains Dianne Yungblut, DTM, of Rose City Toastmasters in Welland, Ontario, Canada. "My evaluator suggested using those details in my introduction instead, which would have given me another couple of valuable minutes for my speech. It was a brilliant suggestion."

Write your introduction immediately after writing the speech. All the information you need is fresh in your mind. Send it to the person who will be introducing you (usually your evaluator) well in advance of the meeting. This allows them time to practice reading it and ask any questions they may have regarding content or pronunciation of certain words or names.

And here's a general tip: Bring an extra copy of your introduction to in-person meetings and have an electronic version handy for online meetings, just in case your original gets misplaced.

An Introduction for Non-Toastmasters

If you speak to a community group, someone will likely ask you for a biography to use as an introduction. However, they may not realize the importance of a speaker introduction and assume the biography is all they need.

But simply reciting a speaker's history does little to excite the audience and, in some cases, can be a negative if it's too lengthy. It helps to prepare an introduction that you've written—one that incorporates key elements about you and your expertise but doesn't read like a resume.

Write your own speaker introduction just as you would for a Toastmasters meeting. Research the organization and your audience to understand their interests. Include this in your introduction to build rapport.

Engage and Inform

When speaking outside the club, the introduction literally sets the stage for the coming comments—and includes information that establishes the speaker's credibility on the topic.

Every audience wants a reason to listen, and to know what's in it for them. Darren LaCroix, the 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking, suggests using "you" phrases when introducing another speaker. For example: *Have you ever wondered how to use hand gestures effectively in a speech? Well, you are in luck, as our next speaker is an expert in the area of body language and will share some of her best tips with us.*

In addition to priming audience interest, introductions are key in establishing the speaker as a subject matter expert on a certain topic or series of topics. Subject credibility is vital—without it, why should listeners believe a speaker? Credibility is especially important when speaking to a new audience or offering advice and tips.

For example, if the speaker is talking about financial management, let listeners know the individual has advanced degrees in business and finance, in addition to 15 years of banking experience, helping hundreds of clients realize their financial goals. That's credibility!

Introducing a Colleague

Ideally, the speaker should write their own introduction. However, if you are introducing the speaker and this doesn't happen, contact them and get the information you need. Write the introduction as if you were the one giving the speech. This approach can also be helpful when you receive an introduction from a less experienced Toastmaster who may not be fully versed in writing a proper introduction. You can offer some tips to help them improve that skill.

Set Up for Success

The speaker introduction is the first of the four key speech parts. Be sure to give it the time and attention it deserves. When you do, it sets you and everyone else up for success! T

Greg Lewis, DTM, *is a retired marketing and management professional with years of experience giving speeches and speech introductions. He is Vice President Education of the Rose City Toastmasters in Welland, Ontario, Canada.*

Ice Breakers Offer Endless Opportunities

Hone your speaking skills by embracing the introductory speech multiple times.

BY PEGGY BEACH, DTM

When Pathways began in 2017, longtime members were surprised to learn that the Ice Breaker project was required in all paths, whether it was their first path or their 11th. While the concept of an Ice Breaker is to introduce yourself to the club and tell a little about yourself, many people wondered, how do you introduce yourself to your club a second, third, or 15th time?

Sue Stanley, senior instructional designer for Toastmasters International, explains that an Ice Breaker is simply an opportunity to deliver a speech. It doesn't have to be an autobiography. It can be a story about an event, something you learned or found interesting, or simply a story about where you are today and what you have learned since your last Ice Breaker.

The beauty of Level 1 projects, says Stanley, is that the topic, content, and type of each speech is completely at the discretion of the speaker, meaning it can be instructional, motivating, humorous, or impart a serious message.

The Benefits of Delivering Multiple Ice Breakers

One reason the developers of Pathways chose to require the completion of all Level 1 projects, including the Ice Breaker, on every path a member completes is that it allows members to assess how they've developed—how they have grown from the work they completed on their last path. Has doing one become easier? What kind of feedback are they getting now? Moreover, projects that repeat across paths, such as Level 1 and Level 2 projects, give even the most experienced member an opportunity to evaluate their current skill level and continue building critical-thinking and leadership skills.

Stanley believes that the Evaluation and Feedback speeches—the speeches typically given after the Ice Breaker—are the most important projects in the entire Pathways program. "That's because you have to give a speech, take feedback, then deliver it again applying that feedback," she says. "Constructive feedback will always help people; learning to receive it and apply it are at the heart of every path."

Explore the Challenge

Experienced Toastmasters have embraced the challenge of giving numerous Ice Breaker speeches. Roger Pritchett, DTM, a member of Little Rock Toastmasters in Arkansas, has been a Toastmaster for 25 years. "I determined early on that I wanted to do a different Ice Breaker each time," he says. "I've done Ice Breakers about my life through the lens of work, education, places lived, philosophy of life, and many more. Recently, I did an Ice Breaker on my core values. I enjoy doing them, and believe I have many more unique Ice Breaker speeches to give."

Tom Ware, DTM, a Toastmaster of 48 years, brought some variety to his Ice Breakers by giving them in two different clubs. Although he is a member of the Dundas Toastmasters in Dundas Valley, New South Wales, Australia, he gave his first Ice Breaker in Auckland, New Zealand, and his second at his home club in Parramatta. Those two speeches were of similar content; however, since then, he has given Ice Breakers on various topics including his experiences as a creative writer and a child growing up in London during World War II.

Kevin Markl, DTM, a member of the Hacienda Park Toastmasters and Prep Squad in Livermore, California, says members should consider changing the format for their second or third Ice Breaker. "If your first speech was to inform, consider a story for the second or focus on incorporating humor with the third, etc." He adds that when writing his second and third Ice Breaker, he considered his audience. "What do I want them to know about me? How can I build a relationship with them?"

Choose Your Order

In late 2019, all five levels in a path were unlocked, meaning they can be done in any order. This means not only can members choose their topic and style, they can also choose when to do an Ice Breaker. So if you can't think of an Ice Breaker topic but you were inspired to learn more about whales after watching a documentary, you can move on to a research speech, and come back to your Ice Breaker later.

Tie Your Ice Breaker to Your Path

Many Toastmasters choose to relate their Ice Breaker to their current path. James Wantz, DTM, a member of New Horizons Toastmasters in Tualatin, Oregon, as well as Feedbackers Toastmasters in Portland, Oregon, picked the Strategic Relationships path because he hates networking. "I knew I needed to challenge myself to do a path that I was not good at—that is the point of learning, isn't it? And I wanted to face my fears. The Ice Breaker was all about my dislike of networking, my absolutely tragic networking fails over the years, and my desire to overcome my fears."

10 IDEAS FOR YOUR NEXT ICE BREAKER

For some speakers, finding a topic for an Ice Breaker can be the biggest hurdle. Kristin Nickells, DTM, President of Mid-Island Advanced Toastmasters Club and Vice President Education for Arbutus Toastmasters Club, both in Parksville, British Columbia, Canada, offers the following suggestions. Create your own list to use for future Ice Breakers.

1. Structure a speech around three of your favorites (foods, colors, subjects in school, etc.).
2. Explain why you chose your profession.
3. Describe the scariest thing that ever happened to you.
4. Talk about the most valuable lesson you've learned.
5. Tell a story about your parents.
6. Describe the craziest thing you ever did.
7. Talk about your favorite author/book and why.
8. Describe a trip you went on.
9. Talk about how you chose your pets.
10. Explain how you got your nickname.

Shyam Varan Nath, DTM, agrees. A member of Oracle Pleasant Speakers and Tracy Toastmasters, both in Tracy, California, he tried to be humorous in his Ice Breaker for the Engaging Humor path. "I explained how humor did not come to me naturally, so that is why I signed up for this path," he says.

Joel Palachuvattil, DTM, of the Agricultural Research Center Toastmasters in Beltsville, Maryland, says giving a variety of Ice Breaker speeches has helped him become more authentic. "For the Leadership Development path, I talked about my leadership experience up to that point, and what I was hoping to gain from the path."

Advice to New Toastmasters

Experienced Toastmasters don't hesitate to offer advice to new members planning their first Ice Breaker. "Don't wait," advises Markl. "Deliver it within a month of joining. If you are concerned about remembering your speech, consider using notes or telling a story."

Nath suggests new members embrace the opportunity to connect with club members on a personal and emotional level. "Use this opportunity to share some side of you that they would not easily know. This will leave a lasting impact."

Ware recommends new members choose a familiar topic and keep in mind what experienced members already know: "Everybody feels apprehensive. But the audience is rooting for you, hoping you will succeed. You will probably not have an audience more supportive than a Toastmasters audience." T

Peggy Beach, DTM, *Past District 37 Governor, is a freelance writer and editor in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is Vice President Education at Hi-Rise Toastmasters in Raleigh and Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina. You can reach her at writereditorpeggybeach@gmail.com.*

Is There a Podcast in Your Future?

This convenient medium is a gold mine if you want to boost your communication skills.

BY GREG GAZIN, DTM

Over the last year, the number of podcasts and podcast listeners has soared, especially with more people staying closer to home. As of April 2020, there were over 1 million podcasts available through Apple Podcasts alone, covering just about every conceivable topic—that's a wealth of content at our fingertips.

If you're already a podcast listener, have you considered getting behind the microphone and starting your own show? It's a great way to share information, promote your business, learn a new hobby, or take on the podcasting project as a Level 4 elective in Pathways.

Podcasting is truly a gold mine for anyone wanting to boost their skills, and what better time to do so than now as we enter a new year? Consider podcasting from three sides of the mic: the host, the guest, and the listener.

As a podcast host, you'll become adept talking to a diverse group of people. I can speak to this personally as both the co-host and producer of *The Toastmasters Podcast* and the *ToastCaster*. I have been a member of Toastmasters for 19 years and began podcasting in 2006 as part of a Toastmasters High Performance Leadership project.

In fact, Ryan Levesque, podcast producer and my co-host on *The Toastmasters Podcast*, says, "As a host, interviewing many diverse guests has taught me to rapidly build rapport and converse easily with all kinds of people, from CEOs of large corporations to community leaders, and everyone in between."

As a podcast guest, you can practice impromptu speaking skills necessary for job interviews, have an opportunity to showcase your expertise, or promote your business.

Finally, as a listener, you can absorb fascinating niche and relevant content. As a Toastmaster, you can also conduct your own mental evaluation of the entire episode, just as you might after a club meeting.

In essence, creating a podcast provides an opportunity to practice the skills we learn in Toastmasters and perform in everyday life.

Pick Your Podcast Format

Once you've decided to make the plunge, the first task is deciding on a topic or angle for the show. Perhaps you and a friend will be reviewing the newest gizmos and gadgets or discussing the latest incarnation of *Doctor Who*. Name your show. Make it fun and

IN THE HOT SEAT

Put your skills to the test and learn how to be a great podcast guest.

A strong performance as a podcast guest can help you establish your expertise as a thought leader in your field or industry and open doors to other opportunities.

To step up your game and be the best guest you can be, go beyond the minimum. Know your material, understand the audience, and be prepared. It's the extra effort you put in beyond those basics that'll help you really shine.

- Take ownership. Reconfirm all the details with your host, including technology requirements. If you are connecting through online platforms like Zoom or Zencastr, agree in advance on an emergency contact, such as an email or phone number in case either of you has trouble connecting.
- Provide the host with your most recent introduction or bio. If you're promoting a book or an event, have the information at hand—dates, times, website links, etc.
- Do your homework on the show and the host; you'll be better prepared for what to expect. Listen to a few episodes to get a sense of the host's personality, tone, and depth of knowledge on the subject.
- Control your technology and environment. Make sure your surroundings are quiet. Turn your phone off or to "do not disturb" mode. Ensure your mic and headset are properly connected, and disconnect any unnecessary devices.
- Use the time prior to the recording for any final clarifications or address any concerns. Don't be afraid to tell your host if you are a little nervous or if it's the first time you've been a podcast guest. They are there to ensure you succeed.
- During the interview, be present and give your host your full attention. Avoid the temptation to check text messages or email.
- Listen carefully to the questions, and if you're unsure, ask the host to repeat or clarify. If you lose your train of thought, forget the question, stumble mid-sentence, or inadvertently talk over others, don't fret. Stuff happens. Just pause to allow for edits and start again.
- Be authentic. The best interviews are like a natural conversation. Notes and talking points can help, but avoid reading from a script.
- Speak directly to the host rather than to an invisible audience. It may seem counterintuitive at times, but it connects better with listeners. Help the audience visualize your words—elicit emotions by using colorful words, phrases, and variations in your voice, and by placing the listener at the scene.
- Make sure you leave your audience with a good solid takeaway or call-to-action, so they will feel their time was well spent.
- After the interview, send a follow up note thanking the host. You can even ask for feedback. Make yourself available for follow up if needed.
- Finally, once the interview is live, be sure to reciprocate by sharing the link on your social media platforms, your website, etc.

—GREG GAZIN, DTM

catchy, or simply descriptive. (*Toastmasters Podcast* isn't a particularly creative name, though it's certainly descriptive!)

Dawn Frail, DTM, is a leadership development specialist, and Immediate Past District Director of District 60 in Ontario, Canada. She started her podcast, *Frankly Speaking*, as a marketing tool for her District. "We wanted to inspire current Toastmasters to continue their journey and attract new members to the organization. We decided to have conversations with lesser-known members with interesting and fabulous stories to share," she says.

Then you'll want to determine the format—solo or co-hosted? The beauty of going solo is that you can record any time you want. You may find the interview format, either solo or with a co-host, is one of the easiest ways to get started, because your guests, not you, supply the fresh content.

Scottish-based podcaster Colin Gray, on his website ThePodcastHost.com, calls the practice of hosting compelling guests "borrowing the expertise or entertainment value of others." The benefit? "It's like talking to your heroes. (It) gives you the opportunity to have a chat with someone you've always looked up to."

Levesque agrees. "Podcasting has led me to interview people I could never have imagined when I first started—rapper MC Hammer, author John Maxwell, Craig Newmark (Craigslist founder), William Hung from *American Idol*, Tony Buzan (creator of the Mind Map, and Golden Gavel recipient), author Keith Ferrazzi, and more."

If you're wondering where to start, check out the "Create a Podcast" elective in Level 4 of the Pathways learning experience. "I was new to podcasting," says Jenson George, a member of three clubs in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. "It was (fellow club member) Ashish Gokhale's idea to have casual conversations similar to *The Joe Rogan Experience* and have fun." Together they created the *Roastmasters Podcast*. After becoming an Area Director in July 2020, Jenson and others stirred up some interest

that led to the formation last August of a new advanced club in Dubai, Podcasters Toastmasters.

Where else can you learn so much and have loads of fun doing it?

Prep Work

Frail suggests selecting guests with interesting stories or a message to share. I've discovered that you'll be more successful if you let them know ahead of time what topic or angle you want to discuss on the program. Request a bio or other background information. Confirm the day, date, and time, and pay close attention to the time zone if the guest is not local to you. It's also a good idea to communicate any expectations, how much time you'll need, and how you will be recording, and offer to assist them with the technology should the need arise.

Technical Considerations

As for equipment, a podcast can easily be recorded on a digital recorder, mobile device, or computer. You don't need to run out and buy expensive equipment. To get the best possible audio, however, it's preferable to have a USB mic and headphones, or at least a decent set of earbuds. Avoid using your computer's built-in mic and speakers whenever possible. The mic may pick up fan noise, and sound coming through the speakers can also feed back into the mic.

> As a podcast guest, you can practice impromptu speaking skills necessary for job interviews, have an opportunity to showcase your expertise, or promote your business.

For coordinating remote podcast interviews, programs like Skype and Zoom allow you to capture audio. At *The Toastmasters Podcast*, we now use Zencastr exclusively, as it records each individual locally on a separate track before uploading the audio to the cloud drive. This makes for easier editing, offers better audio quality, and creates less reliance on internet stability. For editing and local recording, you can also use free programs like Audacity for PC or Mac.

Preparing Questions

When you prepare questions for an interview, keep them brief. Avoid yes or no questions that may elicit one-word answers.

To help your guest open up, ask specific questions. For example, instead of asking, "Tell me about what you do for a living," consider asking, "What it's like being the CEO of XYZ?," or "What does a typical day look like for you?" Those kinds of questions will tap a part of the guest's brain that's likely to produce more original, authentic responses.

Sometimes you may need to ask a difficult, sensitive, or personal question, but are not sure how, or if you should ask.

Greg Van Borssum, a professional speaker and Toastmasters Accredited Speaker, from Killcare Beach, New South Wales, Australia, recounted in a *Toastmaster* magazine article about his dark days in such despair he almost considered taking his own life. That information had already been published, so I asked Van Borssum in the pre-interview if he would be okay with including that question in our interview.

He suggests asking, using phrasing like, "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question because it might help me or the audience?" If it comes from a place of learning or sharing of knowledge, he explains, you'll likely get a positive response.

Cultural Considerations

The nature of podcasting is that content can be created in one part of the world and consumed in another. "There are really no borders to this," says Gokhale, banker and Vice President Education of the Podcasters Toastmasters Club in Dubai. "It's better to realize the sensitivities and that there may be subtle differences to be aware of."

Van Borssum says he tries to avoid Australian vernacular unless he uses it as a joke—but will also explain what it means.

If you're unsure if a topic or a question would be acceptable to your guest, do some research on cultural communication differences or simply ask if there are certain ones that should not generally be discussed.

Checking the Details

To ensure smooth sailing before the interview, make sure your surroundings are quiet, and reduce potential distractions. Turn off other devices and disconnect any distractions on your computer, such as internet tabs or email notifications. Do a sound check and make sure audio passing through the mic is being recorded.

"It's the one that got away," recalls Digital Media Strategist Robert Lavigne, from Brantford, Ontario, host of *The Disposable*

Ryan Levesque

Greg Gazin

Ryan Levesque (left) and Greg Gazin, DTM, are co-hosts of The Toastmasters Podcast.

Web. After securing a coveted live interview, he ended up with a blank recording. Lavigne recommends always monitoring your recording and running a secondary recording device as backup.

Go over last-minute details with your guest. Gauge their comfort level and calm any butterflies with casual conversation or questions about themselves.

Your guest may say something insightful or unexpected that shifts the conversation to a new and exciting direction, leading you to ask an unplanned question. "Use your questions as a guide, but also be prepared to go off script," says Levesque.

A good interviewer needs to be an equally good listener. "Be present," says Frail, "Hear what they're saying, and don't be overly focused on your next question."

Some guests may come overly prepared. One individual who insisted on knowing the questions ahead of time proceeded to read all her answers. If that happens, politely interject and perhaps ask a question like, "How do you feel about that?" You may get a more natural response.

Sometimes your guest will go off on "bunny trails," says self-professed random thinker and Past Toastmasters International President Pat Johnson, DTM. "That happens when I'm engaged and passionate and have so many ideas." If you're afraid to politely interject, don't be. "I'm grateful to be put back on track," she adds.

Ask your guests for final thoughts or parting words, and how people can reach them. They may want to use that time to pitch their new book, steer listeners to their professional website, or mention an article they were profiled in.

Post-Interview

Once you've completed the official interview, keep the recording; you never know what kind of golden nuggets may come out. It's also a great way to get a few extra sound bites (short clips of audio extracted from a recorded interview) you might need to help promote the interview.

Likely you will need to do some editing to create a narrative, including show notes, which are a description or summary of your podcast episode, and where you might also include links and contact information. Before the podcast goes live, listen to it uninterrupted in its entirety as if you were a new listener. This is where you can catch tiny miscues, eliminate unnecessary verbiage, and enjoy the fruits of your labor. Podcasts can range from a 3-minute thought of the day to an hour-long recap of the latest Netflix series. I've found the sweet spot to have a great conversation and get the message across to be on average 20–30 minutes—like a half-hour talk show.

You'll also need to find a place to host your podcast. Search to find one suitable for you. Hosts like Podbean and BuzzSprout offer free starter packages where they can take care of many of the logistics. This includes housing your audio and submitting your podcast feed to directories like Apple Podcasts (formerly iTunes), Google Podcasts, and Spotify where listeners can easily subscribe to them.

> The nature of podcasting is that content can be created in one part of the world and consumed in another.

Once the show is published, promote the podcast on your social media channels. It's also a good idea to learn where your audience is. It may be Instagram, a particular Facebook group, or professional association site. Promote it there.

Finally, send a thank you note to your guest, along with links to the podcast, and encourage them to share with their audiences and social circles.

Lasting Benefits

Podcasting helps you become a better communicator, but it also offers a range of leadership skills, such as project management, time management, relationship building, collaboration, dealing with disruptions, critical thinking, decision-making, and emotional intelligence. And don't forget the technical skills you'll develop.

So, is there a podcast in your future?

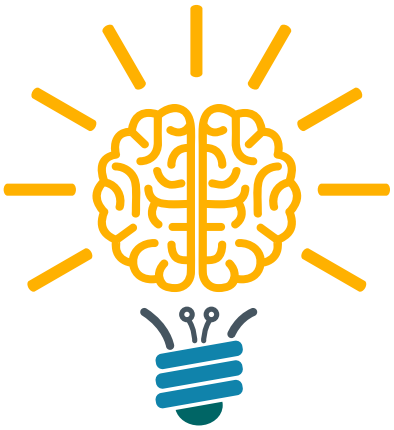
That's up to you; why not give it a whirl? You don't need to commit to starting a podcast empire. Find a topic that interests you, get the mic warmed up, and use it as an opportunity to gain experience and confidence.

Fifteen years and hundreds of interviews and podcast episodes later, if I could borrow from McDonald's slogan, "I'm (Still) Lovin' It!" T

Look for this article on social media and continue the conversation with #talkingtoastmasters.

Greg Gazin, DTM, *is a Past District Governor and veteran podcaster, co-hosting* The Toastmasters Podcast *and producing the award-winning* ToastCaster. *He's also a writer, author, speaker, and 19-year member of New Entrepreneurs and Go Pro Speakers, both in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*

The Art of **Virtual Brainstorming**



Distance can actually be an advantage to creative collaboration.

BY GREG GLASGOW

By adapting to shifting workspace norms, as well as COVID-19, people around the world have gotten good at working on their own from home. But what about working together? Did the art of brainstorming and collaboration start to fade when people stopped working together in the same physical space?

Not by a long shot, experts say. In fact, it may have even gotten better.

Eryc Eyl, a Denver, Colorado-based speaker and consultant on organizational culture, says a key advantage of virtual brainstorming sessions is that on screen, everyone—from company leaders to new hires—is in the same size box, as opposed to in-person meetings that give certain leaders key seats at the head of the table.

"It really does flatten hierarchy, which is necessary in brainstorming," he says. "It's necessary in collaboration to get people out of the mindset of, 'What's the boss going to think?' I think that democratization has been very helpful."

Beginnings of the Brainstorm

The concept of brainstorming has been around since the 1930s, when New York businessman Alex Osborn, co-founder of the BBDO advertising agency, noticed that his employees came up with much more creative ideas for ad campaigns when they were working together than they did on their own.

Osborn started providing employees with a clear problem to solve, using four brainstorming rules:

- **Go for quantity:** The more ideas that are generated, the higher the chance that at least some of them will be great.
- **Withhold criticism:** Osborn believed that people would come up with more creative ideas when they weren't afraid of being judged.
- **Welcome wild ideas:** Sometimes the best solutions aren't the obvious ones, and off-the-wall concepts can often be ideated into something that works.
- **Combine and improve ideas:** Also expressed as "1+1=3," this rule stems from the concept that the right ideas, combined in the right way, can be better than the sum of their parts.

Brainstorming for Toastmasters

Brainstorming is a useful tool for clubs, as well as District leaders and others. It can be just as effective online as it is in person, according to many clubs and Districts who have mastered virtual versions of nearly every Toastmasters activity, from club meetings to contests. Even better: The brainpower behind brainstorming is now global.

"Online brainstorming allows for participation of team members from all corners of the globe," says Gorata Hlope, a member of the Eloquent Speakers Club in Gaborone, Botswana. "Distance can actually be an advantage—it allows for collaboration with fewer limitations and greater possible outcomes."

In 2020, Hlope used online collaborative tools to help organize and lead several first-time virtual events for District 74.

A New Era

For those leading online brainstorming and collaboration sessions, Eyl recommends the following:

- **Understand the technology:** Know what's possible in the platform you're using so you can give participants the most robust, varied experience possible.
- **Start with an icebreaker:** Especially in the virtual world, and even with teams that have worked together for a long time, it's important to establish or re-establish the sense of trust that comes more easily when people are physically together in the same room.
- **Pick a format in which the chat or Q&A is only visible to the moderator:** This keeps things flowing smoothly and allows people to ask questions without fear of ridicule.
- **Use polling to keep people engaged:** A good poll question can get conversations started.
- **Use breakout rooms:** Online tools like Zoom make it easy to separate people into smaller groups, encouraging more participation and making it possible to experiment with different combinations of people skills and personalities.

Even when the pandemic is over, virtual collaboration will continue, Eyl says. It has technology on its side. And the traditional office—where every worker is together, in person, every day—might just be a thing of the past.

"We will continue to find ways to get good at doing things virtually. I don't see this going away." T

Greg Glasgow *is a freelance writer based in Denver, Colorado.*

How To Succeed in the New Corner Office

Working from home? These tips will help you make the most of your new set-up.

BY LAURA VANDERKAM

Working from home was on the rise before March 2020. However, when the COVID-19 outbreak closed almost all non-essential offices, an even larger shift in the workplace happened overnight.

A recent survey by Global Workplace Analytics found that 88% of office workers are working from home at least one day a week during the pandemic, with 76% of them saying they want to continue to work from home in some form once the pandemic is over. The organization predicts that 25-30% of the global workforce will be working from home multiple days a week by the end of 2021.

I've been studying productivity for the past 12 years. I've written several time management and productivity books, and host two podcasts on the topic. My TED Talk, "How to Gain Control of Your Free Time," has more than 10 million views. Lately, I've been delving into the topic of how people can remain productive, even with all the distractions, or quietness, of home.

Nothing is ideal in a crisis, but in general, people tend to like their home offices. Commutes waste time. Working from home allows people to control their environments and work how they work best.

Of course, working from home presents its own challenges too. If you'll be doing it for the foreseeable future, or would like to work from home long term, here are a few new habits that can help you be more productive during working hours, and make some positive changes for your whole life too.

Think Task, Not Time. In an office, a workday is often defined by a typical starting time and ending time. Absent a commute, this can be nebulous. How can you feel confident you've put in an honest day's labor? The best approach is to start defining your days by tasks, rather than time. Set yourself challenging but doable goals for each day: three to five tends to be a good number. The goal is to make progress, but not be totally spent, so you can make progress again tomorrow. When you have finished your intentions for the day, then the day is done, whatever time it happens to be. This is a great way to manage remote workers too. Have your team members share their goals for the day or week, and then check in on their progress. This is more productive than counting hours spent in a chair.

Match the Right Work to the Right Time. Working from home requires self-direction. Absent group norms, you need to figure out when to tackle various projects. A pro tip: Most people have more energy and discipline in the morning. So the first hour or two of the workday is a great time to tackle your toughest projects. Save the inbox clearing and low-key status meetings for afternoon, when most people find their energy levels dropping. If your work hours tend to feature a lot of back and forth with colleagues, consider starting an hour early to take advantage of uninterrupted time. You can always take a longer break or stop a little early to keep things in check. And if you're a night owl? The good news is that remote workers tend to have more control of their schedules — so feel free to schedule your challenging work later in the day, when you'll best be able to handle it.

Set yourself challenging but doable goals for each day: three to five tends to be a good number.

Take Breaks. No one can work without stopping. People think they can, but then they wind up working inefficiently or getting sucked into social media sites for far longer than they intend. Punctuate your day with a few well-chosen breaks, and you'll get a lot more done. Most people need a small break in mid-morning, a break for lunch, and then a break in mid-afternoon. Think about what will boost your energy levels, and proactively plan these activities into your slumps.

Punctuate your day with a few well-chosen breaks, and you'll get a lot more done. Think about what will boost your energy levels, and proactively plan these activities into your slumps.

Reach Out. Socializing is more automatic when you work in person, but it doesn't have to be absent from work-from-home days. One idea: Rather than emailing back and forth with colleagues about logistical matters, pick up the phone and call. This is more efficient, and lets you hear people's voices. Start virtual meetings with a few minutes of scheduled social chat. It's going to happen anyway, and putting it on the agenda means it's built into the model, so it doesn't run on too long, and everyone expects it—that way nobody snarls about not having time for this. That can start any meeting on the wrong foot.

Move. Long commutes are negatively correlated with physical activity. People who work from home have more time to exercise. The problem? They have less occasion to; the walk from your bed to your desk might be just a few steps! So be sure to build in a chance to move during the day. You could do some push-ups and sit-ups during a break, or take a call while walking around the block. Set a goal, like taking 2,500 steps during the workday, or doing 100 jumping jacks by quitting time.

Over-communicate. When you work in a home office, it's harder for people to see what you're doing. They can't read your mind. So keep your boss updated on your task lists for each day (or week) and remind colleagues of anything you'll need from them well ahead of time. If you're stuck on something, no one can see you flailing. So you'll need to speak up. Some organizations create time for collaboration and time for focus by setting core hours where everyone is available. For instance, you might be available by phone, email, and instant message only at certain hours of the day. Then you can do the rest of your work whenever works for you.

Embrace Leftovers. Meals eaten at home tend to be healthier than those eaten out. That means that work-from-home days can be an opportunity to establish healthy eating patterns. To do this efficiently, get in the habit of making more food at dinner than you need. Then you can eat these leftovers for lunch for the next day (or two). If your dinner included vegetables, now your lunch has vegetables too. Add a piece of fruit for a snack and you're well on your way to getting enough produce—or at least further along than you'd be grabbing a burger and fries from a restaurant near your office.

Make Your Workspace Your Happy Place. Working from home gives you a chance to experiment and see what conditions make you most productive. So make sure you're comfortable, with a good chair, a desk, and a door that closes. Put your desk near a window so you get some natural light. Curate what you see out that window—clear away any garbage or broken furniture, and maybe add a plant or something that will make you smile. And remember that anything behind you will be visible in video conferences, so this is a great opportunity to showcase your personal brand with art, books, flowers, or even a conversation piece (like a pet turtle—that will always give people something to ask about).

PRODUCTIVITY IN TOASTMASTERS

Taking breaks from purely work-related tasks is a key element to finding satisfaction and productivity in working from home. You probably find yourself with more time on your hands—your commute is cut down, as is the office chatter. Why not reexamine some of your Toastmasters goals and see if you can use this found time to be productive and work toward some goals?

If you've been letting your meeting attendance drop because of your new routine, or you're feeling the isolation of working from home, recommit to attending club meetings. Besides helping you develop skills, meetings are also a good way to socialize with a new group of people. It's a chance to talk with, network, and get to know people from different backgrounds.

If your company is going through hiring or promotion freezes, or you're looking for a new job, this is a great time to brush up on your soft skills, which will make you a more appealing worker in the future. Toastmasters specializes in these types of skills—clubs are built around improving and growing public speaking, communication, and leadership skills to build confidence and offer personal insight.

Take some time and think about what your goal was when you joined Toastmasters. What can you do to make this year more productive in reaching this goal?

- If you still aren't comfortable giving speeches, reach out to your Vice President Education and schedule some so you're committed. Begin developing and practicing your speeches earlier to hone your writing skills and elevate your delivery.
- If you want to expand your leadership skills, start small by taking on more meeting roles, then commit to running for office next term. Consider being a mentor. Opportunities abound for leadership development in Toastmasters!
- If you're already a club leader, examine your meetings to see if they're as productive as they could be. Socializing is an important part of a club, but if it's taking time away from the actual meeting, maybe you need to build that into the agenda by starting earlier or staying later.

Laura Amann *is magazine supervisor and editor for the* Toastmaster *magazine.*

End Well. Lots of people have starting rituals for work, but the truth is, you're going to begin at some point regardless. Ending is trickier. If you can see your workspace from other parts of your house, it can be hard to relax, and people wind up half-working and half-surfing the web well into the night. To cut this off, try creating an end-of-day ritual. You can write tomorrow's to-do list, write in a journal, or call a colleague to say goodbye. You can walk around the block, or run an errand. If you find this challenging, try creating some sort of commitment in your personal life that will force the issue. If you are running a virtual book club at 7 p.m., you'll have to stop work a bit before that—and you'll be more efficient on those days when you have a hard stop. T

Laura Vanderkam *is the author of six books on productivity, including* Off the Clock: Feel Less Busy While Getting More Done *and* The New Corner Office: How the Most Successful People Work From Home. *For more information, visit* www.lauravanderkam.com.

What Is Your **Dream-Big Vision?**

The importance of passion, purpose, and perseverance in reaching your goals.

BY JOE GRONDIN DTM, AS

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined."
–Henry David Thoreau

Joining Toastmasters in 2001 was the first step toward reaching my dream of becoming an inspirational speaker. I took many more steps along the way. My first speech made me very uncomfortable. My first Table Topics® experience was extremely uncomfortable. Being in front of my first non-Toastmasters audience was beyond extremely uncomfortable.

Likewise, your first *anything* will be uncomfortable. To succeed at a new goal, we must become comfortable being uncomfortable, because what was uncomfortable yesterday will be comfortable today. The pursuit of a vision is a pursuit of a purpose. And what better time to think about achieving new goals than now—the beginning of 2021?

Find Your Passion

Passion is the fuel for your vision. What excites you every morning when you wake up?

A number of years ago, my wife and I took up ballroom and Latin dancing—I took my first lesson at the ripe age of 23. I felt like a fish out of water but developed a passion for dancing. We had a new big dream: competing internationally. Every morning we woke up excited because we knew that on that day, we would either talk about dancing, go to a dance, take a dance lesson, practice dance, or go to a dance competition.

Our dream-big vision, fueled by our passion for dance, became reality when we represented our country—Canada—at the 1999 World Ballroom Dance Championships in Vienna, Austria. What is the one passion that fuels your dream each day?

Take the First Step

Having a dream and a passion don't mean anything if you don't take action. Taking that first step is scary. But the exciting part of action, even if you fail at first, is knowing that you are one step closer to your goal. Failures are inevitable; expect them and learn how to navigate around or through them. I truly believe that our biggest failure is allowing our egos to decide our fate instead of listening to our hearts.

My dream, when joining Toastmasters, was to become a professional speaker. During my journey, I became an avid participant in speech contests and pursued my Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award and the Accredited Speaker designation. I readily admit that I failed often and wanted to quit many times, because my ego was coming up with many excuses to quit. You see, when the ego speaks, the failure becomes everyone else's fault. It's important to push the ego aside so you can find the lesson you need

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOALS AND A VISION

A vision is what we want the dream to look like, while goals are the stepping-stones to reaching that vision. Every goal accomplished deserves a celebration, because each goal brings you one step closer to fulfilling your dream-big vision.

When framing your vision statement, don't be afraid to think big. Too often, we place limits on our vision because we listen to people who place their limits on us. The key is to have a dream-big vision with manageable goals leading to that vision.

The author, Joe Grondin, DTM, gives his final speech for the Accredited Speaker accreditation during the Toastmasters International Convention in 2017.

to learn to succeed. This is taking ownership for your failures.

It took me eight years to reach Toastmasters' World Championship of Public Speaking®, 17 years to get my DTM, and 15 years to get my Accredited Speaker designation. Regardless of all the failures I encountered along the way, I can now say that I am a professional speaker. If I allowed my ego to choose my path, these accomplishments would not have been possible.

Create a Dream-Big Vision

If you remove all obstacles, what would be your ultimate goal? Write down your vision statement and tell people about it. Too often our vision gets blurred because we allow others to tell us that we can't reach it, that our goal is too lofty.

Not my mother, however. If you told her she couldn't do something, she would simply reply, "Watch me." An inspiring example to me of passion and determination, my mother fulfilled many of her goals.

In an era (the 1940s) when women in the United States did not often play competitive sports, she used her brother's identity to play men's semi-pro basketball and baseball. She paved the way for many women as she eventually went on to become the first woman in New Brunswick, Canada, to earn her commercial pilot's license. And not only did she become a lawyer in her mid-40s, she learned a new language to do it. My mother went to a French university in New Brunswick (the only bilingual province in Canada) to learn the language. She subsequently earned her law degree in French.

It's no surprise that she taught all her children a quote from motivational speaker (and former Toastmasters Golden Gavel Award recipient) Les Brown, "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars." The first step to reaching any dream-big vision is to learn to say, "Watch me."

What's Your Why?

Your purpose is the "why" part of the dream. Once you know it, you have a reason to pursue it. When your dream has a deep-rooted purpose, it assumes a life of its own. This is difficult to unearth and may take time.

I pursued becoming an Accredited Speaker in 2017 with the purpose of using my speaking skills, along with my lifelong career and experience as a teacher and school administrator, to advocate for today's youth. I have taught every single school grade and worked with at-risk youth. I often speak to large audiences of educators on the subject of improving harmony and developing a better understanding of our youth. Too often we forget what it is like to be a child and expect our children to grow up too fast.

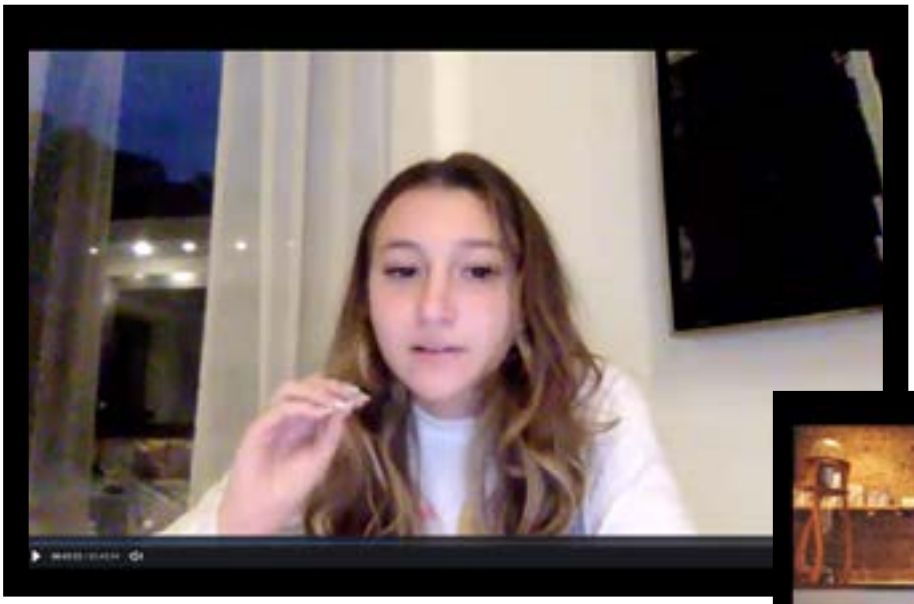
Joe Grondin and his wife, Gwen, compete in the 1999 World Ballroom Dance Competition in Vienna, Austria.

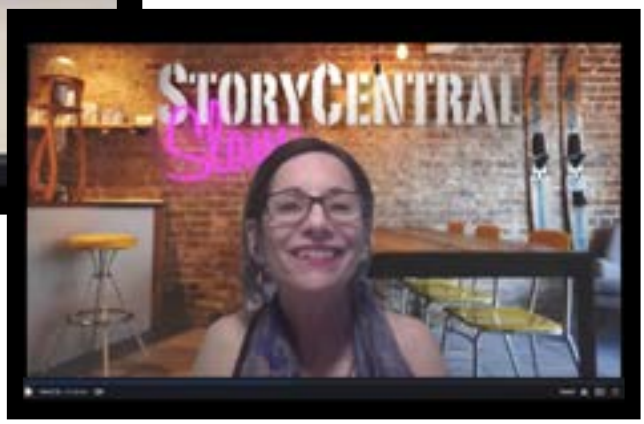
A student I will call "Jeremy" came to a class I taught at the time. He was a well-known drug dealer who spent more time on the streets than in school. He was very close to being kicked out of school, and I am embarrassed to admit that I was fine with this decision. But I changed my mind when I learned that he had been on his own since age 12 and was alone, abused, and homeless. I started to advocate on Jeremy's behalf. As a result, Jeremy graduated from high school and was accepted to college.

My life-changing purpose is to use my voice to help people to better understand our youth. With understanding comes compassion, and a willingness to help. What is your life-changing purpose?

Countless people have defied all odds to accomplish their dreams. This year, it's not too late for you to start your journey. I encourage you to write down your actions, your dream-big vision, your life-changing purpose, and your passion. When you write it, and speak it, you will be more committed to the dream. If you are told "You can't," reply with, "Watch me." T

Joe Grondin, DTM, *is a Toastmasters Accredited Speaker, finalist in the World Championship of Public Speaking, an author, speaker, and retired educator in New Brunswick, Canada. He is the author of the books* Living in Harmony with Our Children *and* Speak to Reach, *which encourage anyone willing to listen, especially our youth, to realize their true potential.*





Lily Keezer (left) captures 1st place—and a $50 cash prize—in the November StoryCentral Slam, a monthly online storytelling contest hosted by the article's author, Caren Neile (below). Keezer's winning story was about an eerie experience related to her love for her grandmother.

Telling **Online Tales**

"Slam" contestants share personal stories, practice skills, and vie for a prize.

BY CAREN NEILE, PH.D.

Picture this: 10 strangers share their brief, heartfelt stories of life and love right in your own living room—and you don't even have to feed them. That's what happens in an online storytelling slam.

By the time COVID-19 hit my area, I had been hosting live monthly storytelling slams for 16 years. What is a storytelling slam? It's an event where participants all present personal stories and compete against each other, often for cash or other awards. The stories are told in a more performative style than you typically would see in a Toastmasters speech. And no notes or visuals are allowed.

In March 2020, my group's event drew 50 people, a perfect number for the cozy little bar that was our most recent venue. In April, as pandemic restrictions increased, we transferred the monthly 90-minute slams to Zoom.

Emily Harris, a Toastmaster who belongs to two clubs in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has participated in several of the slams.

"When I joined Toastmasters four years ago, I learned that weaving personal stories into a speech created an immediate bond with the audience," she says. "The slams give me an audience outside my clubs where I can practice, get feedback from different perspectives, and maybe win a cash prize!"

Harris, an Area Director, says one story she told was about looking for a safe place in the early months of the pandemic. Harris recalled when she was 5 years old and hid in a small, cozy space—the forsythia bush in her family's backyard.

"That was my safe place during another frightening time in my life," Harris said in her story.

Slam History

Storytelling slams began gaining widespread popularity with the birth of the Moth in 1997. The New York-based nonprofit presents slams and a variety of other storytelling events in the United States and other countries. The organization also hosts the Moth Podcast and the Moth Radio Hour, which features storytelling from around the world. Other prominent storytelling events include the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee (started in 1973), and the Scottish International Storytelling Festival in Edinburgh.

Some storytelling slams charge admission and present top-flight performances; others, like mine, are more about building community and letting whoever wants to share their story do so. Most slams feature up to 10 storytellers, who may or may not have registered ahead of time, been coached, or auditioned.

Harris, a member of the Bakery Square and Woman2Woman Toastmasters clubs, views the events as a great supplement to Toastmasters meetings, especially for members who want to beef up their storytelling skills.

"Toastmasters who tell at a slam often have the opportunity to ask for feedback from all the tellers, gaining different

perspectives. And because slams often take place in casual settings and the idea is to entertain rather than educate, there is a relaxed atmosphere that encourages experimentation with spoken word, poetry, music, and movement."

Over the years, our slam participants have shared captivating personal stories on topics that span the range of human experience: immigration, accidents, cancer recovery, meeting the love of one's life, coming out to one's parents—and plain old silly coincidences, practical jokes, and embarrassing moments. Some of my favorites haven't expressed anything remotely dramatic or outrageous at all. Sort of like the famed American television show "Seinfeld," they've been about almost nothing at all; however, the performance of the teller, including word choice, energy, body language, and vocal variety, transforms the mundane into an entertaining story.

Harris says it has been exciting to see speakers improve their skills at the slams.

"I've seen how the core group of storytellers keeps getting better and better. Every month they have more poise and tell tighter, more structured stories. As an extra benefit, their online presentation skills are also improving."

Another benefit to holding slams online: People all over can attend. In our virtual events, we have had people from as far away as Vienna, as well as five or six other states in the U.S., where I am located. One person even told a story from a moving car! (Fortunately, she wasn't at the wheel.)

The Toastmasters Benefit

Nearly every storytelling slam I've ever held has included at least one Toastmaster or former member onstage or in the audience. Toastmasters know that they can glean all kinds of benefits from these events. Here are a few:

- **Having a fellow Toastmaster evaluate your presentation.** (Check first with your club's Vice President Education to make sure the event meets the proper criteria for speaking at outside events.)

- **Practicing storytelling.** "Stories are the best way to express emotion and connect with your audience," says Harris. "Online slams are a wonderful way to get members comfortable with the form, whether they are telling or listening."

- **Promoting your club.** All you have to do is tell a story about something wonderful that happened in a Toastmasters meeting to get people intrigued, as long as it doesn't sound like a commercial. Try something like: "It was a Wednesday evening, 7:45 p.m., and there I was at Village Green Middle School, as I am every Wednesday at that time." Voila! You've just given time, day of the week, and location, and you are still telling a story.

- **Taking the chance to rehearse.** Even if you're not being evaluated at the slam, you can still try out a story you're planning to tell at your next meeting. Or maybe you're not planning to tell a story at the club, but simply want more speaking practice? You've got it!

- **Learning to speak on camera.** "Like club meetings, slams teach Toastmasters to think about the backgrounds people see and effective lighting for more personal, non-PowerPoint presentations," says Susan Schulz, Vice President Public Relations for the Boca Raton Toastmasters in Florida. "We learn where to stand in front of the camera and how much to move around. We also learn about the right clothing, makeup, and hair."

In person or online, slams are a powerful way to celebrate personal storytelling. What can be better than that? T

Editor's Note: *Learn more about the art of storytelling in the Pathways project "Connect with Storytelling," an elective available in all paths.*

Caren S. Neile, Ph.D., *has taught storytelling studies at Florida Atlantic University since 2003 and has presented at two Toastmasters International Conventions. To see a video of a past storytelling slam, or for more information, write her at* cneile@fau.edu.

STARTING YOUR OWN ONLINE SLAM

Why not suggest an online slam to your Club President or Area Director? Here are a few ideas to help you get started:

- Zoom is not the only online conferencing platform. Try out Webex and others, to see which fits your budget and your needs.
- How many people do you want to participate? You may wish to limit the event to Toastmasters and friends. I don't advertise to enormous groups of people. I post to Facebook friends and email people I know personally, and I tell those invitees that they are also welcome to invite friends or colleagues.
- Choose judges beforehand. Be clear with the judging criteria both to judges and to the contestants at the outset. You can open a private breakout room for judges to confer with you and each other, or, to save time, simply ask them to text you their top choices.
- Determine something to do between stories, just for about a minute. You could promote events, conduct an interview, do Table Topics®, or ask participants if they have any event announcements.
- Do you have a prize? Let the group know ahead of time what you are giving.

Friend or Foe?

Will 2021 be a kinder, gentler year … or will we all be painting our living rooms Urbane Bronze?

BY JOHN CADLEY

As you may recall, my December column offered a few suggestions as to how holiday revelers might toast the end of a year in which most people felt they'd already been toasted—to a burnt crisp. I can now reveal that my words were heavily redacted by my editors due to some language I used which they felt was unfit not only for a family magazine but for a sailor's bachelor party. What can I say? I didn't like 2020. It wasn't so much a year as a disaster movie where someone forgot to write the ending.

Some have used the metaphor that the pandemic of 2020 made the world hit the "Pause" button. What button do we push for 2021—"Play" or "Fast Forward"? I would like to be hopeful, which is really saying something for a man who thinks just because the sun has come up every day for 4.6 billion years doesn't mean it will come up tomorrow. But even I've had enough of the chaos. Give me a little predictability, a little stability. Don't make me feel like the X in Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

I have no talent for predicting the future. The only thing I can say with infallible certitude is that my cable bill for January 2022 will be $22.39 higher than it is now for no discernible reason. Others, however, do have a proclivity for prognostication—or claim to—and it is to them I turn. You may call them charlatans and mountebanks but I have no choice. The suspense is killing me.

I will start with the Potentate of Prophecy, the High Priest of Predictions—good old Michel de Nostredame, otherwise known as Nostradamus, who lived from 1503 to 1566 and made some 6,338 prophecies while working his day job as a physician in France. I can only imagine having him for the family doc: *"Monsieur Cadley, you have a condition for which there will be no cure until March 4, 1957. The best I can do for you now is leeches."*

Nostradamus had specific predictions for 2021, including that an asteroid would hit the earth on May 6 (mark your calendar!) and a zombie apocalypse caused by a mysterious virus would occur. He sure got the virus part right. As for the zombie thing, I can't say he nailed it but after a year in lockdown some people sure look like they're getting there. For that I'll give Doctor No a B+.

The only thing I can say with infallible certitude is that my cable bill for January 2022 will be $22.39 higher than it is now for no discernible reason.

In more recent times, the blind Bulgarian clairvoyant Baba Vanga (1911–1966) prophesied that in 2021 the world would suffer great natural disasters and severe financial crises. I'm not sure if she was making predictions or reading the newspapers. More concerning is that she, like Nostradamus, mentioned the asteroid thing. When two seers agree, it's time for me to call the guys with the algorithms and the plastic pocket protectors. And wouldn't you know! The prophets were right—sort of.

According to NASA, a small asteroid called 2018 VP1 did pass near the earth in November 2020, and a much larger one—230 kilotons—has a 1 in 3,800 chance of causing some real fireworks in 2022. These are small odds, and the predictions are off by a year either way. Not bad, but if you profess to see the future, you gotta get it right. Consequently, I was going to give Baba a C- until I learned that Adolf Hitler visited her for a peek into his future during World War II and "left angry," which means she must have told him the truth. For that she gets an A+.

Technology, of course, is where predictions fly fast and furious. This year could see the introduction of computers with speeds reaching one quintillion floating-point operations per second, thus simulating the workings of the entire human brain in real time—except for the part that thinks if you eat ice cream right out of the container it has no calories. We might also see a capsule you can swallow that will send health messages to your watch like "This is your duodenum and we need to talk."

The possibilities are endless, but one thing we do know (aside from the increase in my cable bill) is that the fashion color for 2021 will be Urbane Bronze. We have this on the authority of Sue Wadden, director of color marketing for Sherwin-Williams Paints, who reports that this warm, earthy hue can help our homes feel more like a sanctuary. Sanctuary? From what? Does Sherwin-Williams know something we don't? Only 2021 will tell. T

John Cadley *is a former advertising copywriter, freelance writer, and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Learn more at* www.cadleys.com.

Illustration by Bart Browne

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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT – BO BENNETT, DTM

You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at amazon

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