

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | FEBRUARY 2022

TOASTMASTER®



Leadership in a Changed World

How the pandemic
has pushed leaders to
chart new waters.

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the Love
for Your
Club**

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How to Make Every Member Feel Valued

The first time I tried to attend a Toastmasters meeting I could barely bring myself to walk in the door.

I knew I wanted to join the organization. I wanted to overcome my fear of public speaking, and to do so, I would need to physically enter the room and take my place among the meeting's members.

Yet it wasn't until I peeked in and saw a smiling face shining back at me that I felt safe enough to take the leap into Toastmasters.

I often think about that moment when I ponder the future of our organization. It's no secret that we have lost members over the course of the pandemic. Some were uncomfortable with switching to an online or hybrid model, some missed seeing other members in person, and some simply curtailed their outside commitments.

That's why it's so important to make potential and new members feel welcome from the start. As existing members, our job is to create the safe spaces people crave. People want to be nurtured in new ways, and we can help them on their journeys.



Extending a friendly greeting does wonders for setting minds at ease, and it sets an example for the rest of the members.

None of these approaches cost a dime. In fact, they don't take much effort at all! But incorporating them into your meetings can make all the difference in the world to a shy or hesitant potential member.

1. Say hello immediately. If you don't welcome a new person at the top of the meeting, you immediately begin to lose them. It's like attending a cocktail party alone and not being welcomed into conversations—it's awkward. Extending a friendly greeting does wonders for setting the minds of visitors and new members at ease, and it sets an example for the rest of the members.
2. Ask how they heard about Toastmasters. This gives you a chance to meet them at their level. Perhaps they learned about the organization from a friend or even attended a meeting before. Maybe they know nothing about Toastmasters at all. Whatever the case, learning about their knowledge level gives you a baseline from which to start a lasting relationship.
3. Work their concerns into the meeting. For example, say a potential member wants to brush up on his speaking skills because he has to deliver a best man toast at his brother's wedding. You can provide value somewhere in the meeting by discussing a tip that might be especially helpful in his quest, call it out, and use it to include him. He'll immediately feel cared for.

The world is a bit raw right now, and a little bit of kindness goes a long way. With just a few simple steps, you can make a potential member, or a new one, feel seen and heard—and maybe even change their life along the way.

Margaret Page, DTM
International President

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My First Meeting Webpage

Are you looking for an easy way to explain what happens at a Toastmasters meeting to new members? Share the new [My First Meeting](#) webpage with them so they are prepared to attend their first Toastmasters meeting! If you're still not sure what to say to a prospective member, read this [Toastmaster article](#) for tips and talking points.

Check Out These Translated Paths

Six more paths in the [Pathways learning experience](#) have been translated into Tamil! The following paths are ready for you to purchase and continue your personal and professional growth: Motivational Strategies, Innovative Planning, Strategic Relationships, Dynamic Leadership, Persuasive Influence, and Team Collaboration.

Reminders

Send Us Your Photos

Is your club back to meeting in person? Have you recently traveled on vacation with your digital *Toastmaster* magazine? Maybe you and your mentor finally met up for that lunch. Send your creative high-res photos to photos@toastmasters.org for an opportunity to be published in an upcoming issue.

District Elections Deadlines

If you know someone who would like to take on a District leadership opportunity, encourage them to submit their [District Leader Nominating Form](#) to the District Leadership Committee Chair. Check with your District Director or District Leadership Committee Chair to confirm the deadline to submit the form. Please refer to [Protocol 9.0: District Campaigns and Elections](#) if you have additional questions about the process.

Speech Contest Questions

As you move through your club speech contests, please refer to our [Speech Contests webpage](#) for helpful resources and answers to frequently asked questions. You may also submit your questions to speechcontests@toastmasters.org.

Resources

Toastmaster Online Magazine

Don't miss the February digital edition for extra features, such as videos and audio to enhance your online experience. Go back to the basics of Base Camp with helpful videos, watch a past World Champion share a wealth of storytelling tips, and find out how to wow visitors on your club website.

Jump on the Brandwagon

Ready to create your own branded materials like fliers, newsletters, and business cards? Check out the Toastmasters [Brand Manual](#) and the [Brand Portal](#) for explanations and inspirations. Please submit a [Trademark Use Request](#) or email brand@toastmasters.org to submit your designs for approval. To determine where to submit your request, please refer to page 27 of the Brand Manual.

Tune In

Did you know [The Toastmasters Podcast](#) publishes two new episodes every month? Gain valuable insight from a variety of public speaking and communication experts, hear personal stories from members around the world, and discover more about Toastmasters International Presidents, Accredited Speakers, and World Champions.



Traveling Toastmaster



1 | SASHA-LI CHINLOY, DTM, of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, takes in the scenic views in Montego Bay, Jamaica.

2 | CURTIS HELT, DTM, and **CRISTINA SCOBLE, DTM**, both of Las Vegas, Nevada, take their Toastmaster to Squamish, British Columbia, Canada.

3 | BRITTA BRUNSTRÖM of Turku, Finland, visits a cathedral in Galway, Ireland, with her printed out copies of the Toastmaster.

4 | NISHANT MEHTA, DTM, of Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, wears his "Ask Me About Toastmasters International" button on a flight.



Snapshot



In July 2021, members of Siyane Toastmasters of Gampaha, Sri Lanka, took it upon themselves to donate essential medical equipment to an immediate care center treating COVID-19 patients in Sri Lanka. Club members, family, and friends contributed to fund the project, and they were able to donate two pulse oximeters, three wheelchairs, 3,000 surgical masks, 200 KN95 masks, and three rechargeable torches—all of which were on the health-care providers' priority list.



Top Words of 2021

By Paul Sterman

COVID-19 has dominated the world's attention the past two years—and that's also been true in the world of language. In 2020, Merriam-Webster declared "pandemic" its word of the year. In 2021, as the COVID crisis continued to evolve, the dictionary company announced "vaccine" as its [top word](#).

Along the same linguistic lines, Oxford Languages, creator of the Oxford English Dictionary, named "[vax](#)" its number one word for 2021.

The top words are typically chosen based on their prominence. For example, Merriam-Webster said searches for "vaccine" on its website increased 600% over the previous year—and more than 1,000% from pre-COVID 2019.

Oxford's pick drew on usage data gathered from news sources across the English-speaking world. "Vax," used in phrases such as "vax cards" and being "fully

vaxxed," exploded into the universal lexicon in 2021; the term appeared 72 times as frequently in September 2021 as it did a year earlier, said Oxford.

The publisher even produced a [report](#) delving into the history of vaccine-related language developments, including how they have influenced languages other than English.

Dictionary.com went a different route for its 2021 choice. The online dictionary selected "allyship"—a new word to its site. The social justice-related term was increasingly used in reference to Black and LGBTQ people and represents major themes of the year, said Dictionary.com.

Other words also sparked significant interest. After "vaccine," Merriam-Webster listed the premier words of 2021, in order, as: "insurrection," "perseverance" (the name of the NASA spacecraft that landed on Mars last February), "woke," "nomad" (think "Nomadland," an Oscar-winning film from last year), "infrastructure," "cicada," "murraya" (the word correctly spelled by the winner of the Scripps National Spelling Bee), "cisgender," "guardian" (Cleveland's professional baseball team tapped "Guardians" as its new name), and "meta." Searches of that word rose 10,860% after Facebook announced in October that "meta" would be the company's new name, said Merriam-Webster.

Paul Sterman is
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When Your Greatest Enemy Is You

How an awkward confession led to an initiative that changed my life.

By Conrad Miller

I have always been known for one defining characteristic: I like swimming in uncharted waters. In Toastmasters, this means I frequently select Pathways learning experience elective projects that require skills I do not yet have.

But there was one thing that always sent chills up my spine—Table Topics®. To be fair, my fear was warranted. I remember my very first Table Topics experience like it was yesterday. My hands were sweating, my heart was racing. And my mind was completely blank. Somehow, I had managed to condense what should have been a two-minute impromptu speech into a 10-second sentence. I helplessly splashed around in my pool of scattered thoughts and rambling words.

From that day on, I invested a significant amount of energy into ensuring I looked extremely busy during all Table Topics sessions and always took on critical meeting roles, like timer, to eliminate myself as a potential pick.

Years passed, and it became harder and harder to overcome this gargantuan feat. After I confessed my impromptu speaking fears in a club speech, a few audience members reached out privately and admitted they faced similar challenges. As an engineer and researcher, I was intrigued. I conducted an anonymous online survey with my club members to determine their overall confidence level speaking ad lib and doing Table Topics. To my surprise, the results revealed that there were several other Toastmasters who also had a desire to overcome their aversion to impromptu speaking. This inspired me to create the On-The-Spot (OTS) program.

On-The-Spot was focused on people with a desire to increase their confidence level in Table Topics and speaking off the cuff. These were members of my club and others I had reached out to from other clubs.



There was one thing that always sent chills up my spine—Table Topics.

OTS included the following components:

- Workshop #1: A guest speaker (past Table Topics Contest champion), followed by a Q&A and practice session.
- Workshop #2: A closed-group practice session with just OTS members.
- Volunteering as Table Topics practicers at our home clubs and other clubs.
- A Table Topics Tournament.

The OTS group was updated on all speaking opportunities that surfaced for volunteering in Table Topics. The purpose of this aspect of our initiative was to jump in the deep end by accelerating our exposure to Table Topics and rapidly rid ourselves of the fear. With 16 group members, it was essential to include other willing clubs in the initiative—online meetings made this much easier than it would have been in pre-pandemic times. The group

was frequently told which OTS members had presented at which clubs, all while making it clear that the outcome was never as important as the act of volunteering itself. Inevitably, as they improved, some OTS members were voted best speaker during the Table Topics sessions on their tours.

The project culminated in January 2021 when On-The-Spot members participated in a Table Topics tournament. As usual, the two finalists were asked to provide their one- to two-minute speeches but instead of a typical question, they were to end their speeches with “and *that’s* why people dance.” The audience was thrilled by the blend of responses and interpretations by the two finalists. More importantly, there was an air of victory felt by all tournament participants.

And with that, as the sun set on our initiative, I could see that my fellow OTS members were all looking a little

different than they did when they attended that first workshop. The researcher in me was hungry to qualify and quantify what that change really was! Imagine my joy when the after-program survey revealed their confidence in impromptu speaking had improved compared to their self-assessment that was done before the start of the OTS project.

The vision of On-The-Spot was achieved and exceeded. Today, not only are the group members still active, but other clubs have also launched their own versions of the program. I still have much to learn, but I did learn one big lesson: How to feel the fear and do it anyway. **T**

Conrad Miller is a member of Dynamic Speakers in Jamaica, an engineering manager, and doctoral student. He created a mobile application called I.A.N (Interactive Audience Network), which assists with speech evaluations and gathering feedback.

A Base Camp Roadmap

Learn the basics to navigate the learning management system.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Are you the type of person who reads through the entire instruction manual before you start using an item? Or are you like me and want to jump right in?

Many, especially those who have been Toastmasters for some time, want to get right to the learning in their path so they can start giving speeches. Is there a quick way to get started? Fortunately, there is.

Pathways utilizes a learning management system called Base Camp. Sometimes Base Camp can seem somewhat complex and, at times, confusing. Good news! You don't have to become an expert in Base Camp. You only need to know a few procedures.

Let's look at some of the fundamentals that can get you to your next project quickly.

listed on the right. If you have a check mark next to a project, you have completed it. There is a blue button to the right of each project. If the button says "Activate," click it. This activates the project. You will not have to activate it again. The button will refresh to say "Launch."



for that level. Once the item is launched, follow the instructions to mark it complete. The VPE will receive a notification that an approval awaits. Once it is approved, your level is complete.

Where Do I Find My Evaluation Form?

Links to evaluation forms abound in Pathways. (Note: Toastmasters refers to the evaluation forms as evaluation resources.) Here is the quickest way to get to yours. If you are not logged in on Base Camp, start on the Toastmasters website to log in and go to Base Camp. If you are already in your path, click on the "Home" button in the upper left-hand corner. This takes you to the same place that you were when you signed into Base Camp. If you

You don't have to become an expert in Base Camp. You only need to know a few procedures.

What Is the Overall Structure of Pathways?

Each path has five levels. And each level has several projects within it. I recommend that you complete the projects in order. You don't have to, but don't complicate it. Once you complete all the requirements for Level 1, move on to Level 2. And so forth through Level 5.

How Do I Get Into a Project?

For the purposes of this discussion, I will assume that you have selected your path and know how to sign into the [Toastmasters International website](#). Log in and click on where it says "Welcome, <your name>." This takes you to what is called the "Profile" page. Click on the "Go" button in the "Go to Base Camp" tile. Click on "Paths and Learning." Find your path and click on the "Launch" or "Open Curriculum" button at the far right. This takes you to your path. Click on the level where you are currently working. The various projects are

Click on it. This opens the project file. Then follow the process, page by page.

How Are the Speech Projects Organized?

Each project starts out with a description of that project. After you read that, complete the Assess Your Skills activity. This is followed by content, often including a video, that teaches you the material for that project. When you are done, you complete the Assess Your Skills activity again to see how much you have learned. Once you complete the final self-assessment, your project will show as completed on Base Camp.

How Do I Get a Level Sign-Off?

The Vice President Education (VPE) approves your level completion at the end of every level. When you have completed all projects for that level, you will activate and launch the "Level X Completion" item. The button to activate will not appear unless you have completed all the projects

want the resource in English, click on "Speech Evaluations." This takes you to a page with all of the evaluation resources in Pathways. Find your project, click on the link, click on "Launch," and there it is, ready to print out or download for easy transmission to your evaluator. If you want your resource in a different language, click on "Tutorials and Resources" on the home page.

If you have spent any time on Base Camp, you know that there is a whole lot more than what we have looked at today. This article, however, covers those basic functions that you need to know to get started.

Writing this article has really helped me get a handle on Base Camp. Hopefully it helps you, as well. **T**

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette, and Evening Stars Club in Denver, Colorado. Learn more at www.billbrown-speechcoach.com

Sergeant at Arms: Make the Meeting Shine

Tips for
successfully
filling this
challenging role.

By Will Neuman, DTM



Club officer elections have come and gone, and you may be thinking about what role you'd like to take on next. You're probably familiar with the responsibilities of most of the officer roles. The Vice President Education ensures everyone is making progress toward their educational goals, and the Treasurer is responsible for the club's monetary funds, while the Secretary takes notes and sends out emails.

The Sergeant at Arms starts the meeting and introduces the Club President, and wields the real or metaphorical gavel. They usually make an announcement about silencing cell phones or staying muted if the club is online, but all things considered, it might not seem like a very challenging responsibility. However, as someone who has served as Sergeant at Arms for two clubs multiple times, I can assure you the role requires more than what meets the eye.

The [Club Leadership Handbook](#) does an excellent job of explaining this role. The Sergeant at Arms is the one who sets up the room or the online meeting link, makes sure there are always enough supplies on hand, sees to it that there is a backup plan if the meeting place is ever in jeopardy (or if there's a faulty Zoom link). And that's just the start.

This officer can make the difference as to whether a new guest returns for the next meeting or is never seen again. Being proactive creates a positive impact, and the Sergeant at Arms should constantly be looking to make things better. Here are some examples:

- **Keep in close contact with the President right before the meeting** to let them know you intend to start exactly on time. They will either inform you that there may be some reason for a brief delay or give the go-ahead to start. Give a one-minute notice to let everyone get organized and in their seats so the meeting can start in an orderly fashion. If the meeting is on Zoom, this will allow members to wrap up conversations, mute themselves, and end any conversations in the chat.

- **Help anyone with computer difficulties** if they need it. If your club has online and in-person attendees (a hybrid format), be sure that everyone can hear one another and is familiar with how to mute and unmute.

- **Make sure that the President and Toastmaster of the Day know the names of the guests** and be ready to remind them to make introductions (if that's a practice in your club).

- **During the meeting, keep things in control:** Help a late-arriving guest or member find a seat or welcome them to the Zoom meeting in a private message.

- **Just before the meeting ends, make sure nothing has been overlooked.** Is there supposed to be an Executive Committee Meeting after adjournment? Has the location or link of next week's meeting been changed? If so, make that announcement.

- **Work with the Vice President Membership (VPM) to capture guest contact information** and encourage club members to do a little socializing with guests. If your guests are online, send them a private message to get their contact information and send it to the officers so they can follow up.

- **Keep an eye on guests and as they leave,** say something like, "It was great to see you, and I hope you enjoyed our meeting. Please come back again!"

- **Double-check that the President and VPM have guests' contact information** before the meeting ends.

- **For in-person meetings, be sure to put the room back as it should be.** In fact, try to leave it better than you found it! For online meetings, once the goodbyes are completed, officially end the meeting, and send out the recording, if applicable.

- **Be adaptable.** Our world has changed. We have challenges no one imagined until recently. First, we had Zoom meetings, and now we have hybrid ones. If you've been in a hybrid meeting, you know a lot can go wrong if equipment isn't connected properly and put in place in advance of the meeting. If you don't know how to do this, practice until you are comfortable so the meetings start smoothly and on time.

This is just the start. Hopefully you will think of even more ways to help the meeting be successful. If you just do your job the way you're supposed to, you can get by. But if you want to do an outstanding job, constantly look for ways to make every meeting just a little better. Be proactive! **T**

Will Neuman, DTM, joined Toastmasters in 2013 and is a member of Talk of the Town Toastmasters in Batavia, Illinois; Listen, Learn, Lead in Elgin, Illinois; and Fountain Hills Toastmasters in Fountain Hills, Arizona. He is President of the Illinois clubs.

My Point Is This . . .

Pull your audience in with attention magnets.

By Joel Schwartzberg

As a speaker, it's always your job to successfully convey the [point of your speech](#). It's not your audience's job to draw that conclusion on their own, much less remember it throughout your presentation.

One of the most effective ways to emphasize your point has to do with where you place it in your speech. Because the beginning and end of your speech are often the most remembered parts, state your point clearly at the start of your talk, reinforce it often, and end with it clearly and decisively, like a gymnast sticking a landing. Don't worry about stating your point too often. No one has ever left a presentation thinking, *Felicia's speech was awesome—except that she made her point too many times.*

But even if your point is placed in the smartest strategic position and hit with extra volume, energy, gestures, and eye contact, it may still be missed if someone in the audience is not paying attention or thinking about another part of your presentation.

That's when you bring out one of your most potent presentation tools: the attention magnet.

Attention magnets are short, often generic phrases to signal the audience that something important is about to be shared. It's the verbal equivalent of a neon sign (with blinking arrow).

Here are eight of my favorites:

1 Here's the thing

Example: "We've covered several topics today, but here's the thing. ..."

2 To be clear

Example: "To be clear, our proposal won't solve all of our problems, only the most critical ones."

3 My point is this

Example: "I recognize that there's a lot to consider before we move forward, but my point is this. ..."

4 Rest assured

Example: "Rest assured we will overcome this challenge." (This magnet is especially valuable for leaders speaking to their teams during a crisis.)

5 If you take away one idea

Example: "If you take away one idea from this presentation, it's that we must take this action now."

6 Here's what I recommend/propose/suggest

Example: "To take advantage of this rare opportunity, here's what I ... " (This magnet is particularly useful for

leaders, who should be making points/and recommendations, not just sharing information.)

7 Here's why it matters

Example: "This phenomenon has broad implications for our society, but here's why it matters to us ... " (This magnet is especially important after sharing data.)

8 Here's what I can say

Example: "We've spent a lot of time researching this opportunity, and here's what I can say ..."

Here are a few tips about attention magnets, and how they act as signaling statements.

- Signaling statements are powerful, but if you overuse them, their strength will wane. Reserve that engagement firepower for your most important lines and points.
- Don't confuse attention magnets with attention grabbers (or attention getters). The sole purpose of an attention grabber is to capture attention, so it could be a joke, a scream, a sound effect, or a shocking story. Attention magnets, on the other hand, grab attention but then *direct it* to your point. They serve your primary purpose as a speaker—drawing attention not simply to you, but to your key takeaway.
- A golden rule in public speaking is to be authentic, which means never saying anything that wouldn't ordinarily come from your mouth, including signaling statements. Say each one out loud and pick the ones that feel most natural to your style and vocabulary.
- Insert a short pause immediately after using your attention magnet. Your audience needs that time to process the magnet and then commit their attention.

There are many more examples of signaling statements. Some are generic, others very specific—but all attention magnets share a single purpose: drawing instant audience attention to the most important piece of content: your point. Considering that benefit, attention magnets can be among the most powerful tools in your speechmaking toolbox. **1**

Joel Schwartzberg is the senior director of strategic and executive communications for a national nonprofit, a presentation coach, and the author of *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team and Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter*. Follow him on Twitter [@TheJoelTruth](#).

Let Your Stories Talk

How dialogue brings audiences into the action.

By Craig Valentine

If I put a trophy on top of a table, what do you think I want you to focus on, the trophy or the table? It's the trophy. Why is the table there? It's there to set up the trophy.

We can look at using narration and dialogue in our speeches in much the same way. Narration is the table; dialogue is the trophy. Narration sets up the dialogue, which is what your audiences really want to hear and see.

Let's look at how these two tactics can spice up your stories and greatly improve your audience connection.

Dialogue is the heart of any story because it automatically places the audience in your scene, allows them to hear what you heard, and lets them see a character's reaction to conversations.

Too Much or Too Little?

Many speakers use far too much narration. For example: My wife came home and told me she wanted to go to the circus.

Too much narration can cause your speech to come across like a news report, and we don't want that. It feels like you are detailing something from the past rather than reliving it in the present.

Relying more on dialogue, the phrase might be: My wife said, "I want to go to the circus."

That's more powerful because we hear *how* the words were spoken. However, if overused, dialogue can cause a speech to come across like a stage play, and we don't want that either.

What's the solution? The key is to use an effective mix of narration and dialogue so that your audience knows three important pieces of information:

1. Who is talking?
2. What is being said?
3. How is it being said?

An effective mix might sound like this: My wife came home, ran right up to me, and said, "I want to go to the circus!"

Do you see here how narration and dialogue work together? The narration (table) sets up the dialogue

(trophy). What audience members end up remembering, though, is the dialogue, and that's exactly what we want as storytellers. Dialogue lets my audience hear the excitement in my wife's voice, and it puts them in the scene.

Change Your Style

Many speakers restrict themselves to just using dialogue between characters. However, you can make a much greater connection with your audience, keep them laughing, and stir their emotions when you use these three additional types of dialogue:

1 Character-to-Character Dialogue

This conversational style is the most commonly used type of dialogue. For example, here's an exchange from one of my stories:


He said, "You can win the World Championship of Public Speaking." I said, "What are you talking about? I just lost the Humorous Speech Contest at the club level." He said, "That's okay. The only thing wrong with your humorous speech was that it wasn't funny."

2 Inner Dialogue

Speakers often miss the opportunity to use this style. Inner dialogue involves verbalizing your thoughts so your audience members can literally *hear* what you were saying to yourself at certain times in your story. For example, in one of my stories, I am about to introduce my speaking hero so he can take the stage. While I was backstage, getting my thoughts together, I actually bumped into him, and this is what happened:

I said, "I'm so excited to introduce you today! You are the man who made me want to get into this business in the first place. Thank you so much for being here." He didn't say anything. He just looked at me as if to say, "You don't belong on the same stage."

I immediately thought, *Well, he's about to get an introduction he does not expect.*



Inner dialogue shows the audience exactly what's going on inside my mind at that moment. The great news for you as a speaker is, if you thought it *then*, you can say it *now*. You just need to use an appropriate stem, a phrase that sets up the dialogue to follow.

Take these three stems: I thought; I was thinking; I'm thinking. Whatever words come next represent inner dialogue.

For example: "I was thinking, *I hope the readers of my article understand what I'm saying.*"

I hear many speakers use this unnecessary phrase: "I thought to myself ..." We don't need

speaker to share your interpretation of your experiences while still keeping your story completely true. Projected dialogue is when you give dialogue to other characters in your story based on how *they* are looking at *you*.

do an activity in which I ask my audience to change 12 things about their own appearance. They give me strange looks and I know what many of them are thinking.

At that moment, I say, "You're looking at me as if to say, 'Craig, I don't even have 12 things on.'" Two fantastic things can happen. Your audience often laughs, and you connect more deeply with them. The audience now feels like *you* know what *they* are thinking.

When they get to hear what you think (inner dialogue), and they feel like you know what they're thinking (projected dialogue) your connection will be nearly unbreakable.

What the audience remembers is the dialogue, and that's exactly what we want as storytellers.

the "to myself" part because who else are you going to think to?

Inner dialogue is important because your audience members can't get any closer to you than being inside your own mind. Well, that is, unless you get inside of theirs, which is what this final type of dialogue allows you to do.

3 Projected Dialogue

This is by far my favorite type of dialogue because it gives you tremendous freedom as a

Consider these phrases for projected dialogue:

They looked at me as if they wanted to say, "..."

You're looking at me as if to say, "..."

Did you notice that the last phrase has to do with your audience? Not only can you project dialogue onto characters in your story, but you can also project it onto your audience. All you need to project is what your audience is likely thinking at a certain moment. For example, I

Lift the Trophy

Using a healthy mix of narration and dialogue will indeed infuse life into your stories and speeches. Try putting these three types of dialogue to work for you and open many more opportunities to make your audiences TALL (think, act, laugh, learn).

Hopefully, you're reading this and thinking, *Great! I'm going to try these tools out!* **T**

Craig Valentine, the 1999 World Champion of Public Speaking, is an internationally known speaker, author, and coach. He's the founder of the Speak and Prosper Academy and The Inner Circle for Speakers. Visit his [website](http://www.craigvalentine.com).



Leadership in a Changed World


How the pandemic
has pushed leaders
to chart new waters.

By Greg Glasgow

Kumar Parakala, president of GHD, a Chicago-based technology firm, was quick to see the tip of the communication iceberg when the COVID-19 pandemic appeared in March 2020.

He realized that the stress and uncertainty of the crisis—coupled with employees who were suddenly working from home—was going to require a new level of connection. In a blog post for *Forbes* magazine, Parakala described how his company moved quickly to enhance traditional communications. Teams began to converse more through additional weekly meetings, frequent newsletters, town hall gatherings, one-on-one conversations with employees, and even personalized handwritten letters to keep workers connected and engaged.

“During difficult times, increasing the flow of information helps convey that you care for your people and are available to answer any questions,” Parakala noted. “I’ve found this also significantly reduces misinformation and confusion and brings leaders much closer to their employees.”



Parakala intends to keep up the new level of communication, even when the pandemic is no longer a critical business and humanitarian concern. It's just one of the lessons he's learned. As difficult as the crisis has been for leaders like him, it has offered a rare opportunity to do away with old ways of thinking and reinvent leadership from the ground up. There are new opportunities to seek and act on innovative ideas from non-traditional sources, such as younger, diverse workers who bring less experience but more relevant insight to the table. Businesses will need quick responses and quicker pivots when called for. Experts say it's now more important than ever for companies to live by their mission and values, and continually share how each employee contributes to that effort.

Uncertainty is our new common challenge.

These realities will require the post-pandemic leader to broaden and hone the skills needed to adapt and succeed. Many of these capabilities have nothing to do with the top-down model of the past and everything to do with demonstrating empathy and connection, modeling resilience and transparency, and inspiring trust among workers.



“We are seeing new types of problems emerge. And as leaders, we need to be careful that we are not evaluating new challenges and opportunities using our old paradigms and criteria,” Parakala says.

Uncertainty is our new common challenge. Stefanie Johnson, associate professor of organizational leadership and information analytics at the University of Colorado Boulder, says the past two years brought business leaders face to face with uncertainty—and those who adapted best and most quickly are those who have had the most success. Going forward, the skills that will differentiate successful leaders are skills built around managing uncertainty.

“The new definition of normal is that we need to expect a lot of transition and flexibility,” she says.

Here’s a closer look at five traits that signify resilience and opportunity for leaders in a business world that has changed drastically.

Trust

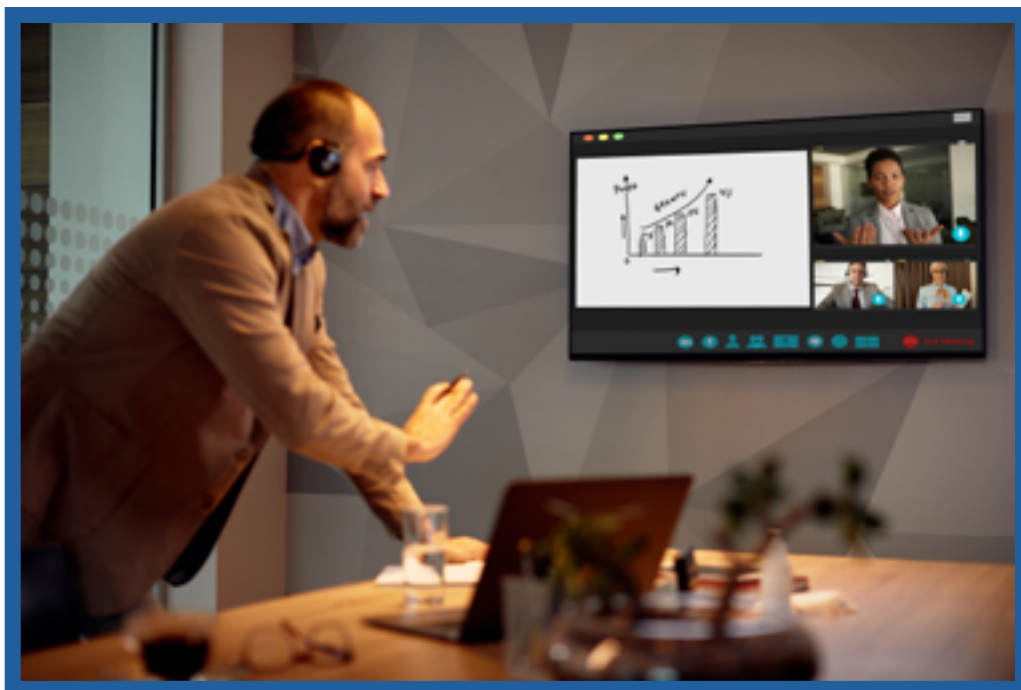
Arguably the biggest workplace change brought about by the pandemic is the widespread adoption of remote work. A [Pew Research study](#) found that a majority of employed adults in the U.S. whose jobs can be done from home are now working from home all of the time, some of the time, or most of the time—and 62% of those respondents rarely or never worked from home prior to the coronavirus outbreak. It’s a change played out across the globe, and one that won’t be going away any time soon.

Numerous studies show that employees who can work from home now vastly prefer doing so, and leaders are experimenting with a variety of work models ranging from hybrid schedules to fully remote. It’s a new frontier that perfectly illustrates the role trust now plays in leader-employee relationships.

In challenging times, leaders need to be authentic in their communication.

“If you don’t trust people to do their job, you’re not going to be able to function,” says Johnson. “You’re going to need to trust your team members to work on their own.”

When workers feel trusted by their leaders, they do better work, collaborate more, feel more engaged, and stay at their jobs longer. Some leaders may have had concerns about remote work at the beginning of the pandemic, but studies show that employees who are able to work remotely tend to work longer hours and perform their jobs just as well as those who are in the office.



Trust has a critical flipside as well, notes Jandel Allen-Davis, president and CEO of Craig Hospital in Denver, Colorado. “As important as it is for leaders to trust their teams, it’s equally important for teams to have trust in leadership,” she says. “In a time like the one we’re going through now, when there’s so much to react to, it’s important for leaders to guide their ship with a steady hand, knowing when to react to the news of the day and when to stay the course.”

Communication

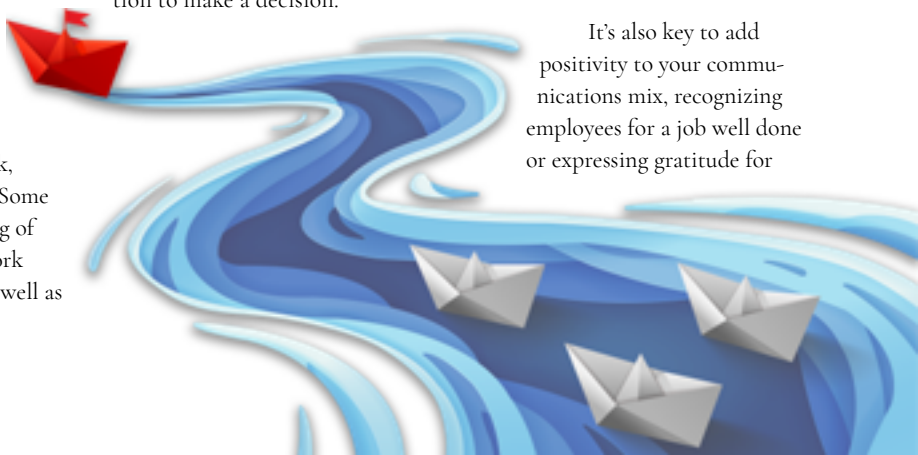
With their workforces scattered, remote, and often distracted or disappointed by the latest news, smart leaders know it’s more important than ever to maintain active communication with their teams, and to make sure team members actively communicate with one another.

Workplace disruption has also led leaders to realize the basic details about issues are often not enough—employees want to understand the “why” behind specific actions and decisions.

“We have had to both interpret and establish the context moment-to-moment since March 2020,” Allen-Davis says. “If you take the time to establish the context, you’re going to get more people on board with you. If people understand how they fit into the picture and what the rationale is for going a certain direction, they’re less likely to panic or be reactive. And they’re also more likely to follow you as you figure out what’s got to be done.”

In challenging times, leaders need to be authentic in their communication, experts say—to be clear and direct—and when appropriate, to admit they don’t have all the answers or are waiting for more information to make a decision.

It’s also key to add positivity to your communications mix, recognizing employees for a job well done or expressing gratitude for





Culture

The pandemic has reshaped the dynamics of the workplace too. Time away from the office, in the midst of a worldwide crisis, has given many workers a new sense of what is really important in their lives. A racial reckoning that exploded alongside the pandemic has sharpened the focus on issues of diversity and equity. And a worldwide labor shortage has made it more important

how hard they're working. For example, a leader reaching out personally to a team member to thank them, or just to ask how they're doing, with no work agenda attached, can mean the world.

And while technology has made face-to-face communication possible during the pandemic, leaders need to be careful not to overuse the virtual tools, Parakala says.

"You need to be conscious that people may want a personal break," he says. "Just because Zoom is available 24-7 doesn't mean we have to use it."

Empathy

The pandemic fundamentally changed the relationship between leaders and their teams. Interacting with workers over Zoom—where pets or children might be seen or heard—and helping them cope with stress and burnout have made it clear that leaders will need to operate with increased empathy in the post-pandemic world.

When workers feel trusted by their leaders, they do better work, feel more engaged, and stay at their jobs longer.

The health crisis elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, causing employers to add mental health benefits and pay attention to employee well-being in a way they never have before. Leaders can no longer view all employees as the same, says Johnson, the Boulder leadership professor. Workers are individuals with unique needs, struggles—and strengths.

"It's about being better able to listen to people and understand their perspective," she says of post-pandemic leadership. "Leaders are there to create an environment where their team members can be successful."

Terri Egan, associate professor emeritus of applied behavioral science at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, believes the new emphasis on workplace empathy also will require leaders to be more flexible with employees about schedules and assignments.

"[Leaders] have to understand that people are going through a lot of changes still, and that what they see on the surface is just a peek into what's really happening in the lives of their employees," Egan says.

than ever for leaders to give their teams a sense of purpose.

"As employers, we talk the game of really caring about our employees through the mind-body-spirit perspective," says Allen-Davis, the hospital CEO. "But in a labor shortage, we need to be able to recruit—and more importantly, retain—a highly skilled workforce who comes to work and feels like, *This is where I want to be. This is worth getting up out of bed in the morning and coming to work for.*"

Parakala has seen the change, especially with a younger workforce who want jobs where they can make a difference. His company has shifted recruiting efforts to focus on company culture, not salaries.

"We have people who are probably getting offered double the money that we are willing to pay, but they want to come and work in our teams because they like the culture and like the purpose," he says. "They like the empathy; they like the way we engage with them. They like our transparency. We are seeing a highly visible trend where if that higher purpose is clearly articulated, it is a motivator for a lot of people to seriously consider when making employment choices."

Humanity

COVID-19 has changed leadership in innumerable ways, but in the end, the biggest lesson for leaders has been the importance of connecting with workers on a human level, Parakala says. It's about prioritizing their health and safety. It's about reaching out in ways you haven't before, and about keeping your door open at all times.

"We need to get out and connect with our people in the organization as if we are connecting with our own family members," Parakala says. "When we talk to our family members, we are generally very open, very empathetic, very caring. The same mindset needs to be applied for people in your organization.

"Every one of those individuals, no matter how senior they are, are all fighting their own battles," he continues. "Being able to understand that and have that emotional connection—to have a conversation that is not just business—is going to be very important to earn trust as we move forward." **T**

Greg Glasgow is a Denver-based freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmasters magazine*.

Talking Up Toastmasters

When someone asks you about joining, what do you say?

By Peggy Beach, DTM

Think back to the time when you walked through the door or logged into your first Toastmasters meeting. Did you know what to expect?

If someone asks you about the organization today, what do you tell them? What should a prospective member consider before joining Toastmasters? Whether you're speaking to a family member, friend, colleague, or stranger on the street, here are some tips and talking points to help them get started in Toastmasters.

What Is Toastmasters International?

In 1924, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley founded [Toastmasters](#) at a YMCA in Santa Ana, California, to help others develop public speaking skills. Today, the global nonprofit has 300,000 members in more than 15,800 clubs in 149 countries. Its mission is to “empower individuals to become more effective leaders and communicators.”

To help fulfill this mission, Zachary Williams, a member of True Blue Talkers in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, explains the importance of listening to the guest and finding out what they hope to get out of their experience.

or afternoon, or at night. Some clubs meet once a week, while others meet once or twice a month. There are also different types of clubs, including community clubs, which are open to everyone, and corporate clubs, open to employees where the club is located. After being in Toastmasters for a while, a member may decide to join an advanced club to help them further develop public speaking skills. Members can also belong to more than one club at a time.

Prospective members are encouraged to visit as many club meetings as they wish until they find the right fit. Guests can participate in meetings as much or as little as they want. Many clubs hold online meetings or hybrid meetings (a mixture of online and in person). To show what a Toastmasters meeting looks like, share [this video](#).

Meetings Make the Experience

Each Toastmasters meeting has [a number of roles](#) that play an important part in making the club experience enjoyable. These include the Toastmaster of the Day (who leads the meeting), Table Topicsmaster

There are clubs around the world that can meet anyone's needs, with meeting times in the morning or afternoon, or at night.

“Everyone comes to Toastmasters with different wants and needs,” says Williams. “Some come for professional reasons and others for personal. Listening plays a major role in deciding upon what benefits of the club are best suited for our nonmembers. From there, the decision to get them to join is pretty simple!”

How to Find a Club

The first step is to find a club by checking the [Toastmasters website](#). Contact information for each club is available there. While all Toastmasters meetings have a similar structure, each club has its own culture.

There are clubs around the world that can meet anyone's needs, with meeting times in the morning,

(who leads the impromptu speaking session), and a prepared speaker. A timer keeps all speakers within time limits and a grammarian helps participants with grammar and vocabulary. Each prepared speaker has an evaluator, and a general evaluator evaluates the entire meeting. Speakers are encouraged to meet with their evaluators before the meeting to establish what the speaker wants to accomplish. Members rotate roles at each meeting so that everyone can experience each role.

Leadership skills are also a key part of Toastmasters. A committee of [club officers](#) is elected each year. Members also have the opportunity to become leaders on the Area, Division, District, and international levels.



Built-In Support

When encouraging someone to [join Toastmasters](#), members often mention how supportive their fellow club members are to new or nervous speakers. Evaluations are positive and uplifting. The emphasis is on building confidence, not on tearing someone down.

Rosemary Hallberg, a member of Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina, believes this is a key selling point for Toastmasters. “I had always heard about Toastmasters,” she said. “But I was so nervous about public speaking that I did not join for years. When I finally joined, I was pleased and relieved to receive support. It really is a warm, supportive environment.”

Lenka Landova is a member of S.E.A. Sharks of ExxonMobil Association club in Prague, Czech Republic, and she agreed that Toastmasters is a friendly, safe environment not only for the development of communication and leadership skills but also for networking. “We have so much to offer ... depending on what people are currently looking for. From time management to constructive feedback, to mentoring, flexibility, and confidence,” she said. “The list can be very long.”

Landova helps new members understand that Toastmasters is not only the club they are a member of, but in fact “a whole regional/national/international community of friendly people all working on themselves and cooperating together. If you want to, you can get so

much outside your bubble, meet amazing people, travel ... it took me awhile to fully get it,” says Landova.

Choose Your Own Education Path

The [Pathways learning experience](#) is the Toastmasters education program, a flexible and interactive way to build real-world, transferable skills at your own pace. When joining Toastmasters, members can choose from 11 paths with 300 unique competencies

designed to highlight a specific skill set. The paths include Dynamic Leadership, Effective Coaching, Engaging Humor, Innovative Planning, Leadership Development, Motivational Strategies, Persuasive Influence, Presentation Mastery, Strategic Relationships, Team Collaboration, and Visionary Communication.

Each path has five levels, increasing in complexity as the member progresses through each level. Level 1 includes the Ice Breaker, a member’s first speech before a club. (Guests can sample the [Ice Breaker Project](#) to get a feel for how projects are structured.)

Levels 3 through 5 include a number of electives designed to engage members in developing new skills. Some electives include Creating a Social Media Presence, Developing a Podcast, and Leading a Panel Discussion.

Members can choose which path to work on and can go at their own pace when completing the Pathways projects—there is no timetable other than the one set by the member. Toastmasters can also work on more than one path at a time.

The first path selected is free. Any subsequent path costs \$20 USD. All Pathways materials are available online, and printed materials include an extra cost. Materials are available in Arabic, English, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Spanish, and Traditional Chinese, with select paths available in Korean and Tamil. Materials are also available for the visually impaired.

If you know someone who is interested, but isn’t ready to commit to becoming a member, they can try [Toastmasters Fast Track](#) to experience the benefits of the program.

Dues

Members pay dues of \$45 USD each April 1 and October 1 (collected in March and September respectively). Additionally, each club will have its own dues. Club dues are usually small but may be larger if the club needs to pay for a meeting space.

A Good Investment

Massimo Peroncelli, a member of Lion Toastmasters Club in Sriracha, Thailand, says that new members can often feel overwhelmed in the beginning of their Toastmasters experience. “It helps to reassure them that they can learn it all by practicing.”

And when someone asks if it’s worth it?

“It is the best investment you can make with the least amount of money,” says Peroncelli. **T**

Peggy Beach, DTM, is a member of Hi Rise Toastmasters in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina. She is a Past District 37 Governor. You can contact her at writereditorpeggybeach@gmail.com.

Getting Started

Share these additional resources with a potential guest.

[All About Toastmasters](#)

[How to Join](#)

[My First Meeting](#)

[Why Toastmasters?](#)

[Welcome New Members](#)

[The Club Experience](#)

[Pathways Overview](#)

[Toastmaster magazine](#)

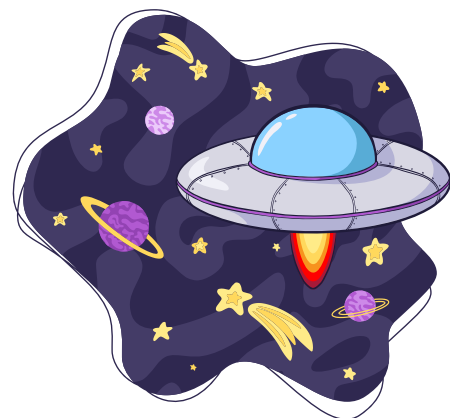
WHAT'S YOUR SPECIALTY?

Members find a creative outlet through specialty-themed clubs around the world.

By Megan Preston Meyer

You already know that Toastmasters helps you become a better speaker and leader; you may not know that it can also help you become a better photographer or chef. Clubs with a special area of focus provide opportunities for like-minded members to broaden their skills and further their particular passions, from business books to science fiction, from photography to food.

The following four uniquely themed clubs put their own special spin on the Toastmasters experience.



Toastmasters in the Kitchen

[Toastmasters in the Kitchen](#)

is an online club that caters to foodies. Members gather virtually on Sunday afternoons to watch live cooking demonstrations and hear food-related speeches, and the club's culinary focus is woven throughout every element of the agenda.

Each meeting has a topic; recent themes have included "Oodles and Oodles of Noodles," "Comfort Food," and "Cookbook Extravaganza!"

The club has relabeled the traditional meeting roles: Members are welcomed by the Maître D' (the presiding officer), who then hands over to the Head Chef (the Toastmaster of the day) to introduce the rest of the kitchen team. Chefs deliver speeches, which are then evaluated by the Master Food Critic and a team of Food Critics. The Inspector performs the Ah-Counter and grammarian roles, "... and our timer is an egg timer," adds Club President Vanessa Lindeberg, DTM.



"Our club specializes in the demonstration speech," says club sponsor and Vice President Education Larry Johnson. "It's a very complicated speech: You have two cameras on you, you are cooking, and you have to speak at the same time." And that doesn't mean just blandly reciting a recipe. "Often, during the demonstration, there are quiet moments—but in an excellent demo speech, you're actually *telling a story* during those quiet moments."

Those stories, coupled with the multicamera view, provide members a chance to practice both visual and verbal communication. "The only thing we're missing is Smell-O-Vision," laughs Vice President Membership Louise Houdelette, DTM.

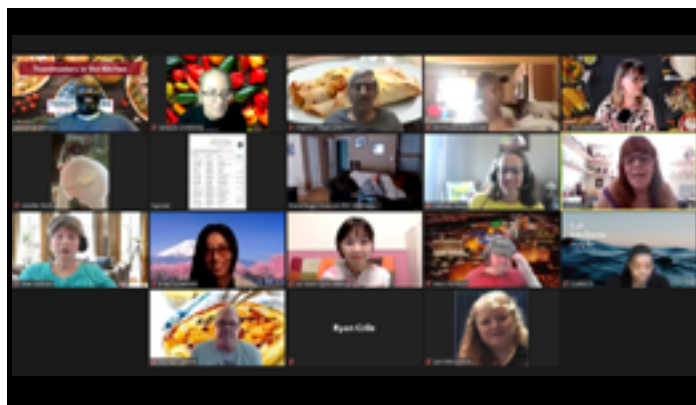
Because the club draws members from different countries, cultures, and culinary backgrounds, the cooking demonstrations are rich and diverse. The club has had demos on how to properly prepare Japanese sticky rice, bake with gluten-free ingredients, and put together a traditional Passover meal.

Michael Lamont, Vice President Public Relations, sums up Toastmasters in the Kitchen's approach: "It's learning about presentations, it's learning about food, and because of it being international, we're getting a lot of different [perspectives]. It's really educational." Lindeberg agrees. "It's traditional—still Toastmasters—but we add in that cooking bit, and have a lot of fun with it." It sounds like the club has found the recipe for success.

Because the club draws members from different countries, cultures, and culinary backgrounds, the cooking demonstrations are rich and diverse.

Toastmasters in the Kitchen is registered in Las Vegas, Nevada, but the club's virtual format attracts members from far and wide. Cathleen Barry, DTM, logs in from Lincoln, Nebraska. "I saw the advertisements for this club and I thought, *I love to cook. This is right where I need to be!*" Other members come from across the United States, as well as Canada and Japan, and the club regularly welcomes international guests.

As the name suggests, the club's activities actually *do* take place in kitchens. The highlight of each meeting is the live cooking demonstration.



Lensmasters

[Lensmasters](#), in Costa Mesa, California, is a specialty club focused on photography. It was started a decade ago by a group of avid photographers who wanted to improve their communication skills. "We've always been interested in photography," says founding member and Treasurer Gary Olive, so they decided to combine that interest "with the Toastmasters format—with the timing, the instruction, and the growth."

Lensmasters meetings look similar to other Toastmasters meetings, but with a twist. "We have the same basic agenda, but we do Table Topics very differently," explains Club President Lynn Gazis. The activity is centered on a photography-related theme, she says; past themes have included high-contrast photography, camera phone pictures, and



wetlands photos. "Members submit photographs [in advance], those photographs are put into a slide show presentation, and those are what the Table Topics speakers talk about."

Photos are presented anonymously, and the Topicsmaster asks the speaker to offer a critique. Since the club includes members with all levels of photography experience, from professional photographers to

amateur aficionados, critiques aren't always focused purely on technique; speakers may also describe how a photograph affects them emotionally. "Some of [the feedback is] combined, a reaction, maybe a little background on what they see in the photo, with a technical appreciation of the photo," says Vice President Education Joel Sax, DTM. "When I give a critique, I try to point out the strong points of a photo and what it echoes out of the culture, as well as what needs to be improved."

"I think I've become a better photographer, and I know I've become a better communicator."

—GARY OLIVE

There is another specialized item on Lensmasters' meeting agendas, as well, says Gazis. "There will be a 'Photo Educational' in preparation for the next theme, where the person who will be Table Topicsmaster next time will give a few tips" on the photo type or technique to be featured in the following meeting.

Club Secretary Diana Dee, DTM, appreciates the combination of critique, technique, and exposure to other people's work. "The advantage that I've gotten out of Lensmasters," she says, "is that I've gotten [not only] the critiques, but also I've gotten to see other people's photos, and that has helped me a lot."



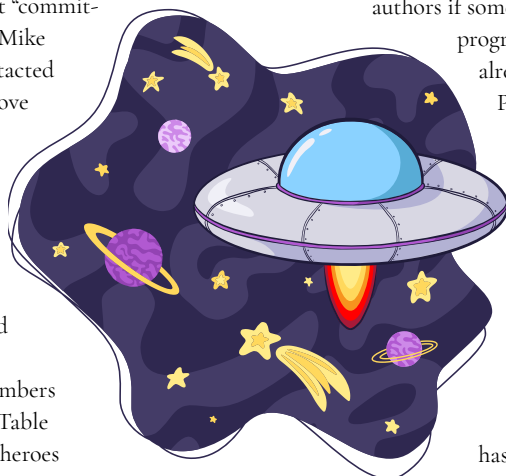
Despite the emphasis on photography, Lensmasters is still very much a Toastmasters club. Members work their way through the Pathways curriculum, and although there's no strict requirement to prepare projects that relate to photography, they do "attempt to emphasize visual aids or other enhancements," says Dee.

By viewing the traditional Toastmasters approach to leadership and communication skills through the lens of photography, the club allows members to grow along all dimensions. The past 10 years in Lensmasters have certainly benefited Olive: "I think I've become a better photographer," he says, "and I know I've become a better communicator."

Worlds of Wonder

Fairly recently, in a galaxy nearby, a committed group of sci-fi and fantasy fans formed a Toastmasters group and began meeting online. So begins one of Worlds of Wonder Toastmasters' [publicity posts](#), and you can almost hear the epic introduction music playing. That "committed group of fans" includes Bill Zain and Mike O'Neil, the club's co-sponsors. "Mike contacted me to explore the idea. He knows that I love science fiction," recalls Zain. "We started inviting people," and the rest is history. The club, which is in the process of chartering, meets weekly to improve leadership and communication skills while discussing books, movies, and television shows in the science fiction and fantasy genres.

Each weekly meeting has a theme; members and guests hear speeches and respond to Table Topics questions about time travel, superheroes



and villains, medieval fantasy, or alien contact. In addition to traditional Toastmasters speeches, the club encourages members to present book reviews of their favorite sci-fi titles. "We also open it up to writers and authors if somebody would like to talk about a work that they have in progress or that they've already done," O'Neil says. The club already counts one published author among its participants: Paul Preuss, co-author of *Arthur C. Clarke's Venus Prime*, who started his career as a scientific writer before turning to fiction.

The club doesn't limit reviews to books, however. "We're starting to promote B-movie reviews," says O'Neil, "those movies that are so bad they're good. We did *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*. Before that, we did a real gem of a B-movie from the early 1950s called *Robot Monster*, which is generally regarded as one of the worst movies ever made."

[Worlds of Wonder](#) started during the pandemic and has embraced the online-only format. The virtual setting is

Do you know
of other specialty
clubs with an
interesting area of focus?
Write to us at

magazine@toastmasters.org.



fitting for a club dedicated to science fiction and fantasy, and provides additional opportunities to engage with the meeting's theme. The club often features visual—even animated—Table Topics, using images and GIFs as prompts, and encourages

the use of virtual backgrounds. “People have fun with the backgrounds,” says Zain, speaking in front of a bleak alien landscape featuring a giant moon and a UFO.

“In the long run, we are considering going hybrid,” says O’Neil, with a futuristic underwater city in the background, “but we always want to keep the online component because of the possible global reach.” Zain agrees. “We already have a few members who join from faraway places like Japan and Spain.” As a young, growing club, Worlds of Wonder Toastmasters hopes to attract members from around the world—and maybe even beyond.

Readership Toastmasters

“Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers.” That quote from former United States President Harry S. Truman welcomes visitors to the website of Readership Toastmasters in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, and sums up the club’s perspective.

The club’s name—and format—is a combination of “reading” and “leadership.” Founding member Diane Windingland, DTM, started the club in 2017. *Toastmasters empowers people to become better communicators and better leaders*, she remembers thinking. *What better way [to do that] than reading, talking about, and discussing leadership books?*

Each monthly meeting is focused on a particular book. Members suggest titles each spring, which are then scheduled for the entire year. Since prepared speeches relate to the book selection, “we plan out the main speakers for the entire year,” says Windingland. “As time goes on, things may have to be adjusted,” she adds, but the advanced book planning still makes her role as Vice President Education easier.

Selected books focus on leadership and cover a wide range of topics, from productivity to empathy to influence. “I like autobiographies or biographies the best,” says Windingland. “My favorite book so far was an autobiography: *Shoe Dog* by Phil Knight [the founder of Nike]. It just was so interesting.”

Unlike a traditional book club, the book sets the tone for the meeting rather than being the sole topic of conversation. “We have three speeches



and an interesting variation of Table Topics related to the book’s theme,” Windingland explains. Using the breakout room feature on Zoom, members split into groups of two or three people. “The Topicsmaster has discussion questions for each breakout room related to the book,” Windingland says. “After the discussion time, we come back together, and each group’s representative talks for one to two minutes about their question.” This way, “even if someone hasn’t read the book, they still get to participate in the discussion of the concept.” This ensures that members and guests leave the meeting having learned the leadership lessons from Readership’s monthly book selection—and having benefited from Toastmasters’ focus on communication, as well. **T**

Megan Preston Meyer is a member of TM International Club Zug in Zug, Switzerland, and a regular contributor to the Toastmaster magazine. She is the author of *The Supply Jane* and *Fifo Adventures*. Learn more at www.supply-jane.com.

Make Your Club Website a Marketing and Recruiting Asset

How to leave an inviting impression with online visitors.

By David F. Carr, DTM

Toastmasters know the importance of a first impression. However, the first impression a prospective member gets of your club often happens before they even visit their first meeting. It's formed when they visit your club website.

Think about the things you invest your time and money in: You probably check them out online first. The question is: Is your website helping or hurting? Does it tell people what they need to know about Toastmasters and your club? Or does it feature obviously outdated information like a promotion for an "upcoming" event that happened a year ago? Does it talk about Table Topics® (insider jargon) without explaining the relevance of impromptu speaking practice?

Here are some ways to make your club website a better marketing and recruiting tool.

Appeal to the Uninitiated

If trying to attract beginners, remember that prospective members may not know anything about Toastmasters. Or maybe they have heard of it and think it sounds deathly dull. A home page that emphasizes posed photos of people

holding up certificates isn't the best way to change that impression.

Instead, show Toastmasters in action. Use candid photos of dramatic moments from member speeches. Better yet, show video of members giving powerful (or hilarious) presentations. Let visitors know these speakers weren't always that skillful but had the

opportunity to learn in the safe and supportive Toastmasters environment. Show with images, show with video, but also put it in writing—about 600 to 800 words is a

good target for the home page, both for the reader and to give search engines text to index.

Spell Out the Basics

Toward the top of the page, list where and when you meet. Since your website can be viewed by people anywhere, be specific. There is a world of difference between Melbourne, Florida, and Melbourne, Australia. If you allow or encourage online attendance, spell out not only the time, but the time zone. Make sure all your information is updated and accurate.

Think Mobile First

The majority of web traffic today comes from mobile phones, not desktop web browsers, so check how your club website appears on your phone. Are the essential details still visible and readable? Are images squished or not fitting within the browser window? Tweak as necessary to get that right.

Brand Yourself

Branding your local club is essential, particularly given the rise of online and hybrid clubs worldwide. You may be excited about the potential to recruit members from all around the world, but that also means you're competing for attention with every other club in the world.

What exactly makes your club so special?

I was the first President at [Online Presenters Toastmasters](#), which has grown into a successful 100% online club. At the top of our club's home page, you learn that the club "serves those who give online presentations professionally, or aspire to do so, whether that means public webcasts and live video or internal company video conferences and screen sharing sessions." That focus was distinct enough to bring in a strong base of members. Other online clubs have found success by focusing on specific skills, such as storytelling.

My advice to hybrid clubs is to hold on to your local identity. Even if you decide to brand yourself as a club that welcomes remote members, or has established a topical



An example of how to let visitors know how to find you



specialty, you want to continue attracting people who are searching for a club within driving distance. Check the Toastmasters [Brand Manual](#) to ensure your site meets brand guidelines.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the art of getting your website indexed in search engines and ranked as high as possible. Ideally, you want to rank for “public speaking” and “professional development” and other keywords, not just “Toastmasters.” Include those words in page titles, headings, and text.

George Marshall, DTM, of Fremont, California, one of the leading voices advocating for smart use of technology by Toastmasters clubs, offers a set of [SEO tips](#) focused on basics, like repeating meetings times and locations several times, on multiple pages. In addition, “Set up as many legitimate links to the website as you can, because Google counts those too,” he says.

Make sure to record your web address in [Club Central](#) on the Toastmasters website. See my [more detailed tips](#) on how to structure pages and links between pages.

Add Depth to Your Website

A full-featured, multi-page website gives visitors more pages to explore and search engines more content to index. If your website includes a particularly strong article on how speakers can improve body language or how to share

slides more effectively on Zoom, that has the potential to rank on Google or get linked to by other websites.

Providing pages focused on individual topics, such as your club’s mentorship program, also gives visitors ways to learn more about your club and why it’s the right one for them.

The desire to add breadth and depth is what drove me to start the [WordPress for Toastmasters](#) project, originally for my home club, Club Awesome Toastmasters, in Coral Springs, Florida. WordPress is web publishing software originally created by bloggers for bloggers, so

it’s easy to add articles. WordPress is always evolving and adding features for SEO, social media, and mobile devices. The trade-off is that there is always more to learn.

The [Free Toast Host](#) (FTH) web hosting service supported by Toastmasters International has the advantage of being specifically for Toastmasters. For example, the FTH website of [North Side Toastmasters Club](#) in Mounds View, Minnesota, makes excellent use of the Toastmasters brand colors to ensure its welcome message stands out. It helps that webmaster and longtime club leader Avonelle Lovhaug is a professional web developer.

Focus on One Thing

However, far from adding more special effects, Lovhaug says most club webmasters should use fewer of them. Many club websites use so many different fonts and background colors that the effect is chaotic.

While Lovhaug happens to be a professional, that’s not the case in many clubs. Toastmasters is a volunteer organization. No club webmaster can be expected to be a technical expert, a design expert, and a great web copywriter. Often, maintaining the website is one of many roles for the Vice President Public Relations or another club

Branding your local club is essential.

leader. They can’t be expected to make perfecting the club website into a full-time job.

Instead of a home page with fancy graphics, insider jargon, or inaccurate details, focus on one thing: making a strong first impression online. **T**

David F. Carr, DTM, is a writer, editor, and digital consultant who has spoken at international technology conferences. In addition to being a member of Online Presenters and Club Awesome Toastmasters, both in Coral Springs, Florida, he is also the founder of the WordPress for Toastmasters project and runs the [Toastmost.org](#) club website hosting service.

Stay in Love With Your Club

Advice for keeping the spark alive and connecting in creative ways.

By Ruth Nasrullah

When you joined your first Toastmasters club, did you get a rush of excitement at the thought of your next meeting? Did imagining your Ice Breaker give you chills? Did you dream that you would be with the club forever?

Okay, joining Toastmasters isn't exactly like falling in love. But, as with romance, it can take some work to make your commitment strong and enduring.

So how do you keep the spark alive? It takes a combined effort by members and leadership. With diligence and creativity, clubs can keep members engaged and members can strengthen their bonds with their club and fellow Toastmasters.

Stay in Touch

It seems obvious but keeping in touch doesn't happen unless someone makes the effort to reach out regularly. It's advice you'll hear over and over if you talk with club members about staying connected.

Cynthia Abdon, DTM, a member of the C & F Leaders Club in Houston, Texas, especially values reinforcing those connections.

"Know each and every member, their likes and goals," she says. "Not just by emails or texts—focus on building continuing relationships. Call if they haven't shown up for a while."

Bhekisisa Ngomane of President Club in Pretoria, South Africa, also stresses staying in touch. He was Club President when meetings went virtual, and he knew he had to take strong action. He divided the membership list among the Club Executive Committee members and drafted a list of questions to ask each club member, focusing on identifying their needs and their comfort level with an online meeting platform.

"We had to rebuild on the opportunity that an online platform presents," says Ngomane. "We've come up with trainings to show people what can be done in online meetings, and we call up people who are not technologically inclined. We've shown them how they can take the skills they learn here and use them in their professional life or use them to connect with other people."

He is a proponent of good old-fashioned phone calls instead of email when touching base with members.

"If you send an email, you can sit there and hope someone reads it," he says. "With a phone call, you can hear what members' challenges and needs are."

Have you called a fellow Toastmaster recently? If you're feeling a little distant from your club, try picking up the phone.

Recognition is Key

Another key way to keep up morale during tough times is to publicly recognize members' achievements. Saurabh Gandhi of the Bibvewadi Toastmasters Club in Pune, Maharashtra, India, says that in addition to using Facebook and Instagram to highlight milestones and accomplishments, they make heavy use of WhatsApp, with categorized lists to keep the focus personal. It's paid off—his club added 20 new members in July and August of 2021.

Social media is an obvious tool for public recognition, and this is unquestionably something you should consider if you are the club Vice President Public Relations (VPPR).

Gianna Abao is VPPR of the Metro Manila Toastmasters Club in Quezon City, Philippines. She is a content creator by profession and has leveraged Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to recognize members' achievements and share some of the key skills Toastmasters focuses on, both in communication and leadership. Her club membership skews Gen Z (those born after 1996), so it works to great effect as the platform is popular for this generation.

"We try to recognize each of our members, their strengths, their Pathways level, and when they see their own face they share it," she says.

She doesn't come up with all the content, though—club members assist.

"I really try to keep the members engaged," she says.

The club's TikTok videos present a combination of tips for public speaking and leadership along with personal stories of how Toastmasters has impacted members' lives. They are good quality, varied in topic, and branded so you recognize them as Metro Manila posts.

Abdon, the Texas Toastmaster, prizes recognizing people as well, not only by highlighting members on social media, but also by talking about them during meetings and special events.



“When you recognize people, they feel part of something bigger,” she says.

Mentors Make an Impact

Mentoring can be critical. While a mentor’s primary task is to show new Toastmasters the ropes, answer their questions, help them get through speeches, and hone skills, they can also serve as a lifeline to your club. In addition to guiding new members in crafting speeches, mentors can also familiarize members with meeting roles and officer roles.

When you join Toastmasters, ask for a mentor. When you’re more experienced, offer to serve as a mentor. It will keep you connected to club members both in and outside of meetings, deepening the Toastmasters experience.

Think Outside the Box

Former Club President Ngomane turned to trainings that went above and beyond the Toastmasters program in order to get members and potential members comfortable with online meetings. Gandhi’s club in India did the same but expanded them to add value.

“Before the pandemic, we would have never imagined calling World Champions [of Public Speaking] to give educational sessions,” he says. “But now we have an almost monthly international speaker for an educational session. We have had three World Champions present educational sessions so far and two of them were joint meetings with Area 41, District 18, and the Bibvewadi Toastmasters

Club. If the meetings were not online, we could never imagine having an inter-District joint event.”

District 74 (Southern Africa) has kicked innovative and exciting practices up a notch. At a recent open house and membership drive for chartering club Breaking Barriers, in Johannesburg, South Africa, the hosts—mostly Division leaders—fostered an upbeat mood, using recordings of raucous applause and asking meeting attendees to unmute and clap loudly after each speech.

The President Club in South Africa takes it a few steps further—dance steps, that is. During their meetings, the Toastmaster of the Day turns on music and encourages members to join him in dancing, turning the atmosphere from a serious club meeting to something more social and focused on fun. Are you a dance fan? Maybe your club can add a little dance break to your meeting agendas too.

If you are a club officer, these types of techniques are something you might want to consider. If you’re not an officer, suggest them. There’s nothing quite so fun as breaking into dance after the exertion of a contemporaneous speech.

Close the Distance

In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our relationships, whether family, friends, colleagues, or fellow Toastmasters. We have had to adapt to using the means that are

available to us, sometimes with varying success.

Toastmasters is a way to stay connected to people who share a common interest. Every time your club meets, you know who you will be seeing there, and you know what you will be doing. There is stability and continuity in that.

Staying active with Toastmasters also provides a way to share your ideas and insights, primarily through speech topic selection. Things you might have discussed at the water cooler can now be shared through a prepared speech, or even Table Topics®.

We don’t know what the future holds, but Toastmasters has been proven to work in a variety of settings. Keep going to meetings, stay in touch with fellow Toastmasters, and once in a while get up and dance. Celebrate life, celebrate Toastmasters, and stay positive and connected with others. **T**

Ruth Nasrullah is a member of the Pearland Toastmasters Club in Pearland, Texas. A freelance journalist based in Houston, she is president of the Houston chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and recently was honored with the Howard S. Dubin Outstanding Pro Member award from the society’s national organization. Read more about and by Ruth at www.ruthnasrullah.com.

Silver Scream

I don't mind getting old. I mind being told I'm not getting old.

By John Cadley

Perhaps you've heard the expression "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." The corollary to that is, "Everybody wants to live a long life, but nobody wants to get old." So we don't get old. We "get up in years," we "put on some mileage," we get not old but older, as in, *I'm not old. "Old" is anybody older than I am.* Nobody is actually old. Old means ancient. The pyramids are old. The Parthenon is old. Dirt is old.

I understand this need to sugarcoat the inexorable onset of decrepitude. After decrepitude comes decomposition, and who wants to think about *that*? There is, however, one genteelism which I could do without, and that is the word "silver." The so-called baby boom generation, now in their 70s, is the "Silver Tsunami," buying and spending in the "Silver Economy." Centrum Silver Multivitamins offer "age-adjusted" micronutrients to—what?—help adjust your age? If you've managed to hold onto your looks, you're a Silver Fox, and if you spend time on the internet, you are—oh, the indignity—a Silver Surfer.

I find this irritating because it is patronizing. Silver refers to hair, of course, which turns gray as we age. Nobody has silver hair unless they shampoo with mercury. Yet it sounds so much more distinguished than gray, which is the color of battleships, leaden skies, and the Department of Motor Vehicles.

I see several problems. What about people with no hair? Men are just as likely to go bald as to go gray, and then what? You don't qualify for the Silver Sunset Special at the diner and have to sit home eating leftover tuna casserole?

What if you have white hair? White is not silver. Silver is the filling your dentist is putting in your teeth. White is your face when he didn't give quite enough Novocaine.

Finally, everybody refers to the autumn of life as the "golden years." You can't have people walking around in their golden years with silver hair. Not only do they clash, but silver is inferior to gold, and if a person has made it through the soul-searing irritations, vexations, and exasperations of this world



with their sanity intact, they deserve a medal, not an inferiority complex.

Given all this, you can imagine how I reacted to an email from my health club informing me that, being over 65, I qualified for their Silver Sneakers Program: *All the benefits of a regular membership for just \$25 a year! Isn't that wonderful?!* This was my reply:

Thanks for the offer but I think your Silver Sneakers Program is about as wonderful as a case of shingles. Why are "all the benefits of a regular

membership" suddenly new? I've always had a regular membership. What do I have now—an Irregular Membership for Old Guys Who Sit on Their Porch Yelling GET OFF MY LAWN? And why only \$25 a year? Because I'm supposed to be on a "fixed income"? How about if I come over and fix your income? And why sneakers? Because old people don't know about running shoes and cross-trainers? They show up in orthopedic Hush Puppies with Velcro straps and ask to use the rotary dial telephone? I don't even wear sneakers. I'm a swimmer. I would only need sneakers if I ran on the bottom of the pool. Do you think that's what I do? And last but not least—there is nothing silver about me. My house is green, my car is blue, my shoes are brown, my dog is black, my golf shoes are tan, and my hair is gray. That's right—gray! Deal with it.

Okay, so I didn't actually send this. I know they're only trying to be nice. But there has to be a better way to refer to "people of a certain age." Some use "mature," but that evokes unsavory connotations. I, for one, would prefer not to be included in "For Mature Audiences Only." "Elder" sounds like you should be wearing robes and a wizard's hat. The American Geriatric Society-approved "older adults" is a

nice try but ... well, nice try. I've heard the British call the elderly "wrinklies" and they don't mind. It conveys a certain affection. That's my choice. If your joints pop, your hearing's shot, your vision's blurry, and your skin looks like crumpled tissue paper, you might as well tell it like it is. **T**

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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

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