

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MAY 2023

TOASTMASTER®



Celebrating Diversity

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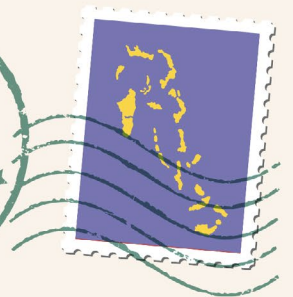


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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL MISSION:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

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Why Do People Join Toastmasters?

Why do people commit time, energy, and effort to become a part of our organization? As club officers, as members, it's important to understand the reasons. I think they're connected to a couple of fundamental questions people ask themselves. The first one being, *Can Toastmasters help me with the skills I want to develop?* If you feel you need communication or leadership-skills development, then Toastmasters can definitely help, as long as the person is willing to be helped.

The second question is a little more personal: *Do I fit in with this group of people who meet at this particular time and place—do I feel like I'm a part or could be a part of this group?* In your club meetings, think about the questions on your guests' minds. Does your meeting demonstrate how your club can help a prospective member develop their communication and leadership skills in a positive and supportive environment? Do you make them feel welcome? Will they walk out and think, *I can see myself as a part of Toastmasters?*

If the answer is no to these questions, then they're not going to join. And in my experience, if the answer is yes, a lot of other considerations become less important. I've found that for most members the primary questions they ask themselves before joining are: *Do I feel that Toastmasters can help me develop my communication and/or leadership skills? Does the club meet at a time and location that work for me? Do I like the format—whether online, in person, or hybrid? Do I fit in? Do I feel like I'm a part of the group?* These last two are important to consider because Toastmasters is a relationship organization.

Do you make guests feel welcome? Will they walk out and think, *I can see myself as a part of Toastmasters?*

Not only do our meetings need to demonstrate that we can help people develop their skills but also that we are a comfortable space where people truly benefit from their membership.

Is your club prepared and eager to share a culture that demonstrates an atmosphere of learning and camaraderie? Can you answer yes to these important questions below?

- Do our club meetings demonstrate that we can help members develop skills?
- Do we make guests feel welcome?

If the answer is yes to both, then I anticipate your club will continue to grow and Toastmasters will benefit more people.

Matt Kinsey, DTM
International President

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News

Dues Increase

Starting with the October 2023 membership-renewal period, your semiannual international membership dues will increase to \$60 USD. The renewal payment is due October 1; however, if you renew before August 1, you can still pay the current membership rate of \$45 USD.

The Board of Directors arrived at this decision after carefully analyzing increased operational costs since the last dues increase seven years ago (with COVID-19 impacts and inflation being major contributing factors). For more information, visit the [FAQ](#) page.



Officers Can Now Enable Member Self-Pay

There is an easier way for members to pay! Club officers can now give members the option to submit their international dues payments online. If you are a club officer and your club has voted to enable Self-Pay, log in to Club Central, navigate to the Club Contact and Meeting Information page, select the toggle button in the Self-Pay setting section, and click “Save” at the bottom of the page. For questions, email renewals@toastmasters.org. Club officers can also email clubquality@toastmasters.org.

Toastmasters Is Now on TikTok

A new social media platform has been added to Toastmasters' online presence: TikTok! Follow us at [@toastmastersofficial](https://www.tiktok.com/@toastmastersofficial) and share videos to help promote the brand and increase awareness.

Resources

Beat the Clock

Toastmasters are taught to run meetings on time, finish speeches on time, and reach membership goals on time. In that spirit, [Beat the Clock](#) is a great motivator for finishing the year on schedule—and with record numbers! Make it your club's goal to earn the Beat the Clock award and encourage every member to take part.

Applications and payments for members with a join date between May 1 and June 30 must be received at World Headquarters or online no later than June 30.

Tune In! Podcast on Proper Name Pronunciation

Meeting members from different countries is exciting, but this diversity brings with it a challenge: pronouncing names from a wide range of languages. Toastmaster Fiona Swee-Lin Price, Ph.D., is a name expert who has worked in the intercultural field for over 20 years. In a recent episode of [The Toastmasters Podcast](#), she offers tips to help you get better at pronouncing culturally diverse names.

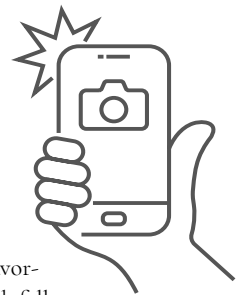
Cultivating Your Future Club Leaders

Is your club still looking for officers for the 2023-2024 program year? To help prepare your club, think about how you can empower members to step into a leadership role for their own personal development and for the club's continued success. Use the club officer role [resources](#) to learn more about each position as you find your club's next leaders.

Reminders

Send Your Photos to the Toastmaster

Is your club back to meeting in person? Are you traveling to a unique destination for your next vacation? Did you take some fun photos at your District conference? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then send in your favorite photos to the *Toastmaster*! Bring your digital magazine on safari or pose with fellow members at your next club outing—the more creative the better! Send your high-resolution images to photos@toastmasters.org for a chance to be published in an upcoming issue.



Run a Speechcraft Session

The [Speechcraft digital experience](#) was created for experienced members to help nonmembers become the best communicators they can be! As a coordinator, you will be given materials to help you recruit five people for a four-, six-, or eight-session Speechcraft event that will boost your participants' confidence and improve their communication, public speaking, and leadership skills—all within a safe Toastmasters environment. Plus, Toastmasters members who become coordinators can earn DTM credit. Order your Speechcraft Digital Bundle today!

Diversity and Inclusion

Quotes on Celebrating Diversity

Diversity and inclusion seem to be the current workplace buzzwords, but they encompass so much more than what your company policies might say. They help create an environment that is more productive, creative, and innovative for everyone. Garner insight on these interconnected topics from the quotes below.

“A lot of different flowers make a bouquet.”

–Islamic proverb

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

–Maya Angelou, American poet and civil rights activist

“We are all different, which is great because we are all unique. Without diversity life would be very boring.”

–Catherine Pulsifer, Canadian author

“We need diversity of thought in the world to face the new challenges.”

–Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web

“We must look past our own narrow interests and attend to the interests of our global society.”

–Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate

“We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.”

–Martin Luther King Jr., American minister, civil rights activist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate

“Diversity and inclusion, which are the real grounds for creativity, must remain at the center of what we do.”

–Marco Bizzarri, Italian business executive and president and CEO of Gucci

“Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together.”

–Jacqueline Woodson, American author

Language

Find a Word for Your Year—or Day

In the [January 2023 issue](#) of the *Toastmaster*, readers were encouraged to select a word that encompassed the theme for their year ahead. While it’s now almost halfway through the calendar year, there’s still time to pick your one-word theme. Find inspiration from the members below—you may even discover your club’s next Word of the Day!

Assiduous

Nayomi Kuruvilla
Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Power

Kelmikis Mitchell
Union City, Georgia

Blossoming

Nitya Kannan
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Perseverance

Rahul Bharadwaj
Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Joy

Sally Bosch
Hillcrest, South Africa

Ecstatic

Sahana M R
Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Motivated

Marie Hanratty
London, England

Forward

Brenda Whitehead
Cobourg, Ontario, Canada

Calm

Vidya Bangalore
Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Intentional

Theresa Baughman
Algonquin, Illinois

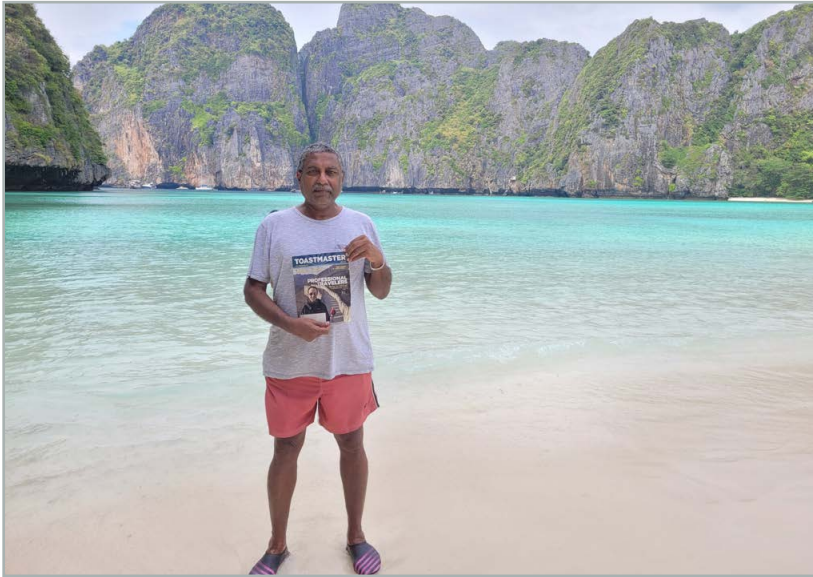
Curious

Johnson Bruno D’Souza
Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Believe

Maggie Holley
Cape Charles, Virginia

Traveling *Toastmaster*



MOHAN MORAIS of Colombo, Sri Lanka, vacations on Maya Beach in Phuket, Thailand.



GAIA CALCATTERA, DTM, of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, holds a printed cover of the *Toastmaster* at Prospect Point in Antarctica.

Snapshot



In March, Doha Toastmasters Club of Doha, Qatar, celebrated International Women's Day with an "Embrace Equity" meeting theme. Their crossed arms symbolize how they are working to embrace equity in their club and beyond.



Pushing Past the Fear of Public Speaking

Saying yes to opportunities allowed me to advance my career and find my voice.

By **Hannah Merschen**

I tossed my notecards behind me, wrapped my hand around the mic, and stepped forward to address the crowd. Although I was prepared, a brief moment of fear swept over me before I opened my mouth. It wasn't my first time speaking publicly about my area of expertise, social media, but it was the first time that I was touted as an expert in front of such a large crowd, and it was the first time in a long time that it was happening in person.

After a few minutes, which I will admit felt much longer, I finished my part of the presentation, thankfully without any egregious errors. I shifted across the stage to put the mic back and let a small smile cross my face. It was over! I had successfully shared my expertise with a room full of eyes staring up at me. But the best part by far was that I had enjoyed doing it.

I work at AKCG—Public Relations Counselors in Glassboro, New Jersey. As a senior account executive, I support the proactive media relations team for the firm's healthcare, education, and association clients. I also represent the firm in short videos on social media. I recently filmed and published a series of clips that are on YouTube and Instagram. I am expected to lead meetings with senior-level executives for each of my clients. Being able to confidently facilitate meetings and answer questions on the fly have been critical skills.

I am now 29 years old, but anyone who had met me fresh out of college would have never believed that I'd be accepting public speaking opportunities on a regular basis. I was always full of good ideas but often assumed the role of a wallflower and paused at the idea of getting in front of a large group of people.

That all changed in 2019, when I landed on the website for Jolly Road Toastmasters, a club in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. The group boasted the ability to develop leadership and communication skills and increase confidence in its participants. Honestly, it felt like a tall order



Hannah Merschen

to fill, but something inside of me knew it would be worth the risk.

A few weeks later, I adhered a name tag onto my sweater and signed into the corporate office where the club met. My coworker, Kayleigh, was by my side, and together we sat

anxiety of public speaking. And as I learned those skills, I started to accept opportunities to speak in front of coworkers, peers, and even strangers. In my new club, Voorhees Toastmasters Club (which is closer to home), I have continued to hone those skills, especially as I advanced into a Level 4 project of Pathways.

Growing my public speaking skills has required me to intentionally put myself in uncomfortable situations. It's awkward to stand up and share your voice. It takes courage to brush off those feelings, show up to the next meeting, and try again.

Recently I was asked to lead an hour-long webinar that was open to anyone in the Philadelphia area. The 2019 version of me would have balked at the idea and quickly listed the reasons that I couldn't do it. But, this year, with the experience afforded by Toastmasters, I felt a jolt of excitement. In fact, I quickly typed "I'm in" and got to work drafting the presentation. It's moments like these that I realize how much I've grown in confidence.

I'm so glad that four years ago I said yes to learning more about Toastmasters. I'm proud of myself for saying yes when I walked through

Growing my public speaking skills has required me to intentionally put myself in uncomfortable situations.

down, glanced over the agenda, the club banners, and various other props that were carefully displayed around the room. I watched the speakers who participated throughout the meeting with admiration. I knew after that first meeting that I wanted in.

Jolly Road Toastmasters is where I broke through my fear of public speaking. It's where I gave my first Table Topics® speech, signed up for my first role, and delivered my first few speeches. I learned how to push past the

the corporate boardroom to experience the club for the first time. I'm happy for all the times I raised my hand to participate, and for the times I signed up to give a speech.

These small "yesses" allowed me to advance my career trajectory, grow my work, and most importantly, find my voice.

Hannah Merschen is Vice President Public Relations of Voorhees Toastmasters Club in Voorhees, New Jersey.

Diversity Comes in Many Forms

Learn how to work with all of them.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Toastmasters International is certainly a diverse organization. And over the last several years, I have worked with members from places like Senegal, Pakistan, Turkey, and South Africa. Although our cultures are different, as Toastmasters we all speak the same language (“speakerese” I like to call it) and ask the same questions.

Interestingly, I have found a greater diversity as far as communication skills training in my hometown in Wyoming.

I have spent most of my professional speaking years in large metropolitan areas—Las Vegas and Southern California. The bulk of my contacts either worked for large corporations or were in the professional ranks. In addition, being a member of, at times, three clubs, I hung around mainly with those in the speaking community.

I then moved to Wyoming. I live in the fourth largest city in the state, and we only have 33,000 residents. The closest “city” is 70 miles (113 km) away, and it only has 4,400 people. Most of my contacts now are ranchers, coal miners, and mechanics. And that poses a challenge to me as a speech coach.

Granted, my training is frequently done online for my traditional demographics, but recently I had some interesting local opportunities.

I was asked to train some first-time candidates for political office. Most of them were ranchers. Yes, they were successful businesspeople, but speaking was not a primary activity for them. And, unlike in Toastmasters, terms like vocal variety, speech structure, and thesis statements constituted a foreign language to them.

That required me to rethink how I communicate my material.

I then had the opportunity to train a local Master Gardener group, a group of gardeners who train other gardeners in their community.

These are people who speak frequently but know little about putting a speech together. They speak a language all their own—different from both Toastmasters and the ranchers.

Each of those audiences provided a unique challenge. And to me, each represented diversity.



As speakers and trainers, it is important for us to realize that there is a diversity that already exists in our audiences.

One way that helps me improve my presentations for a particular group is to ask the audience members at the end what they got out of it. They don't pick up everything that I say, but their answers give me insight on what got through and what issues are important to them. That allows me to tailor my talk for the next time.

The thrust of society at this time is to promote diversity. But as speakers and trainers,

it is important for us to realize that there is a diversity that already exists in our audiences. And we need to learn to effectively communicate to that diversity.

So far, I have been talking about diversity between different groups. But there is also diversity within each group. My club has 14 members. Yes, we have similarities. But, as the Vice President Education, I must work with each member differently. One member has been with the club a long time and is a good speaker. I challenged him to consider the International Speech Contest and he told me that he had never even thought about it. He has since decided that he wants to go for it next year. I will work with him on that.

Another member likes to tell stories and tall tales to inspire kids. Great. Let's develop some signature stories. And maybe one of them will be a contest speech for him, as well. On the other hand, we have one member who is very shy who wants to build her confidence. She is actually good on stage, but she doesn't realize it yet. I challenge her in a different way.

Each member has his or her own goals, skill levels, and mental roadblocks. That, too, is a form of diversity. And my task is to work with each one as individuals.

Yes, diversity exists. That diversity might involve different cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities. But it might also come in the form of different needs, skill levels, and goals. Let us learn to work with all of them.

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.

Translations Triumph

District teams add more languages to the Toastmasters world.

By Stephanie Darling

Over the years, Toastmasters International has received requests for translations of its materials into a variety of diverse languages, including French, Spanish, Arabic, Korean, and more.

For years, the organization was not able to act on these requests. That changed with the rollout of the Pathways learning experience, when the Board of Directors allocated funding to translate the new education program. Member teams volunteered their time to review Pathways and other professionally translated materials through the Translation Review Program.

That first foray into translations has led to a resounding response to a new initiative, the District Translation Program, which became official in 2022. Now, more than two dozen District teams around the world are translating a wide range of languages beyond the 11 original translations undertaken for Pathways.

Toastmasters World Headquarters administers the program while District teams do the actual translations work. The program has produced—and continues to

produce—translations successes, allowing even more members to participate in Pathways in their native language.

In the past two years, 27 District language teams have started, continued, or completed translations in Romanian, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Swedish, and Polish. Work is now underway in Papiamentu (District 81), Lithuanian (District 108), Maori (District 112), Haitian Creole (District 81), and Urdu (District 122P). Most Districts are working on Pathways content, but other education pieces, such as the *Youth Leadership Workbook*, are being translated, too.

Base Camp—Pathways' learning management system—now houses 114 District-translated Pathways projects, with material in seven new languages. To see what is available, go to the [Resource Library](#) and select the language of your choice.

Districts are tackling translations with enthusiasm and endurance to spare. Kerstin Löfstedt, DTM, is Team Coordinator of the Swedish team translating the *Youth*

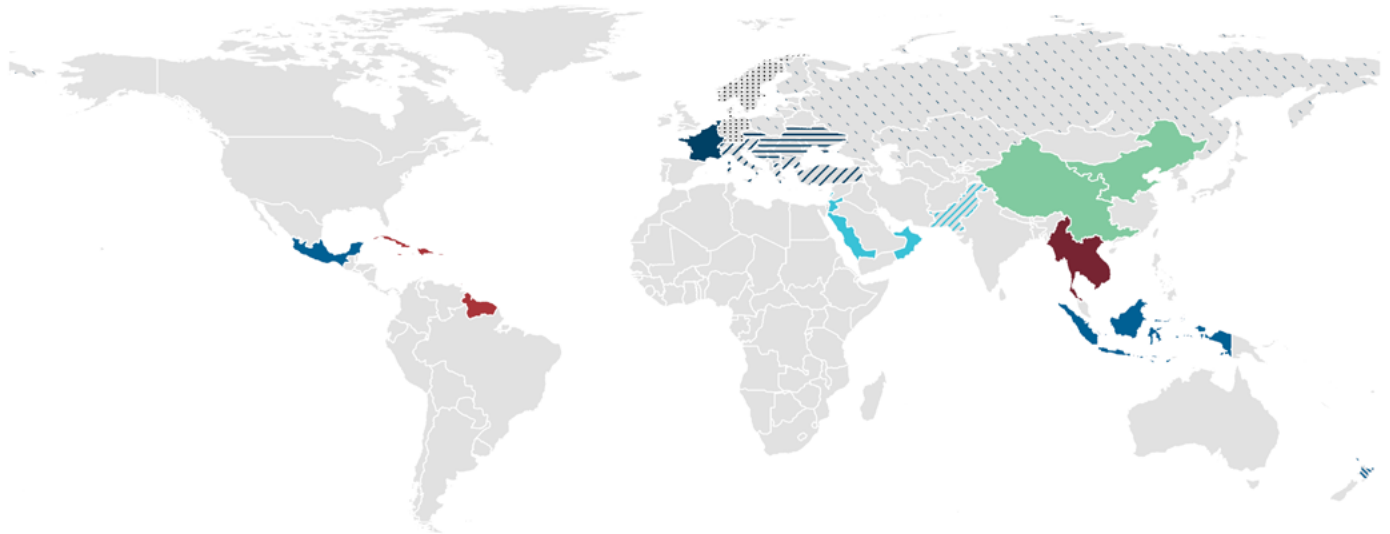
Language Facts That May Surprise You

- ◆ Today, there are more than 7,000 languages and dialects spoken around the world. Chinese, Spanish, English, and Hindi lead the list as the most widely spoken.
- ◆ 90% of these are spoken by fewer than 100,000 people, leading linguists to predict some 2,400 native tongues are at risk of dying out.
- ◆ Papua New Guinea is home to 850 languages, the most in the world. At least 40 are spoken by only a handful of the nation's 7.6 million residents.
- ◆ More than half the world is bilingual, paralleling the more than 40% of bilingual Toastmasters.
- ◆ Africa has the most official languages, at 11.
- ◆ The Cambodian alphabet is the longest of all, at 73 characters.
- ◆ Can you speak Klingon? It's one of the world's 200 fake languages, dreamed up for books, movies, and TV programs.
- ◆ The German language has three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter.
- ◆ Kinshasa, the capital of Congo, is second only to Paris in French-speaking people.
- ◆ With so many diverse languages at risk of dying out, the United Nations has named 2022–2032 the [Decade of Indigenous Languages](#), to support the preservation and revitalization of native tongues.

Source: *Speakt*, a professional translation service

District Translations by Language

March 2023



Language

By Region From Left to Right

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Spanish (District 34) | Italian (District 109) | Urdu (District 122P) |
| Haitian Creole (District 81) | Hungarian (District 110) | Simplified Chinese (Districts 88 & 118) |
| Papiamentu (District 81) | Romanian (District 110) | Hindi (District 80) |
| Dutch (District 59) | Slovak (District 110) | Thai (District 97) |
| French (District 59) | Lithuanian (District 108) | Vietnamese (District 97) |
| Swedish (District 95) | Polish (District 108) | Bahasa (District 87) |
| Greek (District 109) | Malayalam (Districts 104 & 105) | Maori (District 112) |

Source: Toastmasters Research and Analysis Department

Leadership Workbook. The group had some “aha” moments while translating English education concepts into Swedish. The challenges gave them all a “deeper understanding of both languages,” Löfstedt says.

Her team was also acutely aware of quality, noting the work had to be “right, not just

Morikawa, DTM, is the Chief Reviewer on the member team that helped with the original professional translation of Pathways into Japanese. She spent hours reviewing videos, modifying the translations, and meticulously adjusting word order, making it easier for “both bilingual and monolingual members to enjoy listening to

Calin Gilea, DTM, Immediate Past District 110 Director, started thinking about a Romanian translation as soon as Pathways was announced in 2015. However, he waited, and later led his team on a two-year project to translate the entire Pathways program into Romanian via the District Translation Program. The challenge was beyond worth it.

“The smiles on the faces of members and colleagues when they see a Pathways project translated in their native language is priceless,” he says.

The District Translation Program allows even more Toastmasters to participate in Pathways in native languages.

good enough,” to uphold the integrity of this and future translations. The team is now considering translating Pathways Level 1 projects into Swedish.

The experience of meticulously working on translating leads to its own rewards. Sachiko

English, while reading Japanese subtitles at the same time,” she says.

The experience gave her such a confidence boost that she went on to serve as a club coach, an officer in three American clubs, and a member of a club led in English by native Japanese speakers.

Editor’s Note: For more information on the District Translation Program, contact districttranslations@toastmasters.org.

Stephanie Darling is senior editor of the *Toastmaster magazine*.

Make Succession a Success

Develop a plan to train incoming club officers—and the ones after that.

By Kate McClare, DTM

It's an often-overlooked part of every club officer's list of responsibilities: Prepare your successor for office.

If your club barely managed to get enough officers to serve this year, thinking about who will come after them may seem as pointless as planning how to spend next year's lottery winnings. But putting off succession planning could be one of the reasons you're struggling to fill officer roles each year. And a club that has a plan in place can end up feeling like it *did* win the lottery.

Now is the time to create a transition plan for your incoming club officers and those who will replace them.

Time to Transition

Let's start with the short term: 2022–2023 club officers helping 2023–2024 ones. There is plenty of time to assist with this officer transition since there could be a full month or two between the time new officers are elected and the time they start their term, on July 1. (Or January 1 for clubs that elect officers every six months.)

New officers will be able to attend club officer training at the start of their term, but working one-on-one with their predecessor is a great supplement to the group training. Each officer can outline their role for their successor, offer helpful tips, provide useful materials, and answer questions.

"There's no better training than having someone in the role tell you what to do and what are the responsibilities," says Sherri Raftery, DTM, a member of six clubs, including Island Foghorns in Middletown, Rhode Island.

Helping new officers is vital, but in the long run, such efforts should also extend to potential club officers—members who haven't been elected yet but hopefully will be at some point. "Succession planning ensures that club members are mentally prepared for a potential role instead of being suddenly and unexpectedly nominated and voted in at the elections meeting," says Deb Walker, a member of three clubs, including FCC Stubble Jumpers in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Lance Webster, DTM, a Past District Director of District 52 in Los Angeles, California, says succession planning is so important that he believes clubs "should make the transition process an organized part of the Club Success Plan, including deadlines for the transition process."

Current officers themselves benefit from working with incoming ones. "You never learn as well or as much as when you have to teach," Webster notes.

The Long View

The work should begin long before elections, as current officers look for likely candidates to replace them—and even for candidates to follow those officers. The second wave can be positioned as assistants to the formally elected officer, giving them a year of training and mentoring to help them get comfortable with the lead position (subject to club election).

Raftery, a longtime Toastmaster who has served as a club officer many times, says officers should always be cognizant of other club members who would make good future leaders. "That's one of your responsibilities," she says. "If you look at it, [your responsibility] is always to find your successor."

The succession process should begin with each officer listing best practices for their role and noting any associated events, such as membership renewal dates for the Treasurer, for example, or speech contests for the Vice President Education. Many officers even keep a journal of their activities for the year to give their successor an accurate picture of the job.

Beware of TMI

That's "too much information," not "Toastmasters International."

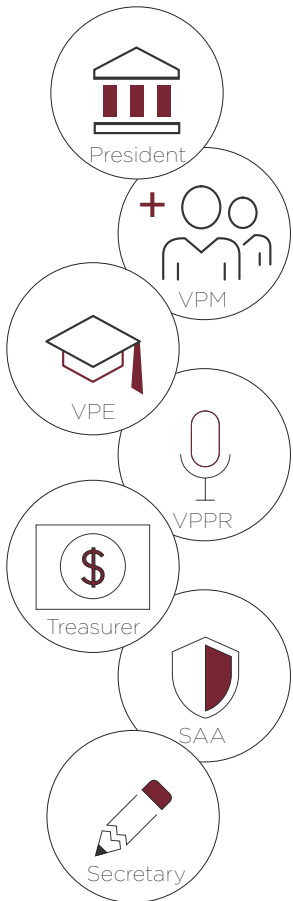
"Well, that's the thing," Raftery says. "You don't want to overload them. It can be too much. In fact, it can take a good six months to learn your role, and once you've mastered it, your term is over, so it's the next person's time."

"That's what's good about Toastmasters—it's an opportunity for everyone to learn the roles, and then the next one gets to learn."

For Walker, the member in Saskatchewan, creating a succession plan means reflecting on your role and how you will perform it. What will you leave behind for others to follow?

"It's like a wood carving," she says. "What am I going to do with this role for the next year? What is my wood carving going to look like? How am I going to chip away at it, and what is my masterpiece going to be by the end? What's your legacy?"

Kate McClare, DTM, is Vice President Public Relations for Miami Advanced Toastmasters in Miami, Florida. She has held several Toastmasters leadership positions, including Club President and Vice President Membership, as well as Public Relations Manager for District 47.



Publisher Travels a Progressive Path

Magazine marks 10 years of promoting diversity, inclusion, and equity in contracting.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

For nearly 20 years, Shelton Russell, DTM, of Raleigh, North Carolina, has been involved in helping advance women, minority, and small-business owners in local government, and the infrastructure, transportation, and construction industries.

In 2013, he realized there were many great stories about diversity and inclusion successes in transportation but no forum to share them. So, he created one: the *American DBE Magazine*.

The DBE in the title stands for Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and the magazine's readers are primarily diverse business owners in the infrastructure, transportation, and construction industries, and organizations such as government agencies and private corporations that have programs to promote the inclusion of diverse companies in their procurement practices.

A quarterly publication, *American DBE* has digital and print editions and is distributed throughout the United States. The magazine highlights projects, industry best practices, and trends, but it also serves as inspiration, with feature stories, profiles of entrepreneurs, guest columns, and project updates. Most importantly, the magazine aims to be a strong voice for diversity.

"We want to encourage small businesses to keep striving for success, and to give them information and inspiration to help them along the way. Success stories are a key factor in each issue," says Russell, who had previously worked as the director of Business Opportunity and Workforce Development for the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

A Toastmaster since 1999, he is currently Club President of the Hi-Rise Toasters Club in Raleigh. He joined Toastmasters after realizing his job increasingly involved making presentations in public settings. His early career was in banking before he decided to leave the financial industry behind and make more of a difference in people's lives.

He became interested in diversity and inclusion and worked with the city of Columbus, Ohio, to help minority- and women-owned businesses win contracts with the city. "I found my passion when I had the opportunity to help people grow their business while using

many of the skills I learned in graduate school and my banking career."

The initial emphasis of *American DBE* was on projects in the federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program. Today, coverage has expanded to local and state government projects, as well as private industry work.

"Our goal is to connect diverse businesses with opportunities on major infrastructure, construction, and transportation projects," says Russell. "We also want to make them aware of industry trends or significant legislation that can affect their business.

"Readers and advertisers tell me that the magazine is a success," he adds. "That shows that we are doing well [as a business] while doing good [for people]."

Russell credits his wife, Valerie Fields, a public relations entrepreneur and journalism professor, with helping him launch the magazine. She has been his partner throughout, assisting with writing and editing stories, managing photography, and working with a graphic designer.

"She was there with me from the beginning. We launched the idea to start the magazine while sitting together in a coffee shop and talking about the future. Her journalism experience gave me the confidence to start," he says.

Russell also credits Toastmasters with improving his professional skills. "Communication is important in business. The chance of success goes up when your communication skills are stronger," he says.

A few years ago, Russell began the *P3 Project Podcast* as an offshoot of *American DBE*. P3 stands for passion, purpose, and profit. The podcast is focused on helping diverse entrepreneurs turn their passion into a business of purpose and turn their purpose into profit.

"Toastmasters has been instrumental in giving me the confidence to do the podcast. I have also been asked to do keynote speeches and longer presentations. Magazine publishers are often asked to speak. I have had to step up my game and Toastmasters has been a great tool to help me do that."

Find the *American DBE Magazine* and *P3 Project Podcast* at americandbe.com.

Peggy Beach, DTM, is a Past District 37 Governor and a freelance writer/communications instructor in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is Vice President Education at Hi-Rise Toasters Club in Raleigh and Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina. You can reach her at writereditorpeggy-beach@gmail.com.





LEARNING TO LOVE MY AUTISTIC IDENTITY

Toastmasters turned out to be the perfect place to do that.

By Jolene Stockman, DTM

In 2018, I publicly shared my autism diagnosis during my TEDx speech, “How to Be Normal, and Why Not to Be.” I wanted people to know I’m autistic, and that I’m successful because of, not in spite of, the way my brain is wired. I also wanted to rewrite “normal,” based on all I’d learned—including as a Toastmaster—before and especially after I was diagnosed.

That TEDx speech was the beginning of a journey, not the culmination as I’d originally thought. My new book, *Autistic World Domination*, offers encouragement for autistic people to create the world they want for themselves.

As a child, I always felt just a bit different. And I *was* different, in the way my brain handled information. After my diagnosis, it took a long time to feel comfortable with my autistic identity. But as I met and connected with other adults like me, we realized we weren’t deficient, or broken—just trying to navigate a world designed by and for “neurotypical” brains.

I now know that many humans are neurodivergent, a term used to describe people whose brains are different from typical. Neurodiversity acknowledges that people have specific ways of being in and experiencing the world, due to how their brain processes information. Research shows there isn’t one “right” type of brain. Some people are more effective at hands-on work; others are great with numbers. Some excel at speaking; others are impressive writers. This has always been true, but due to



Jolene Stockman, DTM

continuing research into brain function, we have the perspective to understand more about how individual brains can specialize.

Statistics on the prevalence of individual neurodiversities (such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, autism) suggest that human brain functions vary widely across the world’s population. So, while many people can process information and function in ways that are considered typical, human beings as a *group* are neurodiverse.

Of all the activities that might be of interest to those with non-typical brains, you might be surprised to learn that Toastmasters has a distinct appeal. It’s the ideal program for neurodivergent minds because as members, we’re given the tools and support to be ourselves.

I was a member of the Ngāmotu Breakfast Toastmasters Club in New Plymouth, Aotearoa, New Zealand, for more than a year before I contributed verbally. I had been encouraged to take roles and sign up for speeches by my mentor Leo Baxendale, a five-time DTM and exemplary Toastmaster. I didn’t know it at the time, but I have situational mutism. I can be physically unable to speak under specific stressors. At the time, I believed what I had been told my whole life, that I was just shy and needed to “work harder” and learn to speak up.

My internal criticism about my lack of Toastmasters progress was relentless. But I never heard any such thing from another Toastmaster. What I heard from them was support, encouragement, constructive feedback, appreciation. The focus was always on what I wanted to achieve, and how to make it possible. That was a huge benefit for me.

As it turns out, Toastmasters was the perfect place to nurture and support my way of being in the world. Here’s why:

Leadership isn't always loud, and a voice doesn't have to be verbal.



New Zealander Jolene Stockman, DTM, is an award-winning writer who has spoken all over the world since giving her first TEDx Talk, where she shared her autism diagnosis.

5 Ways Toastmasters Supports Neurodivergencies

1 Consistency and transparency

All human beings are sensitive to stress; however, neurodivergent brains often feel it more strongly. Repetition and routine can provide an oasis of calm, and Toastmasters provides that consistency in abundance: There are long-term schedules, a strict agenda, exact timings. In fact, you can go to club meetings anywhere in the world and the elements of a club will be the same. This strict sense of sameness lets neurodivergent brains relax into growth.

2 A role-based hierarchy

Members enter every meeting with varying degrees of fear. Our outside titles and achievements, our degrees and pedigrees? Wiped away. Public speaking is the great equalizer. Yet in Toastmasters, every meeting role is neatly defined, scheduled, and rotated. The Toastmasters hierarchy is not based on politics, finances, or arbitrary social rules. A role is a role regardless of age, gender, appearance, or skill level.

3 Step-by-step resources

Every element of Toastmasters has clear, written guidelines. Every role, education project, award, and activity are planned for and explained up front, step-by-step. Toastmasters offers resources, such as scripts, checklists, *Toastmaster* magazine articles, podcasts, and materials in Base Camp and on the website to support you as you learn. You can practice using different communication styles—such as verbal, non-verbal, drawing, writing, or using speech devices or technology—to highlight diverse presentation skills.

4 Communication styles

Research has revealed that autistics and other neurodivergent individuals have ways of communicating that are effective, but distinct from neurotypicals. For example, neurotypical communication includes indirect words, small talk, and eye contact.

Conversely, neurodivergent communicators prefer direct words, clear meanings, comfortable silence, and whole body listening.

And while most existing systems favor neurotypical communication, the very DNA of the Toastmasters program lends itself to bridging the two styles. Since meetings are based on a routine, there are minimal unscripted

social interactions. All members share a common interest, and small talk is optional. I was able to skip social politics and weather updates and launch straight into a more comfortable task-related chat, without being accused of being anti-social or too blunt.

5 The individualized approach

Toastmasters aims to stretch your comfort zone, but in ways that work for you. The program is self-paced, and you build on each skill as you feel ready. You are empowered to choose. You can compete, but you don't have to. You can lead, but you don't have to. You can grow at your own pace, all while having the resources and support to dip in your toe (or tongue) with absolute safety. Our journey is our own.

I will add a disclaimer here. While Toastmasters provides the structure and branding, every Toastmasters club has its own culture, energy, and personalities. Visit lots of clubs and find what works for you.

Celebrate Yourself

Finally, understanding and celebrating my own neurodivergencies led me to work as a writer and trainer on ways to empower autistics, or anyone else who likes to color outside the lines, to create the world they want. First? Dream big. Then? Work back. Carve out a path that leads directly to your perfect world. No matter how you are wired, or what happiness means to you, you can make the world the way you want it.

We all relate to feeling different in this world for whatever reason. I have a responsibility that comes with the privilege I have in knowing and being able to share my identity. As we say in the Māori language, *he mana tō te kupu*: Words have power. Leadership isn't always loud, and a voice doesn't have to be verbal. Your very presence on this planet is a power. As Toastmasters, as communicators, as magical human creatures, we all have the gift of using our words to change the world. Whether it's on a big stage, in a club meeting, or acknowledging our own identity quietly to ourselves.

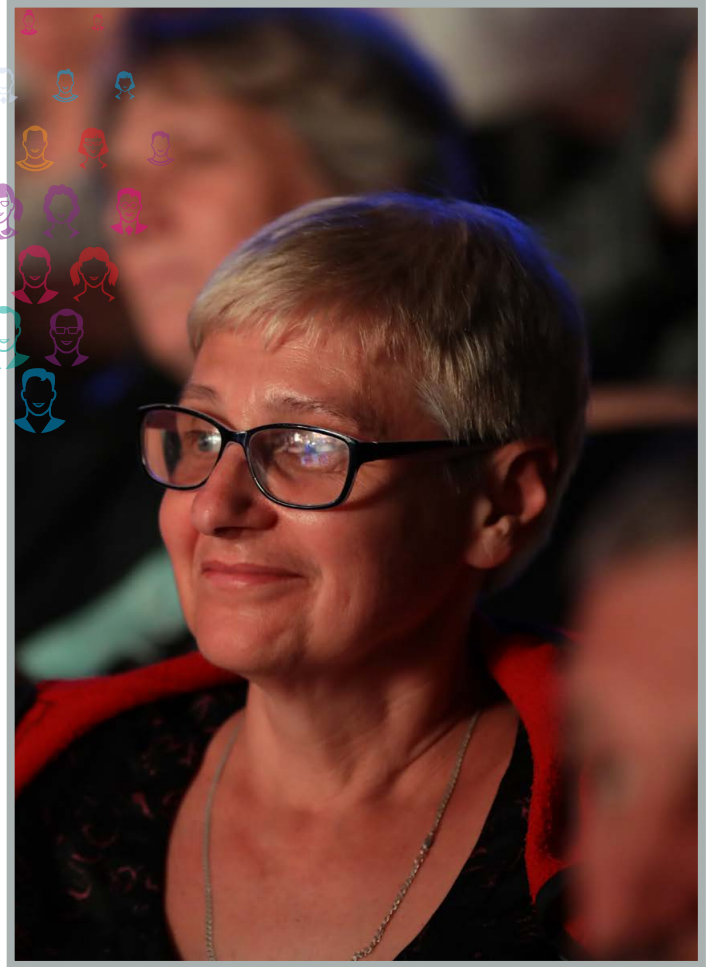
Jolene Stockman, DTM, is an instructional designer, author, and founding member of the Ngāmotu Breakfast Toastmasters Club in New Plymouth, Aotearoa, New Zealand. She is also tangata whaitakiwātanga (autistic). Read more about her at totalblueprint.com.



THE HABITS OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATORS

Empathy and self-awareness top the list.

By Elizabeth Danziger



Navigating the shoals of public communication today requires high emotional intelligence to ensure that everyone in your audience feels included. As Maria Cordova, president and founder of HumanageHR in Los Angeles, California, says, “We’ve all become increasingly aware of the importance of language in creating equitable and inclusive spaces. When language makes people feel they don’t belong, they do not speak up, and you lose out on their diverse perspectives and contributions.”

Your choice of words and images makes an impact, as well as your vocal tone and body language. Inclusive communicators know how to gauge their audience’s sensibilities and share a message that will engage without offending. How do they do it? Here are some suggestions:

1 Develop an embracing attitude.

It is hard to be inclusive when we consider our audience to be somehow “other”—that is, fundamentally different from us. To practice inclusive communication, you need to feel a sense of shared humanity with everyone in your audience, whether they are there in person or reading your words on a screen. Perhaps it’s going too far to say that you need to love your audience, but it is vital to cultivate a general sense of warmth for them.

Sometimes, when I’m about to go in front of a large audience, and I’m feeling nervous or lacking a feeling of connection, I look around the room and picture the people as small children. What did this woman look like when she was 6? Was she mischievous? And that elegant man—did he once wear patched dungarees? Seeing the past child inside an adult makes them seem more relatable.

The more you can cultivate a loving attitude toward the people around you, the less likely you will be to disrespect them inadvertently and use alienating language.

2 Consider your audience.

To reach a diverse audience, consider their interests and sensitivities before composing your words. Talk about what matters to them, and they will pay attention. Also, anticipate your listeners’ questions and comments. Respond to them proactively. For example, if you are announcing a new policy, be sure to explain what the change will mean to your individual audience members, who are likely asking themselves, *How does this affect the group I belong to?*

Remember that respect is the underpinning of all successful communication. If your audience feels you do not respect them or are talking down to them, their minds will slam shut like a clamshell on the beach. Value their strengths and honor their experience.

Use language that your audience will understand. If a nuclear physicist is giving a talk to fellow scientists, she might use many technical terms and acronyms. When presenting her ideas to a group of potential investors who might not have a science background, she would be well advised to simplify her terminology and use metaphors and images to describe her ideas.

Remember that respect is the underpinning of all successful communication.



3 Choose your words carefully.

When preparing your speech, or a written document, remember we are living in an age of great sensitivity to language—some might even say hypersensitivity. While being too politically correct might cause some people to roll their eyes, you ignore individual identities at your peril. Words referring to gender, race, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical ability, and the like have the potential to make some people feel excluded and that is the last thing we want to do. Yet no one can write a list of words you can and cannot use because each audience has its own sensitivities.

Also, bear in mind that everyone in your audience might not have the same proficiency level in the language you are speaking. Keep your terms clear and straightforward and avoid using acronyms or unusual vocabulary. When choosing your words, be aware of gender and cultural differences. For example, avoid mentioning gender when it is not relevant. There is no need to write *female executive* or *lady boss*. An executive is an executive, regardless of gender. Similarly, words like *chairman* can be shortened to the gender-neutral term *chair*. In general, if you are wondering whether it's appropriate to use a word or phrase, don't use it.

4 Try to become aware of your biases.

"Bias is an inevitable part of the human condition," says Komal Gulati, in an article for the NeuroLeadership Institute in New York City, New York. "That's why at NLI, we like to say, if you have a brain, you have bias."

It's difficult to see our biases because they are often unconscious. Notice if you automatically assume that a woman is in a support position or make other snap judgements about people—it might indicate an unconscious bias. Recognizing our unfounded assumptions is the first step to changing them.

Toastmasters can draw on the wisdom and experience of fellow club members to listen for instances of non-inclusive language or behaviors. Ask members to look for these usages, in your speeches and others'. The club offers a built-in sounding board on issues like these. If you happen to be making a speech in another country, ask an international fellow member for advice on respecting that country's culture and language.

5 Use technical tools.

Microsoft has released a helpful guide to avoiding biased language. In

addition, Google Docs now includes prompts to reduce gendered language such as replacing *policeman* with *police officer*. Many software programs also give feedback on unnecessarily gendered language. Toastmasters can also take advantage of the organization's newest partner, [Yoodli](#), an artificial intelligence-powered feedback platform. Members can upload their speeches for Yoodli to evaluate. In addition to evaluations, the program also detects and comments on non-inclusive language.

6 Be authentic.

The best way to develop these habits is to be authentic. By cultivating an embracing attitude, you will be better able to express yourself in a warm and inclusive manner.

However, be sure to distinguish between being authentic and being unprofessional. You can be yourself without letting all your thoughts and feelings hang out. Maintain a professional tone in all business dealings and remember when speaking in club or outside meetings that the audience may be quite diverse and have many different sensitivities. Authentic communication includes respect for readers and listeners.

Willingness to admit mistakes is crucial to authenticity. If you mess up, own it immediately. Perhaps you assume that all young people are technical wizards, or that a quiet person does not have valuable thoughts to share. Perhaps you use a term that seems fine to you, but an audience member says that they felt uncomfortable about the usage. In these situations, it's best to apologize immediately for having unwittingly offended someone. Thank them for bringing the issue to your attention and promise to be more aware in the future. As Cordova says, "The only way to become more inclusive is to increase our awareness, educate ourselves, and face our biases head-on."

Communication is the process of conveying our thoughts into the minds and hearts of others. It's important to act with empathy and self-awareness. When we embrace and respect our audience, we can convey a variety of messages while enabling them to feel comfortable and included.

Elizabeth Danziger is founder of *Worktalk Communications Consulting*, a Los Angeles, California-based company that teaches its clients effective writing. She is the author of four books, including *Get to the Point!* 2nd edition. For more information and to sign up for her *Writamins* monthly writing tips, visit worktalk.com

Celebrating Diversity in the Middle East

How storytelling helped forge a bond between Israelis and Palestinians.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

It is December 2022, and I am in the disputed territory of the West Bank, not far from Jerusalem. I am facilitating my first storytelling workshop for Palestinian and Israeli women. Due to government regulations and safety concerns, the private farm where we are located—the headquarters of the local nongovernmental organization sponsoring the workshop—is the only spot in the area where these two warring peoples can meet.

After I tell a story and take the participants through a few trust exercises, an Israeli begins a folktale that she learned as a child from her Russian refugee grandmother. Unfortunately, she can't recall how it ends.

Fortunately, I have done my homework. I turn to the Palestinians.

"You know this story, don't you?" I ask. "There's a popular Palestinian version too, isn't there?"

They all nod. Then one of them finishes the story, in Arabic.

After her words are translated by the two interpreters, I say, "Well, my work here is done. I can return to the U.S. now." Everybody laughs. They understand the incredible thing that has just happened. Two supposed enemies told a story together, without even planning to.

A shiver runs down my spine. It is the highlight of my 25-year speaking and storytelling career, and I feel incredibly blessed.

Seeking Peace

My work with the nongovernmental organization Roots/Shorashim/Judur (known simply as Roots) began with a meeting of old friends. I knew Hanan Schlesinger when we were teenagers. When

we reconnected 40 years later, he was a rabbi with a long gray beard, living in a Jewish settlement in the West Bank of the Jordan River, on land that is neither fully Israeli nor fully Palestinian. He explained to me that he is a peace activist and the co-founder of the joint Israeli-Palestinian organization, which has a unique outlook.

"Most peace organizations want us to focus on the fact that we are all human," Rabbi Schlesinger said. "That is to say, that we are all the same. Our differences are the cause of the violence between the two sides, so those differences are minimized. But Roots believed that we have to confront those differences head-on, and grapple with two historical and national identities that contradict and deny each other.

"Only when we learn to respect the other side's self-understanding and experiences and to trust them, can we move forward in a positive direction toward a lasting peace."

With my public speaking experience, I felt I could help Israelis and Palestinians develop and use their own speaking skills, as well as bring them together for a shared experience. The organization had already done something similar with photography workshops. Then, after seeing a public presentation about the group's work and ideals, I was completely hooked. I wanted to get involved.

Because the Roots goal of mutual respect, trust, and connection is what storytelling is all about, the organization's board approved my proposal. Then COVID intervened. While I waited for permission to travel, we fine-tuned the workshops. In the meantime, I presented an eight-week public speaking/storytelling class online for the organization's staff.

Moving Forward

Fast-forward to my arrival in the West Bank—several years since I'd first gotten excited about working there. I must admit to having second and third thoughts regarding my ability to accomplish what I'd set out to do. But they soon dissipate. Over the course of the next three weeks, I have the honor of telling and discussing stories with both women and men around the theme of peace.



Israeli Liora Hadar uses storytelling to connect with others.

(We hold three workshops for women and one for both women and men.)

Two interpreters translate the participants' words into English for me, and into Hebrew and Arabic, respectively, for the Israelis and Palestinians. The participants comment on and ask questions about each other's stories. I hear both folktales and true personal stories on a range of subjects, mostly from women.

One shares her terror on learning that her son had gone on a 40-day hunger strike in an Israeli prison. Another tells how learning the bloody history of the region had caused her to move to the Middle East to reclaim her people's historic homeland. A third describes needing 100 stitches after being hit by a boulder aimed at her car while driving not far from her home.

In addition to the storytelling, we engage in improvisational theater techniques to further break down emotional barriers.

Not all of the stories are painful. One woman tells of a childhood fantasy of being on a popular radio program, while another details a perfect birthday. An Israeli talks about how the simple act of greeting Palestinian workers with the traditional words "Ramadan Kareem" during the monthlong Muslim holiday opened an ongoing dialogue with strangers. A Palestinian explains that he became involved with the Roots organization due to the kindness of an Israeli soldier when he was a child.

Naomi Dardik, an Israeli participant in the program, says of the experience, "When we make space to share our stories, we make space for dialogue. Not trying to convince someone of our rightness or to bring them to an opinion, but to relate on a human level of 'I can understand you, and you can understand me.'"

Last Chapter

At the final workshop, I perform a story that interweaves much of what I have heard throughout my visit, framed by that folktale the two women had told together at our first meeting. Afterward, as we all hug and kiss goodbye, my mind keeps returning to the childhood saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Anyone who is emotionally abused or bullied knows this is not true. Words can hurt. They are powerful enough to change not only another human being, but also the world.



Caren Neile (right) demonstrates a storytelling technique to Israeli Natalie Zacks.

Fortunately, we had used them for good. "When we listen to others' stories and share our own ... we can, for a few moments, leave our perspectives and biases [behind] and hear someone else's experience," says Dardik.

A Palestinian participant named Mousa—who asks to use only his first name for safety reasons—agrees about the importance of listening to the stories of others.

ing people understand that this powerful tool of storytelling is available to anybody. It can help people from very different backgrounds come to a place of understanding and respect.

Toastmasters can use their skills apart from traditional public speaking venues in many different ways. Maybe you, too, want to go to a war-torn area and create a safe space for people to sit and listen to each other. Or maybe

"When we make space to share our stories,
we make space for dialogue."

—NAOMI DARDIK

"In the past," he says, "I was just thinking about getting my story out without caring to listen to other people's stories. What I found in this workshop was that all the stories have two faces, even those that are not directly related to the Palestinian-Israeli relationship. Someone looks at a story from one side; the other is looking from the other. But we need to understand a story from both sides." Mousa says he also came away from the experience with an even stronger belief that building bridges is more important than creating obstacles.

Engaging in public speaking and storytelling in the West Bank was a lot more than simply being a "sage on a stage." It also included help-

your work is closer to home, bringing together coworkers, neighbors, or family members through speaking and listening.

"This series changed how I experience the world around me," Dardik says of the workshops in the West Bank. "The world would be a different place if everyone listened more to each other's stories."

I couldn't have said it better myself.

Caren Schnur Neile, Ph.D., teaches storytelling studies at Florida Atlantic University and has presented at three Toastmasters International conventions. Visit her at carenneile.com. Visit Roots at friendsofroots.net.



Bilingual Clubs Cross Borders

Five clubs meet in languages that are different than their native tongue.

By Ruth Nasrullah

Toastmasters clubs can be found in 144 countries, with members speaking dozens of languages. Most club meetings are conducted in a single national or regional language, but some clubs offer members the added challenge of bilingual meetings.

Bilingual or foreign language clubs are particularly successful in the borderless virtual environment. In fact, some were created to bring together people from different countries or regions. In other cases,

bilingual clubs have formed for more practical reasons, such as career advancement.

The Pathways learning experience is translated into 11 languages, including English: Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Spanish, Tamil, and Traditional Chinese. A new initiative, the District Translation Program, allows approved District teams to translate Pathways and other materials into native tongues not previously available, such as Hindi, Romanian, Swedish, Polish, and more.

Language is more than a communication tool. It reflects culture, history, geography, and identity. Global online clubs have given Toastmasters the opportunity to share languages and to cross borders without traveling. Here's a look at some Toastmasters clubs that emphasize language, even if it's not their own.



Dalian Japanese Toastmasters Club

Dalian Japanese Toastmasters Club

Dalian is a port city in northeast China. Over the last couple of centuries, it was in turn governed by Japan, Russia, and Great Britain. That history influences Dalian even today, according to Heidi Liu, Division K Director for District 88.

“This city has a special culture because many years ago the Japanese came to China,” says Liu. “As a result of that, there are many Japanese speakers in Dalian.”

Dalian is a thriving center for international business, including the information technology (IT) industry. IT companies based in Japan with offices in Dalian include Wipro, Infosys, IBM, Dell, HP, Ericsson, Panasonic, Sony, Accenture, Oracle, Hitachi, and Cisco. Proficiency in Japanese is a plus for Chinese employees of these firms.

Dalian Japanese Toastmasters is a Japanese language club with an all-Chinese membership whose second language is English. Most of them work for Japanese technology firms and turned to Toastmasters to improve their communication skills at work.

“My Japanese is getting better and better,” says Club President Xuewei Zhang, whose job sometimes requires the ability to speak Japanese.

According to Vice President Membership Lloyd Dong, the club is especially beneficial because tech jobs like his limit the opportunities for extensive communication in Japanese.

“We don’t have a stage for public speaking. Most of our members work in the IT industry. In our daily life, we’re

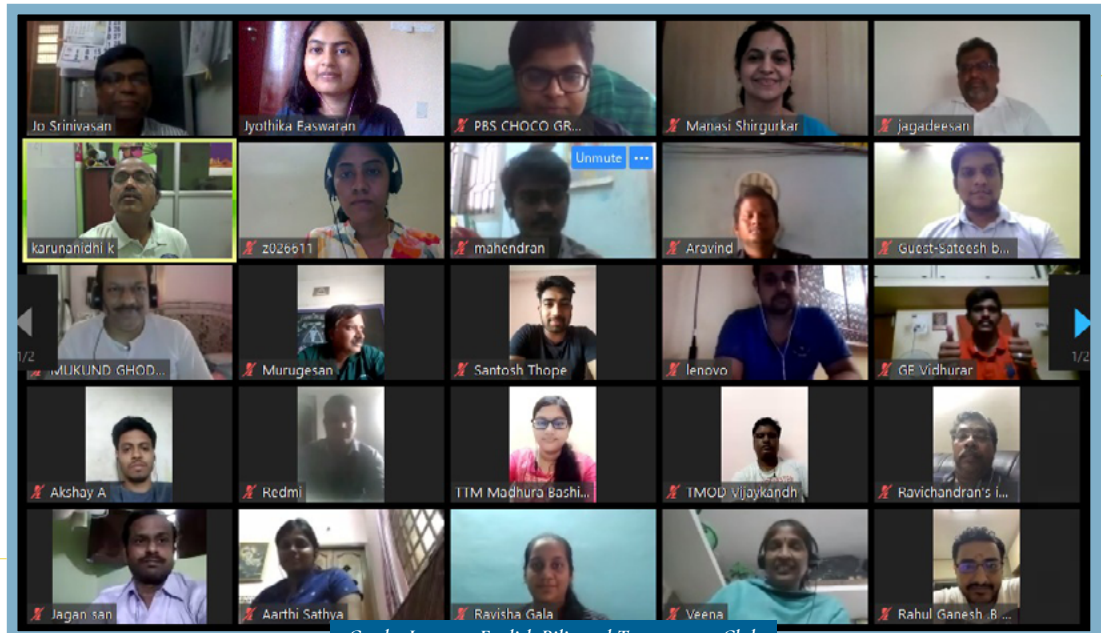
facing the computer. We’re coding, debugging, and programming, so we rarely make a speech to other people,” says Dong. The Toastmasters club gives members the opportunity to practice their Japanese for those moments when they step away from the computer.

Gemba Japanese English Bilingual Toastmasters Club

In Chennai, the capital of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, there is also a strong Japanese business presence. The Gemba Japanese English Bilingual Toastmasters Club, based in Chennai, was among the first in the city to take on the challenge of advancing fluency in Japanese. Their meetings are held in Japanese and in English, the latter being most members’ second language. Members strive to be proficient in Japanese but may use English if their Japanese is not yet fluent. The club touts the benefits of Toastmasters in learning conversational Japanese as an extension of their academic education in the language.

The former Club President and one of the founders, Karunanidhi Kasinathan, says the club is especially beneficial to college students and recent graduates preparing to enter the workforce.

“In India we have 3,000 Japanese companies and we have 20,000 students across India studying the Japanese language,” says Kasinathan.



Gemba Japanese English Bilingual Toastmasters Club

“We think that [Gemba] is a role model as a platform for these students to practice practical communication and conversation.”

Current Club President Jo Srinivasan sees the club as an opportunity for those students as well as workers who wish to pursue employment in India with Japanese businesses or by moving to Japan.

“There are five certificate level exams in Japanese language proficiency. These exams don’t test spoken Japanese,” says Srinivasan. “So, a student who is ready to go to Japan or who is interested in working in a Japanese firm may have a certificate, but when you ask them to converse with the Japanese there may be an issue.”

Amigos Toastmasters Club

Alejandro Martinez is originally from Spain. He moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2018. There, he discovered Toastmasters and joined a local English-speaking club. In early 2019, a friend suggested they form a Spanish language club, which chartered as Amigos Toastmasters.

When the COVID pandemic began, the club turned virtual, enabling people living all over the world to join. The club had members from Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, and Spain, but also counted natives of Romania, Portugal, Great Britain, and Canada in its membership.

One of them was Khalid Amin, DTM, from Manama, Bahrain. He attended college in Texas in the 1980s and learned some Spanish there, but despite being from a country whose national language is Arabic, he considers English his default language and hasn’t used Spanish much since living in the U.S.

When the pandemic started, Amin began searching for a virtual activity to keep him engaged and came across the Amigos Toastmasters club in Copenhagen. He joined the club in part to stay busy and in part to improve his Spanish. He is now fluent enough in Spanish to participate comfortably in club meetings.

“The purpose of Toastmasters is to help people build confidence in speaking in front of others, and it can be in any language they want.”

—SAPNA OHRI, DTM

“I was never fluent [before] but I was able to converse with people,” he says. “I was able to read and write but it was very basic.”

Even before he was proficient in writing and delivering prepared speeches in Spanish, the club benefited him during the isolation of the early days of the pandemic. He felt he was among friends, and that’s by design. Martinez says that the Amigos Toastmasters founders emphasized its positive and collegial atmosphere. A fellow club member encouraged this, pointing out that Amigos—Spanish for friends—should be true to its name. “He told me, ‘Alex, the purpose of this club should be to keep this atmosphere of friendship,’” says Martinez.

The club also extends that spirit to cultural exchange. They adopted a “country of the day” meeting theme, where the Toastmaster of the Day selects a country to highlight. They also shine a light on various special occasions, like Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), a holiday widely celebrated in Mexico.

Airoli Bilingual Toastmasters Club

India is a truly multilingual country. According to the country’s 2011 census, 26% of Indian residents are bilingual and 7% are trilingual. Hindi is the most widely spoken and is the first language of more than 40% of Indians and the official language of nine Indian states.

The Airoli Bilingual Toastmasters Club, chartered in 2020 in the western Indian city of Mumbai, meets twice a month and alternates

meetings in Hindi and English.

The club’s goal was and is to help members increase their fluency in Hindi. The official language there is Marathi, although as in most of India, people in that region speak more than one language. But not all of them are fluent in Hindi.

Sapna Ohri, DTM, a charter member and the club’s current Sergeant at Arms, was in that position. She is originally from the northern state of Punjab and her mother tongue is Punjabi, although she spoke some Hindi. When she moved to Mumbai,





she began speaking primarily English, as her job requires. When the Airoli Bilingual club was formed, its District comprised seven Indian states with multiple languages, and the club offered the opportunity to polish the country's most-spoken language, Hindi.

"I believe that public speaking should not be limited to only one language," says Ohri. "The purpose of Toastmasters is to help people build confidence in speaking in front of others, and it can be in any language they want."

Tokyo Hangul Toastmasters Club

You can fly over the Sea of Japan from Seoul to Tokyo in a little over two and a half hours. Despite their geographic proximity, South Korea and Japan have at times had strained relations. Over the years, stereotypes and misunderstandings have been circulated. The Tokyo Hangul Toastmasters Club, based in Yochiyo, a town near Tokyo, was founded in an effort to overcome such misunderstandings.

Trent Taeryeon Jung, DTM, a resident of Seoul, South Korea, lived and worked in Tokyo for several years. While there, he joined a Japanese-speaking Toastmasters club and on returning to Seoul, reached out to his friends in Tokyo about forming a Japanese and Korean language club. The club chartered in 2020 and meets once a month, devoting one hour to Korean and one to Japanese.

"In Japan I met so many nice people and when I came back to Korea, I wanted to become a bridge between the two countries," says Jung. "Unfortunately, as in many places, there are people who do not like other countries because of misunderstanding and prejudice."

One of the best ways he could envision doing this was through Toastmasters. Club members not only improve their Korean and Japanese language fluency they also polish their public speaking skills. And in the spirit of brotherhood the club was formed to encourage, they also have cultural exchanges at meetings, focusing on areas such as food, travel, or celebrations.

"A Japanese person introduces Korean culture in Japanese, and Koreans

"In Japan I met so many nice people and when I came back to Korea, I wanted to become a bridge between the two countries."

—TRENT TAERYEON JUNG, DTM

introduce Japanese culture in Korean," says Club Secretary Yoshiko Sugita, who lives in Utsunomiya, Japan. "For example, some speeches focused on Korean railways in the travelogue section and Japanese obento in the food culture section."

Meetings have taken place in both Tokyo and Seoul, and always in the spirit of forging bonds and friendships.

"We come together to celebrate the brotherhood between the two groups," says Jong. "This kind of cultural exchange is, I think, a unique and fantastic thing."

Ruth Nasrullah is a freelance journalist and Toastmaster in Texas. She is president of the Houston chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and a co-founder of the COVID-19 Wall of Memories. Read more about her at ruthnasrullah.com.



It's Never Too Late— Or Too Early—To Learn

Two Toastmasters, ages 18 and 96, share common speaking ground.

By Susan Budig

When Kingston Fletcher and Manny Megerssa joined Marsh Winds Toastmasters Club in Minnetonka, Minnesota, they shared determination and a common goal: to improve their public speaking skills. Yet in another way, they couldn't have been more different: Fletcher, a retired business executive, is 96 years old. Megerssa? He's 18 and soon to be a high school graduate.

That's a huge gap. Yet the example of these two members in this club reflects how Toastmasters can help and hold purpose for people at all stages in life.

Each had a different motivation for joining Marsh Winds. Megerssa wanted to tame his speaking nerves and nail his senior graduation speech. Fletcher wanted to stay active and not let the skills he had polished over a 34-year career as a marketing executive with Procter & Gamble get rusty. Staying active in the club, which he joined in 2017, at a mere 91, would help “keep him off the streets in retirement,” he jokes.

Fletcher's initial forays into prepared speeches included regaling fellow members with stories about his extensive travel for work. His many speeches explored what he learned while working for Procter & Gamble and living in Venezuela, Germany, Mexico, Canada, England, Italy, and Japan.

Another tangible way he found to use his public speaking skills was at the biannual alumni meetings of his secondary school alma mater, a college-preparatory academy in Minneapolis, Minnesota. After school administrators talked, they invited audience questions. Fletcher, wanting to highlight the school and drive interest, often stepped up with thought-provoking questions to engage the audience.

“Toastmasters helped me bring out facts [about the school] I'm interested in, and then asking questions I thought would be of interest to others,” he says.

Those thoughts, along with many other lifetime experiences, have gone into his recently published book, *Divergent*

“Finding a club can be challenging. It can be scary. When people are older, that means they know more.”

—MANNY MEGERSSA, ON JOINING A CLUB OF SEASONED MEMBERS

His cheeky remark belies his earnest approach toward self-improvement. Despite years of traveling on international business and interacting with colleagues around the world, Fletcher joined Toastmasters because he felt he still had something to learn about public speaking. “I learned different speaking techniques, sharpened my ability to converse and speak publicly, and made it a point not to use filler words,” he says about his experience in the club, which he stepped away from at the onset of COVID.

Paths: A Life Reimagined. Here he applies his storytelling skills to print—detailing career lessons, philanthropic and literary endeavors, enthusiastic participation in Toastmasters speech contests, and even a competitive racing career on Minnesota's Lake Minnetonka, where he captained a one-design racing sailboat until he was 89.

With so many adventures to recount, Fletcher's book is a nod to time-honored Toastmasters advice: Tap into the past and tell stories.



Kingston Fletcher

Like Fletcher, Manny Megerssa is well traveled. Born in Ethiopia, he emigrated to the United States around the age of 12, with his mother and younger brother. He did not speak a word of English when he arrived. Yet he has an ear for language and within a few years, his speech became indiscernible from that of his peers.

With his senior speech on the horizon, Megerssa knew he needed a place to learn and practice confident speechmaking. “I discovered Toastmasters in my junior year of high school,” he explains. “I figured out the more you practice, the better you get. I wanted to join a speaking class in school, but they didn’t have that, so I searched online and found Toastmasters.”

He noticed that when he visited clubs, the members were usually much older than he was, “but that didn’t stop me,” he says. “Finding a club can be challenging. It can be scary. When people are older, that means they know more.”

He visited seven clubs, narrowed it down to three, then picked Marsh Winds. But he still worried they might not accept him.

However, Megerssa, who is younger than the grandchildren of many Marsh Winds Toastmasters, intuitively found a way to capitalize on one of the club’s prime attributes—its seasoned members. Interacting with them allowed Megerssa to tap into another Toastmasters hallmark: gaining experience and confidence in a safe, encouraging environment.

“The people there engaged me, they were well organized, they provided helpful feedback, and they started on time,” he says.

He didn’t realize how much he would benefit just from talking to club members, and by listening to their Table Topics® impromptu stories and prepared speeches. The club experience has even given him a glimpse into what his own professional future might look like, he says.

Megerssa stepped away from the club due to senior-year school demands, but he has continued to work on his graduation speech by practicing it with other members. As a fellow club member, I’ve heard his presentation and especially like this line, “If you want to be something you’ve never been, you have to do something you’ve never done.”

I believe Megerssa and Fletcher both took that advice to heart during their Toastmasters journeys. They never hesitated to try and learn from new experiences—never shied away from giving speeches and seeking constructive feedback.

Fletcher and Megerssa exemplify the way Toastmasters can help and hold purpose for people at all stages in life.



Manny Megerssa

Megerssa says even after he finishes college, his life is likely to include Toastmasters. “Public speaking is like going to the gym. You have to be consistent; you have to train for it every day.”

Susan Budig has been a member of Marsh Winds Toastmasters in Minnetonka, Minnesota, since 2006. Since then, she has held every club officer role, chaired club speech contests, and served as Area Director. She writes for *Mshale*, a Minnesota newspaper serving African immigrants since 2003.

Reduce Barriers for People With Hearing Loss

Make your club meetings welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

Can you hear me now?

Hearing loss affects more than 1.5 billion people worldwide, nearly 20% of the global population. According to the World Health Organization, that number could rise to 2.5 billion—or one in four people—by 2050. Major causes of hearing loss include congenital or early onset childhood hearing loss, chronic middle ear infections, age-related hearing loss, ototoxic drugs that damage the inner ear, and noise-induced hearing loss. Hearing loss can be mild, moderate, severe, or profound (deaf), and can be in one ear (unilateral) or both ears (bilateral).

People with hearing loss can feel isolated, frustrated, misunderstood, and embarrassed when they mishear. But only about one out of five people who would benefit from a hearing aid actually wears one. “A lot of people won’t acknowledge hearing loss and won’t wear hearing aids,” says Harry Wolfe, a member of Audible Talkers Toastmasters and Park Central Toastmasters Club, both in Arizona. As someone who struggles with hearing loss and does wear hearing aids, Wolfe says, “There is a stigma that hearing aids are a sign of getting older.”

But not all hearing loss is age-related.

My husband, Kim Windingland, DTM, has had hearing loss since he was a child, but he didn’t get hearing aids until he was an adult. His hearing loss also affected the way he spoke and enunciated his words.

Early in his career, a coworker asked him, “Where are you from?”

My husband replied, “I grew up here in the U.S.”

The coworker said, “Then why don’t you speak proper English?”

Ouch.

That stinging question finally motivated him to get hearing aids. He wanted to communicate better and to be treated with respect.

However, it’s not just the responsibility of those experiencing hearing loss to garner respect. It’s important for others to show respect, and one way to do so is

in how you refer to people with hearing loss. “A person with hearing loss” or “a person who is hard of hearing” is acceptable. Don’t use the term “hearing impaired,” as that can make people with hearing loss feel deficient. “You can imply that people with hearing loss are abnormal, even just by saying you have normal hearing,” says Wolfe. If you don’t have hearing loss, you can refer to your own abilities as “typical hearing” instead of “normal hearing.”

There are plenty of ways Toastmasters members can help reduce communication barriers during meetings and in everyday conversations. Below are tips to improve the experience, both in person and online, for a person with hearing loss.

In-Person Communication

- Get the person’s attention (say their name).
- Look toward them with your face well lit.
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- Minimize background noise or move closer in a noisy environment.
- Speak clearly, slowly, and distinctly, but naturally.
- Speak to their “good ear” if they hear better in one ear.
- Rephrase if they don’t understand. Don’t just repeat the same thing over and over.
- Don’t dismiss them if they ask you to repeat (avoid saying, “Never mind.”).
- Avoid sudden changes in topic. Provide context.
- Provide information in writing (directions, schedules, requirements, etc.).
- Don’t assume that they know where a sound is coming from. Spatial hearing loss is common, and sometimes even worse with hearing aids.

Why is it important to face people with hearing loss when speaking? Because they understand speech not only by what they can hear but also by interpreting the movement of lips, eyes, jaw, and tongue, plus facial expressions, body language, and the context of the conversation. Most people with typical hearing also process some speech

information from visual and context clues, so facing all communication partners is a best practice for effective communication.

It may be tempting to speak much louder or much more slowly, or to over-enunciate when talking with a person with hearing loss. Don't. Louder isn't always better, especially when it becomes shouting. Shouting is rude and distorts your voice and mouth movements, making it harder to understand you. Plus, shouting can cause some hearing aid users discomfort. Speaking extremely slowly or over-enunciating also distorts your mouth movements and is patronizing.

Online Communication

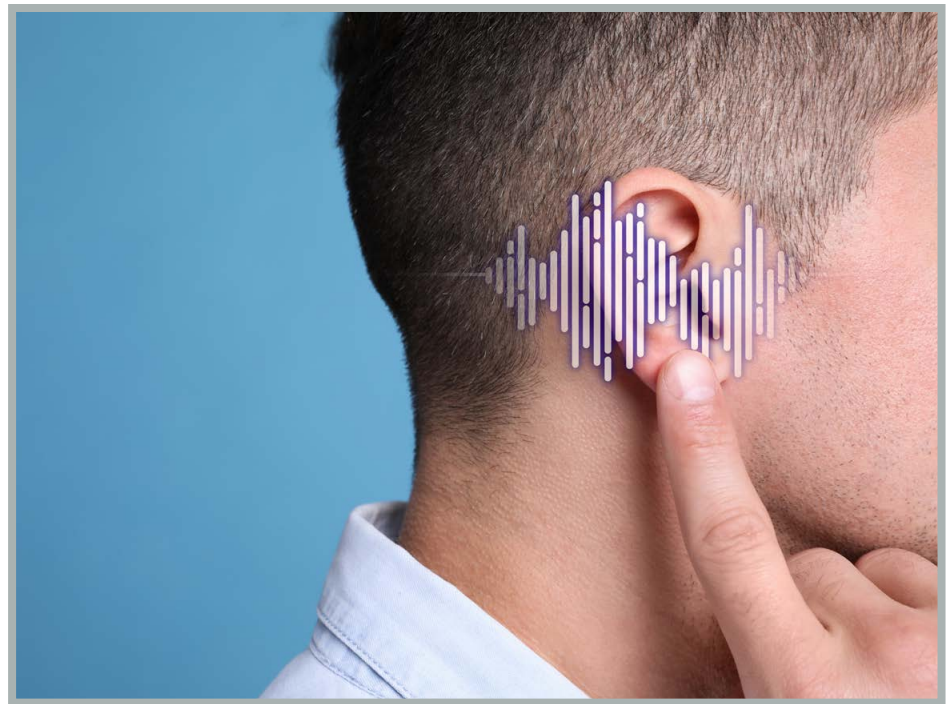
- Keep your camera on, face well lit, and mouth visible.
- Make sure participants are muted when not speaking.
- Have only one person speak at a time.
- Use a good microphone.
- Use the chat function for clarification or to supplement information.
- Send an agenda in advance of the meeting.
- Use captioning tools.

People with hearing loss often prefer online meetings, especially if closed captioning is used. "I get more from virtual meetings with closed captioning than I do in person," says KR Miller, who has hearing loss and is a member of Meadowlark Club in Topeka, Kansas.

If you host Zoom meetings, as I do for my two clubs, you can enable automatic speech recognition captions (which Zoom also calls "Live Transcription") in your account settings. You only need to do this once, but it must be enabled before a meeting to have captioning available. Then, people who want to see the subtitles can click on the Closed Captioning symbol (CC) to view the subtitles (or click on the three dots for "More" to find "captions"). As of now, automatic captioning is not available yet for breakout rooms.

Do you have members who speak English as a second language? Captioning is also helpful for them! It improves word recognition and listening comprehension.

English is the default language when using automated captions, but other languages can be selected. Visit the online edition for more information and a video showing how to implement captions.



Whether you attend a meeting in person or online, if you are a person with hearing loss, see the tips below to reduce communication barriers for yourself.

grammarian or Ah-Counter. You might offer to take on a role differently (e.g., non-verbal communication evaluator). If there are members you have a hard time understanding, you can

Making sure your club has a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible environment means that all participants can experience the benefits of Toastmasters.

1 Self-identify. Tell people that you have hearing loss and how they can help you understand them better when they speak to you (e.g., "Please face me when you speak.").

2 Self-advocate. Ask for accommodations (e.g., Automatic Speech Recognition captions in Zoom, information in writing, microphones).

3 Use tools. Use assistive devices, apps, or services (noise-canceling headphones, speech-to-text apps, personal amplification devices, and Communication Access Realtime Translation [CART], where available).

4 Position. Select your seat carefully at events (better line of sight, near the front, less background noise). In online meetings, use Speaker mode to enlarge the speaker's image.

It's okay to avoid or adjust specific club meeting roles. Let your Vice President Education (VPE) know if you are uncomfortable performing a particular meeting role, such as

ask your VPE to avoid scheduling you as those members' speech evaluator.

Finally, be kind to yourself when you mishear and be gracious to others. "I'm always having to educate other people about hearing loss," says Miller, "but I also realize I need to be gracious and understand that other people may be uncomfortable when I need extra time to understand them."

It may take a little extra effort to reduce communication barriers for people with hearing loss, but it is worth it. They are worth it. Making sure your club has a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible environment means that all participants can experience the benefits of Toastmasters.

Can you hear me now?

Diane Windingland, DTM, is a presentation coach from St. Paul, Minnesota, and a member of two clubs: PowerTalk Toastmasters and Readership Toastmasters. Learn more at virtuallanguagecoach.com.

Sophistry 101

Welcome to the language hall of mirrors.

By John Cadley

If I were a Sophist and you were to quote Sir Walter Scott's words "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive," I would reply: "You say that like it's a bad thing." Weaving tangled webs of words for the express purpose of deception is exactly what sophistry is all about. Not that I encourage such a devious rhetorical tactic. Yes, Toastmasters practice the art of persuasive speech, but always in the cause of the just, the pure, and the righteous, even when questioned by the Internal Revenue Service about their tax deductions. I'm quite sure this is true.

My intention, rather, is to help you recognize when you are being bamboozled so as to avoid any unpleasant consequences, like when someone flips a coin and says, "Heads I win, tails you lose," and you call "Heads!" The premise *seemed* to make sense but ... well, it didn't, did it?

That's sophistry in its simplest form—a proposition that sounds plausible and yet is demonstrably false. In practice it's usually much more subtle and sophisticated, as would befit a skill that began with the ancient Greek philosophers. The search for absolute, universal truth that so engaged other deep thinkers of their day was viewed by the Sophists as the proverbial blind man searching in a dark room for a black cat that isn't there. The only "truth," said the Sophists, is that which each person derives individually from their own personal experience. You say the room is warm; I say it feels chilly. We're both "right," whatever that means.

Hence, in a society where public debate was the predominant method for settling an issue, the Sophists, with their finely honed skills in rhetoric, were basically arguers for hire. Pay them to make your case and they would gladly do so—unless your opponent offered them more, in which case they would



argue *his* case. Unethical? Immoral? I'm a Sophist. What's your point?

Politicians are known for sophistry, of course. There's no one like a senator to get you cheering wildly without any idea why you're so happy. Advertisers, too. Add one nanoscopic ingredient to a product, call it "new and

Toastmasters practice the art of persuasive speech, but always in the cause of the just, the pure, and the righteous, even when questioned by the Internal Revenue Service about their tax deductions.

improved," and charge 10% more. My personal favorite is cryptocurrency, which is sophistry without words: "I'm rich!"/"What can you buy?"/"I don't know!"

The legal profession is where sophistry reaches its zenith—and that is not a criticism. Sophistry is not lying. It is using every bit of

logic, persuasion, reasoning, and eloquence at your command to serve the interests of your client. This is precisely what lawyers do—what they are, in fact, legally *obligated* to do:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, my client is accused of stealing \$547.36 from his office Toys for Tots fund. The law says that to convict him, you must be certain of his guilt **beyond a reasonable doubt**. You have heard that an eyewitness saw him steal the money ... that his DNA was found on the cash box ... that he said, 'I did it and I'm sorry.' Seemingly damning facts, but there are other facts: Only 35% of the adult population has 20/20 vision. Thus, the odds are strong that our eyewitness did not have perfect vision and without prescription glasses would, technically, have been visually impaired.

Can such a person be certain of what they saw?

"As for my client's DNA ... DNA evidence is 99% accurate. Not 100%! *Just* 99% and thus room for error. My client said, 'I did it.' Did what? He said, 'I'm sorry.' For what? He didn't say. Isn't it reasonable to assume we've all done things we're sorry for that are not crimes? In conclusion, to convict you are **legally** required to have reasonable doubt. I have given it to you. Thus, if you vote to convict, YOU are breaking the law. The defense rests."

This is sophistry pure and simple, an attempt, through specious argument, misleading words ("just" 99%!?), and twisted logic to turn an open-and-shut case of pernicious malfeasance into an Agatha Christie whodunit. *You* wouldn't be fooled by this, nor would I ... except for those eyeglasses. *Were* they the right prescription? Your honor, can we see the evidence again?

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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Take our online course to learn the strategies that will help make your book a best seller. For each strategy, a detailed audio and/or video explanation of the idea is included.




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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