

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | AUGUST 2023

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Reflections at the End of the Program Year

As my term as International President comes to an end, I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve for the last 12 months. It has been my absolute honor and delight.

I've begun looking back at how the year has gone. What went well? What could we have done differently? I'm reminded that reflection requires separation.

In 2014, I ran unsuccessfully for the position of International Director. Thanks to the encouragement of many Toastmasters, I quickly made up my mind to run again in two years. And so shortly after my unsuccessful run, I began reaching out to people who had observed me during the campaign to ask for their feedback. What had I done well? What did I need to improve? What could I do differently to gain the trust and respect of our members to allow me the honor of being on the Board of Directors? However, I quickly realized that the advice they were giving me was not exactly what I needed.

I think that was because of two reasons. One is I was still hurt at the loss. I was still emotionally processing what had occurred. And perhaps they sensed that. The second reason, and probably the more important one, is not enough time had gone by. It was too close to the election. The people I asked for feedback needed time to process it as much as I did.

My experience is that reflection requires separation in both time and emotional space.

For me, the best way to reflect is to write down notes immediately after an event. Think about what happened and what the impact was, and include emotional impacts as well. Let those notes sit for a while. Only go back to them when you are no longer emotionally tied to the event and there's been a sufficient amount of time for you to process what occurred. When I asked those same individuals a year later what I could have done differently, the advice I got was spot-on. It was exactly what I needed to hear to improve my performance, to improve the way I came across to members so that I would be able to serve on the Board of Directors.

What about you? Many of you have recently finished leadership terms at the club or the District level. Write down some notes, think about what you have learned, but then let some time pass before you look at them again to allow for deeper reflection. My experience is that reflection requires separation in both time and emotional space.

Once again, it has been my absolute delight and honor to serve as your International President. I will always be here for Toastmasters.

Matt Kinsey, DTM
International President

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Notable Events From Past International Conventions

Take a look at memorable moments from past conventions.

By Mackenzie Eldred

1959



Toastmasters hosted the 28th annual convention at the Sheraton-Palace Hotel in San Francisco, California. Mayor George Christopher presented Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, founder of Toastmasters International, with a key to the city.

1964



The Highlander Boys, a crack drill team, demonstrated a close order drill during the 33rd International Convention in Denver, Colorado. The drill team also performed at Opening Ceremonies by presenting flags of the countries that had Toastmasters clubs.

1967



A bagpiper led the procession of officers, directors, and their families as they entered the President's Celebration during the 36th International Convention in Toronto, Canada.

1970



Ralph E. Howland, DTM, International President 1969-1970, was “knighted” and inducted into the Portland society of the Royal Rosarians by Portland Rose Festival Queen Laurie King during Opening Ceremonies of the 39th International Convention in Portland, Oregon.

1986



Ted Wood, DTM, International President 1986-1987, who was the first Black International President of Toastmasters, stands on the stage during the 55th International Convention with Helen Blanchard, DTM, who served as the first female International President from 1985-1986.

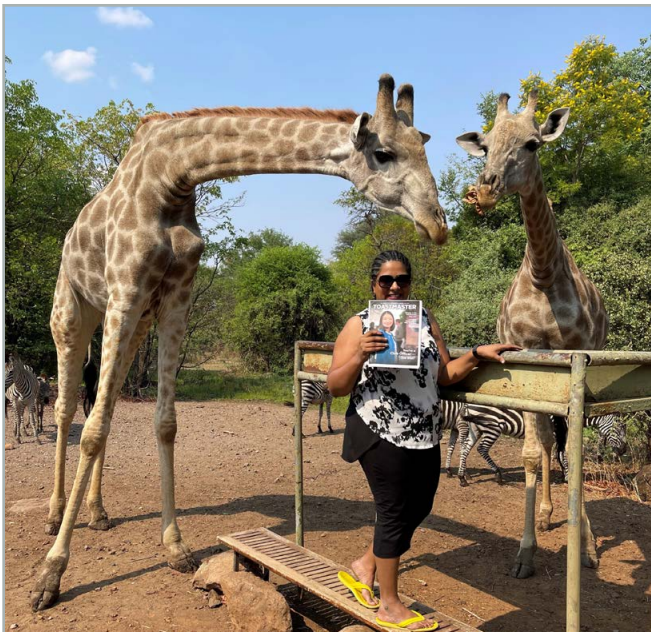
Snapshot



THE TRALEE CLUB of Tralee, Ireland, celebrates its 30th anniversary at the Ballyseede Castle Hotel with current and former members and officers, and current and past District officers. The evening consisted of food, speeches, songs, comic sketches, and reminiscences.



Traveling Toastmaster



SMITHA ABRAHAM of Doha, Qatar, poses with giraffes while vacationing in Livingstone, Zambia.



MANIDEEP KANAGALA, DTM, of Hyderabad, Telangana, India, holds a printed cover of the *Toastmaster* in Khao Sok National Park in Thailand.

In Memory of John Noonan

The 1989–1990 International President is remembered as a devoted leader and family man.

By Paul Sterman



For John Noonan, Toastmasters was always a family affair. He zealously shared his love of Toastmasters with his wife and three children—and all of them became avid members themselves.

“He lived, breathed, and ate Toastmasters,” says his daughter Andrea Gilmour, noting how he often took her and her two siblings to Toastmasters events when they were growing up, and gifted each with an annual membership when they turned 18. “Toastmasters was such an integral part of our lives that I actually thought we were related to [Toastmasters founder] Ralph Smedley!”

Noonan, the Toastmasters International President in 1989–1990, passed away on April 17 in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

A member for more than 50 years, he earned the Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award and in 1993 achieved the [Accredited Speaker designation](#). Toastmasters leaders praised Noonan for his dedication, knowledge (he was a master of parliamentary procedure), and the guidance he gave his fellow members.

“He was a valuable mentor to numerous Toastmasters,” says Eddie Dunn, DTM, Toastmasters International President in 1983–1984. Dunn, a resident of Fargo, North Dakota, recalled their time serving together on the Toastmasters Board of Directors.

“It was obvious John was a rising star within our organization,” he says. “He was intelligent, focused, and would quickly get to the heart of any issue. He had great insight and could be counted on to offer sound advice during Board deliberations.”

Dunn also remembers Noonan’s spirited and friendly manner. “It was impossible to know John and not be aware of his hearty laugh. It was strong (a respectful way of saying ‘loud’), authentic, and infectious.”

Pat Johnson, DTM, Toastmasters International President in 2010–2011, paid tribute to her friend and fellow British Columbia resident in a post on the Toastmasters Past District Directors/Governors Facebook page:

“This kind and knowledgeable man supported me during my leadership journey and contributed a great deal to countless other leaders and Toastmasters. He was also very involved with Registered Parliamentarians and taught many of us how to run an efficient and effective meeting!”

Noonan was one of only 19 Professional Registered Parliamentarians in Canada, according to the *Vancouver*

Sun newspaper. He worked as a chartered professional accountant for the Business Development Bank of Canada, eventually becoming their national director of training.

After retiring, Noonan used his communication skills as a professional auctioneer, helping numerous charities and foundations with fundraising events.

He first joined Toastmasters in 1968, as a member of the Cariboo Club in Prince George, British Columbia. In 1981, he became a founding member of the Advanced Speakers Club in Vancouver. He was also a longtime member of Friendship Toastmasters Club in North Vancouver.

His wife, Stephanie (“Stevie” to her husband), was a Toastmaster for nearly as long as John. With his encouragement, she entered the International Speech Contest in 1976—and became the first woman to ever reach the finals of the competition, winning third place.

Likewise, daughter Andrea says her father inspired her to enter the same contest—at the tender age of 19. Impressively, she, too, advanced to the finals, held that year at the International Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Her dad, she says, “was front and center watching me in Atlanta, as I gave my speech on the international stage.”

Andrea now works as a speech coach in British Columbia. Both she and her sister, Valerie Martin, are members of the online club Toastmentors. Her brother, Joe Noonan, had been a member of the SEC Roughriders club in New York City. All three, she says, have benefited in their careers from their Toastmasters training.

Past International Director Margaret Hope, DTM, a resident of Burnaby, British Columbia, is also a member of the Toastmentors club. She says it’s fun to see Noonan’s daughters carry on his Toastmasters legacy. Hope was a member with Noonan of the Advanced Speakers Club for more than 40 years. An Accredited Speaker, Hope says she always looked to him for advice as she took on Toastmasters leadership roles.

“He was really good at everything he did,” she says. “He was good with people, and good with records—he always made sure all the boxes were checked off.”

Andrea Gilmour says she’s grateful her father introduced her and her siblings to the Toastmasters world.

“My dad was right to wax on about the merits of Toastmasters,” she says, “as it enriched all of our lives immeasurably.”

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.

How I Leveraged Toastmasters to Become a Manager

Use your leadership opportunities to climb the corporate ladder.

By Stefan Jenssen, DTM

As someone who started out as a new insurance professional and five years later leads a team of nine, I can tell you that Toastmasters can be a valuable tool in your journey to becoming a manager. So many entry-level management jobs request five years of experience, which can be discouraging. However, to secure my first management role, I climbed the leadership ladder in Toastmasters to gain hands-on experience.

One of the best things I did was take advantage of the additional education and training that Toastmasters offers. Management is a transferable skill, and leading people when you don't pay them a salary is much harder than leading those you do pay. There is no end to these opportunities in Toastmasters! Serving in positions such as Vice President Education (VPE), Club President, or Area Director provides you with valuable managerial experience, even if you're doing them a second time.

When you speak to nonmembers, drop the Toastmasters jargon and use recognizable terms. If you are VPE, don't use words like "Pathways," "levels," and "Distinguished Club Program." Instead say, "I led four education sessions of 45 minutes each, and those played an important part in reaching our club goals for the year."

When I was still working my way up in my career, I made sure my supervisor knew what I



Stefan Jenssen, DTM

I earned my first Distinguished Toastmaster award (DTM) before becoming a manager to further develop my leadership skills, and because I enjoy the journey of professional development and seeing how far I can go. I recently achieved my second DTM. As leaders, it's important that we not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. After achieving my first DTM, I set a new goal of becoming a District Director.

I found a mentor who was skilled in areas in which I considered myself weak. I was born and raised in Norway, and I had a hard time

Norway. My first mentor and I read the book *Crucial Conversations*, which helped me realize when my direct approach wouldn't work and provided tools for those moments.

I also recommend finding a mentor who is doing or has done what you want to do. If you want to be a manager or supervisor, don't find a mentor who has never led people. Find a manager who is someone you aspire to be and ask them to be your mentor.

In management job interviews, you'll likely face many situational questions that can be answered with examples from your Toastmasters leadership experience. As you navigate situations like delegating tasks, streamlining processes, and training team members, document these situations. Also, write down any lessons you learned from an experience that didn't go as well as you'd hoped.

Be intentional with your time and efforts. Planning for a promotion takes time and patience. Just like you won't stumble your way toward a DTM, you won't just happen upon a manager position. Tell your boss what your goals are and ask for help in creating a professional development plan. I also found a job description for the position I wanted and checked the boxes I was and wasn't qualified for yet, so I knew my strengths and weaknesses.

Taking advantage of all that Toastmasters offers propelled me from being an insurance newbie to a first-level manager. When you do these steps over time, results will show. Don't be afraid to apply for jobs where you might not meet some of the requirements. If you get your foot in the door, adventure awaits.

Taking advantage of all that Toastmasters offers propelled me from being an insurance newbie to a first-level manager.

was doing in my Toastmasters club, how I was doing it, and what skills I was gaining. Highlight your Toastmasters experience and goals during your work performance reviews, or even in general conversation. Let your boss know any committees you work on, or innovative solutions you find for challenges within the club.

acclimating to a typical office environment in the United States when I moved. Not only did I struggle with what to say and what not to say, but also with how to say it. I was, and probably still am, very direct in my communication style, something that was exacerbated when I served my mandatory military service of 12 months in

Stefan Jenssen, DTM, is a member of *Mutual Toasters Club*, a hybrid club in Hastings, Michigan. He lives in Florence, Alabama, with his wife and son, and is a commercial lines underwriting manager at Hastings Mutual Insurance Company.

The Reluctant Leader

Accepting my skills brought me a new perspective on leadership.

By Bill Brown, DTM

I must confess, I am a reluctant leader. Perhaps you are, too.

I was a club officer for years. I liked it at first, but after years of serving on Club Executive Committees and even as an Area Director, I became tired of the roles. I told my club at the time that I was no longer a candidate for an officer position. Been there, done that.

I prefer to be a lone ranger, rather than a team leader. A thought leader, rather than a people leader.

Or so I thought.

Then I moved.

If you have been following this column for a while, you know that I now live in a small town in northern Wyoming. It is just barely big enough to have one Toastmasters club. The nearest neighboring club is two hours away. And 90% of the clubs in my District are five hours away or more.

Plugging into the District activities is not something that happens out here in the boonies. Our club is healthy but has a culture all its own.

When I first joined the club, I had no interest in being on the Executive Committee. But I did attend the officer meetings, in part just to get to know the members better. I found that, based on my experience with a number of clubs in larger cities, I was able to contribute with some suggestions on how to do things better.

On top of that, the Vice President Education (VPE) had been in that role for years but was getting ready to move out of the area. She needed to hand over the reins and, after a few months, approached me about taking over. My first reaction was to decline, but I owed it to her to consider the position. It took me a while, but I finally agreed to take it on. I said

to myself, *Okay, I suppose I can be “a leader”—in a limited sense.*

Although she had handed off the position, she was still the heart and soul of the club and was “encouraged” to take on the President role. She was spending half of her time, or more, in her new town, so I ended up as second in command taking on much of her role. During that year, I came to admit that, yes, I was becoming



I had moved from being leadership adverse to seeing myself as a key leader. How did that happen?

“the leader” of the club—at least with the day-to-day activities.

I am now completing my second term as VPE and have been told that I am not allowed to run for any other position. They need me to continue as VPE. But, as a mem-

ber of the Executive Committee, I have found myself thinking in a more general way. How do we build membership? How do we do a better job of publicizing the club? How can we get better?

In the process, I have found that my leadership reluctance is starting to fade. And I started thinking that maybe I could be Club President—someday, when they let me. And, realistically, as a member of the Executive Committee, I can still present my vision for the club.

I am now realizing that our club views me as a key leader. And I am starting to view myself in that vein as well. I am realizing that I am the one to guide the club to the next level.

I had moved from being leadership adverse to seeing myself as a key leader. How did that happen? In part, I saw the need. But also, I have come to see that I am, by nature, a leader. That is who I am. And that is changing my focus.

Rather than wait for someone else to take on responsibility, I am now actively seeking it.

And that’s not just at the Toastmasters level. I have also taken on a leadership position within our community by running for a political office. And am actively participating in other organizations, as well.

The key is that, whether or not I want to admit it, I am a leader. That is how I am wired. And, if you are a leader, you will end up leading. It is in your nature.

Are you a reluctant leader? If you are, you are still a leader. Be willing to lead. Do not hold yourself back by being reluctant. Embrace who you are.

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette. Learn more at billbrownspeechcoach.com.

Leadership Lessons From Unlikely Characters

Guidance from some of your favorite fictional cartoons.

By Shannon Dewey

What are the traits of a successful leader? While we often regard those in positions of power as people to emulate, their behavior may not always demonstrate good leadership. But a few fictional characters have a proven track record of making an impact while mentoring and leading others. See who you might identify with, or who you strive to be.

Winnie the Pooh

"You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."

Winnie the Pooh is a benevolent bear known for his relationship with his human friend, Christopher Robin. But where he really shines is as the charismatic leader of his fellow animals in the Hundred Acre Wood. Winnie the Pooh and his friends sometimes run into problems while on their adventures (*Oh, bother*), but he maintains a positive attitude even during challenges. His empathy and honesty show through when the other animals look to him for answers, which is often. Whether it's battling heffalumps and woozles, or just checking up on Eeyore's well-being, Winnie the Pooh's loyalty and leadership is abundant.



Key traits:

- Team player
- Problem solver
- Humble

Mulan

"You told me my journey was impossible. Yet here I stand, proof that there is a place for people like us."

Mulan is the heroine of her movie, overcoming many obstacles while trying to discover her identity and maintain her cultural responsibilities. After taking her father's place when he was called by the military, she found herself outside of her comfort zone and without the respect of her comrades. She eventually proved herself through her bravery and savvy decision-making while fighting the Hun Army, ultimately saving her captain's life and the people of China. She earned everyone's trust in the end, never giving up on her objective and always putting the needs of others ahead of her own.



Key traits:

- Strategic thinker
- Empathetic
- Dedicated

Rafiki

“The past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it or learn from it.”

Rafiki is the eccentric monkey mentor for Simba in the movie *The Lion King*. While his methods may have been unconventional at times (like hitting Simba over the head with his stick), his messages still got through. He offers sage wisdom to the lost lion on his journey to becoming king of the pride, and while he must relay hard truths, he does so with the best intentions. His obscure analogies often held a deeper meaning, all while trying to help Simba overcome his painful past. Rafiki’s name in Swahili translates to “friend”—fitting for this lifelong advisor.



Key traits:

- Strong mentor
- Honest feedback
- Motivator

Joy

“You can’t focus on what’s going wrong. There’s always a way to turn things around, to find the fun.”

Living up to her namesake, Joy is the cheerful and energetic character from the movie *Inside Out*. She’s also the ringleader for all the emotions that live inside the mind of a young girl named Riley. Her true leadership qualities emerge as she wrangles the rest of the emotion characters—Fear, Anger, Disgust, and Sadness—to help Riley get through a challenging time in her life. While Joy was resistant to change at first, she listened to the other emotions and came to understand how they worked better as a team.

Key traits:

- Emotionally intelligent
- Positive mindset
- Learns from mistakes

Winnie the Pooh: Collection of children’s stories by A.A. Milne, published in 1926

Mulan: *Mulan*—1998 film produced by Walt Disney Pictures

Rafiki: *The Lion King*—1994 film produced by Walt Disney Pictures

Joy: *Inside Out*—2015 film produced by Pixar Animation Studios

Olaf: *Frozen*—2013 film produced by Walt Disney Pictures

Woody: *Toy Story*—1995 film produced by Pixar Animation Studios

Olaf

“Love is putting someone else’s needs before yours.”

Olaf is the affable snowman from the movie *Frozen*. While naïve in nature (he dreams and sings about the heat of summer), Olaf comes through for his friends with compassion, sincerity, and simple advice no matter what is happening around them. In the movie, Olaf is a side character, but his friendly nature and approachability can be desirable traits of a leader in the making. His innocence helps him see the world differently, noticing details others might miss. Olaf may not be CEO material, but perhaps his loveable qualities would earn him the role of Club President.



Key traits:

- Optimistic
- Outgoing
- Good listener

Shannon Dewey is digital strategy and engagement editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.

What Does a Bad Leader Look Like?

Woody

“Listen, Lightsnack. You stay away from Andy. He’s mine, and no one is taking him away from me.”

On paper, Woody, from the movie *Toy Story*, portrays the perfect leader. The other toys look up to him, he’s an engaging speaker, and he cares about who gets left behind. But when his owner Andy introduced a new toy to the group, Woody’s leadership began to falter. Once a brave face for the rest of the toys, Woody became unraveled and panicky in difficult situations. It was obvious to the others that he felt threatened, and eventually, he lost their trust. While Woody has some redeeming moments, he is one character who fell down a few rungs of the leadership ladder.

Key traits:

Self-centered • Resentful • Uncompromising



Mentor Sparked a Lifetime of Learning

An early Toastmasters experience continues to pay off three decades later.

By Leif Gregersen

As I walk into a Toastmasters meeting room, with a lectern at the head of a long table and a timer at the foot, I feel the same way I did many years ago, walking into a similar room as a teenager. I had my difficulties back then, yet I had so many advantages: close friends, a loving family—and the Royal Canadian Air Cadets.

This national organization, for youths 12 to 18, promotes physical fitness, good citizenship, and an interest in the Air Force wing of the Canadian Armed Forces. One of the best things it did for me was bring Toastmasters into my life. Back in 1987, the Air Cadets sponsored a Toastmasters Youth Leadership Program (YLP) for our group of about 20 students in St. Albert, Alberta, Canada.

We began our first weeks of the course with two Toastmasters, Peter Helten, DTM, and Bernard Jordaan (who has since passed away). Peter then took over the course and taught a number of 10-week sessions for different students, for about two years. That takes true dedication.

He had been an Air Cadet himself—in fact, the Senior Warrant Officer of our squadron, 533 St. Albert Royal Canadian Air Cadets.

Peter was an invaluable mentor to me. He gave me encouragement and support at a time when I really needed it. I can still hear the words of my old instructor: “Keep your feet planted and look up from your notes every few seconds to make eye contact.” His impact on me was lasting.

Thirty-six years after I participated in the YLP, I have joined a club: Norwood Toastmasters Club in Edmonton—recommended to me by Peter. Despite our different paths in life, I have kept in touch with my old mentor (a fellow Edmonton resident) over the years, often running into him on the train or meeting him for coffee. Peter says the time he spent teaching the YLP to Air Cadets was one of the best experiences of his life.

“There is nothing like the feeling of seeing young people grow and learn in their public speaking and leadership skills, and then go on to develop as adults,” he told me recently.

A Shaky Start

I still remember my first prepared speech in front of my fellow Air Cadets. I uttered lots of ums and ahs and was visibly shaking. I couldn’t maintain eye contact with the audience members and felt no one wanted to hear me talk about my hobby of collecting combat uniforms from different countries. But somehow I got through it.

By the end of my Toastmasters YLP course, I was far more comfortable speaking in front of others, and my general confidence level had soared. Peter established a safe and supportive atmosphere, and I experienced an amazing amount of personal growth.

Peter had first joined Toastmasters after hearing about it as a member of the Independent Order of Foresters, a fraternal organization. He remained a Toastmaster until the 1990s and then rejoined in 2014. He’s currently a member of two clubs in Edmonton: Edmonton Advanced Toastmasters Club and the Fabulous Facilitators Club.

For me, the work I put into Air Cadets, especially the YLP workshop, kept paying me back throughout my adult life. Just knowing how to express myself with confidence in front of people came in extremely handy. At times in the ensuing years, I went to support groups and was able to talk about things that bothered me. In my current part-time work as a community education presenter for the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta, I speak in front of audiences about how I overcame mental health difficulties.

I had been living with a diagnosis of schizophrenia since I was 18, but never really felt like I was a part of the solution. Now, giving speeches to groups at high schools, universities, colleges, and other organizations greatly helps my mental health. Giving these presentations helps me stay grounded. Talking about how I overcame my illness reminds me of the importance of taking medications, and to keep on consulting with my treatment team. There is also the bonus that I am increasing awareness and decreasing the stigma surrounding a serious illness that is often misunderstood.



Leif Gregersen and Peter Helten, DTM

Not having any practice or training for a long time made the public speaking job difficult at first, but after a few presentations my old skills kicked in and I really began to enjoy the process. I learned to adapt my presentation to different audiences, and I gradually became more and more comfortable. Now I am often

I currently have a second job teaching creative writing and current events to patients at a hospital that I once was a psychiatric patient in, 22 years ago. It feels good to be able to give back, and I honestly don't think I could have done it without the kickstart Toastmasters gave me in my teen years.

Taking time out each Thursday to attend the meetings takes me back to my youth, when I was an Air Cadet. It also gives me so many things to look forward to, from completing my path in the Pathways learning experience to entering speech contests, and generally not only feeling better about myself but improving in everything I participate in, from giving presentations to teaching.

“There is nothing like the feeling of seeing young people grow and learn in their public speaking and leadership skills, and then go on to develop as adults.”

—PETER HELTEN, DTM

asked to give talks about mental health to the Edmonton Police recruit class, something I am very proud of.

Literary Passion

I have written books about mental health, and also written poetry and stories. I have also participated in language-related “slams”—competitions where the speakers perform the poetry or the stories they have written. For a time, I even had my own community-access radio program where I would read classic poetry and interview local poets and writers.

In early 2023, I became a member of the advisory council for CureSZ, a charitable foundation serving people living with schizophrenia. It meant I would have the opportunity to speak at conferences and other events, so I decided it was a good time to return to Toastmasters.

Luckily, Peter Helten was still just a phone call away. He was the one who directed me to Norwood Toastmasters Club, just a short walk away from where I live in Edmonton. I have already made friends in the club and had a wonderful time stretching my public speaking muscles.

Next Chapter

Peter is still using his Toastmasters experience to help others. He was asked to be a regional judge this year for the Air Cadets' National Effective Speaking Competition, is a judge for Toastmasters speech contests, and has taught a Toastmasters Speechcraft course for the University of Alberta Pharmacy Department.

After being introduced to Toastmasters as a teenager, I am excited to be a member all these years later. As I learn more and become more familiar with the “adult” Toastmasters program, I feel I still have a lifetime of learning and growth to look forward to.

Leif Gregersen is a member of Norwood Toastmasters Club in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He works as a writer, teacher, and public speaker. He has written 12 books, all available on Amazon.



The Secret to Confidently Humble Leadership

Learn to balance a strong skill set with the ability to admit what you don't know.

By Maureen Zappala, DTM

When Laila, a successful and confident entrepreneur, joined Toastmasters, she began doubting her abilities. Some meeting roles were easy, but some intimidated her. She struggled to adapt, and her confidence waned. When asked to become a club officer, she turned it down because she questioned if she had what it took to make a difference beyond her business world.

John, another successful entrepreneur, was used to being in control and making things happen. As a Toastmaster, he frequently took on leadership roles, even when he wasn't sure what to do. However, because he was unwilling to admit what he didn't know, he became overly bossy and controlling, refusing to delegate or ask for help.

Great leaders find a balance between being confident and humble. At first, these can seem like opposing qualities. Confidence is associated with assertiveness and self-assuredness. Humility is associated with modesty

and deference. Yet these two qualities actually complement each other. Confidence helps you make decisions and lead with conviction. Humility keeps you open to feedback and receptive to new ideas; it helps you connect with your team on a deeper level.

Excessive confidence—John’s flaw—can be seen as a lack of humility and may lead to an inflated sense of self-importance or disregard for others’ perspectives.



By being aware of your strengths and weaknesses, you can lead with confidence in areas where you excel and remain humble enough to seek help and guidance in areas where you may struggle.

On the other hand, a lack of confidence—which hinders Laila—may be reflected in an unwillingness to take risks and pursue goals.

Confucius said, “Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance.” New Zealand author and painter Peter McIntyre wrote, “Confidence comes not from always being right but from not fearing to be wrong.” How do you find this balance between confidence and humility? The key is self-awareness. By being aware of your strengths and weaknesses, you can lead with confidence in areas where you excel and remain humble enough to seek help and guidance in areas where you may struggle.

Toastmasters Builds Self-Confidence

The Toastmasters program is designed to help members develop the self-awareness needed to become confident and humble leaders. Confidence increases with every speech. Humility is developed with every evaluation. Members self-reflect to identify areas for improvement, set goals, and track progress. Skills assessment and frequent feedback help members better understand their own leadership styles and communication preferences. This can all then be leveraged to build stronger relationships with their teams and to make better decisions.

In a perfect Toastmasters world, members like Laila and John should flourish and grow. But doubt keeps Laila from stepping into leadership, and arrogance keeps John from facing his lack of skills. One lacks confidence, and one lacks humility.

Derailed by Doubts

In his book *Think Again*, author Adam Grant describes what he calls “confident humility.” It’s having “faith in our capability while appreciating that we may not have the right solution or even be addressing the right problem. That gives us enough doubt to reexamine our old knowledge and enough confidence to pursue new insights.”

Not all doubt is bad. Sometimes doubt leads to healthy questioning of one’s assumptions and beliefs, resulting in personal growth and intellectual curiosity. The critical thinking that encourages people to seek out information and consider alternative viewpoints is good. In contrast, some doubts are more like destructive skepticism, shaking your confidence and affecting decision-making abilities. Those doubts can lead to overcompensating behavior and stalled personal growth.

Impostor Syndrome and Self-Doubt

Self-doubt is a key element of impostor syndrome: the chronic inability to internalize success despite overwhelming evidence of that success. Competent, qualified people think they’re not as smart or capable as others think they are, and they feel that at any minute they’ll be uncovered as a fraud. Impostor syndrome screams the loudest in times of change, such as earning a promotion or tackling a new project.

It’s no surprise that many Toastmasters can experience this self-doubt. People join from all different backgrounds and career paths. Stepping into a new Toastmasters role can trigger self-doubt because the tasks are so



of respect or trust. This thinking also hinders personal growth because more energy is spent on the façade of competence instead of actually gaining competence.

The difference between the “fake it till you make it” and Young’s “keep going regardless” is where you place your confidence. There’s a difference between having confidence in your tools/skills versus confidence in your capabilities/capacity. It’s normal to not be confident in a skill you don’t have. But your capacity to learn it could give you the confidence to do what it takes to perfect it. In fact, far too often, we undervalue the character traits like resilience, optimism, congeniality, and curiosity that have contributed to our successes. “Keep going regard-

It’s normal to not be confident in a skill you don’t have.
But your capacity to learn it could give you the confidence
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different from normal life. Other than club meetings, how often do you time something? Or evaluate someone? Or create a speech from scratch? Those first few times doing it are nerve-racking, and doubt can lead well-qualified people to feel like an impostor, not as qualified as they think they should be.

Valerie Young, co-founder of the Impostor Syndrome Institute, defines a “humble realist” as someone who has an accurate understanding of their own abilities and limitations and who is able to acknowledge their accomplishments and accept their mistakes without letting either define their sense of self-worth. Humble realists are not defined by external validation or achievement, but rather by a sense of purpose and inner confidence.

In Young’s “Rethinking Impostor Syndrome” program, she teaches people to “keep going regardless.” Don’t wait until you feel confident, because emotions are the last to change. Actions come first. Challenge your beliefs and assumptions, change your inner dialogue from self-doubt to self-assurance, then move forward. Accurately assess your skills, recognize your shortfalls, be open to asking for help, and keep going regardless.

In contrast, the popular, but misguided suggestion to “fake it till you make it” implies if you act as if you are successful, you will become successful. However, this amplifies feeling like an impostor because now you really are one. It’s dishonest and can lead to mistakes, as well as a lack

less” means using these traits to propel you through a learning curve until your tactical skills catch up.

Bob Iger, CEO of The Walt Disney Company, has said, “You have to ask the questions you need to ask, admit without apology what you don’t understand, and do the work to learn what you need to learn as quickly as you can. ... True authority and true leadership come from knowing who you are and not pretending to be anything else.”

How To Be More Self-Aware

It’s tempting for a leader to assume they need to be the expert at everyone’s job in order to lead. But that can lead to micromanaging, team apathy or resentment, and generally poor results. Strive for better. Whether you call it confident humility or humble realism, it’s wise to explore where the balance is between confidence and humility. Becoming more self-aware will give you confidence in your capacity while admitting the gaps in your knowledge, making you a much more effective, resilient, and collaborative leader. To become more self-aware:

- Recognize your strengths and weaknesses; become more open to seeking help when you need it.
- Incorporate daily journaling or meditation to help develop a habit of reflecting on your thoughts, emotions, and actions.

- Ask others for honest feedback about your performance; use it as an opportunity for growth.
- Prioritize learning. Commit to learning something new every day. Read books, attend workshops or training sessions, and find mentors. Expanding your knowledge will increase your confidence.
- Learn to delegate tasks to those better suited to handling them, freeing up your time and energy.

The “D” Word

Delegation is hard for some leaders. But refusing to delegate because you don't trust your team or fear not being in control will hurt your team and your leadership. Delegation is a skill as much as it is a mindset, but it's a skill that can be learned. Understanding how to assess a task's importance and urgency, identifying resource availability, and knowing your personal capacity will help you decide if you tackle the task yourself or delegate it out.

Ask yourself, *Does this task line up with our organization's (or your personal) goals?* If not, put it at the bottom of your to-do list. If it does, determine who should take on the task by asking more questions:

- Do I have the skills, time, and desire to do this?
- Do I enjoy it?
- Can someone else do it better, faster, cheaper?
- Will delegating this free me up to do other important work?
- Does it provide a learning or growth opportunity for someone on the team?

Shouldn't the Leader Know Everything?

It may be tempting for a leader to assume they need to be the expert in everything, another reason they may not delegate. They may resist simply saying “I don't know” for fear it makes them look weak. That is not only unrealistic, but exhausting. The pressure to know all and do all will lead to burnout.

The solution is to indicate a willingness to learn or get help after revealing you don't know. Try these alternative responses:

1. “I don't have all the answers on this topic, but I can learn more and let you know.”
2. “That's a great question! I'm not sure, so let me do some research and get back to you.”
3. “I'm not an expert on this subject, but I know someone on my team who is. Let me connect you with them.”



Great leaders find a balance between being confident and humble.

Not only are these powerful phrases, but they will give your team more confidence in your leadership, and more willingness to participate in reaching goals.

Striking a balance between confidence and humility is important to ensure cooperation, respect, and loyalty from your team. A confident leader inspires peak performance. A fearful, controlling leader hampers it. A humble leader creates a sense of safety, trust, and curiosity in the team. A leader who constantly defers to others or fails to provide direction can cause confusion, disengagement, and lack of focus.

If John had been humble enough to admit his skill gap and ask for feedback and help, he would have done wonders to solidify a strong and dedicated club. If Laila had more confidence in her ability to take on the leadership of her club, based on her past success as a business leader, she would have found another avenue of influence and camaraderie.

Strive to be the leader who has found the perfect middle ground, where confidence and humility work together and complement each other well.

Maureen Zappala, DTM, is a former NASA propulsion engineer. Today she's a professional speaker, author, and presentation skills coach, as well as founder of *High Altitude Strategies*, a coaching and speaking service. Visit maureen.com to learn more.

9 Surprising Ways You Can Benefit From a Pause

Allow your mind to script your mouth for a speech with impact.

By Joel Schwartzberg

If silence is golden, pausing is a golden ticket, because it activates silence as a powerful tool for all communicators, whether they're giving a convention speech to hundreds or sharing ideas with a small team. But while some of the benefits of pausing are well-known in communication circles, others may surprise you.

Read on to learn more about the great powers of the pause, including some that will almost certainly give you pause!

1 Pausing puts your mind in charge of your mouth.

For many of us, our mouths run ahead of our minds—you're saying things before you've fully conceived the phrasing, resulting in rambling, redundant, and often incoherent word salads.

Pausing enables you to reverse that order, so your mind runs ahead of your mouth, laying a logical groundwork of thoughtfully curated words and ideas for your mouth to say. Put another way, pausing allows your mind to script your mouth.

We can test this. Answer this question out loud in the form of a few complete sentences:

What is one of the things you like about your job?

Done?

Now do the same thing with the following question, but this time, take as much time and use as many pauses as you need to let your mind work.

What is one of the things you dislike about your job?

Was answering the second question easier? Was the answer better? Could you feel your mind saying, "thanks for letting me do my thing"?

As you can imagine, this exercise is very valuable for job interviews.

2 Pausing gives the audience time to process.

It takes at least twice as long for your audience to process your point as it takes for you to say it. Why? Because while you're very familiar with what you're saying, the audience is hearing it for the first time. Pausing gives

them time to not only hear your point, but digest it, understand it, evaluate it, determine its relevance, and apply it. Without a pause, they're still doing that cognitive work while you're already onto your next point.

This processing time also makes your points easier to recall. Consider your points like water poured over soil—it takes time for them to sink deep.

3 Pausing draws and holds attention.

Pausing creates small but powerful moments of drama and suspense, making your audience instinctively wonder what will come next. Like watching a suspenseful movie, they think, *What will happen next? What will break this silence?*

They're now hooked until your next word. This is why effective speakers often pause just before they make their most valuable points:

We can solve this problem ...

(pause)

... by combining our five key objectives into one unifying goal.

(pause)

Let me show you how.

4 Pausing looks like thinking.

Used confidently, pausing during a presentation or a meeting can look like live thinking, which can be exciting for an audience—similar to the anticipation of live theater or sporting events. When an audience sees a speaker taking a moment to think, it conveys that they're receiving the best of the speaker's knowledge and insight, not just the best of their notes.

Just make sure you're looking directly into the eyes of your audience—not at notes or a PowerPoint slide—to create that nearly hypnotic effect.

5 Pausing puts power behind key ideas.

Have you heard a classical song stop suddenly, then hit a huge crescendo? It's the combination of silence and noise that produces that aural impact. Similarly, a moment of silence in your presentation draws immense attention to what comes next.



But don't squander that power. Use it deliberately—not randomly—to emphasize your most important points and ideas. Like that crescendo, points preceded by pauses land harder and are remembered longer.

6 Pausing controls speed.

If you're a naturally *fast talker*—which can overwhelm an audience—pausing slows you down by immediately dropping your speaking speedometer to zero. Yes, you may accelerate again, but each time you pause, it halts that inertia. And the more comfortable you feel pausing, the more competently you'll be able to control your rate overall, like instinctively using the brakes in your car.

7 Pausing lets you breathe.

Breathing not only keeps you alive, it also calms you down. And if you're very excited or nervous, it's easy to run out of breath while speaking. Pausing gives you time to draw that refreshing and valuable breath. Just keep your mouth closed and breathe through your nose so that you inhale and exhale as silently as possible. Taking breaths while speaking is a secret between you and your body.

8 Pausing defeats crutch words.

One of the most practical uses of the pause

is to conquer tendencies to use *crutch words* like “um,” “ah,” and “uh,” which, as meaningless fillers, can damage your credibility.

I encourage one of my students or clients to insert more pauses in their presentation, I then ask the group how many pauses they noticed.

Pausing creates small but powerful moments of drama and suspense.

The key to stop using filler words is to replace them with pauses. Why are pauses better? Because nonsense words call attention to themselves; moments of silence do not. With practice, you can train your brain to sense when a nonsense word is coming and intervene to insert a pause in its place.

The speaker will typically say, “too many,” while the observers will say, “maybe one or two.”

I often joke that pauses are like your sophomore year of high school: No one remembers it because, well, nothing remarkable happened during that time. (Your high school mileage may vary.)

9 Pausing costs you nothing.

It may be tempting to assume that if you pause, the audience will think you've forgotten what you intended to say, like an actor forgetting their lines. The pause also feels awkward—your mind is thinking: *Shouldn't I be speaking right now? Shouldn't someone be speaking?*

So use pauses to let your mind script your mouth, help your audience process your points, build suspense, seem spontaneous, and ultimately ... (pause) ... convey your points with precision and impact.

But few audiences respond to a presentation or a meeting share by saying the speaker “paused too much.” This is because pausing—a moment of nothingness versus nonsense—is hard to remember, let alone criticize. When

Joel Schwartzberg is the senior director of strategic and executive communications for a national nonprofit, a presentation coach, and author of several books, including *Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message* and *Make Your Words Matter*. Follow him on Twitter [@TheJoelTruth](https://twitter.com/TheJoelTruth).

Put Your Podcast in Practice

Starting a podcast can be intimidating. But it doesn't have to be.

By Tara McMullin



If you've ever had a "driveway moment," where you stayed in your car after arriving home just to hear the end of a podcast, or gone down the rabbit hole of listening to podcasts about one of your passions, you've experienced the magic of audio content. A podcast can forge a powerful, intimate connection between the host and listener. It can turn a chore like folding laundry into a cherished activity.

About 10 years after I first listened to a podcast, I started my own. I've been a podcaster for nearly eight years now and produced over 400 episodes of my show, [What Works](#). I've also become a [producer](#) for 15 other shows on topics ranging from entrepreneurship to social justice to homeschooling. Podcasting has made me a better speaker, a more attuned listener, and a more effective communicator. Plus, it's taught me the value of consistency and practice.

Through my podcasting practice, I've learned to embrace a sustainable pace, experiment with new ideas, and find satisfaction in incremental

progress. And as a result, I've connected with my audience in meaningful ways. I'll share how you can do the same.

The "Practice" of Podcasting

A practice is a tool for cultivating presence, well-being, and perspective. I have a podcasting practice the way I have a yoga practice and a writing practice.

Practice gives us an anchor in today's chaotic and uncertain world. It can feel like we're at the mercy of ever-changing project plans, algorithms, and business priorities. Urgency is often in the driver's seat. Practice gives us something to rely on, and, in turn, we learn to rely on ourselves.

Podcasting is a practice because it's process-driven and constantly available to you. There is always *something* that needs tending, whether it's a script, an edit, or an editorial plan. And it's best not to put those things off until they must be done but to choose to show up regularly to the proverbial mic instead.

There was a time when the idea of practice was anathema to me. If I couldn't do it up to my expectations the first or second time, well, I just wasn't going to do it. I wasn't interested in skill-building or maintenance. I didn't want to run drills or do conditioning—just put me in the game, coach.



Podcasting changed that for me and helped me find satisfaction in practice and consistency. It introduced me to the pleasure of doing the same thing over and over again—and discovering something new every time.

How to Start Your Own Podcast

Starting a podcast can be intimidating. But it doesn't have to be. Most people think the challenge of podcasting is technical—recording, editing, uploading, etc. But the real hurdle for many is embracing a consistent creative process. “I'm convinced most barriers to creativity become non-issues when you have a personal practice,” says Jay Acunzo, a speaker and the host of *Unthinkable*.

So how do you jumpstart your personal practice? Start with a solid foundation.

The first step is to develop a clear podcast premise. Your premise is the subject matter of your show, plus your unique angle. For my podcast, *What Works*, the subject matter is work in the 21st-century economy. The angle I explore is human well-being. I cover a wide variety of topics—economics, philosophy, and culture, to name a few—but each topic is related to work and how we can maintain our well-being despite systemic obstacles.

Podcasting has made me a better speaker, a more attuned listener, and a more effective communicator.

When you have a strong podcast premise, you can explore topics outside your usual purview while maintaining a strong point of view. “I love podcasting because it helps me refine my points of view or messaging, and really work out the most valuable aspects of the topic before I bring it to the stage with more laser focus,” says Katy Widrick, host of *Rising Tide Talents Show*.

The next step is editorial planning. While your podcast premise gives an overarching theme to your soon-to-be body of work, your editorial plan lays out specific topics you'll cover in future episodes. Even if you plan to host an interview podcast, planning topics first means you'll prioritize your message and perspective over flashy names or guest pitches.

On *What Works*, I plan most of my content in a series of four to eight episodes. A series has a broader topic (e.g., “Self-Help, LLC,” “Time and Money,” and “The Economics of ...”), and then each episode tackles a

different question I have about that topic. In my recent series, “The Economics of ...,” I asked, “What makes information valuable?” to frame an episode. Every episode I produce is based on a question that intrigues me, a story I find gripping, or an idea that I want to explore.



Once you have a premise and an editorial plan, it's time to develop your voice. I ask new podcasters to think about the kind of relationship they want to have with listeners: mentor, teacher, expert, savvy friend, curator, interlocutor, etc. Each role has a slightly different tone and will lead to small differences in how you might approach a topic. This decision—like any decision about your podcast—is not set in stone. My own voice has shifted over the years from consultant to curator to expert to journalist.

As your podcasting practice develops, you'll learn to “show up more fully in all the spaces” you're in, says Tania Bhattacharyya, host of the *Campfire Circle* podcast. “[Podcasting has] given me a chance to nurture my own voice,” she adds.

Forging a Sustainable Pace

The first thing new podcasters discover is that podcasting is a marathon, not a sprint. While many of us have learned to ping-pong from one task or project to the next—letting speed and efficiency run the show—podcasting requires consistent attention over the long haul.

At any given time, I might be working on three to eight episodes in different stages of the production process. Even as I write this, I've just wrapped up a research-intensive eight-part series, and plan to take the next few months to prepare, report, and write another series to air later this year. I'm not releasing new episodes regularly right now, but I'm still immersed in the practice of podcasting. I'm pacing myself.

Podcasting has taught me the value of moving a bit slower than my default speed so I can focus on quality and longevity. The intention is to do just enough that I'm proud of what I'm doing—and can do it again next week and the week after that, and the week after that.

Experimenting Creatively

When I first started podcasting, my show was extremely simple. There was a canned intro, pre-recorded guest bio, the interview, and the credits. I put all my effort into making the interview engaging and unique. And the show was good! Over time, it didn't take so much brainpower to make the interviews distinctive—so I could give more thought to other aspects of the show.

I fine-tuned the premise of the podcast and developed new episode structures. I leaned on narrative and argumentation techniques to hone

“[Podcasting has] given me a chance to nurture my own voice.”

—TANIA BHATTACHARYYA

my episode intros. And most recently, I shifted the format of the show from straight interviews to a highly edited narrative style.

It took me more than five years of podcasting practice to take the leap into the creative territory I once only dreamed about. If I'd set the bar for my show where it is for episode 400 when I was just working on episode 1, I would have never started. I'm the podcaster I am today because I made those first 400 episodes. I fumbled some interview questions and absolutely nailed others. I backed down from some sticky subjects and tackled others head-on. I've lost focus and regained it. I've gotten way behind and way ahead.

But year after year, episode after episode, I experimented with incremental changes that add up to something my listeners routinely tell me is special and singular. With any practice, putting in time and effort will help you improve. With every podcast you produce, you will learn something new and discover a skill you can enhance or gain a better understanding of.

Any form of communication or creativity requires a practice. Not as in “practice makes perfect,” but practice as in presence and care. Without these, we won't be as effective as we can be. And we'll deny ourselves the benefits of sustainable pacing, creative experimentation, and satisfying work.

Whether you're already a seasoned podcaster, an aspiring podcaster, or a human who creates or communicates in any way, embracing the *practice* of that work can open some incredible doors—now and in the future.

Tara McMullin is the host of [What Works](#), a podcast that explores how to navigate the 21st-century economy without losing your humanity, and the author of *What Works: A Comprehensive Framework to Change the Way We Approach Goal-Setting*.

Hybrid Club Celebrates a Winning Culture

The key is following the model of a successful sports team.

By Stephanie Darling

Members of PMIWDC #01 Toastmasters Club, a hybrid club in Falls Church, Virginia, have likened their club to a dynamic sports team—uniting as individuals with diverse talents, giving their best to achieve a common goal, and reaching personal milestones along the way.

Chartered in 2006, PMIWDC #01 Toastmasters Club was originally affiliated with the Project Management Institute, which confers a professional certification for project managers. When the club chartered, it used the PMI initials, and added WDC for its proximity to Washington, D.C., resulting in its unusual name. Today, anyone can join.

In keeping with its sports metaphor, the club works purposefully to create a winning culture, which includes receiving the President's Distinguished designation for the past 17 years. It is one of the largest clubs in District 29 (Northern Virginia), and has logged the fastest membership renewal and highest participation rates in the District. In 2022, the club welcomed 15 new members.

However, the club's real pride is in its members, who bond around skill-building and camaraderie, which enrich the culture for everyone.

"We happen to believe that social connections and learning are complementary qualities," notes Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) Victoria Hsueh.

"Joining means not only meeting but also connecting with other like-minded people," adds Edmond Joe, DTM, Club President.

Among the club's engagement strategies: a robust mentor program, often manned by senior club officers, and the practice of quickly immersing new members

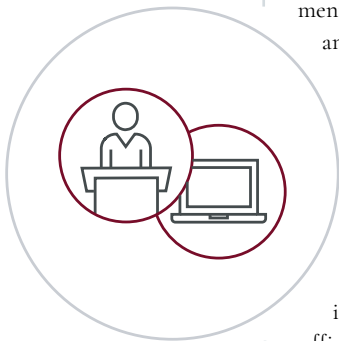
20% remote. Virtual members hail from many locations, including Washington state, Texas, Maryland, Connecticut, South Africa, and Brazil.

In 2021, a member survey revealed some divergent interests and preferences. Many members had tired of two-hour meetings on top of busy days, long commutes, and maybe most of all, after working remotely all day. Continuing online-only meetings was not universally welcomed, notes Joe. Yet still another group wanted the social interaction and traditional speaking space of in-person meetings.

Hsueh and her Executive Committee quickly revised the meeting format to maximize engagement. They cut meetings from two hours to 90 minutes, included breakout rooms for simultaneous Table Topics®, and added both Table Topics evaluators and extra timer roles.

Creativity factored into a new meeting approach. Hsueh and Joe created a quarterly dinner workshop, which blends fun with a dash of Toastmasters education and practice. Each dinner is themed, incorporates a brief lesson by the Vice President Education (VPE) or a guest speaker, and culminates with all attendees giving a short impromptu speech. Since the tradition began in 2021, the dinners have been a favorite of club members, guests, and occasional District leaders.

The club continues to attract guests and new members; leaders have found that the Meetup app has been its most successful outreach tool to pique interest in Toastmasters. The club also updated its website to include a brief, yet thorough, overview of what Toastmasters offers and how people can benefit from membership. The club makes its focus clear in three words: inspiration, leadership, and fulfillment.



"We happen to believe that social connections and learning are complementary qualities."

—VICTORIA HSUEH

in Pathways and having them take on meeting or officer roles.

However, the club never loses sight of what it takes for people to join and stay. Hsueh makes member satisfaction a priority. In fact, asking members for input and adjusting club functions to meet varying member needs is a club hallmark. That means making changes that suit the club's mixed member base, which is about 80% local and

The mindset of a dedicated, purpose-driven sports team works well for PMIWDC #01, Joe says.

"Everyone enjoys being on a winning team," he explains. "People always push a little harder when they know they're contributing to the team."

Stephanie Darling is a former senior editor of and frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



6 Secrets for Surviving Your First Ice Breaker

Prepare for the longest 4 to 6 minutes of your life.

By Kate McClare, DTM

It's the simplest assignment in your Toastmasters journey, but that doesn't mean it's easy.

"Just talk about yourself."

As you prepare to give your inaugural Ice Breaker, the first prepared speech in Toastmasters, you'll hear that a lot. Because that's all it is: a short speech about yourself, with no rules about what you can and can't say or how to say it. Easy, right?

Right.

If you're like me, talking about yourself is a lot easier said than done. I can expound on any number of topics I know a lot about and a few I know nothing about. The one thing I know the most about—me—is the one I least care to discuss. Not in front of relative strangers, anyway. And then there's the fear.

You're not the first to struggle with your Ice Breaker, and after you've given it—and you WILL give it—you'll see many new Toastmasters wrestling with fear and uncertainty as they prepare to follow you to the white-knuckled spot on the lectern that you and so many others held on to for dear life.

The Ice Breaker concept has changed in recent years. Once, new members gave their 4- to 6-minute Ice Breaker speech and then moved on to complete nine projects covering basic speaking skills. Today, it's an integral part of each Pathways path and can be used to share a different aspect of your life or simply to tell your club about your goals for the project.

But first things first: your very first Ice Breaker. Here's some help for now and for when it's your turn to help

those who come after you with knocking knees and chattering teeth.

How to Keep Your Cool in Your First Ice Breaker

1 Scared to start? Begin with Table Topics.

“People are frightened, they’re scared, they aren’t experienced at speaking,” says Christopher Pritchard, DTM, of Naples Advanced Toastmasters in Naples, Florida. When a new member is struggling with preparing their Ice Breaker, Pritchard will ask them to speak during Table Topics about something they like to do. They’re halfway to the Ice Breaker and what do you know? They’re still standing.

2 Make it all about you.

That’s right. For once, it really is about you. Talk about a favorite hobby, your last vacation, what you do for a living, something funny or intriguing about growing up, why you joined Toastmasters. My first Ice Breaker was about how “I Always Have to Be Different,” like using an Android phone when everyone I knew had an iPhone. You don’t have to be that elaborate or structured. Some of the most powerful Ice Breakers I’ve heard have been straightforward, unadorned stories from immigrants who talked about how they came to the United States. The beauty of using your personal story is that it’s easy to remember. And if you do forget part of it, well, who but you will know?

3 Read the Ice Breaker project in the path you’re working on.

It will give simple, clear instructions on how to prepare and deliver the speech (see sidebar), including how to create an outline. Be sure to watch the videos, which are invaluable moral support. They feature Toastmasters talking about their Ice Breaker experiences and marveling at how much they enjoyed the project. Download them to your phone and play them when your feet start icing up.

4 Write down your speech in some fashion.

You don’t have to write it word for word, although you can if you like. Make an outline,

jot down a few key thoughts, create color-coded flash cards, see what works. After 12 years in Toastmasters, I still write my speeches and envy the people who can speak without a script. But that comes with an important addendum:

5 Practice, practice, practice. And practice some more.

Run through it again and again until you’ve internalized your script and can speak naturally. In my opinion, no good speaker ever succeeded by “winging it,” and those who think they can haven’t listened to themselves ramble and stammer over material they aren’t sure of. I’ve interviewed several World Champions of Public Speaking and they all told me it takes a lot of practice to sound like you’re winging it.

6 Relax and have fun.

Know that everyone has been where you are right now, and they want you to succeed. Listen to their feedback, which will probably be positive and supportive even when it’s about how you can improve.

And don’t be too quick to get off the stage. Drink in the applause and enjoy it—it will be the first of many ovations you can look forward to in Toastmasters.

Kate McClare, DTM, is a professional copywriter and President of Miami Advanced Toastmasters Club in Miami, Florida. She gave her first Ice Breaker in 2011, shortly after joining Toastmasters.

Pathways: The Ice Breaker

Your Ice Breaker is a story about you. For this speech you can share anything about yourself that you would like. The speech can be personal, but it doesn’t have to be. Some people give an entire speech simply describing their favorite meal, while others delve into an important or momentous event in their life. If you’ve already delivered an Ice Breaker in another path, you can tell the audience why you chose your new path and what you hope to accomplish. Or just share something new about yourself (unless you told every single fact about yourself in that first 4 to 6 minutes).

Your speech can be in any style; it can be funny, informative, persuasive, or anything else you’d like.

Give your speech an opening, body, and conclusion to effectively communicate your overall purpose.

A simple template for an Ice Breaker goes like this: First, find a topic or time in your life that you can talk about for 4 to 6 minutes. Begin by introducing yourself. In the body of your speech, share information you would like your fellow members to know about you. Conclude with a funny or interesting anecdote that relates to your desire to become a better speaker and leader.

Think of the Ice Breaker as an assessment of how you are feeling about your skills at the beginning of your path, and something you can build upon for improvement. For instance, maybe your goal is simply to survive this often-feared speech. But take note of other challenging areas as well—how did you feel about finding a topic, writing the speech, and making your voice sound natural? For your next speech, challenge yourself to work on one of the aspects you found difficult this time.

—Kate McClare, DTM

You're in Trouble

Those loaded words that let you know *this can't be good*.

By John Cadley

As a darkening sky foretells inclement weather, so do certain words and phrases signal the arrival of unpleasant news. It seems if there is something we have to say that will not be well received, we like to give fair warning, however brief, before lowering the boom.

For instance, when someone begins with the word “Unfortunately,” you know what’s coming next can’t be good. *Unfortunately, the ship is leaving in five minutes, and I don’t see any reservation in your name for the 50th anniversary cruise you booked five months ago at the cost of \$10,000. Sorry.*

Or, “Listen, the reason I’m calling ...” This is usually prefaced by some small talk from a person who never calls you for small talk, like your stockbroker. *Hey, how you doing? How are the kids? Getting out to the golf course much? Great! Listen, the reason I’m calling ...* Does he or she really have to go on? Clearly, you’ve just lost some money. Better to end the call right there than stick around to find out how much.

“Do you know how fast you were going?” We all know that one. With a seemingly innocent question, the state trooper has said it all: *I don’t care what you say because I know you were speeding, so here’s your ticket, which will cost you money, put points on your license, and make you call your lawyer to see if you can get out of it, which will cost you even more. Have a nice day.*

Then there’s that moment in the workplace when the boss calls you into his or her office and says, “Close the door”—three little monosyllables that can really be translated into two: *You’re toast*. You might be lightly toasted or burnt to a crisp, but when you hear “Close the door,” you know your bread is buttered on the side that hits the floor.

If you’re British and someone initiates a conversation with “I’m not being funny, but ...,”



you can bet it’s not going to be funny—in fact, quite the opposite. The British use this idiom when they want to convey something serious or sensitive: *I’m not being funny, but your father’s will clearly stipulates that you inherit what you always said you loved most—his dog—while your sister gets 14 million pounds because—and I quote—“it’s only money,” which is apparently what you said when you*

We all know when someone says, “Can I ask you a question?” this is the equivalent of a loaded cannon pointed straight at you.

were spending his. I’m sorry, is there a problem? Talk about not funny.

The American equivalent to the above is “I hate to say this but ...” Not only does the phrase presage bad news, it is the height of

disingenuousness, since what it really means is: *I am happy to say this because you’re in trouble, not me.*

I also have advice when someone says, “Can I ask you a question?” We all know this is the equivalent of a loaded cannon pointed straight at you. So why not simply say, “No, you can’t ask me a question.” It may be rude but it’s better than getting hit with a “question” designed to lower your defenses so they can pound you with a jackhammer: *Can I ask you a question? Your last three performance reviews have all mentioned how snapping your gum annoys the people around you, yet you continue to do it. Are you that spectacularly insensitive or just utterly clueless?*

This same outcome may arise from a different phrase: “Because I was just wondering ...” This occurs when “Can I ask you a question ...” doesn’t get the desired response, when you don’t admit or even acknowledge your guilt. This frustrates the questioner to no end because you have already been arrested, tried, and convicted in the court of this person’s mind and they won’t stop until they get a confession: *Because I was just wondering ... if, as you say, you are still not aware of your gum-snapping problem after three performance reviews, I’m going to delete “insensitive” and “clueless” and go right to “stupid.” HR will set up a time for you to watch the video “The Importance of Being a Team Player.”*

On a personal note, when my wife calls me “John,” I know I’m in trouble. Usually, it’s “honey” or “sweetheart,” but when it’s “John,” it’s like a jury saying “guilty on all counts”—of what, I don’t know, but I do know with the certainty of death and taxes that I’m about to find out.

John Cadley is a former advertising copywriter and currently a musician working in upstate New York. Learn more at cadleys.com.

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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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