

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | SEPTEMBER 2023

TOASTMASTER®



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Dip Your Toes In and Rediscover Toastmasters

While thinking about what to write for my first column, I kept coming back to a quote from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “No one ever steps into the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man.”

This is also how I see our organization at the moment. We are not the same organization we were in 2019; so much has happened to the world and to each of us. We’ve all been impacted in some way.

And that’s also true of Toastmasters.

Our organization has had to change to help us continue to benefit from the program. And as we emerge into this post-pandemic world, the organization will have to continue changing to help us through this time. It’s not the same organization it was, just as we are not the same people that we were.

We’re in a new dynamic environment, with more online activity in the workplace. Our values have changed because of what we’ve experienced, and as Toastmasters, we may now belong to clubs that no longer meet in person but meet online or in a hybrid format. In fact, I’m now a member of three clubs: two hybrid and one online. That’s something new, but something that has enriched me more than I would have known earlier.

I would encourage all members to take the experiences they’ve had in the past few years and rediscover the organization.

In many ways, reflecting on what has changed is a bit like rereading a book—each time we read it we see something different. We take the experiences we’ve had since the first time reading it and bring them to the second time, allowing us to see and understand things differently.

It’s also the same when we take a leadership role for the second or the third time. The first time I was President of my home club, I’d been a member for only a couple of years. The second time was the year after I had been District Director. And so I came with a completely different perspective of the organization.

Technically, same river, same club—but it wasn’t the same river or the same club, because I wasn’t the same person.

In this new season of Toastmasters, in this post-pandemic world, I encourage all members to take their experiences and rediscover the organization; rediscover themselves as fresh people within the organization; rediscover themselves as fresh leaders.

How have you grown and changed? Bring that growth to your position in the organization, whether that’s as a mentor or a club or District leader, or someone just working the program to get the best you can for the life that you have today.

I’ll be with you on the journey.

Morag Mathieson, DTM

2023-2024 International President

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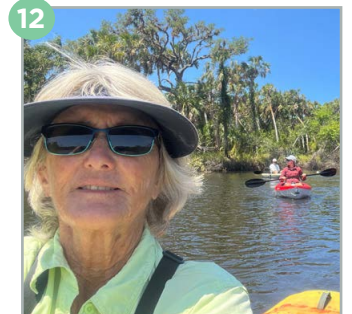
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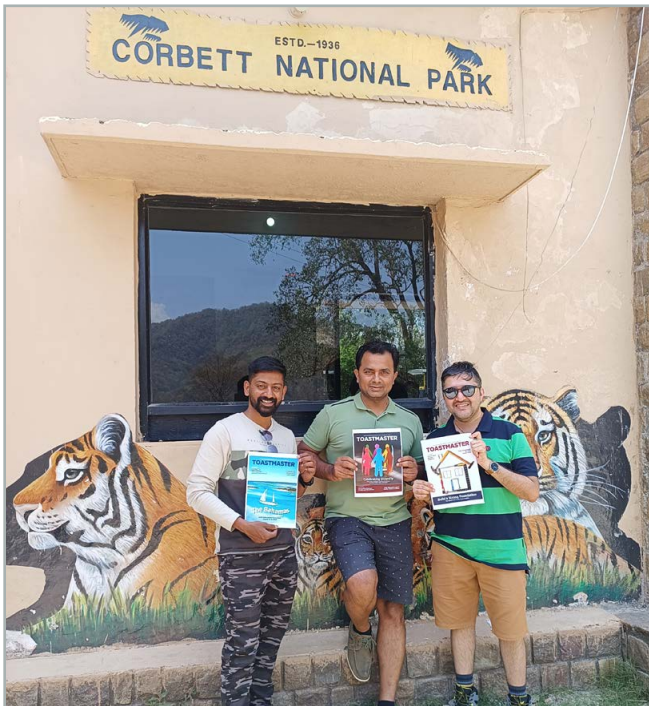
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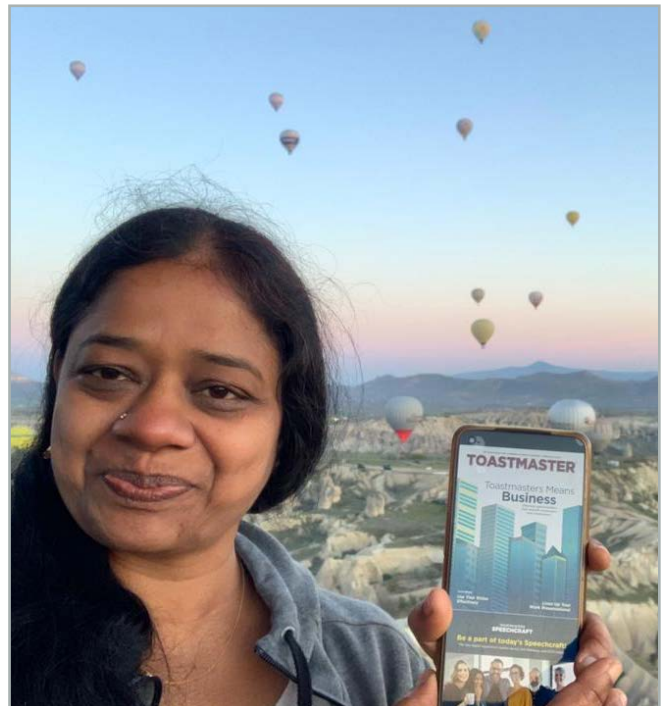
BRISBANE SUNRISE SPEAKERS in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, host a “Room and Zoom” hybrid meeting after a recent rebranding. To help attract new members, the club expanded its online social media presence, updated its website, and welcomed guests and members from the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, India, and Mongolia. The club also conducted an intensive two-day Speechcraft course over 800 miles from Brisbane for staff and volunteers of the Queensland Rural Fire and Emergency Services.



Traveling Toastmaster



ADITHYA S, SAI WARE, and **VARUN MALAVALLI** (left to right) of Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, visit the Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve in Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand, India.



SUMATHY RAJAKUMAR of Doha, Qatar, rides in a hot air balloon over the lunar landscape of Cappadocia, Turkey.

Path of Opportunities

Kelly Kaur finds her voice and purpose through Toastmasters' speech contests.

By Stephanie Darling

Kelly Kaur admits she's been "hooked" on Toastmasters speech contests since she joined her first club more than 15 years ago. She was even a semifinalist in the International Speech Contest and competed in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2017. Yet of all her experiences onstage, she considers finding her own voice perhaps the most powerful gift of all.

"It's not about winning or losing," she says. "It is about being in that glorious moment when your inner voice rises to meet the outer world, and stories and lives intersect in the most beautiful ways imaginable."

Kaur began to discover her voice as a young woman in Singapore. She wanted to study overseas rather than follow the wishes of her traditional father: an arranged marriage, children, and a household to manage. Kaur dreamed of a different path. And so, she gathered the courage to use the power of one little word: "No." (Which she later turned into a notable District 42 speech.)

"I whispered *no* to social expectations and to my traditional and conservative family and father," Kaur says.

Her dream of studying internationally came true—she earned a bachelor's and master's degree in English from the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. It was an achievement her father later both supported and funded, and it set Kaur on the path to discover who she was, and what mattered to her.

"My degrees have given me the independence, financial possibilities, courage, strength, and a chance to redefine the role of a traditional Indian woman," she says.

Today, Kaur teaches English at Mount Royal University in Calgary. She's a published author and poet and is currently curating an anthology of African art and writing for the International Human Rights Art Festival in New York City. Some of her works are on the Lunar Codex (time capsule) project, which will be going to the moon in November 2023 and November 2024. She was a nominee for the Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Awards, given by

Canadian Immigrant magazine.

Yet in the beginning, the move from Singapore to Calgary for school was a culture shock, Kaur remembers. "There were moments of utter loneliness and

confusion. I was apprehensive about my voice, my accent, of being different."

A friend cajoled her to attend a Toastmasters meeting as a guest. Kaur joined, yet still felt insecure.

"I started as someone who had no clue about Toastmasters, or the confidence to stand up on a stage. I was an immigrant woman with a different accent and strange stories. I worried that I did not fit in."

Unsurprisingly, her fellow Toastmasters didn't feel that way at all. So Kaur stayed on, came to love speaking contests, and finally found her authentic voice and purpose in speeches that celebrated human diversity.

Kaur won District 42's Evaluation Contest, and later captured the District Table Topics® Contest title four times. Later, her speech about the power of the word "no" earned her third place in the District's International Speech Contest.

Then in 2017, to her "utter shock and delight," she won the District's International Speech Contest and competed at the International Convention in Vancouver.

"When I stood on the international stage, I felt like I was in a dream. It was such a long track for a young girl from Singapore. To hear my voice on the world stage with a large international audience sharing my message about human connections—it was the beginning of the power of possibilities for me," she says.

Kaur credits Toastmasters for building her speaking prowess, confidence, and ability to connect with audiences. Her speeches led her to realize another of her dreams—to be a fiction writer. Her first novel, *Letters to Singapore*, was published in May 2022, and her children's book, *Howdy, I'm Harnam Singh Hari*, about the first Sikh pioneer in Calgary, will be published in spring 2024.

"Toastmasters is a bold, big, beautiful bridge for me; it gave me the literal, symbolic, and metaphorical voice to be heard," Kaur says. While she was once apprehensive about seeming different, Toastmasters led her to celebrate differences.

"Toastmasters is the perfect path for those who walk on precarious bridges of difference and diversity because Toastmasters builds confidence and encourages unique voices for any and every speaker in the world," she explains.

"Every time a Toastmaster stands up and gives a speech, they carve a notch on their wall of life."

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



Kelly Kaur

Turning Compliance into Competition

How one District spread brand awareness.

By Mayuri Assudani, DTM

We believe our posters and designs should portray what the organization stands for.

During my term as 2018–2019 Area Director in District 98 (India), I regularly came across Toastmasters posters that were not brand compliant. As hard as it can be to adhere to Toastmasters' brand standards, it's vitally important.

A brand brings uniformity and recognition across all borders. It binds the community. The mere mention of a brand sends an image to our mind, and connects us with the product or organization. Even the colors, fonts, and other guidelines of Toastmasters are designed to convey what the organization stands for: leadership, dedication, and empowerment.

To ensure that clubs in my Area adhered to brand guidelines, our Vice Presidents Public Relations (VPPRs) were asked to share their clubs' posters in a WhatsApp group before posting them on social media. This helped make sure all marketing materials met the brand guidelines and created a cohesive look throughout the Area.

After such success with this group, our District leader team extended the same practice to the entire District and created a WhatsApp group of all the club VPPRs in the District.

Our District takes brand compliance seriously. We believe our posters and designs should portray what the organization stands for and should not dilute the essence of Toastmasters. We encourage our VPPRs to keep in mind visual hierarchy: The Toastmasters International logo should stand out and the other elements should adhere to the appropriate color, fonts, etc.

When I became District 126's 2022–2023 Public Relations Manager, I wanted to go one step further and spread even more awareness about branding. I felt our VPPRs were not appropriately rewarded or recognized for all their hard work and creativity, so the District hosted a PR contest—held live—for creating the best poster. The contest wasn't difficult to execute and is something any District can undertake.

The Preparation

Our concept was to have contestants create a poster, live and on camera, based on one of two themes that would be provided at the start of the contest. We invited VPPRs to participate and sent out a Google Form for signups. Registered contestants received an email with the District's PR contest rulebook and the guide and ballot used by judges. There were seven criteria for judging: purpose of the design, visual appeal, color, font, size, logo, and images.

Contestants were instructed to keep their camera on at all times during the contest. We used Canva as the design tool, since many participants already used the platform to design their posters, and shared YouTube links

ahead of time to a PR Masterclass we designed to train members on using Canva. Finally, we created individual editable Canva links for all registered contestants.

During the Contest

The contest was conducted on Zoom with the same number of breakout rooms as contestants. The individual Canva links were sent to the contestants five minutes before the contest. Contestants could choose one theme for their poster: 1) a joint meeting between a book club and a Toastmasters club, or 2) "Unity in Diversity" to represent how India is a country with many cultures and languages yet there is unity within the single nation.

Contestants were sent to individual breakout rooms and had one hour to create their design. Judges were able to join breakout rooms to observe the work in progress. On Canva, it is possible to verify whether two or more people are logged in and working on the same design, which allowed us to ensure no contestant received help from anyone.

After the Contest

At the end of the hour, contestants were asked to submit their completed design via a Google Form. (The Canva link was also made non-editable.) Our judges individually scored each design on the seven judging criteria. Scores were tallied and we had our winners.

All contestants received a certificate of participation and individual feedback on their design. The winners were also recognized during the District Annual Conference in June 2023. While we didn't experience any technical difficulties or major challenges with the contest, we realized that one hour was too short to design something incredibly creative. Contestants not only enjoyed the challenge but came away with a better awareness of the importance of branding.

This contest helped bring awareness to our Toastmasters brand and why it is important. Our organization thrives on its professionalism, something that can be conveyed through marketing materials. The contest proved that using brand guidelines can result in truly aesthetically appealing designs.

We have now successfully conducted this PR contest twice as a way to continually encourage the proper adherence to brand guidelines.

Mayuri Assudani, DTM, was the 2022–2023 Public Relations Manager for District 126 and is a member of Loyal Toastmasters Club in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India. You can reach her at assudani.mayuri@gmail.com.

Building Our Club Through Brainstorming Sessions

How we use the *Toastmaster* magazine to engage, inspire, and recruit members.

By Gemma Costello

Have you found yourself forgetting to read the *Toastmaster* magazine since it transitioned to an online format? It's something that my fellow club members and I have been struggling with. But in January 2022, I came up with a solution.

Vox Populi is a thriving club of 27 members who currently meet in person twice a month at a hotel in Dublin, Ireland. The club has existed for over a decade, and while our membership numbers fell during the pandemic, we regained ground since returning to in-person meetings thanks to the Trojan efforts of our Executive Committee.

Since 2022 I have hosted four mini-brainstorming sessions during club meetings to help reactivate interest in the *Toastmaster* magazine and as a tool to drive recruitment. I generally deliver a session during meetings where we may have a gap in the agenda (e.g., we only have one speech that night or perhaps none at all). I select an article based on my knowledge of the members, their interests, and what would be relevant to their work/careers, etc. I choose a different article each session and outline the main points captured by the author. I then invite input from the audience and facilitate an interactive discussion around the points raised in the article.

Each session takes approximately 10 minutes, and at the beginning and end, I encourage members to check the online magazine for continuing professional development ideas. Club members have said the sessions serve as a valuable reminder of the great resources available in the *Toastmaster* magazine. And we all learn something by discussing the articles together.

Inspiration for Goal Setting

In a recent session, I chose an article that I hoped would inspire members to think about and plan for their Toastmasters journey this year: "[It's Time to Get SMART](#)" by Greg Lewis, DTM, from the August 2022 edition. I highlighted how Lewis had broken down the



Gemma Costello (center, holding digital magazine) poses with members of Vox Populi.

acronym SMART—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Bound—and provided examples of how these concepts applied to setting goals in Toastmasters.

I then described my own typical speech-planning cycle:

- One week of writing, editing, and finalizing a speech.
- Two weeks of practicing my speech with my husband (a fellow club member)—at least 10 run-throughs before actual delivery.

We had a good discussion based on this article, with members sharing their own personal experiences of goal setting and highlighting any issues they had with their speech preparation. This was extremely beneficial for the members and guests alike.

At that night's meeting, five guests in attendance all expressed an interest in receiving information on how to join Toastmasters. Three of them joined Vox Populi following the meeting.

During our magazine brainstorming sessions, I also invite members to contact me if they are interested in one-to-one coaching with myself or another member of the committee as part of a mentoring program for speech preparation. This is an effective marketing tool, demonstrating to our guests how proactive our club is.

I recommend hosting brainstorming sessions to help members further develop their skill set in terms of learning how to facilitate sessions as well as adding more engagement to your club meetings. As Club Vice President Public Relations Susie Kelly put it, "Toastmasters is ultimately about developing ourselves, so the brainstorming sessions have allowed everyone to embrace the true nature of the organization, as well as connect and get inspired together."

What are you waiting for? Why not give it a go in your own club!

Gemma Costello manages the mentoring program for Vox Populi in Dublin, Ireland.

The [Toastmaster magazine](#) is available in both PDF and digital format, allowing you to read it anytime, anywhere. As a member, you should receive an email at the start of the month reminding you that the online edition is available. (Don't see it in your inbox? [Request one here.](#)) When you land on the magazine webpage, you'll find the latest content under Featured Articles; keep scrolling for additional stories to help you with work, club meetings, and interpersonal communication.

The Art of the Performance

Excite your audience with a compelling story.

By Bill Brown, DTM

Stories are an important part of many speeches and much has been written on how to craft a great one. Most of that centers on the words you choose to create a compelling story. But if you are relating your story via the spoken word, how you perform that story is also very important.

A story is not a narrative where you are merely recounting facts. “This happened, then this happened, then this happened—blah, blah, blah.” A story is an opportunity to bring your listeners into the event and enable them to experience it for themselves.

Two of the best ways to do that are through dialogue and an appropriate amount of drama. Here are four ways you can engage your listeners through words and actions.

First, make the story seem real. This is not a time to sound bored or disinterested.

If this is a personal story, I, the listener, want to feel that it is meaningful to you, the speaker. I want to feel that you really care about it. Note that I said “feel,” not “think.” You need to convey that sense through your expressiveness. As you tell us the story, relive it in your own mind.

If this is a true story about someone else, let me sense that you care about this as well.

If it is an obviously fictionalized story, this is where you can have some real fun, especially if there is a tongue-in-cheek component to your story. This is where you can exaggerate and get away with it.

As a listener, I want to live the experience myself. To provide that experience, you must appeal to as many of my senses as you can. Describe the events in vivid detail. Use elements of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste as much as you can.

Second, don’t just narrate the story, include characters, and let them speak for themselves. Use dialogue. Give each individual

a unique voice and personality. If you are recounting a real story, the characterizations need not be exact unless your audience knows the individuals involved. The point of the story is the important part.

If it is a fictional story, you have more flexibility in your characterizations. If the story requires it, give them standard personalities, although they could be slightly exaggerated.



A story is an opportunity to bring your listeners into the event and enable them to experience it for themselves.

However, if the story allows it, make them bigger than life or, perhaps, strongly exaggerated, a caricature even.

Be sure to communicate the emotions of each character. The spoken word gives you the opportunity to transfer these emotions into the minds of your listeners.

Third, add in a sense of wonderment.

This is one aspect that I look for in a story. Merriam-Webster’s definition of “wonder” is “exciting amazement or admiration.”

If you are rendering a story in a corporate setting, perhaps a sales presentation, this may only take the form of slight excitement. In a more casual setting, particularly if it is a humorous story, you could be more expressive. Think how you would tell a story to a group of children. “Once upon a time ...” While that persona might be a bit too much for adults, that is the direction that you might consider. And if you are telling a tall tale in a Toastmasters contest, don’t hold back.

Fourth, bring in some suspense. This is not something that fits with all stories. But if it fits with yours, it can keep your audience members at the edge of their seats. And it can make your story that much more memorable.

This starts with your words. Leave some doubt in what will happen to your characters. But also use your voice to create that suspense. Pauses are great here. As is a sense of strong drama and intensity.

Personally, I enjoy being expressive on stage. And because of that, I really enjoy storytelling, especially the fictitious kind. Be as expressive as your story will allow you to be.

You want your audience members to want to listen to you. You want them to get the point that you are making with your story. Yes, you could tell them the lesson in words (“and the moral of the story is ...”), but it is far better if they see it for themselves and even feel it for themselves.

Communicate the importance of the message. Communicate the drama of the experience. Communicate the emotions that you want your listeners to carry away with them, for that will be what they remember long after your presentation is over.

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.

Take Your Story From Forgettable to Memorable

Build an emotional connection through vulnerability.

By Jillian Mitchell

Humans have a vast and rich relationship with storytelling—from cave paintings, written words, and oral traditions to PowerPoint presentations and TED Talks. And though the medium continues to evolve, the want for storytelling is inherently the same—intrinsically human.

The presenter in you has likely wondered, what makes a “good” story? After more than 20 years in the vocal coaching industry, I have seen firsthand what takes a story from forgettable to memorable—vulnerability.

What Is Vulnerability?

Vulnerability is a key foundation of voice. This concept is perhaps most obvious in singing. To fully express a song, we need to tap into our emotions and really feel the story to effectively express the story. Same goes for acting, and you guessed it, for public speaking and day-to-day conversations. Emotions build story and vulnerability is the gateway. Vulnerability is the “how” behind emotional connection, and it endears an audience to a storyteller. But vulnerability also comes with a flip side.

In her 2010 TEDx Talk, “[The Power of Vulnerability](#),” researcher and author Brené Brown, Ph.D., defined vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.” For most people, this is not an ideal concoction. But to make your mark, you must be willing to get a bit uncomfortable. You must be willing to risk being seen as too much or not enough; too “this way” and not enough “that way.” It’s in this risk that the connection to your audience is born. (And likely, your audience is not thinking any of those things about you anyway.)

As Brown shares, “The difficult thing is that vulnerability is the first thing I look for in you and the last thing I’m willing to show you. In you, it’s courage and daring. In me, it’s weakness.”

The Best Stories Are Emotional

From a neurological standpoint, human beings are wired to share things that move us emotionally. We are also wired to remember them, whether it’s something that made us happy, sad, angry, etc. If we’re moved, chances are we’ll remember it.

Still, there’s no denying that some presenters shine while others flicker. So, what exactly differentiates the

wow from the underwhelming? The answer largely comes down to how the presenter made us *feel*. This is vulnerability in action.

Being vulnerable will help invoke emotion in your audience, and how you genuinely make someone feel is what takes your story to the next level.

The Brain on Storytelling

The brain has a fascinating relationship with storytelling. In fact, stories create meaningful connections between concepts and words—this assists in how we remember things.

As explained in molecular biologist John Medina’s book *Brain Rules*, “When the brain detects an emotionally charged event, the amygdala releases dopamine into the system ... dopamine greatly aids memory and information processing.” Stories have power, and they can be enhanced through vulnerability, as a means of creating emotional connection and stronger recall in an audience.

Perks of Vulnerability

Vulnerability is the gateway to emotions, and emotions are the gateway to memorable stories. A few of the many perks of incorporating vulnerability into your next presentation include:

- Creating a human connection
- Encouraging sharing about difficult subjects
- Promoting transparency and reciprocity
- Garnering trust
- Building rapport
- Allowing for next-level performances

How to Access Vulnerability

So often as presenters, we take careful consideration to craft the perfect story—the perfect words, concepts, imagery, and delivery. And those are all marvelous if you start with an emotional connection as your foundation.

Ask yourself, *Why am I telling this particular story? What does it mean to me? How does it make me feel?* Recounting events is not telling stories; moving someone emotionally is.

You don’t have to share *everything* to effectively tell a story, but sharing some personal details will make the story more endearing.



Here are some ways to access and practice vulnerability:

Create a safe space. If you're new to this practice, you'll want to create a sense of safety as you explore your emotional side. Find a private quiet space, throw on your coziest sweater, brew a cup of tea, whatever makes you feel your best. Next, explore the emotional aspects of

anything," she says. "Stay in the felt emotion in your body and then let whatever comes out come out—and it does feel incredibly vulnerable."

Stay in the story. Exercise mindfulness. When you're speaking, ditch the outward focus (i.e., what are people thinking of me?) for an inward focus (i.e., what's the story, and how does it make me feel?). The key is to stay in the

You don't need to tie your story with a bow. It's okay not to have an ending; you might still be trying to process your story's experience. Be honest—if you're still learning and growing, let your listener know. Uncertainty is a form of vulnerability.

Do a trial run. Practice storytelling with someone who makes you feel safe. Then try it again with a group that makes you feel a little nervous. (It's easier to tap into those emotions when the nervous system feels safe.)

Vulnerability is the "how" behind emotional connection, and it endears an audience to a storyteller.

your story and let that emotion guide the story as if you were telling it to your best friend. How might this change your delivery? Record it and listen back later so you're not tempted to judge the process as it happens.

Repetition. Vulnerability is akin to a muscle that needs strengthening. Just as you get more comfortable with lifting a weight as you increase the repetitions or weight itself, you are more willing to embrace vulnerability with practice. It will feel less uncomfortable the more you do it.

Ditch perfectionism. To be human is to be imperfect. And we want to harness this imperfection because it's relatable! Vocal coach Kimberley Smith is a big proponent of imperfection as a means to access vulnerability, and ultimately, next-level performances. "When it's perfect, it's boring, and [we, the audience] don't feel

story and resist the urge to judge your experience of the storytelling. Sure, you'll flip-flop, but the trick is to speed up the comeback. It might be helpful to set an intention for your story—what are you trying to share? Use this to bring you back to the story.

Play or laugh. Broadway musical theater coach Mary Saunders Barton recommends play as the vehicle to vulnerability. "Play is the center of everything. Laughing helps engage in the connection to the body, and it helps you let go of a lot of other things. And it's an ultimate relaxer."

Embrace the "yuck," the challenges. You cannot build trust with your listener if you only talk about successes. Challenges make for great stories; they are relatable and they amp up the tension. As Brown says, "Vulnerability requires courage, repetition, and the ability to manage one's own discomfort."

Explore your voice. When practicing vulnerability in storytelling, you may be surprised at some of the sounds you make. Get curious! Explore how to best [use your instrument](#) for emotional delivery and convey what you mean.

Honor your growth. Celebrate your successes! And remember to reserve judgment. This practice takes courage.

Put vulnerability in action. Remember practice—not perfection—while feeling your way to greatness. And when the road gets tough, remember being vulnerable will help invoke emotion in your audience, and therefore, connection and memorability.

Jillian Mitchell is a vocal coach, recording artist, podcast host, and all-around voice advocate. She is the founder of [Voxsana](#), an online platform dedicated to voice empowerment. Mitchell lives in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, with her husband and two children.



Brucie Cummings, a South Florida tour guide, is shown leading a tour on the Myakka River in Venice, Florida.

Tricks of the Tour Trade

Tour guides talk the talk as they walk the walk.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

While attending a recent presentation, I barely looked at the speaker. Good as she was, what drew my primary focus was even better. It was a Picasso masterpiece. The presenter was a docent in an art museum.

Docents and other tour guides walk a fascinating tightrope between being seen and heard like any other speaker and helping people experience something else—a work of art, or an architectural or natural wonder. One way they meet this challenge is by bearing in mind that most tourists seek a compelling, entertaining activity, as opposed to a serious learning experience.

It's a perfect occasion for storytelling.

Communicating With Clients

Toastmasters skills provide an excellent foundation for tour guides. For instance, making the most of their voice—tone, volume, and rate of speech—allows guides to communicate effectively with clients. So do their words. That doesn't just mean content, but also form.

Tour operator Pankaj Pradhananga, DTM, helped start the Tourism Toastmasters Club in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 2017. He says that although what you know is important, how you tell people what you know is even more important. To determine that, he says, it's essential to know something about the group you'll be talking to.

Pradhananga, director of Four Season Travel & Tours, identifies the background of his clients in advance, especially in terms of cultural do's and don'ts. "What's funny for French travelers," he says, "may not appeal to a Japanese group." In addition, you may want to learn about certain disabilities, such as visual, physical, or auditory impairment.

Understanding a bit about the audience is useful for more than just preventing mishaps. Glenn Tomlinson, who oversees docents at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida, draws an example from one of the Norton Museum docents. The docent was guiding a group of students through a section of the museum covering a particular historical period. Knowing that the students had recently studied that era, the docent adjusted her comments to refer to and expand upon what the students had learned.

"It sparked the students, letting them know that this older person whom they had just met cared about them and what they were learning," Tomlinson says. "When people feel acknowledged and valued, they're more comfortable sharing their observations and engaging in dialogue."

This sort of back-and-forth can make for dynamic encounters.

Interaction is great, says Tomlinson, the Norton Museum's William Randolph Hearst chief officer of learning and community engagement. "It allows guests to

share insights and pose questions that may lead in unanticipated directions. As a tour guide, allowing yourself to let go and follow the flow of the discussion can be challenging, but it may make the guest feel heard and validated.”

Tour guides ask their own questions. South Florida guide Brucie Cummings speaks to up to 50 business tourists at a time, many of whom select the day’s activity without having much idea of what they’re in for.

“Whether I’m leading people on a bus or by bicycle,” says Cummings, who works for Dragonfly Expeditions, “my biggest challenge is keeping the group interested. While I can’t expect that everyone will like the same thing, I ask probing questions to keep them engaged.”

Daniel Ginensky, a tour guide in Jerusalem for the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, asks questions, too. “I pose a question/dilemma/contradiction at the beginning of the talk,” he says, “and I try to resolve the tension by the end.”

Tick, Tick, Tick

Questions bring us to a special issue for all speakers: timing. Ginensky tries to keep his talks short. “If someone wants more information,” he says, “they can ask. I’m always extremely pleasant, but I can be ruthless about moving on.”

Toastmasters certainly know a thing or two about timing. To keep on track, Barnaby Davies, co-founder of the Dutch tour company EastguidesWest, makes logistical announcements on the bus. Flexibility helps as well. As with any good speech, memorizing a text from start to finish can be problematic if you’re running behind.

he asks. “What can we share that will excite them about an object that seems culturally remote? What’s the human connection?”

A great way to foster relevance and connection is storytelling. For Davies, storytelling is a requirement for guides. “It makes all the difference in the world for helping travelers understand their destination,” he says. “And never forget: Adults on vacation are just big kids! Make it fun.”

He notes, “When we pass the original Hard Rock Cafe in London, I tell the story of Eric Clapton putting up one of his guitars as a plaque—and then Pete Townshend from the Who saying, ‘Mine’s just as good as his.’ It’s a great story and marks the journey from one guitar to over 86,000 pieces of rock ‘n’ roll memorabilia worldwide.”

Ginensky, meanwhile, uses storytelling to capture his guests’ imagination through a sweep of history.

“Stories challenge the listener to understand the connection between a place and an idea,” says the Jerusalem guide. “This is usually a very satisfying ‘aha’ experience. For example, I use stories when guiding in the Jerusalem Western Wall Tunnels to relate the antiquities from 2,000 years ago to the modern state of Israel.”

Pradhananga, the tour operator in Nepal, maintains that a guide’s stories should be simple, short, and relatable. “Too much historical data may make guests lose interest,” he says. “They want to know more about contemporary society, people, and food.”

“Adults on vacation are just big kids! Make it fun.”

—BARNABY DAVIES

“A tour guide is constantly improvising,” says Davies, a Hastings, England, resident and until last year a Toastmaster since 2013. “Once I was giving logistical information to a group in London. We were due to travel to Paris the next day. One of the guests raised a hand and said, ‘Will we still be going inside Notre Dame tomorrow? I’m looking at the news, and it’s on fire.’” Time for Plan B!

Connect With Your Audience

Above all, says museum executive Tomlinson, is the question of relevance. “What about a given discussion is relevant to a particular audience?”

No matter how you choose to capture your guests’ attention, storytelling can add humor, get a guide out of a sticky situation, or both. When Davies got a question he couldn’t answer on his very first tour, he used a pinch of story. Unable to identify the trees outside the bus, he summoned his best Table Topics® skills.

“These trees on the left are wooden ones,” he said. “They’re rather special trees, actually; we plant them on the left-hand side of the road here in England. But let’s talk about trees in a few minutes, because there’s a stretch of Roman wall coming up on your right with a legend attached to it ...”



Barnaby Davies, a tour operator and longtime Toastmaster, strikes a playful pose (along with a tour guest) in front of the Eiffel Tower during a tour of Paris.

Stories to Avoid

While it’s important to connect with the group, guides must pick and choose their material. I once took a tour during which the docent meticulously described his background in an unrelated field. Important? Not so much. Memorable? Not in a good way.

“The one type of story I never tell is one that reveals personal information about myself,” says Ginensky. “That’s not what I’m there for.”

Other guides may feel that divulging a little about themselves through story at the outset of a tour, such as their experience as a guide, establishes credibility and connection. They may wish to avoid or edit stories that may upset certain group members, including children. To be on the safe side, try to steer clear of the Big Three: sex, religion, and politics.

The poet Maya Angelou once wrote, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” When guides combine storytelling with other Toastmasters skills, they help tourists remember all three. And that’s a souvenir they will treasure for years to come.

Caren S. Neile, Ph.D., is a frequent contributor to the magazine. She has presented at three Toastmasters International Conventions. Contact her at cneile@fau.edu.



Meet Morag Mathieson, DTM

The 2023–2024 Toastmasters International President from Germany shares her post-pandemic vision for the organization.

By Paul Sterman

Talk to Morag Mathieson, DTM, for a while and you notice certain phrases pop up more than once. Phrases like “helping people to make tomorrow better than today.” They reflect her emphasis on helping others, whether it’s checking in with a friend who looks discouraged, offering a useful speech evaluation to a fellow Toastmaster, or leading in a manner that ensures members feel heard.

Another favorite phrase: “Never close the circle.” In other words, don’t leave anyone out—make sure everyone feels welcome and included in Toastmasters events and activities.

Mathieson, a native of Scotland who now resides in Moehrendorf, Bavaria, Germany, is the 2023–2024 Toastmasters International President. A 17-year member, she belongs to three clubs, including an online-only one she started two years ago (it includes members from different countries).



David and Morag Mathieson (at top, and below, on their wedding day) joined Toastmasters together in Germany in 2006. Both have earned the Distinguished Toastmaster award.



Above, Morag Mathieson speaks at the Annual Business Meeting during the 2022 International Convention in Nashville, Tennessee.



The new President, who worked as a longtime manager and executive in the pharmacy industry, is embracing the challenge of leading Toastmasters International at this unique time—as the world starts to recover from the global pandemic. She frames it almost like a psychological journey: the organization emerging from a precarious period, bruised but resilient, charting its future path.

“I think we’re at a time where there is an appetite to move forward and to understand our post-pandemic selves,” Mathieson says in her spirited Scottish lilt in a recent interview over Zoom.

“[The organization] had to make lots of changes in that time. We made decisions and turned the ship around a lot quicker than probably most of us thought we could,” she adds.

And though we’re not yet where we want to be in terms of membership numbers, Mathieson says, and we’re doing some things differently than we were before, she’s excited about what will come next.

“I’m looking forward to this season of hopefully rebuilding confidence in what the organization has to offer. It is my job to reassure people that we can do this. And I believe that we can do this.”

A Husband-and-Wife Journey

Mathieson moved to Germany from London, England, in 2006. She and her husband, David Mathieson, DTM, have belonged to Toastmasters since they joined together that same year. She says it’s been special to share the journey together. (While Morag serves as International President this program year, David will be Club President of

the Fräenkly Speaking Toastmasters, an advanced German- and English-speaking club they’re both in.)

She vividly recalls attending her first District conference, in 2007. Walking into the venue—a hotel in Vienna, Austria—she looked up at the gallery in the hotel lobby to see many different Toastmasters club banners all around. “What a really powerful moment! That was the point where I suddenly thought, *I get it. I’m part of something so much bigger than myself.*”

Mathieson says her ideal Toastmasters club is one that combines a sense of professionalism with the ability to have fun. The same could be said of Mathieson herself. She is certainly a high achiever, having scaled the leadership ladders in both the corporate and Toastmasters worlds. But she is also quick to laugh, and her face lights up talking about certain topics.

These include her cuddly black rescue dog, Jana, who Mathieson says is very well-behaved. That is, if you discount the time Morag and David took their canine friend to a Toastmasters conference—and, well, let’s just say that a few unused voting ballots did not survive intact.

Other subjects that spark a smile: tending to her garden at home, walking the hills and forests of Bavaria with David (and Jana), writing poetry, and reading voraciously. (Learn more about her literary endeavors in the sidebar.) Mathieson grew up in a small mining town in central Scotland and though she loves living in Germany, she says Scotland will “always have the tug of home.”

The Toastmasters organization “had to make lots of changes [during the pandemic]. We made decisions and turned the ship around a lot quicker than probably most of us thought we could.”

—MORAG MATHIESON, DTM

Embracing Leadership

From an early age, Mathieson leaned in to



From left, clockwise: Morag Mathieson on a club-building visit to Ajman University in the United Arab Emirates; David Mathieson and the couple's dog, Jana; Morag and her niece, Hazel Anderson (also a Toastmaster).

leadership. "David and I met when we were youth workers a long time ago and organizing events for young people in Scotland. We would regularly organize conferences for 300 young people to come together."

Almost as soon as she joined Toastmasters, she took on club and then District officer positions. She played a key leadership role in the surge of membership growth in Europe.

As a member of the Toastmasters Board of Directors, she helped lead the organization during the COVID crisis. In an October 2022 [webinar](#) for District 71, Mathieson spoke about the challenges leaders face during uncertain and anxious times. That's when it's even more important to be open and authentic, she said—to "dare to be vulnerable."

And to show humility and empathy.

"Empathy as a leader is taking a genuine interest in the people around you, finding out what makes them tick, what inspires them and the way they feel."

Collaboration and building community are also high among her leadership ideals. Mathieson, who also lived in Belfast, Ireland, for a number of years, remembers a simple remark from a member once that spoke volumes.

At the time, she was District 59's Lieutenant Governor Education and Training (the role we now call the Program Quality Director). She was speaking at a 2011 Toastmasters event in Poland that drew hundreds of members. Some of the sessions were in Polish and some in English. (Translators were provided.)

"I delivered my first session in the morning, and then it came to lunch, and I sat at a table with a group of women around me, and some of them spoke English and some didn't. And there was a lady sitting opposite me, and she just kept looking at me and looking, and then she said something to her friend, and then she leaned across the table and she said to me, 'You're just like us, aren't you?'"

"And that for me was one of the most beautiful moments—that realization that, yes, you come from somewhere else, yes, you've taken on leadership responsibilities, but deep down, we are just people helping people to make tomorrow better than today. That's what we are at our core as leaders."

Next Steps

Mathieson now works as a professional development consultant and does college coaching, mentors MBA students, and chairs the board of the child sponsorship charity Living Water Germany e.V. The nonprofit raises funds to provide food and healthcare for children in Guatemala and Albania. It's a challenge she doesn't think she would have tackled 15 or 20 years ago.

"I don't think I would have had the confidence to take on being the chair of the board of an organization here in Germany, and having to deal with all the authorities, the lawyers, the finance department, and so on. But somehow or other, you find that confidence through Toastmasters."

When Mathieson first became a member, all of continental Europe was represented by just one District. She remembers how geographically spread out District officers were because of this. For example, when she served as District Governor in 2012–2013, she was in Germany and her Lieutenant Governor Education and Training was in Portugal.

But she and other Toastmasters leaders there presided over a dramatic period of growth. Eventually a second District was added to continental Europe, and then Mathieson spent one year chairing the committee that oversaw a trailblazing reformation in 2018: the expansion of two Districts into six. The move reflected the epic progress of Toastmasters in Europe over a couple of decades. Today there are eight Districts in Europe—and there are now just about as many Toastmasters outside of North America as inside, a remarkable evolution in the organization's history.

A Leader's Love of Literature

Morag Mathieson is a book lover. She reads avidly, and her home is filled with tomes.

"I have over 3,000 books at the moment!" she says.

The Scotland native likes all kinds of genres and is a huge fan of author Alexander McCall Smith, particularly his *44 Scotland Street* mysteries, set in Edinburgh.

Not surprisingly, the new International President also enjoys books about leadership. In fact, she and fellow Toastmaster Margaret Jankowsky, DTM, hosted an online book club this past program year for members in their District interested in reading about leadership. The five books the group read: *The Leader's Checklist* by Michael Useem, *The Ideal Team Player* by Patrick Lencioni, *The Fearless Organization* by Amy C. Edmondson, *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown, and *Crucial Conversations* by several co-authors.

Ever since she was young, Mathieson has also loved writing. She writes poetry, and has had several of her pieces published. One ample source of inspiration is the physical world of nature. In a poem called "Heralds," Mathieson observes the first signs of spring.

*Morsels of moss on stone steps,
dropped in haste.
Birdsong clear and musical,
trilling out across the day.*

She wrote the poem "Bridegroom" when her godson got married in Mexico a few years ago, and one called "Goodbye" to mark the passing of her father-in-law.

"A lot of my writings are related to things I see in the world around me, experiences I have had," Mathieson says, "or to working through my feelings about those experiences, or paying tribute to people who have passed."

—Paul Sterman

After Ted Corcoran (Dublin, Ireland) in 2003–2004, Mathieson is now Toastmasters' second-ever International President from Europe. She's also the first female one from outside North America, a particularly meaningful milestone to her. She says it's important for women in Toastmasters to see other women in top leadership roles.

"When I think of each step I've taken in leadership, particularly going beyond the District, like becoming Region Advisor or serving on the Board, there would always be people who would come up and say to me—people from Europe, and also from other parts of the world—"Because you've done it, we know it's possible." And I think that's a huge thing.

"Whether they ever do it or not [run for leadership positions], that will be up to them. But it's that feeling of, *It's possible*."

Some more musings from Mathieson:

On what excites her about leading Toastmasters International at this time in its history:

This will be our 100th year, heading up to the 100th anniversary [in October 2024]. So it is a crucial time for the organization. To be responsible for the stewardship of a 99-year-old organization, and building on the legacy of all those giants in Toastmasters who have come before us—men and women who've done amazing things to really push the boundaries at times, and they've each faced their own challenges in 99 years of history, I'm sure—it's something I'm really looking forward to.

On what she would tell a Toastmaster who is considering taking on a leadership role:

I would say, Think about saying yes before you say no.

Often when the opportunity comes up, we attempt to say, "Oh, no, I couldn't do that," because we don't believe in ourselves. We don't think we

have the time or the skill, or we think it's going to be too much work, or too much responsibility.

But I would say to anyone: If that opportunity comes up, understand what saying yes would mean. "How could I grow through this?" "What doors would it open for me?" "What joy would I get in taking on this role?" Think about the "what could this mean for me?" before immediately defaulting to the no.

On what continues to impress her about the impact Toastmasters has on people:

When you see people take on the Toastmasters program and adapt it within their local culture, their local context, and then they are able to make a difference in their own lives and in their communities or their countries, it never ceases to amaze me.

On the enjoyment she gets from meeting Toastmasters around the world:

I love it. When I get to meet people anywhere, I think it's just one of the great joys of life. When you're an international officer and you go on a visit to a District, I like just being available to everyone. I want to see the leaders and spend time with them, but I actually just want to speak to everyone, because there is nothing quite like the impact you can have with a member who perhaps is new, someone who's kind of feeling like, *This is my first time here, and I'm not really sure how all this works*.

And it comes back to that idea of not closing the circle. Giving people the sense of, *I want you to feel a part of this. And I don't need you to know what my title is—I just want you to feel a part of this with us*.

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

ChatGPT: Enhance Your Toastmasters Speeches

How this powerful tool can help refine and enhance, but not write, your speech.

By Victor David

At the end of 2022, Open AI introduced ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot that allows for almost human-like interactions. Within months, ChatGPT took the world by storm, giving people the ability to generate words or images in seconds.

With such powerful technology at our disposal, it would be easy to assume AI tools, such as ChatGPT and other chatbot platforms, can write our Toastmasters speeches instantly for us. And while this path to writing speeches may look attractive at first, speeches written by AI will unfortunately sound, well, artificial. Your audience might notice you saying unusual words, your evaluator might comment on your stilted sentences, and judges at Toastmasters' competitions will likely mark you down for lack of originality.

That said, ChatGPT can be used as a tool and sounding board when creating speeches. After all, AI is a great tool for inspiration, just not composition.

Expand and Refine

Think back to some amazing speeches you've heard recently. Chances are they were about a great premise, insight, or personal experience. ChatGPT cannot generate these for you directly—it doesn't know your background, so it can only make well-informed guesses. However, you can use the software to test the waters and to come up with new ideas.

For example, if you were considering writing a speech about friendship, you could ask ChatGPT to come up with 10 speech topics related to friendship. Reading those results may bring up a personal story about a friendship or give you a new angle to write about that you hadn't thought of before. You can use ChatGPT to mine for topic ideas, but it's still you who writes the speech based on your experience.

That said, the first result of a search is not always the best result, but luckily, unlike a human, the software never runs out of patience. You can twist the task you ask ChatGPT to perform. Fine-tuning the query into the AI machine is called "prompt engineering." For example, you could refocus the query from topics on friendships to topics on childhood friendships. Or you could ask ChatGPT: "Which topics should I consider for a speech about friendship?" or simply tell it, "Outline a speech on friendship."

You can go back and forth as often as you want to create more refined answers—the responses will likely not result in the perfect outline or most original topics, but there's a good chance the responses will inspire you to find new additions and angles for your speech.

Once you have some ideas, it is up to you, with your human brain and unique set of experiences, to craft those suggestions into an actual outline that both suits you and is unique to you. You can always deviate from the ChatGPT's suggestions; in fact, that will most likely give you a more original speech than if you stick to the machine-generated plan.

Once you have a rough idea for the outline of your speech, write the speech as you usually would. What works for me is to talk out loud with the outline in mind and get a sense of which words seem to fit well. Of course, if you'd rather stick to writing the speech on paper or screen first, that works fine, too.

Compare and Contrast

Once you have something written, you can compare how ChatGPT would have written the speech based on your outline and check if there are any parts of its content you like better. I've found that doing this usually works best for parts of the speech, rather than the whole speech at once. ChatGPT is especially useful if you get stuck on



AI-generated image of a human composing a speech on a laptop.

You want ChatGPT to tickle your imagination, not write the whole story.

part of the speech that just doesn't seem to flow right. You can ask ChatGPT to write a version for you if you're really stuck, or you could copy and paste the sticky paragraph into ChatGPT and ask it to rewrite it. Didn't like that version? You can ask it to rewrite it again, lengthen it, or shorten it, as often as you want.

ChatGPT can also write in a more formal or casual style, depending on what you like or need. From my experience, however, ChatGPT can overdo it and sometimes starts to sound unnatural. Always go with the version that feels right for you, not with the version ChatGPT presents from your prompt. You want ChatGPT to tickle your imagination, not write the whole story.

If you're looking to enhance your speech further, ChatGPT can do that, too. You could, for example, ask it to come up with a few quotes on friendship from notable thinkers that you may want to blend into the speech. Or maybe you

want to add a cultural reference or a parallel example, e.g., "Can animals make friends?" Something important to keep in mind here is that while ChatGPT is a web-based platform, it is currently not connected to the internet and has limited knowledge after September 2021. If you need some type of research, such as statistics or information about a recent event, do your research outside of ChatGPT through a regular search to ensure it is correct.

Think of ChatGPT primarily as a tool to get text and variations quickly and impartially. Humans have a more emotional connection with words and the ability to be creative, while AI can only look at patterns in existing text and create a new pattern based on the examples from its massive database. True creativity needs to come from humans, not from a machine trained to mimic creativity. (Or at least, I tend to believe so—let's see where the artificial intelligence developments take us!)

Remove Mental Roadblocks

If you get halfway through brainstorming a topic or speech and then get completely stuck, ask ChatGPT for ideas on how to continue the story. Simply enter the initial bits you have and ask it to expand on the idea. By default, ChatGPT tends to respond with an opening, a few considerations and bullet points, and then a conclusion or closing statement, like a short essay-style answer. Reading the machine's long-form answer may help, but I encourage you to ask ChatGPT to specifically come up with some new ideas or twists to the story where you got stuck, to look for a more in-depth answer. Not everything the software comes up with is great material, it only serves as a sounding board for you to continue writing.

Another point to keep in mind is the tone of AI responses. ChatGPT tends to answer pleasantly, but it does make mistakes and can even accidentally offend—after all, it's not a human with a common-sense filter. If you ask it to do something it cannot do (for example, look up the weather) it will tell you so, but it can also go astray without you knowing, (for example, giving people credentials they don't have, or coming up with data that is incorrect or out of context) so always apply common sense and critical thinking, and consider cultural sensitivity. It's only a tool, not a gospel.

Finally, when you are happy with the speech overall, why not run it through ChatGPT and ask it for some suggestions? The responses may not all be brilliant, but some could be great. I wrote this article entirely from scratch (yes, I swear!) but guess how I came up with title ideas? But in the end I chose the one I wrote myself—true creativity comes from humans, right? Or did I just feel superior to how a machine creates textual expression?

Victor David is a member of the City Tattersalls Toastmasters Club in Sydney, Australia, where he works for the government as a senior communications advisor. He is also the founder of aixplainer.com a platform to help people understand AI. Contact him at victor@aixplainer.com.



Storytelling Tips

From Contest Winners

How to effectively use this timeless method of getting your message across.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff

Humans have told stories for thousands of years. Think of ancient cave drawings, Greek myths, fairy tales, and folklore. As long as people have been able to communicate, they have used stories.

Stories are a powerful way to make a connection with someone, which is why so many speakers use them as a way to engage their audience. Rather than simply describing something, stories draw listeners in, amplifying a lesson or life experience and making it relatable. Recall a time you were mesmerized by someone's story—chances are you got lost in the tale and felt as if you were part of the experience being shared.

We reached out to four speech-contest winners who competed at the World Championship of Public Speaking® to get their insight and advice on storytelling.



Jim Key, DTM

Princeton, Texas

2003 World Champion of Public Speaking

Storytelling can establish/strengthen a speaker's connection with the audience, which is an important part of increasing the audience's embrace of the speaker's message.

Speakers have to be mindful of their audience's thought process: how they will process the story as they hear it, and how clearly they will see the connection between the story and the points that the speaker is trying to make. The speaker may have familiarity with aspects of the story that the audience may not, so it is important that the story is framed in a way that

“It is important that the story is framed in a way that will introduce the audience to aspects of the story they are not familiar with.”

—JIM KEY, DTM

will introduce the audience to those aspects. (Just because it is in *your* mind, doesn't mean it is in *their* mind.)

One of the delivery techniques I frequently use to incorporate a story into a presentation is what I refer to as the dissociative (or “step away”) storytelling technique. This is where the speaker tells part of the story, then pauses the story (and frequently moves away from the physical spot where they were telling it) to make some outside-the-story observations or to draw focus to a certain part of their message. This might be something very brief, or it can be something that takes a larger portion of time. Following this, the speaker resumes the story from the point at which they had previously paused it and continues.

Anita Fain Taylor, DTM

Pembroke Pines, Florida

3rd place, 2018 World Championship of Public Speaking

Storytelling adds impact to a speech, because through your choice of descriptive words and body language, you can appeal to the five senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Storytelling effectively connects you with the audience.

It is through listening to speeches that I've gained a better appreciation of good storytelling. I belong to the Gelfand Good Morning Toastmasters club in Hollywood, Florida, and one of our members, Aditya Devendra, gave a speech that I evaluated titled, “The Land of Maple Leaf.” It was about two towns in Canada, and he used excellent descriptive words, along with appropriate body language. I felt as if I could see the snow-capped mountains, feel the air, hear the thunder of Niagara Falls, and smell the aroma and taste the pastries of his favorite restaurant. After his speech, I included Canada on my list of places to visit! That's effective storytelling.

The most challenging part of storytelling is time constraints. One aspect of a story may be important to you, but does it add value to the overall speech or to the audience? It narrows down your decision-making process to this: “To cut, or not to cut, that is the question.”

Storytelling can be therapeutic for the speaker and the audience. Most recently, I shared a personal challenge I'm experiencing. Through self-reflection, I turned a negative situation into something positive simply by putting myself (and the audience) in someone else's shoes. I wanted the



“It is through listening to speeches that I've gained a better appreciation of good storytelling.”

—ANITA FAIN TAYLOR, DTM

audience to reflect on themselves and (hopefully) approach life differently. They were listening to my speech, and so was I, because I needed to hear it for myself, from myself to myself. During the speech, members laughed and cried. After the meeting, a few members told me how it moved them. Someone suggested I should enter it in the next speech contest (*hint, hint*).

Mark Hunter, DTM

Helensvale, Queensland, Australia

2009 World Champion of Public Speaking

So many book titles include the word “naked.” This is often done to convey a sense of vulnerability or rawness by being exposed or void of pretense. The use of this word can also convey a willingness to expose an authentic self.

So being a naked storyteller is about laying bare our thoughts, our lives, our essence. Each time we tell a personal story, we can share our own unclothed lives to make what we have to say relevant to our audience, and hopefully more interesting.

However, as a warning, there are traps for the novice storyteller.

One public speaking sin that prevents a story from reaching an audience is ego. A story delivered by the ego has all the attractiveness of flat champagne and sounds like the throbbing of untuned percussion instruments.

The following points will help ensure your stories are not ego-driven:

- Share your story to inspire, not motivate.
- Avoid exaggerating your achievements and talents.
- Refrain from sharing your story solely for personal catharsis.
- Avoid sharing your stories as absolute truths.
- Avoid sharing your stories as a means of pushing your success into the minds of your audience.
- Never, ever accompany your story with a “selfie”! It’s a sure sign of your ego disconnecting you from your audience.

There are many opportunities to use naked storytelling to lead effectively. Keep in mind that when sharing stories as a leader, your task is not to tell your audience what to think, but rather to get them to think about the message in the story. In other words, tell your story to suggest rather than direct.

Some ideas of when storytelling can be most effective for a leader:

- To inspire the organization to undergo a significant change.
- To set a vision.
- To teach important lessons.
- To define culture and values.
- To explain who you are and what you believe.

Telling stories is an art form, one that can be used by a leader to influence others by “unclothing” our lives.



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—MARK HUNTER, DTM



Mas Mahathir Mohamad

Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia

3rd Place, 2022 World Championship of Public Speaking

Stories have become more important than ever when it comes to leaving a lasting impression, connecting with your audience, and even inspiring action. Wouldn't you agree? There's just this magic of emotional connection when we listen to stories. The late Sam Balter, an Olympic-winning athlete and later a sportscaster, once said, "Stories can express the most complicated ideas in the most digestible ways."

It's no wonder that people strive to add stories to their presentations. The question is, how can you do the same?

Start by creating a story bank, which is essentially your diary of stories. It can be recording the simplest day-to-day routine or even random stories

“Remember that facts tell,
but stories sell!”

—MAS MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

and events that happened to you. Deposit them into your bank so you can always refer to them when you need to use them.

The best way to express your main idea and drive your points home is to incorporate stories that demonstrate, showcase, or illustrate how the main idea works. Remember that facts tell, but stories sell!

Powerful stories come from describing a struggle or talking about an aspiration. Think about it: If someone told you a story of how they got up, got dressed, got to work, came home, slept, and repeat ... would you feel excited or hooked by the narrative? Probably not. But when a storyteller shares a story about something difficult they want to overcome or a goal that they want to achieve, it keeps us on our toes wanting to know what's next.

My friends, share your stories! Incorporate them into your presentations and you will see how your presentations transform not only you, but the people who listen to you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Toastmasters is a great place to fine-tune storytelling strategies. Practice in your club and check out the techniques outlined in "Connect With Storytelling," a Level 3 elective project available in all 11 paths of the Pathways learning experience.*

The Winning Speeches

Jim Key, DTM

His speech, "[Never Too Late](#)," described how it's never too late to follow our dreams, regardless of the difficulty, heartache, and disappointment we face in life.

Anita Fain Taylor, DTM

In her speech, "[It Is What It Is, It Ain't What It Ain't](#)," Fain Taylor told of her father's unchanging advice to her during trying times—advice that finally helped her see that she was not defined by her failures, but by her ability to overcome them.

Mas Mahathir Mohamad

His speech, "[Two Gifts](#)," blends humor, self-awareness, and insight gained from his parents—an amiable father and a stern mother with high expectations for her son.

Mark Hunter, DTM

His winning speech, "[A Sink Full of Green Tomatoes](#)," described his life prior to and following an accident that left him in a wheelchair. Using the metaphor of green tomatoes in his grandmother's kitchen, he related how he found a way to be himself.

Hear From More Champs!

Watch a roundtable discussion featuring three past World Champions of Public Speaking (Mark Brown, 1995; Ramona J. Smith, 2018; and Cyril Junior Dim, 2022) offering communication tips on topics such as storytelling, speechwriting, and delivery. The program, held at the International Convention in August, is available for On Demand viewing through October 25 (via the All-Access Pass, sold through August 19.)

Hone Your Spontaneous Speaking

Tips to think faster and talk smarter on the spot.

By Matt Abrahams

Think back to the last time you had to communicate in the moment with little to no preparation. An unexpected question that came up at the end of a meeting. Chitchat with your boss's boss in the elevator. Feedback for your colleague at the end of a virtual meeting. Now, review how it went. Were you able to shine or did you deliver a lackluster response?

For most of my life, I've been on the front lines of spontaneous speaking. Based on my last name (Abrahams), I occupied the alphabetical hot seat in school. Going first in elementary school show-and-tell and solving high school algebraic equations at the board provided me ample practice to become more comfortable and confident in my impromptu speaking.

Years later, this skill was called to good use when the deans of Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, where I teach strategic communication, asked me to solve a pressing problem. Our talented and prepared Master of Business Administration (MBA) students were freezing when placed on the spot with cold-call questions from their professors. To address this need, I created a methodology to help anyone—including MBA students—improve spontaneous communication.

As outlined in my book *Think Faster, Talk Smarter: How to Speak Successfully When You're Put on the Spot*, honing our speaking on the spot requires us to focus on both our mindset and our messages.

Mindset

Step 1: Manage anxiety.

Most people get nervous when speaking in front of or to others, complete with a racing heart, sweaty palms, and dry mouth—and it often gets worse when called on unexpectedly. Fortunately, you can manage your anxiety by focusing on your physical response.

First, take deep belly breaths, filling your lower abdomen, making sure to exhale twice as long as the inhale. Next, channel your natural adrenaline by using big, broad

gestures and step forward toward your audience. Third, hold something cold in the palms of your hands, which serve as thermoregulators for your body in order to reduce your elevated body temperature brought about by your increased blood pressure.

Step 2: Adjust your approach.

High expectations can make spontaneous speaking more difficult by increasing performance anxiety. Lessen the stress by reminding yourself that there is no one “right” way to communicate. I advise my students and coaching clients to follow the improv maxim: “Dare to be dull.” Instead of trying to blow away someone, seek simply to get the job done. Reducing pressure actually frees you to communicate in a more relaxed and authentic manner.

Another suggestion comes by way of over 100 communication experts whom I have interviewed on [Think Fast Talk Smart: The Podcast](#)—be in service of your audience or person you're speaking to. In other words, it's not about you. Remembering this should relieve some of the pressure to be “right,” and allow you to focus more on collaborating and building understanding with those you're speaking to whether onstage or in a meeting. Try invoking a mantra before you speak that reminds you that your message has value, such as, “I have value to bring.”

Step 3: Appreciate what is needed.

Spontaneous speaking can seem like a test or challenge, which can put you on the defensive, leading to a curt tone and brief answers. But what if you saw impromptu speaking as an opportunity to collaborate with others to further knowledge and understanding? This simple shift can help you serve the people you're talking to by seeking common ground and connection, especially if you're facing an audience of one.

Imagine you and a colleague are leaving a tense meeting. Your colleague turns to you and asks, “How did I do in there?” If you're just listening superficially, you might point out a few of your colleague's missteps that could be

addressed. However, if you had listened to your colleague more completely—noticing inflection, pace, and nonverbal cues—you might realize his query was really a request for support and encouragement, not a request for feedback. By missing the nuance, you might have worsened your colleague's mood and potentially damaged your relationship.

To listen in a more focused manner, slow yourself down and become more present in meetings, in conversations, and onstage. Take a deep breath and get yourself into a mental state where you can be engaged and curious. This shifts you from defense to being more receptive and open, and leads to better understanding.

Message

Step 4: Structure your message.

With the right mindset in place, you can now focus on your message. The brain does not respond well to long lists and rambling responses and prefers structured, logical ordering of information. My favorite tool for organizing spontaneous messages—be it answers to questions, feedback, or even small talk contributions—is to leverage the “What? So what? Now what?” structure. In this structure, begin by describing what it is you’re saying (your answer, your feedback, your contribution). Next, explain why your response is relevant and important to your audience. Finally, introduce next steps and actions. For example, if I



Getting comfortable with any communication structure requires practice. A great way to get your reps in for this structure is to ask yourself, *What? So what? Now what?* after reading an email, article, or other document. Drilling this technique makes it easier to deploy in the moment.

Step 5: Focus your content.

A sure way to turn off your audience is by rambling or going on too long. During an unnecessarily long communication, who among us hasn't looked longingly at the door during a presentation or at our watch during a one-on-one meeting? A simple focusing tool is quickly defining your goal for any impromptu commu-

find yourself speaking spontaneously. And finally, here's what I want you to **do**: Use some of these best practices the next time you speak in the moment (e.g., during Table Topics®).

Another focusing mechanism is to consider the language you use. Avoid using acronyms, jargon, and terminology that get in the way of others clearly understanding what you're trying to communicate. As you talk, remind yourself that you suffer from the “curse of knowledge.” In other words, you know way more about your subject matter than whoever you're speaking to. Your audience does not possess the same level of insight and information as you have. The antidote to this curse of knowledge is empathy. Think about your terms and lexicon to help you make your content accessible and focused.

Honing our speaking on the spot requires us to focus on both our mindset and our messages.

were answering interview questions about my approach to speech coaching, I might say:

“**[What?]** I believe in providing foundational principles and specific action steps to those I teach and coach. **[So what?]** In providing a little theory behind my tactical guidance, the people I work with better appreciate and remember the advice I give. **[Now what?]** If I were to work with you, then I would immediately begin by exploring the specific communication needs of your employees.”

nication using the “Know, Feel, Do,” framework. First, what do you want your audience to **know** about your topic? Next, how do you want them to **feel** as a result? And finally, what do you want them to **do**?

Framing your goal in this manner helps you prioritize your content and your thinking. For instance, my goal for this article is for you to **know** specific best practices for speaking on the spot. I want you to **feel** confident and excited about using these strategies the next time you

Taken together, these tools for mindset and messages can help you become a better in-the-moment communicator. It takes repetition, reflection, and feedback to think faster and talk smarter, but by leveraging your Toastmasters experience and these suggestions, you have all the ingredients you need for a spontaneous speaking success.

Matt Abrahams is a lecturer at Stanford Graduate School of Business, the author of *Think Faster, Talk Smarter: How to Speak Successfully When You're Put on the Spot and Speaking Up Without Freaking Out*. He also hosts *Think Fast, Talk Smart: The Podcast*.

Overheard

Give me just half a sentence and I'll take it from there.

By John Cadley

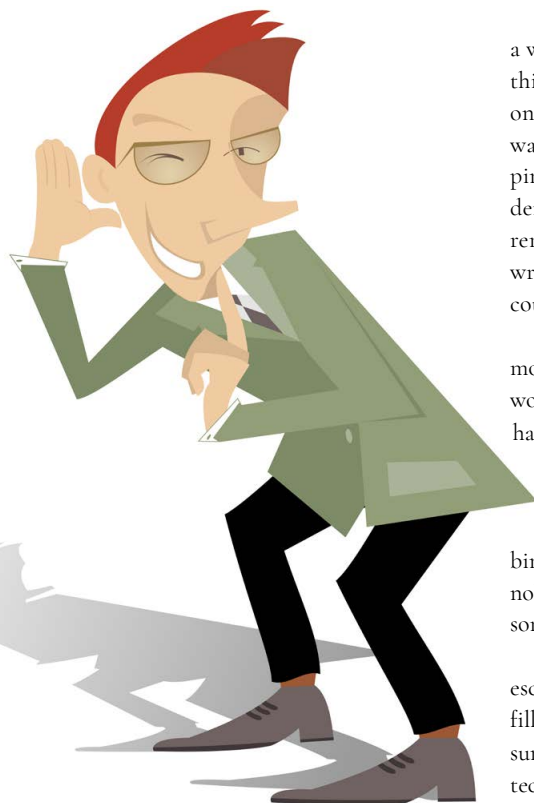
I live near a beautiful state park where I take long walks several times a week. Not infrequently I will see a small group of hikers headed toward me in the opposite direction, and as they go by I will hear a snippet of their conversation—not much, no more than a few seconds. But it's always enough to make me wonder what they're talking about.

Yesterday I passed two women as one said to the other, "... and you know what I said to her?" I spent the next quarter mile wondering—what *did* she say? Who did she say it to? It sounded like the woman was referring to some remark she didn't like. Someone accusing her of cheating at pickleball? A customer service representative informing her that personal articles of clothing are not returnable?

It kills me not to know. I'd like to say it's the trademark curiosity of a dedicated writer, studying life so as to reproduce it faithfully in his art. But it's not. I'm just nosy. I do not subscribe to the *National Enquirer*, but I will—and have—given up my place in the grocery store checkout line to finish reading the copy I've borrowed from the rack. It's lurid, probably not true, and I don't care.

You can imagine my torment when I catch a particularly intriguing phrase such as, "Well, you know the trouble with Judy ..." Trouble? Did somebody say trouble? For nosy people, the word "trouble" is catnip. It makes us crazy to know more. But alas, there is no more. Judy's friends have passed from earshot, leaving me Tantalus-like on the forest path, reaching for fruit that will forever elude my grasp.

It is even more tragic because here I am, walking through a veritable Garden of Eden. Shouldn't I be contemplating the beauty of nature, marveling at the mysteries of Creation? Shouldn't I be filled with wonder? I *am* filled with wonder. I'm wondering what's the trouble with Judy.



You can imagine how much self-restraint it takes for me not to stop and follow these people to find out more. Heaven knows, I'm tempted, especially when I overhear something that sounds like I *should* find out more, something that sounds

For nosy people, the word "trouble" is catnip. It makes us crazy to know more.

vaguely nefarious. Have I stumbled upon some criminal enterprise in the making? My imagination runs wild and I see the headline: *Local Man Foils Plot to Overthrow Town Planning Board*.

Worse yet, what if the passersby have already committed the crime and I'm catching

a whiff of their plan to cover it up? I still think of the two older women I encountered on the Bog Trail some months back. One walked with trekking poles and wore a large, pink fanny pack around her waist embroidered with I ♥ NEW YORK. The other remained incognito behind large, black wraparound sunglasses that looked like they could have been used for welding.

The two women walked slowly, so I caught more of their conversation than I normally would: "You can never get that out of a rug. We had to rip it up and ..." I walked a few more paces, stopped, and turned around, my antennae quivering with suspicion. Say what you want, but in my long experience binge-watching true crime shows on Netflix, nobody rips up a rug unless they've got something to hide.

The pieces began to fit: trekking poles for escape over treacherous terrain ... fanny pack filled with supplies for wilderness hideout ... sunglasses to stymie facial recognition technology. Or maybe they were just two old friends out for a walk. How could I find out? I could pretend to be a park ranger and ask for identification. But then they could jump me and leave me unconscious in the woods. Don't laugh. Seniors may not look strong but many of them take martial arts classes. One well-placed chop and I'm waking up next Wednesday.

I decided to let them go. I also decided I may be crazy. Who thinks like this? Is there a 12-step program for eavesdroppers? ("Hi, I'm John and I'm a snooper.") Unlike other 12-step programs, however, Eavesdroppers Anonymous meetings will have no talking. I know that sounds awkward, but then again, who wants to share their feelings with a room full of nosy people?

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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Online Course

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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