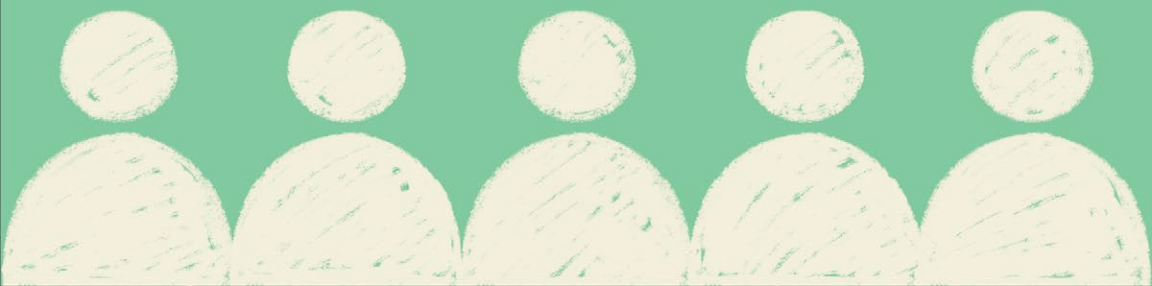


**Toastmasters'
Best of**

TOASTMASTERS
INTERNATIONAL®

HEALTHY CLUBS

Grow and maintain a vibrant club
using collected articles from
the **Toastmaster** magazine.



Toastmasters' Best Of Healthy Clubs

Grow and maintain a vibrant club using collected articles from the **Toastmaster** magazine.

Toastmasters International



Copyright © 2025 Toastmasters International

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any matter without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

ISBN: 979-8-218-74421-2

Toastmasters International and all other Toastmasters International trademarks and copyrights are the sole property of Toastmasters International.

toastmasters.org

Lead Editor Laura Amann
Editors: Paul Sterman, Laura Mishkind, Mackenzie Eldred
Art Direction: Bianca Montoya
Cover Design: Andrew Kubik
Layout: Andrew Kubik
Illustration: Andrew Kubik

Published by:

Toastmasters International
9127 South Jamaica Street, Suite 400
Englewood, Colorado 80112

Table of Contents

- Introduction VII
- Chapter 1: Boosting Club Membership 1**
 - Be Our Guest 2
 - A Personal Touch 8
 - Top Tips for Membership Building 12
 - Spread the Word: Grow Your Club 17
 - Choose Your Words Wisely 22
 - Build the Club You Want 26
 - Open Houses Open Doors to New Members 30
 - Cost-Effective Marketing Techniques 34
 - You Can Always Return 37
 - CLUB SPOTLIGHT: The First Moment of Truth 40
- Chapter 2: Retaining Members 43**
 - Re-engage! 44
 - 4 Influencers of Membership Retention 49
 - Membership Retention: Is Your Bucket Leaking? 55
 - How to Resuscitate a Struggling Club 60
 - When Bad Things Happen to Good Clubs 64
 - Help New Members Find Their Place 69
 - CLUB SPOTLIGHT: Social Events Build Bonds 73
- Chapter 3: Creating Quality Meetings 76**
 - 6 Tips for Successful Club Meetings 77
 - Keep Your Club Healthy 81
 - Prescription for Productive Meetings 85
 - Get Down to Business With Parliamentary Procedure 90
 - Speakathons Squeeze in More Speeches 94
 - CLUB SPOTLIGHT: A Roadmap for Club Growth 97

Chapter 4: Outreach: Marketing, Publicity, and Social Media 101

- Craft a Winning Social Media Strategy 102
- 5 Social Media Tips for Club Leaders 107
- Make Your Club Website a Marketing and Recruiting Asset 111
- Spread the Word: Getting Press Coverage 115
- The Benefits of Branding 119
- CLUB SPOTLIGHT: Using Social Media to Attract Guests 123

Chapter 5: Adding Variety to Meetings 125

- Break Away From the Everyday 126
- Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C: Creativity! 131
- Improv-ing Club Meetings 136
- The Theme of Today’s Meeting Is 141
- Maximize Your Meeting Role Lineup 143

Chapter 6: Fostering a Sense of Belonging 146

- Foster Belonging and Inclusion in Your Club 147
- Confronting Our Hidden Beliefs 150
- Supporting Neurodiversity 155
- Reduce Barriers for People With Hearing Loss 159
- 5 Ways to Make Your Club More Inviting 163
- The Age of Opportunity 165
- MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Saluting Toastmasters Centenarians 170

Chapter 7: Communicating Across Cultures 173

- Bridging the Culture Gap 174
- “Can I Ask That?” 178
- Speaking Across Cultures 183
- Celebrating the Holidays in a Multicultural Setting 188

Chapter 8: Navigating Challenging Members 192

- Annoying People Are Everywhere 193
- Dealing with Challenging Members 197
- Interruption Reduction 203

Chapter 9: Mentoring Programs 206

- Build a Rock Star Mentoring Program 207
- Club Mentor Program: A Win-Win-Win! 212
- The Value of Virtual Connections 216
- DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT District Mentoring Programs 220
- MEMBER EXPERIENCE The Advantages of an Atypical Mentorship ... 225

Chapter 10: Online and Hybrid Meetings 227

- Establishing Online Meeting Decorum 228
- Add Variety to Online Meetings 231
- The Wide World of Hybrid Technology 235
- CLUB SPOTLIGHT: The Path of Earthlings 239

Chapter 11: Advice for Club Coaches 242

- Club Coach to the Rescue 243
- MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Club Coaches, Learn From My Mistakes 247

Contributors 252

Introduction

Thank you for investing in *Healthy Clubs*! We're glad you're here.

Being a club leader offers a unique opportunity to grow your own skills by ensuring your Toastmasters club is the best it can be. By taking the initiative to purchase this book, you've already taken the first step toward achieving that success.

This book is a compilation of articles from the *Toastmaster* magazine. We sorted through more than 200 articles from the past 10 years to find the ones that best answer some of the most common challenges and opportunities that clubs face today. They are written by Toastmasters for Toastmasters.

Tips for creating a quality club has been a constant article topic since the magazine launched in 1933. Club leaders have always needed and wanted advice on common challenges such as finding new members and engaging current ones; creating a friendly, supportive community; and handling problematic situations.

Many topics in this book are ones that club officers from 100 years ago would find familiar, but there are also new challenges today, such as marketing your club in a digital world, using technology to create a compelling meeting, and welcoming people from a wide variety of cultures, each with different social norms.

We hope this collection sparks inspiration and excitement for you and your club.

And please let us know if your club benefits from something you discovered here! We love hearing success stories from clubs and members.

Laura Amann

Managing Editor, Toastmaster magazine



Chapter 1

Boosting Club Membership

Be Our Guest

Bring in visitors to build a bigger, better club.

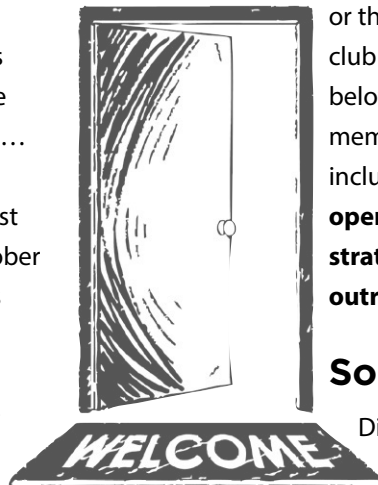
By Paul Sterman

So you want to add more members to your club. It's a goal that members have strived toward ever since ... well, likely since Dr. Ralph C. Smedley formed the first Toastmasters club in October 1924. No doubt members of that small Santa Ana, California, group said to themselves, *Let's get more people in here so we have more help with the meeting roles!*

The more members, the better the club experience.

Of course, not everyone loves to be in a big club. But for the most part, that's an enviable problem to have. A quality club should have at least 20 members.

So how do you gain more people? Here are some tried-and-true techniques to aid your mission, whether your recruiting efforts are aimed at online meetings



or the traditional in-person club setting. The sections below explore key aspects of membership building, including **social media, open houses, recruitment strategies, and community outreach programs.**

Social Media

Digital marketing is particularly valuable in today's world. Promote

your club and its events on social media networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Toastmasters International also has social media accounts that you can link to or embed, including YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X. Meetup.com is a popular site for promoting Toastmasters meetings.

Lauren Parsons, DTM, AS, a New Zealand Toastmaster, says Facebook is a fertile ground for generating interest

in your club. She suggests having a club member be assigned at each meeting to take photos—someone giving a speech, for example, or participating in Table Topics. Post the pictures on your club's Facebook page. Then tag those members, which means their friends and connections will see the photos too.

"This means we will be able to organically reach more people and create conversations about what is going on at our Toastmasters club meetings," says Parsons, 2019–2020 Club President of the Talk of the Town Toastmasters in Palmerston North, New Zealand. She created three videos on PR tips for Facebook, including how to create a club Facebook page.

Yesica Vazquez, DTM, a Toastmaster in California, is also a big advocate of social media as a marketing tool. She has posted about her club's Toastmasters meetings on Instagram, describing snippets of action to spark interest from non-members.

"I think social media is one of the most pivotal things that members and clubs can use to help promote their clubs, especially smaller ones," she says.

Meetings Matter the Most

Membership building starts with quality club meetings. Like trying to sell a car

with a shiny outside but a lame engine, you can't sell your Toastmasters club if the product isn't sturdy and successful. High-quality meetings show visitors this is a place where they can learn and grow, where they can achieve personal and professional goals. That's what turns guests into members.

Balraj Arunasalam, DTM, Toastmasters' 2017–2018 International President, knows membership building well. When he became president of the Colombo Toastmasters Club in Sri Lanka nearly 20 years ago, there were only three clubs in the small island nation. Now, because of the work done by him and other Toastmasters leaders, Sri Lanka has more than 150 clubs.

Compelling club meetings draw people, stresses Arunasalam. As he stated in a 2018 column for the *Toastmaster* magazine: "Guests and members are eager to attend club meetings that are exciting, offer diverse topics, provide valuable opportunities, and have great speakers and dynamic leaders."

That applies equally to online meetings. The virtual format offers a high-quality experience of its own. It presents an opportunity for members to stretch their skills, building their confidence and comfort level with communicating online. That's a particularly valuable skill in today's global workplace.

One advantage of recruiting guests to online meetings is that it's easier for them to attend—they can see what Toastmasters is all about from the comfort of their own home. And if visitors are inexperienced with virtual communication, share resources for online club meetings that will help them feel more comfortable in that setting.

Hold an Open House

An open house is basically what it sounds like: an open invitation to visit your Toastmasters home and see what you do. It's one of the most reliable tools for recruiting new members.

Set up the event like a standard club meeting, with the same kind of structure and activities (and applause!) Show your guests the feeling of achievement they will gain. Explain each aspect of the meeting. A PowerPoint presentation is available to use at open houses. And provide plenty of time for members and visitors to mingle.

Vazquez, the California Toastmaster, says her club—the San Diego Toastmasters 7—typically tries to hold three or four open houses a year. One such event drew close to 80 people last year, she says.



What's the key to a successful open house? Planning and promotion. Have a club committee plan the event. Invite members of the community and publicize the free program in local media outlets.

Promote your program with a customizable Toastmasters flier. Email the flier or print it out and post it around your community. Be sure to include online meeting information, if applicable.

Also invite “alumni”—past members who for one reason or another let their membership lapse. In addition, consider inviting members of local Rotary clubs; Toastmasters International and Rotary International formed an alliance to mutually benefit each organization. There's an email template you can personalize and use to invite Rotarians to Toastmasters club meetings, as well as a PowerPoint template for talking to Rotary clubs about teaming up in a local alliance.

At the event, have a guest packet ready for visitors, even a virtual one you can email later.

It's important that open house speakers represent a mix of experience levels, says Vazquez, a 2019–2020 Division Director in District 5. If only the club's most distinguished speakers give speeches, she notes, novices in the audience might feel intimidated, thinking there are no beginners in Toastmasters.

Reach Out

There is an art to reaching out and recruiting new members. One immediate step is something Toastmasters know well: talking. Talk up Toastmasters. Tell people about the organization's value. Give an "elevator speech" about your own experience and how you've benefited. Share your message with friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, community members, and others.

Pitching to potential members isn't just about touting the value of Toastmasters—it's about what the program can do for that person specifically. Find out what they're looking for and tailor your message to how Toastmasters can help them with their own specific goals and needs.

Like so many things, word of mouth carries weight; in fact, it's still the most effective recruiting tool. That's what helped Ian Proud's club boost membership. "People do things because someone they trust asks them to do it," says Proud, a member of the Greater Susquehanna Valley club in Pennsylvania. "Members [in our club] asked friends and colleagues to accompany them to a meeting. They tended to stay and became members."

If your club is meeting online, invite guests with a digital document created

for that very purpose—the Online Prospect Flier—and follow up with the Virtual Guest Packet.

The Kossowan Touch

Peter Kossowan, DTM, is legendary in Toastmasters circles for his persuasive powers. The Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, resident has chartered more than 170 new Toastmasters clubs. That's not a misprint. A member for 50 years, he is passionate about bringing new people and clubs into the organization, and very successful at it. He finds a softer approach works better than a hard sell.

When Kossowan meets prospects, he doesn't say, "You should join Toastmasters"—he says, "Why don't you join me at a Toastmasters meeting and see for yourself the benefits?"

You could also ask members to wear their Toastmasters pin or badge—this often generates questions from other people. Or print club business cards and give them to members to hand others.

Follow Through

As important as getting the word out is following through on your actions. A first impression is made even before a guest walks in the door. If someone calls or writes your club to ask questions or express an interest in visiting, make sure

to respond promptly. Consider this: In a Toastmasters International survey last year of prospective members who had contacted a club, 60% of the respondents said they did not ultimately attend a club meeting; when asked why, more than 70% said it was because the club failed to respond.

Ian Brooks is determined to not let those opportunities slip away. “We work to get an email answer out to every inquiry within hours, and certainly within 24 hours,” says the 2019-2020 Vice President Membership (VPM) for the Eagle Club in Wallingford, Connecticut. “I always offer my cellphone number and invite questions at any time by ‘talk, text, or type’ and remind inquirers of the next meeting details a few days prior.”

The club’s initial email response features a positive, encouraging tone, highlighting that there is no charge to visit and no pressure to speak. It includes an invitation to attend the next meeting. “We are promoting public-speaking training with friendly individual and group support,” says Brooks. “It’s how we connect with guests who clearly have some ‘need’ to simply make the effort to contact us.”

The 25-year-old club has attained President’s Distinguished status every year since 2003.

In the Meeting

Greet your guests and make them feel comfortable and welcome. That’s the golden rule of visitor protocol. A club member should greet guests when they walk in the door—some clubs even have an “official greeter.” Invite the guest to sit next to a member, who is essentially a personal host, helping the visitor understand what’s happening every step of the way.

How important is this initial welcome? “In some ways, you’ve won or lost a new member in their first 30 seconds in the room,” says Brooks, the Toastmaster from Connecticut.

You can add a more personal flavor by giving everyone name tags to wear or putting name tents in front of everyone’s seat. In Zoom calls, have people set their names to appear on the screen. Have visitors sign a guestbook or a similar document, so the club has their names and contact information on file. Also, provide them with information about your club, a club contact, and Toastmasters materials about membership and benefits; this can be done virtually or through a physical packet.

One practical but essential matter: Be sure your club website information is up to date, particularly when and where your club meets. The last thing you want

is a guest missing your meeting because the information they read was wrong. Confirm that your club's information is also accurately listed on the Toastmasters website's Find a Club section.

Be sure to formally acknowledge your guests in the meeting, and at the end, ask them if they would like to offer any comments on their experience. Always invite guests to come back, and don't forget to ask them to join your club. Kossowan says he has been to too many meetings where that final step is skipped. "They don't invite visitors to join. You have to ask for the sale!"

Offer Speechcraft

A Speechcraft program is a great pitch for Toastmasters. Speechcraft is one of the organization's community-outreach programs, and clubs use it to teach the fundamentals of public speaking to non-members. Aside from helping people boost their comfort level with public speaking, the hope is that participants will decide to continue their skill-building by joining Toastmasters.

Clubs typically present Speechcraft through a series of workshops, delivered in four, six, or eight sessions. The program introduces people to the core of club meetings, with speeches, Table Topics, and evaluations.

Speechcraft offers non-members a taste of Toastmasters, a brief exposure to the benefits you can gain over the long term. As such, it's an excellent recruiting tool—and about to get better.

A Website's Value

A club's website is one of its most important recruitment tools. Many potential members find a club through the group's website—and its information, tone, and accessibility often influences a person's decision to visit a club or not. Clubs that have no website at all are at a disadvantage.

"It is vital that a club have a strong, current, accurate, and attractive website to attract new members," says Beth Stinson, DTM, who has served as webmaster for her club, the Greater Olney Toastmasters in Olney, Maryland.

Not only should the site provide basic logistical information about the club, it can offer instructions, links, and resources to help members deal with different Toastmasters challenges.

There are many benefits to belonging to Toastmasters—don't be shy about reaching out and inviting others to share the experience.

Adapted from a July 2019 article

A Personal Touch

Attract, invite, and encourage guests by adding your own touch.

By Megan Preston Meyer

In today's data-driven world, it's easy to convert everything to numbers. Conversations about club growth can quickly turn transactional: "We need to attract x guests and convert y% of them in order to hit our annual membership target." Action plans are drawn up, spreadsheets are created, and recruitment campaigns are designed. These can all be helpful tools, as long as the overall focus remains on the end goal: building a vibrant, dynamic group of people who support each other along their path to improvement. Growing your club requires effort and intention—and a healthy dose of the human element. As you attract, invite, and encourage guests to join, make sure to keep things personal.

Personal Responsibility

One of the best methods a club can use to attract guests is to encourage members to bring people they know. Many members

have already done so—and might even be Toastmasters themselves thanks to the invitation of a friend or family member. Since this is such a proven technique, why isn't it used more heavily? The answer may be a phenomenon called "diffusion of responsibility."

We've all experienced it. The Club President closes the meeting with a request for everyone to bring a friend to the next one. The entire group nods—and has the best of intentions—but when the gavel drops at the following meeting, everyone around the table is a seasoned member. "If you tell a group of people 'someone bring a guest next time,' everyone's going to think that someone else will; they personally don't need to do it," explains Mike Raffety, DTM, of Chicago, Illinois.

To fix this issue, Raffety suggests adding a new role to the rotation: a Guestmaster, whose sole responsibility

is to bring a guest to the next meeting and to introduce him or her to the club. Singling out an individual to act prevents diffusion of responsibility. “If you tell one specific person—if they volunteer or are ‘voluntold’—‘you are bringing a guest to the next meeting,’ they are pretty likely to do it, because there’s a specific expectation on one person to do so.” Instead of tasking all your members to bring a guest to the next meeting, try asking them, one at a time, to take on the personal responsibility.

Personal Touch

While personal recommendations and word-of-mouth are effective tools for attracting new members, Toastmasters International has high brand awareness, so you’ll likely encounter guests that no one in the club has ever personally met—especially if you have a strong online presence.

Vibha Talati, Vice President Public Relations for Carpe Diem Sharjah Toastmasters Club in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, recalls a recent visitor whose friend had suggested Toastmasters. “He didn’t specifically tell him to go to our club. This person googled, and we showed up on the search engine results.” To stand out online, be sure to keep your club’s listing on Find a Club up to date, maintain

your own website or Facebook page, and highlight your club’s personality.

Use your club’s social media accounts, and engage your members as well. “One of the key things is to get your members to post activities on their own page, because then their network will see it,” says Raffety. “Post a picture of a meeting or someone speaking on the club page and then tag their names (with permission) ... then it will show up on their feed, and their friends’ feeds.”

Make the most of the posts you’re encouraging members to share by “showcasing what you’re doing,” says Talati. “Video, photos ... Many clubs are doing a really good job, but they’re not able to portray it [on social media].” She recommends showing the club’s fun side, as well as its serious side. A recent post on the Carpe Diem Sharjah Toastmasters’ feed highlighted a panipuri-eating contest held during the club’s post-meeting socializing session.

You can use social media for personalized communication, too. During her time as Vice President Membership, Talati made it her mission to reach out individually to each of the club’s Facebook followers and earned a new member by doing so. “They say [social media] is not personal, but I say it’s always personal. It has to be personal.”

Personal Connection

Putting in the effort to make a personal connection with potential guests is always a good idea, and if you can target your messaging to reach them specifically, so much the better. This is especially relevant for corporate clubs. “If we were a community club, we would definitely be looking at a wider pool, in terms of recruitment, but then the focus would be more diverse,” says Eric Tan, DTM, a committee advisor for AIA Toastmasters in Singapore. He sees the club’s narrower focus as an advantage. “Because we understand our company’s direction, we understand what our fellow AIA consultants are looking for in terms of their self-development. It is easier for us to cater to them, to ‘speak to them in their language’ ... I think that puts us in a better position.”

AIA also caters to their guests literally. Whether it’s a coffee meeting with a colleague or a cozy family dinner, food and drink go hand in hand with personal connection, and AIA Toastmasters knows it. They are known for offering plentiful buffets because their meetings are held over the lunch break. “Why lunch time? Because, as [insurance] advisors, we need to make appointments and meet clients, so lunchtime is really our down time,” explains Eric Tan (no relation), Vice

President Membership. “That’s where the food comes in. You don’t need to worry about wasting lunch ... you can just come in and grab [some food] and enjoy the features.” This personal touch shows that AIA Toastmasters appreciates the time its guests—and members—devote to checking out the club.

They aren’t alone in using food to foster connections. When asked about her club’s recruitment tactics, Talati’s first response was “We have yummy snacks.” In addition to the infamous panipuri, “we have cakes, we have croissants, we have sandwiches, and we have tea and coffee.” The refreshments add to a “party atmosphere” that makes meetings enjoyable for guests and members alike.

Personal Example

One of the most effective ways to attract guests to your club is to demonstrate just how much Toastmasters can do—and what it has done for you. Offering your own experience as an example to friends, family members, and colleagues can be a powerful motivator.

Sandra Phua, President of AIA Toastmasters, notes that in addition to their regular Toastmasters club meetings, “we work together with the training department of AIA, and we get our

advisors who are Toastmasters members to share.” Phua is one of those members.

These company-wide workshops are excellent recruitment tools for the corporate club, explains Tan, the committee advisor. “When [guests] see how confident Sandra is, and how credible she is as a speaker, it draws them in. When people see a role model they want to mimic, they want to follow their path.” Use the communication and leadership skills you’ve gained at Toastmasters to become a role model—and then personally invite friends and colleagues to follow your path.

By setting an example, fostering connections, adding thoughtful touches, and encouraging individual action, you can keep things personal as you attract guests and gain new members. By keeping the human element at the forefront of your quest for club growth, you’ll be able to hit your numerical targets—and build a vibrant club.

Adapted from a January 2023 article

Top Tips for Membership Building

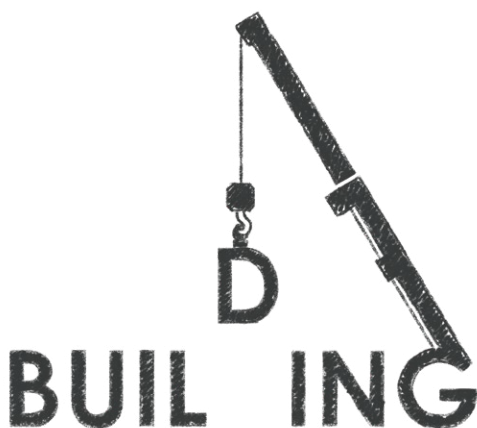
20 ideas to engage your members and gain new ones.

By Laura Mishkind

It's no secret that going to your first meeting can be the scariest part of joining Toastmasters. That is, assuming you even make it through the door. Toastmasters around the world have made the confession that their first meeting didn't attract them to a club.

Lark Doley, DTM, 2018–2019 International President, was scared away after being forced to participate in Table Topics. Brand specialist and professional speaker Amanda Mae Gray says that she never even attended her first meeting because she couldn't find the room and was too scared to walk in late. Both are prime examples of why it is vital to create a welcoming atmosphere for guests—step one in building membership.

Growing your club doesn't just happen, it takes preparation. First, take an objective look at your club and identify



any areas for improvement. Conduct the Moments of Truth evaluation to examine your club's performance in a few areas. Once you're confident that your current members are satisfied, consider what steps to take to entice guests to visit your club and ultimately, join. There are many ways to do so, and here are 20 that might be worth trying.

1. Host an open house. The most tried-and-true way of attracting new members is to host an open house, ideally at least once a year. It's a prime opportunity to have guests visit and for your club to put on the best display of what Toastmasters has to offer. Advertise the event in your community, online, and everywhere you can to ensure a large turnout. Don't forget to ask the guests to join the club at the end of the meeting!

2. Have a bring-a-friend challenge. Encourage every member to invite a friend to a meeting. This could mean everyone brings a friend to one particular meeting, or each member brings one guest to a different meeting.

3. Respond to Find A Club inquiries. A recent survey of prospective members uncovered that 77% of those who never visited a club didn't attend a meeting for one reason: They never received a response after contacting a club. Be sure that the email address listed on Find a Club is accurate and up to date. Then the Vice President Membership or other officer should regularly check the inbox and respond to any inquiries received. Try creating a template to make the job even simpler.

4. Create an onboarding process to welcome new members.

Attracting guests is important, but once they've converted to members, it's vital to get them up to speed as soon as possible. Create a plan for what officer will complete each task for the new member. Who will introduce them to a mentor? Who will add them to easy-Speak or FreeToastHost and give them a tutorial of the platform? Who will walk them through Pathways and help them navigate Base Camp? Remember, this is all new to a new member, so it's important to explain every detail—don't assume they'll just pick it up.

5. Add testimonials to your website. One of the best ways to showcase the members of your club is by posting testimonials on your website and social media. Ask a few members to share why they joined Toastmasters and what they have gained from being part of the club. Share their short stories with a photo of the individual to draw guests in.

6. Implement a mentorship program. It helps a new member feel more engaged if they have a go-to person for questions. A mentor can serve as that individual. So how do they get matched? That's where a mentorship program comes into play. Plan on whether club officers will discuss potential mentors for each new member or mentors will sign up to take on mentees as they join. Having the program in place before new members join will help the process go smoothly.

7. Send out renewal reminders. Toastmasters International fees are due twice a year, on April 1 and October 1, but busy members can easily overlook these dates. Send out reminders via email, post on social media, and make announcements at club meetings leading up to these deadlines.

8. Set up a booth at a community event. Your local farmers market or a university club fair are just two examples of community events that offer booths or tables. Research upcoming events in your area and see if it costs to set up a booth to share information about Toastmasters with the broader community. Bring branded fliers and materials, and have club members staff the booth to answer any questions.

9. Conduct a member survey. Solicit feedback from your members and send out an anonymous survey to see what the club is doing well and what could be improved. It's important to ensure your current members are satisfied with their experience before introducing new members. Some of this feedback could also help you decide what to highlight on your club's social media pages or website.

10. Promote the Youth Leadership Program or Speechcraft. Toastmasters offers benefits beyond its standard education programs and club experience. Consider sharing more information about the Youth Leadership Program (YLP) and Speechcraft at a community event, on social media, or during an open house. YLP benefits those under 18, who may then join a club as adults, while Speechcraft was created to introduce nonmembers to Toastmasters and teach some basic communication skills.

11. Bond through activities. Celebrate members' birthdays, organize picnics, plan hikes, visit other clubs as a group, or attend self-development seminars together. Getting outside of your regular meetings allows for members to create new memories together and become closer. Creating community makes people less likely to leave.

12. Collect guests' contact information and follow up.

Often guests will email the Vice President Membership before visiting a club, but sometimes they'll simply show up. Be prepared with a sign-in sheet to collect the guest's name and contact information. Then use that information to send a follow-up email or make a call to see what they enjoyed about your club and if they'd like more information.

13. Host a Table Topics for brainstorming recruitment tactics.

Get the club involved! The responsibility of membership building shouldn't fall only to the club officers. Ask members to share their ideas for recruiting new members in a special Table Topics session. This could make the meeting more fun and give members the opportunity to share their ideas or play off something someone else already said.

14. Reach out to former members.

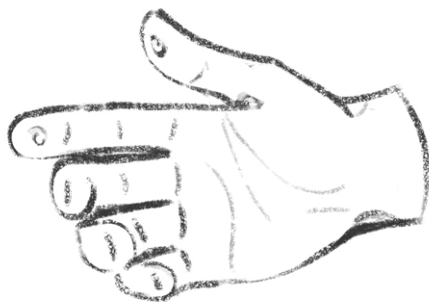
Sometimes members leave because the timing is no longer convenient or they feel they don't have time, but circumstances change. Reach out every year to former members to see how they're doing and if they're interested in returning to the club.

15. Embrace the Rotary alliance.

Toastmasters and Rotary International formed an alliance in 2019, and members around the world have worked to build collaboration and community between the two organizations. Reach out to your local Rotary clubs to see if you can present to them about Toastmasters or consider creating a club for members of both organizations to join.

16. Use social media.

Post frequently on your club's social media pages. Share photos of members and meetings, and highlight members on their birthdays. Show how supportive your club is and be sure to share any upcoming event dates or days that meetings may be canceled due to holidays. Social media is a great place to keep people informed of club happenings and show the fun you have!



17. Invite a well-known speaker to a District conference. Your conference should benefit Toastmasters education, but some sessions may apply to the broader public. If you have a popular speaker conducting a keynote or education session, advertise the event and encourage your community members to come watch and learn about Toastmasters, too.

18. Provide free food. A simple incentive is offering food at a meeting. This could be a catered meal or a potluck where members bring in their favorite dish to share. Advertise the event to entice guests to come see what Toastmasters is about while enjoying a tasty, free meal.

19. Offer Toastmasters swag or gifts. Have a raffle or provide an item from the Toastmasters Online Store as an incentive for members to attend meetings, bring guests, or sign up for a particular role. Guests may like the idea of a tangible gift, and most Toastmasters are excited for the opportunity to win a new sweatshirt or branded notebook.

20. Emphasize membership benefits. Toastmasters around the world are happy to share how the program has benefited their career and personal life. Many have gained confidence, been promoted, improved their communication skills, and more. Highlight that! When speaking with a potential member or friend, tell them how Toastmasters has helped you as an individual. Everyone has a unique story to share. Figure out what skills they're looking to gain and emphasize how your club can help them do just that.

Adapted from a March 2024 article

Spread the Word: Grow Your Club

Tips on recruiting new members.

By Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS

Wouldn't it be great if everyone who visited your club, joined your club? Sure it would! But maybe you're thinking, *how do we even get someone to visit our club?*

Member recruitment is a common concern of Toastmasters clubs worldwide because building membership keeps a club strong and its members growing. Thankfully, there are many resources and techniques available to help your club develop an effective recruiting program.

Recruiting has several phases. First, you get the word out so visitors come in. Then you must create a visitor-friendly club environment. And while enjoying each other's company in a club is great, the heart of a good club is one that offers a high-quality experience when it comes to learning communication and leadership skills. No matter what you do to recruit new members, they may not

stay engaged unless you deliver on the Toastmasters Brand Promise to empower them at every stage of their journey through personal and professional development. Club membership must offer a compelling benefit that is authentic and credible, and it must be consistently maintained.

Finally, you ask your visitors to join, and follow up with them, if necessary. Seems simple? It is! Let's break it down even further.

Get the Word Out

Recruiting starts with marketing and public relations—this falls on the shoulders of every member. When members adopt the mindset of sharing the benefits of Toastmasters, it's easier to draw in curious visitors. Traditional methods of getting the word out have

worked for decades and continue to be effective, even in today's electronic, digital, and online culture. For example, consider these time-honored methods:

1. Hold a meeting in a public place.

Sometimes you can schedule a club meeting during a community event such as a town festival, networking event, or holiday fair. Try hosting a meeting in a coffee shop or even a park. Aero Speakers Club in Laverton, Melbourne, Australia, conducted an outdoor Table Topics session at a local open-air market on a busy Saturday, patterning it after the famous Hyde Park Soapbox style where someone stands on a box to deliver a speech, eliciting responses from passers-by. Helen McKenzie-Fairlie, a member of the club, proudly reflects on the experience: "Our purpose was to recruit new members to charter our club." The club chartered within two months.

2. Use print media. Distribute fliers, hang posters, mail postcards. The Toastmasters website has free resources, including fliers, brochures, charts, manuals, surveys, PowerPoint templates, letter templates, and digital files. The Brand Manual and Brand Portal on the Toastmasters website gives guidelines for colors, fonts, and logo use, as well as convenient

downloadable logo elements. Get help from someone with a marketing/design/advertising background so your items are both visually attractive and marketing-minded. Focus on the benefits, not just the features, of club membership.

3. Issue press releases to announce special events, contest wins, and other news of note within your club.

4. Conduct special training programs, such as Speechcraft, or one of the modules from the Success Leadership Series, and open it up to the community or your company.

5. Invite guests to special events such as a speech contest, holiday party, open house, or training event. Golden Speakers, a robust club in Fairfield, Iowa, population of 10,000, hosts regular open houses. Member Rick Starr says, "We document everything about the event—the structure, publicity, content ... so it's easier to plan the next event. We'll get 75 to 100 people at these events, and many join over the next few months. After each event, we review what worked and what didn't, and suggest changes ..." The plan works. His club has been President's Distinguished almost every year since it chartered in 1999.

6. Participate in any of the member building campaigns:

Talk Up Toastmasters, Beat the Clock, and the Smedley Award. See the Toastmasters website for more information about these.

Less traditional methods reflect our world's reliance on digital methods and social media outlets. Clubs can reach a wider and more diverse population by using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Meetup, online video, virtual (online) meetings, email, text campaigns, and club websites. Social media does not replace face-to-face contact, but it can help you build relationships. Jenilee Taylor, DTM, of Cuyahoga Falls Toastmasters club in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, says, "Our best recruiting campaigns have had recruiting as a secondary intent. More guests join us because they love our Facebook updates. They see the fun we have and they want to be part of it. We start conversations on social media and visitors come."

Meetup is a social media tool where people can search for groups of people who share similar interests. A Toastmasters club can list its meeting on Meetup and people can find it by searching for keywords like "public speaking" or "leadership development." You can include all the meeting details,

as well as general information about the club, and the benefits of membership.

If your club has a website, it's essential that the information is current, complete, and accurate. If a website visitor sees the most recent post is from your 2015 spring contest, they'll see a lack of attention to the site and assume the club is not up-to-date. It's also critical that inquiries are handled promptly. When a visitor submits a question and receives no reply, it's a poor reflection on your club and on Toastmasters, in general. People will remember that experience for a very long time.

The website of the NUS Toastmasters club in Singapore is fresh and modern-looking. It is clear, current, and compelling, and it offers member testimonials and states the benefits of Toastmasters. There's also a terrific promotional video called "The First Step" showing the process of going from a frustrated and frightened speaker to a guest, and then a member. The club posts videos on its website and on YouTube. Finally, there's an FAQ that's easy to navigate with dropdown menus, and a blog with tips, resources, and news. It must be working well. This club was ranked second in overall education awards for 2017.

YouTube is a fantastic recruiting tool. Not only is video the ideal medium for

speakers, it engages people in a way that print media or web posts cannot. You can find “Video Tips and Tricks” on the Toastmasters website to guide you as you create your own.

These marketing outlets provide your club with huge opportunities to get the word out to get visitors in. The next step is to create a great experience for them.

Moments of Truth

In marketing, a “moment of truth” is when a customer engages with a brand, product, or service, and develops an impression about it. In your club, you can evaluate that engagement with the Moments of Truth module in the Successful Club Series. A visitor forms a first impression before they walk into your meeting. If your venue is hard to find, or has insufficient parking or complicated security procedures, visitors may be frustrated or embarrassed for being late. Anything you do to help visitors find you will pay great dividends.

Queens Best Toastmasters club in Elmhurst, New York, was ranked as the No. 1 club in education awards in 2017. Its website offers precise directions to the meeting site, including what subway or bus line to take, where to park, and a detailed description of the building interior. Invest in signs for your building’s

exterior doors and halls, leading visitors to your meeting. Is your meeting room accessible to all? Is it quiet enough to conduct a meeting? Is it set up ahead of time to project a professional image? Is your club banner displayed? Clubs meet in all types of venues from corporate conference rooms to public libraries or church basements. Whatever the space, make sure it’s comfortable, spacious, and acoustically adequate.

When visitors arrive, are they warmly welcomed? Do you provide nametags? Is the meeting well-planned so that there’s not a lot of confusion beforehand? Are people adequately prepared? Start and end the meeting on time, because that communicates respect. Have guests introduce themselves to the club, stating how they found the meeting and what drew them in. Allow them to participate in Table Topics if they’d like. And always keep the energy and mood positive. Toastmasters are so accustomed to applause and energy, it’s easy to forget that most visitors are quite surprised and often magnetically drawn to it.

Ask for the Sale

Many Toastmasters mistakenly assume that if a guest likes what they see, they’ll simply join. However, only a few will. Most won’t. Guests may leave the meeting

wanting to join, but were not confident enough to ask how. If only someone asked them to join! On the flip side, it's tempting to say, "You should join our club!"

Peter Kossowan, DTM, of Edmonton, Canada, has chartered more than 164 clubs. He prefers a softer invitation, asking visitors, "Now that you've seen the benefits of Toastmasters, would you like to join the club?"

Follow Up

Many visitors will join on the spot. Many, however, will need time to decide, making follow-up critical. Call them, or send a handwritten note. Few people send handwritten notes anymore, but they're always appreciated. Get a guest's permission to add them to the club email list, and keep them on it until they unsubscribe. Past District Governor Dana Barnes, DTM, a member of three clubs near Cheyenne, Wyoming, says, "One visitor joined after 13 years (yes, 13!), because she kept getting emails." Ian Murray, of Brunswick, Victoria, Australia, echoes this. A member of two clubs, he says, "When people notice and decide to opt-in to a mailing list, it's a request for more information. Make sure they get regular updates as they mature from interested guest to stalwart member." Max Lopez of Daybreakers Club in Houston

says, "Email interesting tidbits about member successes and club activities . . . Without follow-up, we . . . miss so much."

Recruiting is a lifestyle within strong clubs. It's not just a once-and-done activity, nor is it the job of only the Vice President Membership or Vice President Public Relations. If every member adopts a recruiting mindset, you just may see a nonstop flow of visitors to your club meetings, and those visitors will become members.

Adapted from a February 2018 article

Choose Your Words Wisely

Help attract guests and gain new members with inclusive, clear language.

By Amanda Mae Gray

I never went into my first Toastmasters meeting. I was late trying to find the right room and once I arrived, the meeting had already started. I couldn't muster up the courage to barge in and interrupt. Later, I found a different club to try instead of going back to the first, since I was too embarrassed.

Once you are in Toastmasters, you know it is the most welcoming and supportive environment, but those first steps can be scary, and some will find any excuse to run away or not go at all. It takes a lot of courage to go to your first club meeting, and it can be even more intimidating and overwhelming if members are using jargon and acronyms you don't understand.

Finding the right words to convince a prospective member to take those first steps or to create effective marketing

materials can be tricky. It is easy to slip into the same verbiage we use internally and feel like we are connecting with those who may be interested in learning more. Transforming your marketing efforts starts at the core of communication and understanding what brings people in and makes them feel comfortable instead of unintentionally pushing them away.

Careful Language Selection

There is not a secret message that converts people instantly. There is a lot of nuance that goes into why someone decides to join Toastmasters. It's important to keep that in mind as you craft your message or pitch.

Think back to the very first meeting you went to. How did you learn about

it? Did you know anyone there? How did you feel walking into the meeting? Was it a bit scary?

Reflecting on our first experience gives good insight on how we can be more welcoming and mindful of a first-timer's potential feelings.

What does this mean for our marketing efforts? Use language that not only speaks to prospects, but clearly communicates the benefits of Toastmasters. Be cognizant to avoid jargon when marketing or speaking to a prospect. Jargon is the internal language and acronyms a group uses that don't translate clearly to someone outside of the group, like DTM or District Director.

"Jargon creates a barrier," says Nitay-Yair Levi of City Tattersalls Toastmasters Club in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, and 2021 runner-up in the World Championship of Public Speaking. He explains that jargon isn't inherently bad. In fact, it's great for communication between fellow Toastmasters, and it creates a sense of belonging to a group. However, if someone is not part of the group, it creates isolation.

"Not only does it create isolation, it actually emphasizes that you don't belong. It also puts someone in a position of power over someone else," Levi says. "That's terrible if you want to invite someone to a club."

Using internal terms like "Division E" on an open house flier, or "our VPM" when chatting with a prospect about who will get their contact info, puts up those barriers. If I don't know what you're saying, or if I feel inferior, I'm just going to turn away and say no.

Instead of leaning on familiar jargon, try going more general. For example, if you are making a flier for an open house for an Area, Division, or District, try using physical location terms like the county name or metropolitan area. What do people in your geographical area already relate to?

If the District Director is speaking at your open house, use their work title or company name instead of their Toastmasters role. Or when explaining the education program, instead of using the term "Pathways" right away, keep it broad with "training programs."

Levi explains, "You want to create a sense of security that I might have with the group. I want to sell it to you instead of using all these Toastmasters words."

He suggests introducing Toastmasters as a volunteer organization. Explain that we help each other become better speakers and leaders. Then say something like, "We all volunteer here. Amanda is a volunteer this year. She's actually helping to run the club and navigate it to the next year."

If you were to say, “Amanda is the Club President,” that may put up a barrier, but phrasing it as a “volunteer role” puts the guest at ease. It’s inclusive language, and Levi says it helps show “we’re selling a relationship, not a number.”

Promote the Practical Benefits

How can you find ways to be more general while still communicating the amazing benefits to someone new? Consider how your time in Toastmasters directly impacted your work or career.

Many members feel Toastmasters has benefited them at work, including Pankaja Kulabkar of Pune Advanced Toastmasters Club in Pune, Maharashtra, India, and a project lead at a publications company. She learned the sandwich method for evaluations (positive feedback—suggestions for improvement—positive feedback) very helpful when doing appraisals of her work team.

“Toastmasters [is] where we experiment with ideas and then the confidence comes from that to implement [the idea] when working,” says Kulabkar.

Think of the ways you’ve used Toastmasters skills on the job. Ask fellow club members what they now use in work that has come from their Toastmasters experience and create a club-specific

approach when talking or marketing to potential members. For example, if your club has a lot of entrepreneurs, they could provide great selling points for networking. If Bob works in finance and has learned skills in Toastmasters to speak at his work-recruiting functions to gain more clients, mention that directly. By highlighting specific member achievements or skills people have gained as a result of being in your club, you create a personal approach that new people can connect with.

This is a way to celebrate your current members and give new prospects a way to connect, too.

Continued Connection

It’s important to follow up with your prospects and stay connected with them. Sending a quick email or text the following day is a great way to see if they have any questions while things are fresh on their mind. Keep it short and sweet! Try something like:

It was great meeting you yesterday! Wanted to see if you had any questions. Hope to see you again at our next meeting [insert time and date]. Feel free to reach out any time.

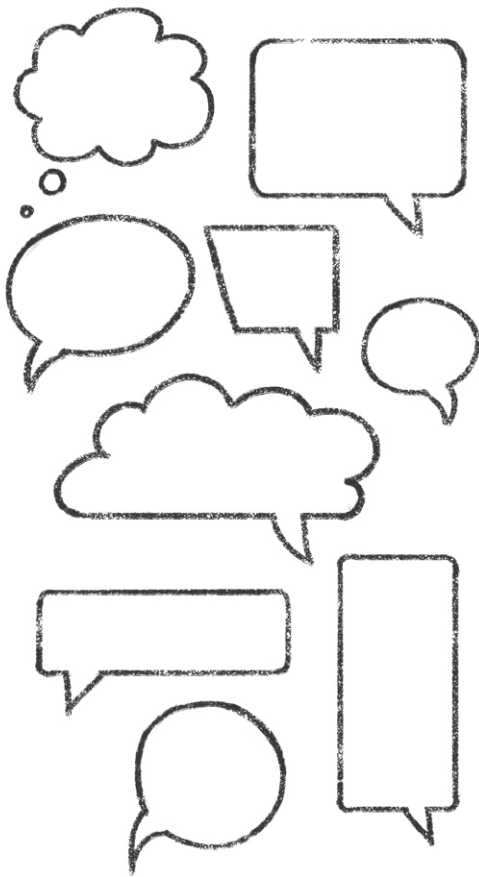
People tend to forget with their busy lives exactly when they should be coming back. It is key to remind them of the

specific time and date. Sending a message 24 hours before the next meeting also helps to give people the time to free up their calendar while not being so far out they forget. This could be a task for the Vice President Membership but be sure to change the email from meeting to meeting to maintain engagement—include information about special events or the theme or word of the day.

To bring people in, start thinking outside the box for meeting ideas. Hold a meeting where everyone gets to practice and receive some feedback on their elevator pitch. Try a mock interview round-robin. Or have a toast meeting where each person gets 30–60 seconds to give a toast at a work or personal event. Advertise these types of meetings where the traditional format can be loosened to get lots of people practicing with real-world applicable skills.

When you open up the doors to invite people to join in a way that makes them feel comfortable, confident, and included, they are much more likely to come back again and again!

Adapted from an April 2023 article



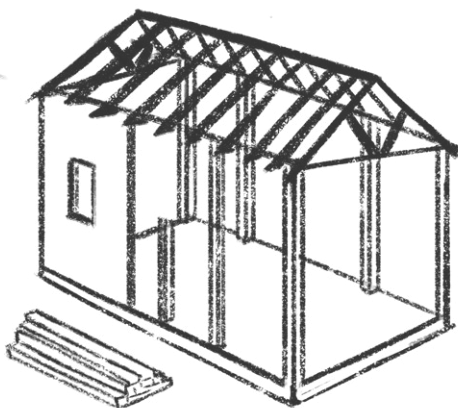
Build the Club You Want

Decide how many members to recruit.
Then go find them!

By Ryan Urie

Nearly every Toastmasters club wants more members, and nearly every Toastmasters club struggles to find them. As an Area Director, when I mention “recruitment” or “membership building” to club officers, I’m frequently met with a groan. I get it. Getting the word out, finding potential guests, inviting them, and convincing them to join is a lot of work. It’s not surprising that many clubs rely on luck to attract guests and see membership building as outside their control. Who hasn’t said or at least thought, *I sure hope more guests start showing up*. Hoping doesn’t bring in new members—taking action does.

It’s time to stop waiting for guests and new members and instead choose the size you want your club to be. Decide how many members you want and then go find them.



Personal Benefits of Membership Building

Take a moment to mentally list three or four leadership skills you hope to gain by being involved in Toastmasters. Now, think about the skills you need to attract new guests and build your membership. Chances are, there’s a lot of overlap in those lists.

Membership building is not a chore that Toastmasters *must* do; it *is* Toastmasters. It’s an ideal opportunity to practice persuading, communicating, planning, strategizing, and executing—all of the very skills we’re in Toastmasters

to learn! You won't find a better place to practice leadership than in membership building. And once you've mastered these skills of persuasion and communication, you can put them to use driving positive change in your work and volunteer activities, your community, or your family life.

How to Do It

Membership building can be broken down into four steps.

1. Form a team

Leadership is not something you do by yourself. You'll want the whole club to help eventually, but start by forming a team of three or four people to initiate the project and develop a plan.

2. Set a goal

Decide how many people you will bring into the club. A simple baseline is the number of members you need to achieve Distinguished status by the end of the current term. This gives you a specific goal as well as a hard deadline.

3. Make a plan

First, brainstorm lots of ideas for how to grow your membership. Second—and this is the hard part—pick only one. When you have lots of good ideas, it's tempting to try them all to see

what works. But if you do, you won't do any of them well enough to make a difference and you'll tire out your volunteers. Pick the single activity most likely to achieve your goal and put the rest away for later. Finally, break your chosen idea into steps, start to finish, and determine who will do what by when.

4. Execute

Now carry out the plan and evaluate the results. Even if the first thing you try doesn't work, you've still developed new confidence, skills, and knowledge. Choose the next-best item on your list and try again.

Some Ideas to Get Started

You know best what the right approach will be for your unique club, but here are some ideas to consider.

Personal Invites: Focus most of your effort on face-to-face invites. Signs, fliers, or social media posts are appealing because they are safe and easy. However, they don't work near as well as the human touch. Many of us are bombarded with advertising and social media posts, and we are becoming adept at ignoring them. We only trust recommendations

from real people, ideally people we know personally.

Asking someone to come to Toastmasters can be intimidating, but it's no different from preparing for a speech. Decide who you will ask, when and where you'll ask them, and what you'll say to open the conversation. Then find a partner in the club and role-play asking until you are comfortable with it. If you still struggle, a personalized email invitation is still an improvement on an anonymous sign.

Events: It can be a hard sell to ask a busy professional to attend yet another meeting. Holding an event creates an opportunity to invite guests with promises of fun, food, and a no-pressure introduction to the club. Plus, it's fun for current members to do something new. You might hold an open house, a viewing party for the World Championship of Public Speaking, a storytelling hour, or whatever you think will excite your potential guests and current members. As mentioned, advertising often doesn't work these days, but there is an exception: It works when it includes the words "free food."

Target Your Recruitment: Don't try to market to everyone or you won't reach anyone in particular. Identify the groups in your community who are

motivated to improve their leadership and speaking skills and then go to them instead of waiting for them to find you. Which local companies, nonprofits, or civic organizations might benefit from what Toastmasters has to offer? Volunteer to speak to a human resources representative about the benefits of Toastmasters, perhaps with an offer for lunch or coffee.

Get Visible: Many people have never heard of Toastmasters, and of those who have, many often have no clue what it's about. We have to show them! Every so often, try meeting in a new and public place, like a restaurant, coffee shop, or park, and let people see what your club does. Make it clear that guests are welcome to observe or even participate. This might be as simple as opening the doors at your regular meeting place or inviting the public to an open house event.

Another seldom used option is speaking outside of the club. We don't become public speakers just to give better speeches from Toastmasters' manuals. We do it to drive change in the real world. Check with local civic organizations, schools, churches, or community groups to find speaking opportunities, and after you bring down the house, be sure to mention where you honed your impressive skills.

You Can Do This

It's easy to get discouraged, to throw your hands up and say, "We've already tried these things before!" But this is just an excuse. Even ideas that failed once might work at a different time, a different place, or with a different approach. Keep trying!

Recruiting new members is a challenge. But it's a worthwhile one. It's the kind of challenge that drives you to learn new skills, take new risks, and grow your abilities as a leader. It's a challenge that makes you better. Stop hoping for more members. Stop waiting for more members. *Choose* how many members you want, and then make it happen.

Adapted from a May 2019 article

YOU CAN
DO IT!

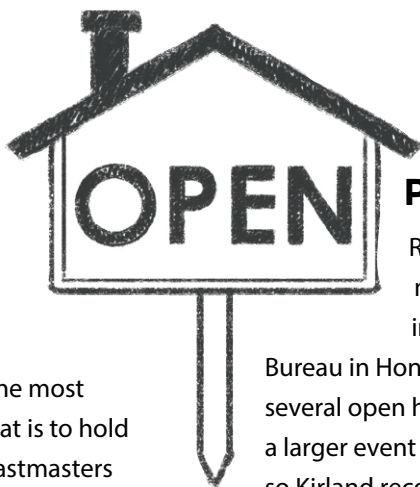
Open Houses Open Doors to New Members

Give guests a chance to engage with your club in action.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

Successful clubs have a blend of both experienced and new members. If your club needs a boost of fresh folks, one of the most popular ways to do that is to hold an open house—a Toastmasters meeting where prospective members are invited to attend. While all Toastmasters meetings are open to visitors, the open house emphasizes the benefits of Toastmasters to prospective members, and may include food or a special program.

The goal is to attract a large number of guests, with a portion of them joining as members. What are the key elements to having a successful open house? Several Toastmasters shared their insights.



Plan

Rose Kirland, DTM, a member of 10 clubs, including Hawaii Speakers Bureau in Honolulu, Hawaii, has hosted several open houses. An open house is a larger event than a standard meeting, so Kirland recommends assembling a team to ensure the event runs smoothly. Team members can work on a variety of functions, including event promotion, meeting planning, food preparation, and guest relations, according to their interest.

“Planning is essential,” says Kirland. “You and your team should brainstorm answers to what are the goals of the event. Who is the target audience and what are the roles of the team members? Of course, you also need to decide the time and venue.”

That said, be sure not to get too caught up in the planning stage. "Others have successfully run open houses before you, so reproduce what works best and learn from the mistakes of others," says Florian Bay, DTM, of the London Victorians in the United Kingdom. Contact leaders in your club, Area, or District who have hosted an open house and get their best advice.

Bob Hooey, DTM, AS, of the Wild Rose Club in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, emphasizes that the meeting itself should be well planned.

"It needs to be well run, tight," he says. Prospective members are more impressed with a well-run meeting."

Timing is important

both in person

and online. Be sure to create an agenda and stick to it!

Finally, don't forget the need for communication and coordination within the team. "I scheduled biweekly meetings on a group channel on Slack," says Yi Zhang, a former member of Virtual Speak Toastmasters Club in Palo Alto, California. "We talked about opportunities, concerns. Direct communication builds trust, and it made our communication smoother."

Zhang also says a theme for the open house can draw in visitors. Themes may

revolve around an upcoming holiday or sporting event, a television show, or favorite hobbies. A theme gives the added benefit of a relatable way to market the event, garner excitement, and add pizzazz to the open house itself.

Promote

If you don't adequately promote your event, potential guests won't know to attend. "There are 101-plus ways to tell the world—fliers, press releases, social

media, digital marketing, word of mouth,"

Kirland says.

Toastmasters has some resources to help, such as a press release template

and pre-made fliers that you can use digitally or traditionally.

Bay suggests that clubs aim for quantity of guests. "If you want to have 50 people in the room, do enough marketing to attract 100 people," he says. "The plan is to attract as many guests as possible and to convert as many as possible into members. Use this as a guiding light throughout."

Take advantage of social media. Many clubs have Facebook and LinkedIn pages, which can be used to promote meetings

**PROMOTE
PROMOTE
PROMOTE**

and members' achievements. Encourage club members to share these posts on their personal pages as well or send them directly to friends. Don't forget about the tried-and-true method of putting up fliers and submitting a notice to the local newspaper. Members of corporate clubs can see if the company will post a notice about the meeting on its internal employee communication channels.

Your best bet, however, is word of mouth. "Ask members to personally invite people to come," says Hooey. "It makes a huge impact by having a personal touch." It's an even more effective method if members offer to bring the guest or meet them at the door.

Select Speakers

Finally, you'll want to consider your speakers. Some clubs have one or two members speak (perhaps an experienced and a newer member), but a special guest speaker is also an option.

Zhang opted for a guest speaker and reached out to his District Director for recommendations. Kirland has done that as well, but she prefers to look within the club first. "We've found that it builds camaraderie and strong internal relationships, and helps morale, which adds to why members stay. Open houses

give members the opportunity to show their pride," she says.

Some clubs, such as Hooey's, have both member and guest speakers. "We make sure our members are there to build rapport with the guests," he says. "The guest speaker is used to promote the event. Both work very well."

Of course, whether you have a guest speaker or a club speaker, you'll want to make the meeting interactive and fun for guests. "Talk to the guests," Bay says. "Be sure they get a chance to speak during Table Topics. Get them involved right away."

Online and Hybrid Open Houses

If you're conducting an open house online, take advantage of the chat box and think of it as a lobby. "We usually ask two or three Zoom monitors to assist about 30 minutes before start time," she says. "The monitors welcome guests and members." Before the meeting starts, they have a short break to get water. Once the meeting begins, they put the agenda in the chat box and share a screen about virtual etiquette.

It's also helpful to encourage members to make small talk before and after the meeting, as well as during any breaks, so guests stay engaged. "We noticed that

[guests] were often shy to speak up, so interacting with the group was important,” says Zhang. “It was a new environment, but people became more confident once they started to interact with the group,” he says.

When it comes to a hybrid open house, be sure to have your technology set up so that online attendees feel they are getting the full experience, just as an in-person guest would. Camera and microphone setups play a big role in this. Ensure in-person speakers can be seen and heard clearly by all participants.

The benefit for online attendees is a bit more personalization. Encourage them to pick a virtual background that matches the theme of the event or provide one to be downloaded. It’s helpful to have a club member attend online so they can help online guests feel engaged and included.

Don’t Forget the Ask

Hooey reminds members that a call to action is needed at the end of the open house just as in the end of a speech. “You need to ask the guests to join,” he says.

Have the application forms printed out and pass them around the room or share the document in the online chat. After a few days, club officers should follow up

with guests to see if they’d like to apply for membership. You can include a link to Member Testimonials, a Club Experience video, and the *Toastmaster* magazine. Don’t let your hard work go to waste!

While an open house highlights the benefits of Toastmasters for potential new members, it also allows current members to grow new skill sets.

“In addition to becoming more confident in public speaking, I learned soft skills by planning the open house,” says Zhang. “All the feedback I got from my club members is so valuable to me. I have the most amazing club!”

Adapted from a March 2023 article

Cost-Effective Marketing Techniques

Stay budget conscious while increasing your club's visibility.

By Laura Mishkind

Gaining new members is vital not only for clubs to thrive and expand but also to challenge and engage current members. Marketing your club doesn't need to be costly, so if your funds are on the low end, try a few of these low-cost techniques to attract new members.

Display your spirit.

Encourage questions by regularly using items from the Toastmasters store—slip on a shirt or jacket, don a hat, sip from a water bottle, display the centennial book or commemorative magazine, or wear a pin.



Use social media.

Social media platforms are one of the easiest ways to market your content for free! Yes, there are paid advertising options, but begin with generating organic traffic. Post frequently on your club's pages and share photos of members participating in meetings. Add photos and updates of your own progress to your personal pages too!

Embrace the Rotary alliance.

Connect with your local Rotary clubs to see if you can present about Toastmasters at one of their meetings, or consider creating a club for members of both organizations to join.



Host a potluck.

A simple incentive is offering food at a meeting. Keep costs low and ask every member to bring a dish to share. Advertise the event to entice guests to come see what Toastmasters is about while enjoying a tasty, free meal.

Host a Table Topics to brainstorm recruitment tactics.

Ask club members to share their ideas for recruiting new members in a special Table Topics session. This could make the meeting more fun and give members the opportunity to share their ideas or play off something someone else said.

Host an open house.

Showcase all Toastmasters has to offer with an open house event. Advertise it in your community and online. Toastmasters International has templates for fliers that can be printed out at low cost or shared on social media.

Respond to Find A Club inquiries.

The Prospective Member Management page allows all club officers to see Find A Club contacts, review when someone has scheduled a visit, and assign an officer with each contact to ensure no one is missed. Take advantage of this tool and connect with prospective members. The Prospective Member Conversion Guide has all the resources you need, including an email template!

Emphasize membership benefits.

Talk up Toastmasters whenever you can! This can be speaking with a potential member or simply a friend. Tell them how Toastmasters helped you as an individual.

Start a member referral program.

Ask every member to invite a friend to a meeting. Challenge everyone to bring a guest at some point during the year, similar to Toastmasters' Plus One Pledge.

Follow up with guests.

Send a follow-up email or make a call to everyone who visits your club. Getting them in the door may be the first step, but you want to keep them coming back—it's essentially continuous marketing.

Build community engagement.

Create connections in your community by attending local events, such as a farmers market or a university club fair. Look into setting up an informational booth and garner attention with items from the Toastmasters Store, such as balloons.

Add testimonials to your website.

Take the opportunity to lean on digital storytelling through videos and pictures. Record a few members explaining why they joined Toastmasters and what they have gained from being part of the club and post them on your club's website. Encourage members to share on their social media, and send to friends and coworkers who might be interested.

Adapted from a March 2025 article

You Can Always Return

Members might leave your club—but that doesn't mean they're gone forever.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Clubs can learn a lot from members who leave and those who rejoin—whether they return to the same club or a different one. Consider these actions to help all your members and make your club stronger.

When Members Leave

1. Conduct exit interviews.

You may assume members leave because they don't value the Toastmasters experience or believe they can't gain anything more from it. But people leave for all kinds of reasons, and it's important for your club to understand why.

As Toastmasters, we know feedback is essential. Conduct exit interviews with members who are leaving—talk with them to learn why they're leaving, what their experience has been, what the club's strengths are, and



any ideas they have to make the club experience better.

"We often tell ourselves a story as to why they left," says Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS, who has left and then rejoined Toastmasters three times. "An exit interview eliminates any misconceptions."

Even if you know why a member is leaving, it's worth taking the time to ask the person for thoughts and ideas. "It's not that we're trying to lure them back in," says Zappala. "We want to know—is it us or life circumstances?"

2. Make changes based on feedback.

Similar to speakers who receive evaluations, once you have feedback

from departing members, reflect on it. Consider how the club can apply that input. You could learn invaluable insights about how to address a challenge or receive an idea on how to make something good even better. Feedback helps speakers—and clubs—improve and grow.

3. Maintain contact with former members.

Many members who leave and return note they felt cut off while they were away. Keep the connections alive and the door open for people to return. Share the link to the magazine. Send them the club or District newsletter. Invite them to special events. Or just check in to see how they're doing.

"Many people leave Toastmasters not because they're dissatisfied, but because life takes them in a different direction," says Balázs Gergely, of Budakalász, Hungary, who left when his children were small and later joined a corporate club. "A warm invitation to reconnect, coupled with reminders of the supportive community and personal growth opportunities, can reignite their interest."

Even if it's not possible for them to return to your club specifically, former members might be able to join another club or simply serve as advocates for

the Toastmasters program. Think about how you heard of the organization and why you attended your first meeting—maybe even why you joined. Word of mouth and personal testimonials are powerful marketing tools.

4. Create a scholarship fund.

Costs can be prohibitive for some people, whether related to the exchange rate, the fact that they're students or people who are not working, or myriad other reasons. Consider advocating for a District-level scholarship fund or start one in your club. You can also try to minimize any club fees above the required Toastmasters International dues.

When Members Return

1. Ask returning members what their goals and motivations are.

Georgina Anum had to take a periodic pause on her membership at Accra Toastmasters Club in Accra, Ghana. When she rejoined, no one asked her why. Recognize that returning members might have different and more specific goals.

"Because we all have different reasons for joining Toastmasters, we should identify the members' needs,"

she says. “We can group members by their purposes, and we can get the right orientation and get them involved accordingly.”

2. Don’t assume that returning members know, understand, or remember the Toastmasters program and your club’s protocols and procedures.

When Zappala rejoined Toastmasters, she found a revised education system. Because she was a previous member, club members assumed she knew everything. But it took her a while to understand the new program. Assess returning members’ understanding of Pathways and be ready to support them.

3. Ask members for insights about their time away and their reentry.

Returning members offer important perspectives and experience. When they rejoin, they can see the member onboarding experience with a fresh, yet experienced, set of eyes. They can also talk about the value of Toastmasters and what they missed while they were gone.

Mani Shrestha of Lalitpur, Nepal, had to leave his corporate club when he took a new job; four years later, he took a new job that had its own club. He brought his ideas and best practices from his previous club to his new one, helping strengthen it.

Returning members can also offer a different and maybe even stronger perspective to prospective members and corporate club sponsors about the value of Toastmasters, since they left and recognized what they were missing enough to return.

“My journey highlights the natural ebb and flow of a member’s life,” says Gergely. “I joined in my early 30s to advance my career, then stepped away to focus on family, and later returned when the time was right. Clubs can thrive by understanding these cycles and creating a welcoming environment that encourages returning members to pick up where they left off.”

Adapted from an April 2025 article

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

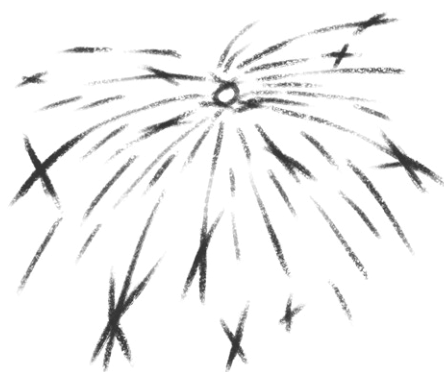
The First Moment of Truth

Sparking the interest of prospects quickly is critical in the digital age.

By Stephanie Darling

The first time you hear that Cologne Toastmasters welcomed 54 new members during the 2022–2023 program year, you might think your ears were playing a trick on you. The same might happen when you hear that during that same period, the club hosted 240 guests, with the highest number of visitors for one meeting topping out at 19.

And while these numbers are extremely impressive they're not a priority for the club, says Past Club President Peter Ratko. "These are people—new colleagues—behind the numbers. What's key for our club is to motivate and help them achieve along their journey. We're all learning together."



How did this bilingual, hybrid club in Cologne, Germany, reach—and engage—so many new members? They used the same touchpoints as other clubs do—websites, open houses, personal discussions—but with the keen awareness that each technique offers only about five seconds to spark the attention of a prospect, making quick, compelling impressions extremely important.

"That first touchpoint with the club is the first moment of truth," says Ratko. "Especially in the digital setting; if you don't interest them quickly, they're gone."

The club is dedicated to fostering a warm, inviting, newcomer-friendly culture. Visitors need only bring “openness and a good mood,” the website notes. At the same time, the club has worked hard to back that sentiment with a thoroughly thought-out, strategic approach to member recruitment and retention.

“In 2021, we [club leaders] asked ourselves, ‘How can someone find us without knowing Toastmasters, or our club, exists?’” explains Olaf Langenbeck, DTM, Club Secretary. Leaders then created a “communication concept” aimed at finding and reaching the club’s target group—everyone from age 18 to 60.

Ratko, a professional website designer and Google analytics expert, studied what people were searching for online that matched what Toastmasters and the Cologne club offered. Three top key phrases emerged: improve speaking skills, give presentations, and overcome stage fright. Ratko and a team of journalists and writers in the club revamped the website. Those phrases—and similar variations—are now at the top of the club’s homepage and are repeated throughout the site. “The ranking of the website is getting better and better the more matches/matched searches performed,” Ratko explained.

To properly orient and educate new members, the club created a customer

journey that covers five phases: awareness, interest, desire, action, and post-action.

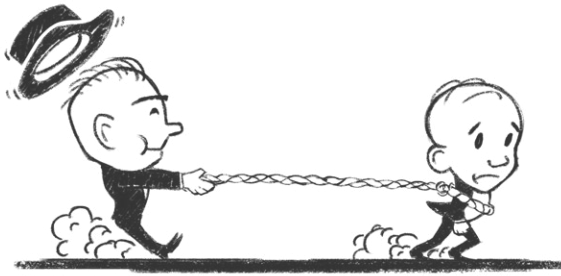
Here are some of the specifics aiding in the journey.

- **Easy contact:** Visitors can sign up to attend meetings straight from the website. These, and all inquiries, are answered personally by the Vice President Membership the same day, or even instantly, Ratko says.
- **Guest manager:** This new role is rotated among club members. The guest manager welcomes all online and in-person visitors and is available before and after the meeting to answer questions.

“We have a very open atmosphere at our meetings,” Ratko says. “Every member is open to communicate with new people in the room, whether they are guests or new members.”
- **Onboarding:** The club holds an onboarding session every two to four weeks, depending on need. New members and guests learn about the club and how it functions, including Pathways, easy-Speak, and the structure of Toastmasters. Questions are welcomed, and attendees receive a flier about Toastmasters and the club.

- **Mentoring program:** The club is sharply attuned to this effort, after learning that many mentees weren't comfortable finding a mentor on their own. The club Mentorship Manager finds members to serve as mentors. The club website includes a mentoring section, including a mini profile of several existing mentors and their areas of expertise. Anyone searching the pages can easily see how the program works and the broad range of skills-building advice that's offered.
- **Programs:** Planning for the program year begins by listening to member interests and needs, Ratko says. Based on feedback, new club meeting formats have included a month on the topic of quality mentorship, meeting outside the club's regular space, and workshops on Table Topics or humor.

Adapted from an October 2023 article



Chapter 2

Retaining Members

Re-engage!

Win back members in your Toastmasters club.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

You've seen the signs: empty seats at club meetings and decreased participation. When renewal time comes around, some members don't renew. As club leaders watch membership numbers drop, they plan ways to recruit new ones. It can feel a little like trying to fill a continually leaking bucket. But there are ways to fix the leak. Or at least reduce the outflow.

While some attrition is inevitable due to members moving or having schedule conflicts, there can be other reasons that members leave. Do you know why they leave? Do you try to win them back?

Reach Out

Does your club reach out to members who don't attend meetings, letting them know they were missed?

If your club doesn't already have a member communication plan, create one that includes contacting members who miss a meeting (without communicating their absence ahead of time) or if their

participation wanes (most obviously, if they stop giving speeches). The Vice President Membership often follows up with these members, but mentors or other members can also do so.

Phone calls, video meetings, or in-person communication can be most effective, as tone of voice and facial expressions convey empathy and care more than text-based, asynchronous communication.

When reaching out, tread lightly. Open a dialogue with empathy. Ask about their initial goals in joining Toastmasters and if those have changed. Inquire about their current needs and how the club can support them. Remember, the key is to listen, not to pressure.

Some phrases you can use:

- “[Name], we missed you at the meeting yesterday.”
- “I always enjoy [something you enjoy about the member or their participation].”
- “I hope to see you at the next meeting.”
- “Do you have challenges with attending or a change in your schedule?” (Gently probe for reasons why they didn’t attend; if they don’t offer a reason, try to determine if there are any ongoing issues.)

If they indicate that the meetings aren’t a fit for them anymore, try some of these phrases:

- “What were your goals when you joined?”
- “Have your goals changed? Are there new goals we can help you achieve?”
- “Is there anything we’re missing?”
- “How can we help you get the most out of your membership?”
- “What would need to change [for you to stay/participate more]?”

Rekindle Interest

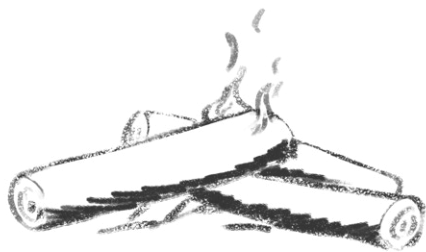
Rekindle interest by reminding members of what drew them to Toastmasters.

John Barrett, of Toastmasters On A STick (TOAST) in Saint Paul, Minnesota, suggests keeping former members on the weekly email list to regularly remind them of the club and inviting them to share their Toastmasters testimonials in the newsletter.

“Keep in touch with members who’ve dropped out,” adds Harry Wolfe, a member of Audible Talkers Toastmasters in Phoenix, Arizona. “Welcome them to attend as guests.”

For many former members, timing is an issue. Priorities change and can lead people to seek out Toastmasters again.

“My professional career was the reason I left and the reason I came back,” says Accredited Speaker Stephanie Angelo. “I left in 2004 because I was starting out as a professional speaker, and the time it took me to create Toastmasters speeches conflicted with what I was doing as a professional speaker. I didn’t have time to do them both. I came back in 2017 because I could use



Toastmasters speeches as opportunities to practice short segments of my speeches for clients.”

10 Strategies for Engagement (and Re-Engagement)

In addition to checking in with members, you can be proactive in keeping them engaged by taking the following actions:

1. Vary meeting elements.

Consider adding roles, such as Quiz Master (asking questions about the speeches or other aspects of the meeting) or Joke Master, to engage more members in roles and inject fun in the meeting. Also, consider implementing a few unique meeting themes or other engaging formats, like a backward meeting.

2. Address member needs.

“Giving them something today that they can use tomorrow is very helpful,” says Barrett, the Minnesota member. “Most people look at things from a ‘what’s in it for me?’ mentality, so you have to provide things that are ‘in it for them.’”

3. Promote

Toastmasters resources.

Include quick tips about Toastmasters resources in meetings. Show how members can get even more value from their membership. For example, demonstrate Yoodli or how to submit a level completion in Pathways.

4. Conduct a Member Interest Survey annually.

A survey can reveal members’ goals and get their input on club quality characteristics.

5. Give them a mentor.

Match mentors with new members, as well as members who may need extra guidance to get the most out of their membership or to meet a specific goal. A mentor can be a significant catalyst for re-engagement. And being a mentor can make a longtime member feel valued. “I enjoy using my skills to help others,” says Sharon Abrahamson, DTM, who lives in Sweden. Abrahamson left Toastmasters but returned to the organization during the pandemic and participated in several online clubs based in Israel, ultimately joining Jerusalem Toastmasters. “I felt I was useful. I felt I was needed.”

6. Provide meaningful engagement.

Make everyone feel valued and needed. “No matter how small the task (e.g., distributing name badges, assembling banner stand), everyone has ‘skin in the game’ and feels important,” says Tammy Revesz, DTM, of Glass City Toastmasters in Toledo, Ohio.

7. Keep online attendees engaged in hybrid meetings.

Experiment with your hybrid setup to ensure online attendees don’t feel less important than in-person attendees. Make sure microphones and cameras are set up so that they can hear and see all participants and be heard and seen as well.

8. Create opportunities to foster friendships.

It’s hard to leave a club when you have built friendships. Consider having time before or after a meeting to allow people to chit-chat. Hold social events regularly, in person or online. For virtual meetings, try having discussion-style Table Topics in which breakout rooms are created for two or three people to discuss a topic for about 10 minutes, with one

person from each group reporting on their topic to the larger group. This method allows people to get to know each other better while still practicing interpersonal and impromptu communication skills.

9. Encourage participation by all members at every meeting.

Speaking of Table Topics, ensure that the Topicsmaster knows to first call on people who do not have speaking roles in the meeting. Try to have this goal: Everyone speaks at every meeting. “Make sure Table Topics is suitable for both online and in-person attendees,” says Abrahamson. “Make everyone feel included in meetings.”

10. Recognize accomplishments inside and outside of Toastmasters.

Encourage members to tell stories about how Toastmasters has helped them achieve professional or personal goals. Your club could highlight a member at a meeting, on your website, on social media, or in a club newsletter.

Know When to Let Go

Sometimes, despite best efforts, members may choose to leave. Respecting this decision is crucial, as forcing engagement can be counterproductive.

“If your club can’t be what they need, encourage them to visit other clubs,” says Andrea Tantillo, DTM, of Timmons Talkers in Houston, Texas. “Even though we are all structured similarly, club culture can vary from club to club, and what may be a good fit for some may not be the best fit for others.”

Ultimately, re-engaging members in Toastmasters is about creating a community where each member feels valued and fulfilled. It’s a continual process of adaptation, communication, and recognition. By focusing on these areas, clubs can retain members and inspire them to grow and contribute actively to their club and the Toastmasters community.

Adapted from a March 2024 article

4 Influencers of Membership Retention

Knowing what your members value is the key to a vibrant club.

By Sravanthi Vallampati, DTM

Do you remember what you came looking for at your very first Toastmasters meeting? Think back to when you didn't know what to expect. How did you feel?

Reflecting on your Toastmasters experience since, did you find what you were looking for? Do you know someone who did not?

Making sure members are able to achieve their goals and get the fulfillment they need out of their Toastmasters journey is key to clubs being able to keep members for many years.

A Positive Start

I vividly remember going to my first meeting—it was also the first meeting of Twinspirations Toastmasters Club, a hybrid club in Ohio that was just chartering and would become my home club. And I was the first speaker at that first meeting!

My palms were cold and moist, my voice trembled, and my heart drummed against my ribs as I shared my love of gardening in my Ice Breaker speech, “A Place of My Own.”

Afterward, I received a surprise bigger than the positive encouragement people gave me—a fellow member, 80-year-old Barb Baumgartner, asked me to be her mentor. “I want to stay young, and I know you can help me be just that!” she told me. Her words transformed my perception of who I was, and why I thought people joined Toastmasters.

Robin Walshesky joined Progressive Messengers, a corporate club in Ohio, in 2016. Despite describing herself as a “loud, outgoing, talkative person,” she needed to find a way to overcome the fear that enveloped her every time she got up to speak, especially in a formal

setting. Through the support and mentorship from club members, she earned a promotion, became an ordained minister, and officiated two weddings—all in one year.

Maurice “Mo” Holloway, also a member of Progressive Messengers, returned to Toastmasters after eight years away to refine his presentation skills, but stayed because he enjoyed being part of an incredible group “where support and encouragement were almost unbelievable—magical,” he says. He loved the vulnerable stories members shared about themselves, allowing them to build trust and comfort with one another over time.

Why People Join Toastmasters

Barb, Robin, Mo, and I joined for different reasons, and we all invested time and effort to achieve our goals. But we also all found something well beyond our expectations, and much of that was due to supportive club environments and enriching educational and growth experiences.

People join a club for a variety of reasons—some are looking for opportunities to grow their communication or leadership skills; some want to learn something new; some

are looking for a group of people with similar interests.

When members decide not to renew, it may be because they already accomplished their goals or found the club, or program, not aligned with their expectations; however, the majority do so for a reason out of the club’s control: Their schedule has changed, they have a new life circumstance, or they felt it was too much work.

While club leaders cannot control unexpected events, they can ensure members are committed to their goals, understand the resources available, and receive encouragement along the way.

What Members Want and Need

Over the years I have studied what makes people stay in their clubs, a topic I spoke about at the 2024 International Convention. I have compiled four of what I call “key influencers” that affect the value and success of each member. If clubs and leaders can tap into these areas, they can positively influence the experience of every member.

- **Education** – helping members learn and grow through Pathways
- **Environment** – ensuring everyone feels welcomed and has a sense of belonging
- **Enrichment** – including programming for members to learn from people outside of their club
- **Empowerment** – providing opportunities for members to continue to grow after achieving their original goals

Let's look at these four influencers to better understand what club leaders and members can do to make their club strong, healthy, and vibrant—one that people want to join and stay with.

Education

People join Toastmasters to enhance their communication and leadership skills. There are many ways this happens, so make sure guests and new members know about the opportunities.

- **Pathways** – Toastmasters' education program offers a variety of paths and projects, and is fully customizable. In addition to its expansive content, Pathways is a self-paced, structured program, allowing each member to learn at their own pace to achieve their individualized goals.

- **Experiential learning** – Toastmasters learn by doing, without teachers or trainers. We grow not only through delivering speeches but also through evaluations—which enrich our active listening skills and help us focus on what makes an impactful speech—and club meeting roles.
- **Leadership opportunities** – Anyone can be a club officer, and Toastmasters provides resources to help you understand how to successfully navigate these positions. The Club Success Plan, Distinguished Club Program, and a variety of other resources help you understand your members' needs, and how to create a quality club. Don't forget to use them!

Environment

A Toastmasters club isn't just about learning, it's also about feeling and belonging. When a guest or a new member attends, they probably feel slightly anxious, but if they are welcomed warmly and have meaningful interactions with other members, they will feel encouraged and comfortable. It's nearly impossible to learn and grow if you are in an environment where you don't feel welcomed or valued.

- **Physical** – The location, accessibility, seating, audio/visual resources—all of these make your first impressions that much more impactful. If it's hard to find the meeting location or link, or there aren't enough seats, or there is no way for someone in a wheelchair or walker to access your space, people are likely to be turned off.
- **Social** – Consider how you greet people. Is there a warm welcome? Are there meaningful interactions between members? Are you helping guests and new members find a place to sit and introducing them to others? Are you extending the same warmth in virtual environments?
- **Cultural** – We need to have a respect for diversity in all its forms and make a conscious effort at being inclusive. The cultural aspect of our environment is vitally important; you want guests and members to feel like they belong at your meeting, as persons. And we all grow from hearing stories from other cultures.

As an immigrant, non-native speaker of English in the United States, I have found members in my online Speak to Lead Toastmasters club to be kindred spirits,

people with similar barriers to overcome and goals to achieve.

Since joining the club, these members have found freedom from self-doubt, made close friends, and felt an impact on their lives. Some enjoy the structure and support, some the momentum of growth and learning, and others the professional skills they have gained.

Enrichment

Some members want a little more than what the club and club meetings have to offer, or the meetings and members need to be energized differently. How do you make that happen?

- **Special events** – Invite a guest speaker, host an open house, have a joint club meeting. Allow your members to be exposed to new people and new ways of thinking and doing.
- **Field trips** – Go outside your club. If we are only confined to our meeting rooms, we are limiting the fundamental aspect of Toastmasters—experiential learning. We are influencers and we are leaders, and opportunities to equip ourselves for life are all around us.

- **Celebrations** – Celebrating events or occasions is so enriching! Recognizing achievements and milestones is a golden approach to enhancing morale.
- **Mentorship** – A strong mentor program is enormously beneficial, both for the mentors and the mentees. Both groups gain important skills and perspectives and grow through the mentor-mentee relationship. I know I have reached this level of progress because of so many mentors who believed in me.

“I initially joined Toastmasters to enhance my ability to organize my thoughts and communicate clearly,” says Stephanie Hill, Vice President Education of the online club Diversity 4 Success Toastmasters. “Over time, my purpose has evolved. Now I am driven by a desire to help others grow and discover their own voices.”

Empowerment

How are we helping our members continue to grow and get more out of Toastmasters? Challenging opportunities like these can be the answer.

1. **Stretch assignments** – Speechcraft, the Youth Leadership Program, and Interpersonal Communication are great ways for experienced members to help non-members learn valuable communication skills.
2. **Leadership** – Look beyond the club level for many opportunities to hone leadership skills—Areas, Divisions, and Districts offer many ways for members to get valuable experience in a variety of skills. Equally important are testimonials where members bring back stories of how they applied their Toastmasters learning outside of the meeting room.

When a seasoned member feels their personal, professional, and social goals are being met, they are likely to step out of their comfort zone, try something new, and thus grow in unexpected ways.

“I loved writing and delivering speeches, but that was secondary to learning how to inspire, motivate, and lead people,” says Wendi Polman, DTM, a former Division N Director in Ohio. “I found that leading at a club level was different than at an Area, Division, or District. Each level brought new learnings and experiences that I incorporated into all aspects of my life.”

Applying These Concepts

Think about your club in terms of these four areas. How are you measuring up? Opportunities abound within each of the key influencers.

- Find what you are already doing in your club, and what you might want to try.
- Match activities, programs, and resources to member needs and talents.
- Create avenues for engagement and involvement.
- Appreciate authenticity. Recognize effort.
- Ask for feedback, formally and informally.
- Define, refine, and evolve—pivot to adapt to new ways of thinking, doing, and being.

Paying attention to the four areas of influence brings extraordinary value to our Toastmasters experience. When guests or new members come to a meeting, we need them to be engaged and excited about the potential—the potential of the program, of the club, of their ability to reach their goals and gain self-confidence. Through our efforts, we help them visualize a future where the skills and competencies they learn at the club unfold in powerful ways.

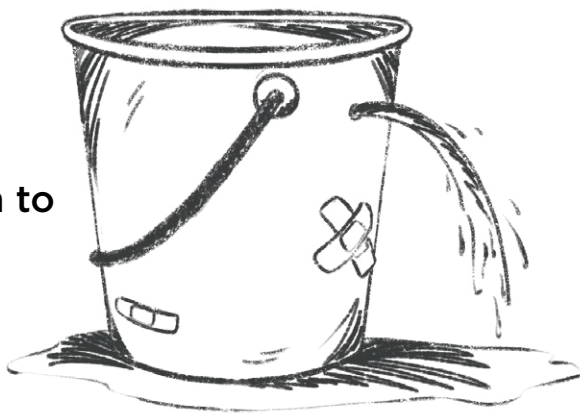
Success is the sum of small iterative efforts on a continuum. Use these building blocks to design the Toastmasters experience of choice for yourself and your club members.

Adapted from a March 2025 article

Membership Retention: Is Your Bucket Leaking?

It's easier to retain an existing member than to gain a new one.

By Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS



In the commerce world, the “leaky bucket” is a metaphor depicting a business as a bucket and the customers as water in the bucket. A leaky bucket is a business that is losing customers. For the business to survive, it must either stop the leak (keep existing customers) or add more water (new customers) at a rate that is equal to or greater than the rate of the leak.

The metaphor applies to Toastmasters clubs as well. Member attrition due to changes in life circumstances is normal. Flourishing clubs focus on both recruiting new members and retaining the existing ones. Membership drives and open house meetings can help add water to the bucket. But no matter how many members you recruit, they won't stay if your club doesn't deliver on their

expectations. So what is your club doing to plug the leak?

Can your club completely stop a leak? No. But it can be slowed down to a trickle. In fact, it's easier to retain an existing member than it is to gain a new one. Think of your members as having individual “satisfaction accounts” that control their involvement with your club. If you make sufficient “deposits” that increase their level of satisfaction, they won't have a problem making a “withdrawal” from their real bank account when it comes time to renew dues.

What are those deposits? They are seven simple strategies that can help keep members engaged, satisfied, and excited about their Toastmasters journey.

Define Their Needs

Every member’s needs are different and they change over time. Many joined Toastmasters to become better speakers but found terrific leadership training. Some joined expecting fast improvement but experienced slower progress than they anticipated. Cindy Laatsch, DTM, of Rumble Don’t Mumble Toastmasters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, says, “Toastmasters is so multifaceted. It’s the club’s job to find out what members need and help them see that the Toastmasters experience offers that. Speaking, networking, learning, horizon-broadening, safe place to fail? Yes—Toastmasters has that!”

Matt Goldberg, DTM, of Voorhees Toastmasters club in Voorhees, New Jersey, says, “In my nearly 10 years of membership, I’ve thought about ‘retiring’ a few times. My meeting attendance sometimes felt obligatory or futile, even as an officer for nine years. It’s important to keep one’s goals fluid, and mine have changed over time. Now I do more professional speaking and training than I did when I joined. I value my own growth,

but I also value mentoring others to help them find their own voices.”

Along with defining members’ needs, it’s important to define what they *don’t* want. Some don’t want to pursue a DTM or complete a Pathways path at lightning speed. Some don’t want to compete in a contest or be the club treasurer. Honor their “don’t-wants” as well as their “wants.”

Elevate the Fun Factor



Psychology confirms that when people have fun, the brain releases feel-good chemicals such as oxytocin and dopamine, leading to feelings of bonding and safety with other people. An overwhelming number of employees who work for one of *Fortune* magazine’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” say their work environment is “fun,” which can lead to reduced conflict and increased employee engagement.

While Toastmasters is not a for-profit workplace, there’s every reason to assume that increasing fun at meetings can have the same effects. Members who have fun will be more productive, more creative, more accepting of others, more likely to stay in Toastmasters, and more

committed to reaching their own personal goals. Think about the times you've had fun with others. Most likely, you felt a warmer connection to them, and those positive emotions helped cultivate a stronger community.

Try themed meetings, club parties, or special events outside the regular club environment. Insert levity and humor into your meetings. Institute some wacky traditions, or do something unexpected or unusual. Entertained members become retained members.

Provide a Safe and Supportive Environment

Joining and belonging differ. Joining is an event. Belonging is a journey. Brené Brown writes in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*: "True belonging is not the belonging that comes with just joining a group. It's not fitting in or pretending or selling out because it's safer. It's a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people—without sacrificing who we are." Members want to feel accepted, safe, and free to express their authentic selves. Toastmasters is an incredibly supportive and celebratory environment, but many members still fear new challenges. A harsh evaluation can crush their confidence. A rude

comment can sting for weeks. A tight group of friends can feel like a clique to someone on the outside.

Does your club feel safe? Are there conflicts and unrest that cause divisions or disillusionment? Are members free to express themselves without fear of criticism? Be aware of how unmet expectations can make a member feel uncomfortable.

Offer Massive Value

Community Brands, a technology company that serves nonprofit groups and associations, conducted a member loyalty study that describes three levels of member commitment ranging from ultra committed to least committed. Members of this least committed group are the most at-risk for leaving because they are looking for value in the organization but may not see it.

Toastmasters offers great value, but some clubs may struggle to identify exactly what it is. The document "Features, Benefits, and Value" (downloadable from the Toastmasters website) defines the tangible impact Toastmasters can have on individuals and organizations. This document can help one of these "at-risk" members find the value they are seeking. For example, Table Topics is a feature of Toastmasters that has the benefit

of helping members to think quickly. The value of this is greater confidence in impromptu situations, such as in communications with customers.

Poll your members to find specific examples of the value they receive.

Show the Big Picture

The world beyond the Toastmasters club is filled with opportunities. Attend or serve as an official at an Area, Division, or District contest. Attend a Toastmasters Leadership Institute, the twice-yearly club officer training, to see the values, mission, and vision of Toastmasters. For a truly magnificent experience, attend the annual Toastmasters International Convention in August. Nothing comes close to showcasing the global impact of this extraordinary organization. People from all over the world share stories and develop friendships, and they all started with the same project—the Ice Breaker. The brand of Toastmasters transcends culture, gender, and generations. It would be difficult not to be inspired by the global impact of the simple concept of helping people develop communication and leadership skills.

Increase Recognition

Toastmasters is generous with applause and recognition, but that next milestone

can seem far away. It's easy to lose focus, get bored, and quit. To help wandering members regain enthusiasm, some clubs have recognition for other activities beyond the education program or speech contests.

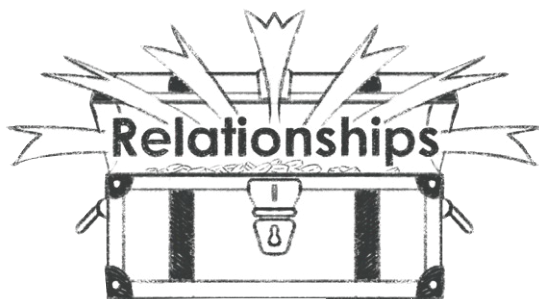
Consider recognizing members who volunteer for roles the most, attend the most meetings, do the most speeches within a certain time period. Encourage not just first-time speakers, but first-time role-takers. You can hand out awards for “Most Improved” rather than “Best” to encourage less experienced speakers and encourage more experienced ones to step up their game. One club awards points to members who compete or serve in contests, sign up for a role in advance, attend officer training if they are not an officer, and more. Points are added up toward a Toastmaster of the Year award.

Treasure the Relationships

If you ask a thousand Toastmasters why they stay in their clubs, you'll hear a consistent answer: relationships. If you're like most members, you probably joined Toastmasters for one reason, but stayed for another—the people. Consider these comments from members:

“Every time I've pulled away from Toastmasters, I return because of my

Toastmasters friends. When someone asks for my help, I'll say yes. So many people have helped me through my journey that when I can give back, I will."—Karen Colby Aubrecht Donovan, DTM, a member of two clubs in New York.



- "Warmth and friendship keep me here. Our club is incredibly connected, and we enjoy activities together outside of meetings."—Leigh Kottwitz, Missouri.
- "I found lifelong friends who believe in me and appreciate my hard work for the organization that changed my life."—Daniel Morris of Great Land club, Alaska.
- "I stay because of the camaraderie, the education, the chance to enjoy hearing someone progress from a 'scared timid rabbit' to a confident speaker and evaluator. I've met people that I would never have had a chance to anywhere else."—Leah Cox, DTM, of Crosswinds Toastmasters club in Iowa.

- "I almost quit a few months ago. Why did I stay? The people in my club want me to. They want my help."—Michael L. Trotter of the High Definition Speakers Toastmasters club in Santa Clara, California.

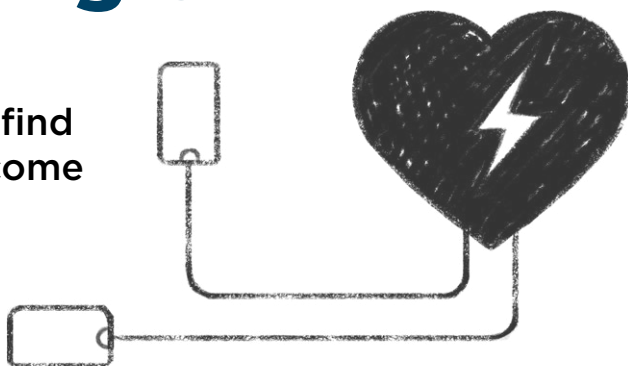
In theory, slowing the leak in your club bucket is not complicated. In practice, it requires being intentional and consistent to make these deposits in the members' satisfaction accounts. Satisfied members are longtime members, and when it's time to renew, they'll be happy to make the withdrawal to pay their dues.

Adapted from a March 2018 article

How to Resuscitate a Struggling Club

These strategies helped our club find new life and become Distinguished.

By Michael Lum, DTM



When I was an Area Director, the Bukit Panjang Toastmasters club at Bukit Panjang Community Centre in Singapore was under my charge. Meetings were boring, attendance was poor, and morale was low. Members left without renewing. The club had 12 members, the majority of them passive, and they were being asked to relocate the club's meeting place. Two options were available: either close the club or find another location at no cost and within short notice.

I volunteered to coach the club. I was committed to reviving it and having it attain Distinguished status by the end of my two-year term. One club leader, Hussain Fathah, found a new meeting place. We changed the club's name to Senja-Cashew Toastmasters, after the community center, our new host. Within

four months, the club achieved five Distinguished Club Program (DCP) goals and within 12 months, 10 out of 10 DCP goals, making it President's Distinguished for the first time.

Your club can experience this revival, too, by using the following strategies.

Build rapport

First things first. Take a personal interest in your club members. Be sincere and authentic. Get to know each one well. Call them by their preferred name. Get acquainted with each member by learning about their profession, family, and hobbies. Be careful not to be too intrusive. Any time you sense uneasiness, stop probing. More importantly, take time to discover their genuine purpose for

joining Toastmasters. Learn about their concerns, fears, and aspirations. This will enable you to address their challenges and meet their needs.

Mary Kay Ash, American businesswoman and founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, once said, “Everyone wants to be appreciated. If you appreciate someone, don’t keep it a secret.” When members feel appreciated and valued, they feel part of the club and want to contribute to its success. No one wants their club to fail.

Boost morale

Like a football coach, club, Area, and District leaders need to inspire members to achieve both their club’s and their own goals. Praise is the most effective motivator, and it comes free. Be careful not to sound insincere or make superfluous comments. To recognize members’ efforts, make sure your club has enough ribbons to go around for Best Speaker, Best Evaluator, Best Table Topics, First-Time Speaker, etc., at every meeting. I also give motivational books to the best speakers. Try buying snacks to share with members during the break. They will appreciate your effort.

Involve them

There is a saying that goes something like this: *Tell them, and they will forget. Teach them, and they may remember. Involve them, and they will remember for the rest of their lives.* If you involve every member in meetings, they will feel valued and part of the club. Assign newer members the simpler (yet still valuable) meeting roles, such as timer and Ah-Counter, and ask them to take on logistical tasks such as arranging the room or purchasing food. You can also ask them to welcome guests. Performing these duties will give them a sense of achievement; they will feel like they belong to a team and that they are important members of that team.

Remember the adage for success in teamwork: “United we stand; divided we fall.” Forge a spirit of fellowship in your club and it will bode well for the future.

Bond through activities

Bonding is the glue that holds members together through both happy and challenging times. Celebrate members’ birthdays. Organize picnics, hikes, or movie outings. Our club celebrated the winter holiday season with an offsite holiday party—no projects or speeches, just games and food—to give members and their families the opportunity to get to know one another better.

I have discovered that several members in the Senja-Cashew club enjoy attending self-development seminars. So we attend inexpensive or free talks, including workshops about mindfulness, selling techniques, and branding. Besides bonding over these opportunities, we get to see another world of public speaking.

We also visit other clubs. Not only does this allow members to watch other speakers, and see how other clubs function, it gives them a chance to deliver speeches at other clubs and network with fellow Toastmasters.

After our evening club meetings, we adjourn to a fast-food chain or coffee shop. We give additional feedback to project speakers, debrief about the club meeting, and discuss topics of interest. Whenever possible, we arrange tea or meals with members for one-on-one talks.

Play up speech contests

Organize speech contests and get everyone involved. Although I could find less expensive trophies, I pay extra to purchase elegant trophies in appreciation of the speech contest winners' diligent work. I also coach members who have goals of winning District speech contests.

Offer support

Make newer members feel secure by assigning them a mentor. Review educational manuals with them and direct them to relevant pages on the Toastmasters website.

If members feel lost or down, listen to them and empathize with them. Offer encouragement so they can continue in their journey and embark upon their next project. Set attainable objectives for them. Celebrate any mini achievements at appropriate milestones. When members complete projects, share in their sense of accomplishment. This gives them a sense of belonging and a commitment to learning. Monitor their progress and send them gentle reminders of their projects.

Share video and article resources

Communicate with each other via a messaging service such as WhatsApp, or form a chat group, or a closed Facebook group. And if you come across any motivational videos or content members can use for their project speeches, post them. Be mindful not to inundate groups with too many videos. Share any inspirational or useful articles via email. Many members look for topics and content, so direct them to the appropriate resources and websites.

Recruit, recruit, recruit

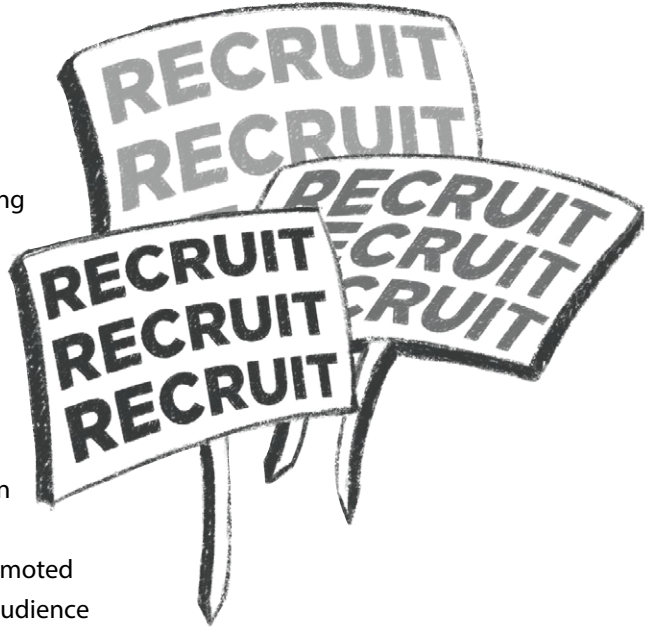
Members are the lifeblood of the club. It is crucial to recruit new members regularly.

Our club added at least eight members through the following channels. In the process, the club won the Smedley Award for its membership drive.

Make every guest, and every member, feel welcome and important, and you'll be on track to rejuvenate your club.

Adapted from an April 2017 article

- **Social Media** – Our club's Facebook page plays an effective role in attracting members. Post your meeting updates, photographs, and social events on social media.
- **Workshops** – To recruit members, I conducted three public half-day workshops—on persuasion skills, vocal charisma, and hypnotic speaking. We promoted Toastmasters and invited audience members to our club meetings.
- **Guests** – Our club encouraged members to bring friends and colleagues to club meetings. When guests arrive, our senior members welcome them and explain how Toastmasters works. A few days before the next meeting, we have someone call and invite our visitors back.



When Bad Things Happen to Good Clubs

How to recognize basic membership problems and solve them.

By Craig Harrison, DTM

All clubs experience bumps and bruises over time. They are prone to the effects of economics and egos, logistics and fluctuations in quality. Over time, the membership of most clubs waxes and wanes. Yet some clubs experience particularly tough times. The question arises: What to do when bad things happen to good clubs?

Location, Location, Location

About 15 years ago, AT&T clubs throughout North America were suddenly faced with a loss of onsite meeting space because of a policy change. A combination of communication, leadership, and public relations strategies resulted in a recommitment to providing secure meeting space for these clubs.

So how stable is your meeting location? Are you regularly in touch with your landlord or site contact? Nurture that relationship in good times to protect yourself from changes in policy or sentiment toward your club. Demonstrate your club's value to your host organization's human resources department and upper management. Remind them that great things are happening in the club and that the club adds value to their organization, neighborhood, and community. You may be able to avert disasters related to logistical challenges with a little planning and communication.

Here are a few difficulties your club might face:

- You lose your primary location (sometimes on short notice).
- You're forced out of your regular meeting room and possibly downgraded to a less popular location.
- Your members might be forced to register, in advance, for each meeting as a result of security concerns.
- Your company (a primary source of members) relocates, downsizes, or closes—stripping your club of talent and mass.
- Your club becomes too big, outgrowing its location or delaying the growth of some members wishing for more opportunities to participate.

Solution: *Have a backup or emergency plan in case, on short notice, your site is unavailable for one or more meetings.*

Ego, Ergo They Go

Sometimes strong personalities within a club will lead to attrition of members over time. Even healthy clubs lose members when a particular member's dominant personality or overriding style drowns out other members' voices. And don't

think it's only the Club President who can have this effect.

I've been in a club where an overaggressive multilevel marketer used the club as a platform for growing her business. This led to sales speeches, unwanted sales phone calls, and emails. Thus, the club environment was poisoned for many members. When club leaders were slow to address it, several members quietly left. Only later did the club realize why it was losing members.

One club I visited was highly politicized. It had developed a political agenda based on local and national parties and propositions. Visitors soon realized this club was far from neutral in terms of its political leanings. Guests either fell in line or felt the wrath of members who weren't shy about espousing their prevailing beliefs and attempting to persuade visitors and new members. As a result, this club's membership remained constant; there was little growth. Only its true believers felt comfortable.

Solution: *With the exception of some clearly designated specialty clubs, Toastmasters clubs should be open to people of all races, religions, and orientations—inclusivity is the key. Whether through speeches or Table Topics, members and guests should not feel the need to adhere to others' belief systems or politics. Nor should they be sales*

targets. Club leaders should make regular announcements to address this issue and should discuss the importance of evaluating a speech's writing and delivery—not necessarily its content.

A Leader Runs Through It



Bad things can happen as a result of leadership challenges. On occasion, a club will suffer from an overbearing Immediate Past President who is reluctant to let go of a club's culture or allow new leaders to modify its structure or operation.

I've seen specialty clubs, whose officers are elected for one year at a time, re-elect their President for a second year. Members will tolerate a leader they're not enamored with for one term, but two consecutive terms is more than many will endure. Without fanfare they will withdraw or transfer their membership. I've always felt the strength of a club comes from the diversity of its members—their styles, thoughts, opinions, and skills, and the rotation of leaders each term. Too much of any one member may inhibit others from expressing their excellence.

Sometimes a power struggle or battle of styles will occur between officers. When it goes public it can divide the club; some people side with one officer while other members support the opposition. Polarizing members with "political" friction leads to fissures and fractures of the club's cohesiveness. This is definitely not a recipe for club excellence!

On occasion a club leader will browbeat members with rules. Occasionally these club leaders can be so dogmatic that their entire focus is on the letter of the law and they miss the spirit behind the law. They espouse rigid rules—often not official Toastmasters rules—at every opportunity, neglecting the focus that Toastmasters really encourages personal growth and learning in a safe environment.

Sometimes over-ambitious club members and leaders, in their zeal to excel in the Distinguished Club Program, focus on empire building and amassing points, to the detriment of human relations. When everything is quantified instead of humanized, a coldness pervades the Toastmasters experience.

Solution: *True leaders are unifiers, not dividers. Be sure to elect leaders who further the purpose of the club, its members, and Toastmasters International. True leaders recognize that the core of every club is its people.*

The Long Decline

Some clubs suffer from the cumulative effects of many small decisions, each causing a slight decline in quality. Regarded individually, each choice or practice may seem inconsequential. Yet the sum of all these parts leads to an average or below average club experience for members and guests. I call it the curse of mediocrity.

Consider the “Pedestrian” Toastmasters club. This now-defunct group was once Distinguished. At that time it had a nice blend of men and women, and longtime and newly joined members. Their meetings were vibrant and varied. Over time a series of events occurred, each causing a small ripple. For instance:

- The Vice President Membership stopped leading membership-building campaigns.
- The Vice President Education stopped assigning roles weeks in advance.
- The club leaders began to construct the agenda on a flip chart after that day’s meeting had started.
- A few members left and were not replaced.

- Guests were ignored when they visited and didn’t join or return.
- Members failed to show up for meetings and neglected to arrange back-ups to cover their roles.
- Meeting standards declined a little bit each month.
- Members gave impromptu speeches.
- The Sergeant at Arms stopped stocking the appropriate speech evaluation forms for each assignment.
- Members increasingly arrived late.
- Speakers rarely provided introductions in advance, but scribbled on lined paper right before they were to speak.

An air of informality pervaded meetings. Soon the membership had dwindled to a handful of die-hards, mostly male. The environment resembled more of a men’s club. And thus, a club that was once a model of excellence became a club likely to dissolve within a year without attention and a rededication. That year passed, and the club died.

In communities, quality of life is tied to practices such as repairing potholes

in the roads as soon as they appear. The quality of a Toastmasters club is similarly threatened by the incremental diminution of quality in its various practices.

Solution: *Infuse your club with more quality and preparation in its practices, communication, materials, and interaction. Then watch it grow!*

It's Not What Happens, It's How You React

Bad things may happen to your club. Yet nothing is irrevocable. There are club specialists, coaches, and rescue chairs available to assist you in saving your club. Learn more about club coaches [here](#). Also, veteran members can deliver modules such as Moments of Truth to help. Your Area Director can also assist. You don't have to go it alone in your quest to make your club the best it can be, again.

Adapted from an April 2017 article

Help New Members Find Their Place

How member orientation programs benefit individuals and clubs.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Making sure new members understand how Toastmasters works and how to navigate Pathways ensures they start on solid footing. It prevents the chances of confusion or overwhelm or misunderstanding. Additionally, members who actively engage with Pathways are much more likely to continue their Toastmasters journey and take advantage of opportunities for years to come.

District 16 in Oklahoma understands the value of orienting people quickly. To help new members, the District offers monthly onboarding sessions. This ensures people across the District receive the same level of training.

"Some clubs offer better orientations than others, so District training is a baseline," says Ron Olsen, DTM, the District's Public Relations Manager.

The new member orientation discusses topics such as Toastmasters beyond the club, the Pathways program, leadership opportunities, and how to make the most of the Toastmasters experience. It also provides a handbook that covers Toastmasters International's history, protocol, roles, Pathways learning experience, and website.

District 16's monthly, 90-minute orientation is open to everyone. "I like to say, 'Whether it's your first time or you want to learn something new, please attend,'" says Olsen, a member of Tulsa Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "There's always something changing. We want to make sure members are getting what they're paying for and achieving their educational goals."

In addition to participating in the District 16 program, both the Speakeasy

Club and Tulsa Club teach new members how to navigate their clubs' websites and share more about Pathways.

There's also mentoring at the club level. "We try to get new members into the mentoring program right away—to get them going on the first speech," says Olsen. "Usually, it's the first three speeches that make or break a member."

Measuring Success

District 105, which spans Jordan, Oman, Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates, also offers a monthly online training and sends a new member handbook to each newcomer. This encourages clubs to partner with the District and be creative in their own new member orientation.

"The primary goal is to ensure each new member feels like a valued part of the club right from the start—giving them tools and resources so they thrive in their public speaking journey," says District 105 Club Growth Director Ramanujam Raghavan, DTM, from Orbit Toastmasters Club in Muscat, Oman. "They should have a clear picture of a way forward."

Like District 16, the orientation covers Toastmasters basics and club expectations. It also offers resources and will soon include a centralized mentoring pool for members across the District.

District 105 measures success of its orientation programming in four areas:

- 1. Retention rates:** Are new members renewing, particularly at their first renewal cycle?
- 2. Engagement levels:** Are new members attending events, volunteering, and participating in committees?
- 3. Leadership involvement:** Are new members filling club roles?
- 4. Educational path progress:** Are new members moving through the Pathways program?

Benefiting New Members and Clubs

District 120 (India) also offers an orientation to new members and measures its success through member retention and club health. The District provides a welcome kit to share more Toastmasters resources and works in collaboration with its clubs, so there are orientation activities at both the club and District levels.

Clubs in District 120 focus on ensuring new members understand expectations, opportunities, and the support available. Mentors are assigned to help guide newcomers through their initial speeches and roles.

For clubs, the goal is to integrate new members into Toastmasters, motivate them to contribute during meetings, and help them grow.

“Ultimately, the program aims to empower new members to set personal goals, enhance their public speaking and leadership skills, and make the most of their membership,” says District 120 Club Growth Director Aswathy Rajan, DTM, Ph.D., from Dynamic Leaders Forum Toastmasters Club in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

District leaders have found that well-oriented members become engaged members, who add to other members’ learning journeys and a club’s overall success. They also tend to remain members.

“We strongly believe retention is the fastest way to grow,” says Rajan. “When new members clearly understand the club structure, meeting roles, and learning opportunities, they are more likely to participate actively, keeping the club vibrant and dynamic.”

Complementing the club orientation, the District provides a broader picture of Toastmasters. “All About Toastmasters” sessions are offered during District 120 Club Officer Training.

“These sessions are designed to familiarize new members with the organization’s global structure, leadership

pathways, and networking opportunities beyond their home club,” says Rajan. “The District-led orientation also creates a sense of belonging to a larger community, motivating members to actively engage in their growth journey.”

District 16, 105, and 120 leaders all emphasize that retaining members is vital for club health. Because retention is so important and can be a challenge, it’s important to establish a welcoming and supportive environment starting with the guest experience and continuing that throughout club members’ journeys.

It’s also essential to understand individual members’ goals. “When people join the club, we ask what they want to accomplish, and we check back in,” says Olsen.

Most new members are focused on their initial goals and how their club works. It can be exciting for them to learn about Toastmasters’ global structure and reach. It can also be overwhelming.

Still, it’s important for members to understand they’re now part of a worldwide Toastmasters community. Oftentimes, this is a key focus of District orientation programs, which can plant a seed for members’ future growth opportunities.

A sense of belonging is another important goal for new member orientation programs, whether at the

District or club level. Effective onboarding also develops members' confidence and feelings of empowerment.

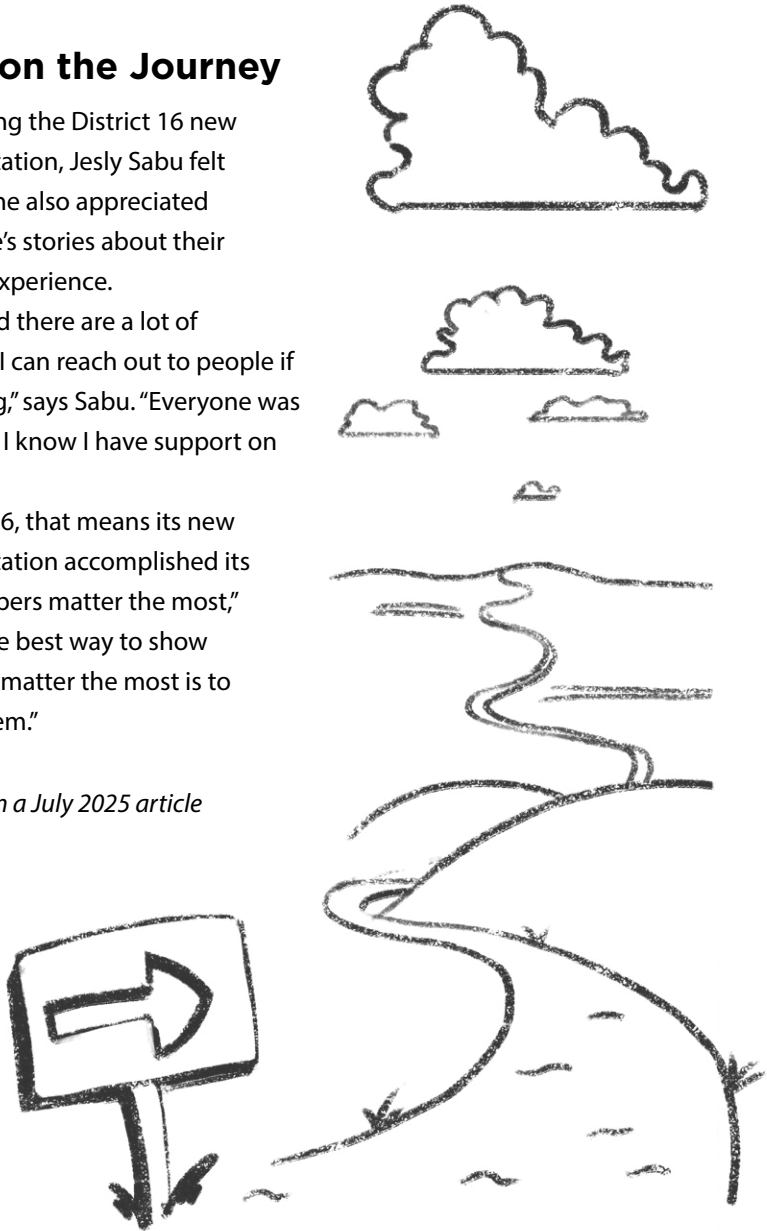
Starting on the Journey

After completing the District 16 new member orientation, Jesly Sabu felt encouraged. She also appreciated hearing people's stories about their Toastmasters experience.

"I understand there are a lot of resources, and I can reach out to people if I need anything," says Sabu. "Everyone was willing to help. I know I have support on this journey."

For District 16, that means its new member orientation accomplished its mission. "Members matter the most," says Olsen. "The best way to show members they matter the most is to take care of them."

Adapted from a July 2025 article

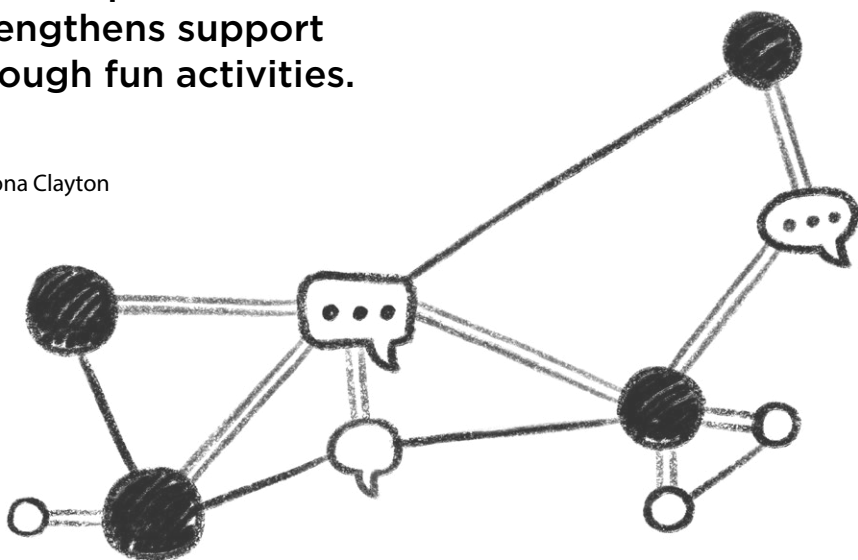


CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Social Events Build Bonds

How my club fosters friendships and strengthens support through fun activities.

By Fiona Clayton



Spa Speakers is a thriving Toastmasters club that meets every other Wednesday night in Leamington Spa, a market town nestled in the heart of England. When I became Club President, I considered how I wanted to build on the strengths of this fantastic club and looked for areas of improvement.

The venue for our meetings—which end at 9:30 p.m.—requires us to leave by 9:45. However, many members are still engaged in conversation at that time. I felt we needed some time and space outside of meetings to get to know each other better, where conversations

could flourish uninterrupted and friendships could blossom.

I first organized a picnic in our local park. Naturally, it rained, but 12 brave souls turned up bearing food of all varieties. We couldn't help but have fun while huddled under a gazebo until the sun eventually decided to join us. Spurred on by the success of that first event, along with requests for more, I organized a bowling night in the autumn, a Christmas meal in winter, and wine tasting in the spring.

I passed the baton of leadership to a wonderful new President, Jas Kandula. Jas had attended all the previous social events and felt the club benefited greatly from them. They had helped build camaraderie and support for newer members so they could quickly integrate. Jas asked me to take on a new "social secretary" role. So I organized a social program that included one event per month. Not a meeting went by where I wasn't announcing a future activity or reminding members to sign up for the next get-together. Having something in the works helped the social program stay top-of-mind.

The secret to maintaining such a full calendar, I found, was having some events that were easy to organize, such as tea and cake on a Saturday morning, and others that took additional coordination

but felt a bit special, such as a trivia night at a local restaurant. Club funds can't be used for social activities, so it was also important to consider cost; we didn't want anyone to feel excluded. With this in mind, we made some events free and charged a small fee for others. But I always kept the latter to a minimum.

Over time, members also presented educational workshops on a range of subjects, such as evaluation, vocal variety, rhetoric, and challenging negative beliefs. The workshops helped us learn more about each other and the wealth of skills that exist within the club. These activities created a domino effect, with more members starting to organize their own events, including a winter walk, an open mic night, and a visit to a literature festival.

Where have these efforts led us? The social program is now an integral element of Spa Speakers, as is the role of social secretary on the Club Executive Committee. But even more importantly, these additional events helped build connection and community. As with many clubs, our membership is diverse in nationality and background; some members are in partnerships, some live alone, and some are newly arrived in the country, living here for the long or short term. The social program draws us together, no matter what our background,

to share, relax, and laugh. It is an additional bit of mortar on what was an already firm foundation.

Spa Speakers is a successful club for many reasons, but the social program indicates to guests that here is a bunch of people who enjoy spending time together and have a lot of fun along the way. Maybe this is one reason our membership has grown to such an extent that a new club has opened in our neighboring town, and there are now two social secretaries on the Executive Committee of Spa Speakers. In a few weeks' time, members from both clubs will gather in the local park for our now-annual summer picnic, and perhaps for the first time we won't have rain!

Adapted from an April 2019 article



Chapter 3

Creating Quality Meetings

6 Tips for Successful Club Meetings

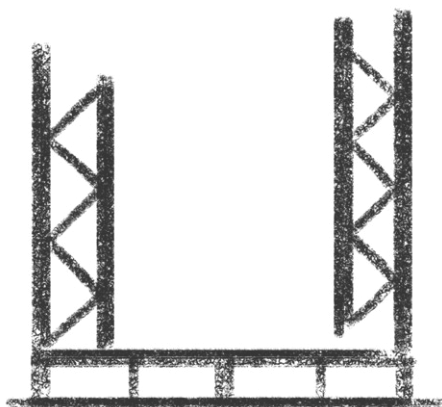
Find out what it takes to be great.

By Greg Lewis, DTM

I am one happy Toastmaster when I attend a well-organized, engaging, and educational club meeting. I've been lucky enough to experience that many times over the years.

Yet I've also experienced some club meetings that are chaotic, inefficient, and flat. These always leave me a little frustrated and dissatisfied. Perhaps you have had similar experiences.

While it's unfortunate that some meetings don't live up to their potential, the good news is they all can. As Toastmasters, we can learn from each other and make every meeting a great one. The more we like being there, the more we'll benefit. As Toastmasters International founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley once said, "We learn best in moments of enjoyment."



Building a Strong Foundation

Toastmasters doesn't have a mandatory meeting format; however, meetings are built around three elements: prepared speeches, Table Topics, and speech evaluations. In addition, it's recommended that clubs hold a business session at the beginning or end of meetings at least once a month.

Otherwise, clubs have a lot of leeway with what they can do. Many have unique meeting roles (Jokemaster, Mystery

Greeter, Meeting Poet). Some conduct educational sessions or host outside speakers. This flexibility allows each club to create its own unique personality.

Yet great clubs also have a few things in common. Let's define "great" as a club where members want to stay and guests want to join. Members' goals are met, and there is a strong sense of community and support.

Whatever your club's personality or your members' goals, these six elements can help your meetings be great.

1. Be well prepared for meeting roles.

Advance planning helps members be prepared and better able to succeed. Some clubs distribute their agenda about three weeks in advance, which gives each participant time to properly prepare for their role. If three weeks is not realistic for your club, try to at least get the agenda out early and not scramble at the last minute. That way if a member is unsure of what their role requires, they have time to get help from the Vice President Education (VPE) or their mentor if they have one.

2. Begin and end meetings on time, and follow an agenda.

Developing the skills to prepare and adhere to an agenda is an important part of every Toastmaster's development. While the Toastmaster of the Day takes the lead in managing the meeting flow, everyone with a role helps. Brenda Toth, of Garden City Toastmasters of St. Catharines, in Ontario, Canada, says when she served as Sergeant at Arms, she always worked closely with the Toastmaster to help keep the meetings running on time. "It's not all up to the Toastmaster," says Toth.

To that end, some members with roles will need to make adjustments during the meeting. For example, if the meeting is running late, the Table Topicsmaster might need to shorten the number of questions. If you're assigned a meeting role, review the agenda to know exactly how much time you have been allocated.

3. Welcome guests and make them feel part of the group.

Look at a meeting from the perspective of both guests and members. For guests, a supportive, positive environment is key. Immediately greet visitors when they arrive and introduce

them to other members. The more they feel comfortable and included, the more likely they are to return.

At Viva Las Voices Club in Las Vegas, Nevada, every officer assumes responsibility for guests, ensuring they are not alone during a meeting. “Guests are extremely important to our club,” explains Club President Christine Wittwer. “We ensure they have a great experience and leave with a visitor information packet. And we contact each guest following their visit to invite them back.”

The same principles apply to an online meeting. Invite guests to log on early before things start and get to know other members. The Club President or Toastmaster should also formally acknowledge and welcome each guest at the start of the meeting, and ask for any comments or feedback at the end.

4. Give speakers proper introductions and positive, helpful evaluations.

A proper introduction sets a speaker up for success by providing background on them and explaining their speech’s goals or objectives.

This gives audience members more context for what they’re about to hear. An introduction is also a chance

to help the speaker by relaying basic information about their topic that would otherwise take up valuable speaking time.

Effective speaker evaluations are a hallmark of every great meeting. As speakers, we improve when we receive positive and practical feedback. Just as a speaker needs to prepare, so do evaluators. Make sure you are familiar with the speaker’s speech assignment as well as the speaker’s objective. When giving feedback, offer constructive suggestions for improvement and deliver them with encouragement.

5. Recognize member achievements.

Celebrating the progress of members is crucial. When I was a member of Rose City Toastmasters, in Welland, Ontario, Canada, we would always acknowledge member achievements during meetings. The Club President or VPE would make a point of recognizing major speech milestones (Ice Breaker speech, Pathways path completion, speech contest participation, etc.). We also recognized (with their permission) members who experienced major life changes (new job or promotion, having a baby, etc.). A little recognition goes a long way.

6. Regularly update members on club business and progress.

Is the club business meeting the least popular aspect of Toastmasters? Some members think so. Yet when done right, they can actually be fun—yes, fun! Members who take pride in their club want to know how well it is doing. It's a time to celebrate your success. Each club officer can provide updates on their respective areas of responsibility. The VPE or Club President can review the club's status in the Distinguished Club Program. That's a perfect opportunity to highlight member progress.

If there are areas of concern, the Club Executive Committee should review these issues and develop a plan to address them. In addition, it's never too late to review your current meeting format and look for ways to improve the member and guest experience. In fact, try to do this on a regular basis.

evaluate speakers, you hone your ability to offer helpful feedback to people in all kinds of settings.

A final word on Toastmasters meetings. The most important factor is attitude. You must want to create and run a successful club meeting. One that meets everyone's needs. High-quality clubs are filled with energetic and enthusiastic members, and officers who put best practices to work. Members are prepared for meetings, happily welcome guests, and provide valuable and positive feedback to speakers.

As Kathy Orth, President of Garden City Toastmasters of St. Catharines, in Ontario, Canada, says, "These elements constitute the 'scaffolding' upon which we hold our meetings. They are habits now, and new members seem to take to them easily."

Now, how will you create your own great meetings?

Adapted from a December 2022 article

Applying Your Skills

When you run a successful meeting, you gain skills that will help you stand out among your peers. You'll develop more confidence, a deeper appreciation for efficient and punctual meetings, and better organizational skills. When you

Keep Your Club Healthy

Ask these five questions to make sure your club is meeting members' needs.

By Janet Fuchek

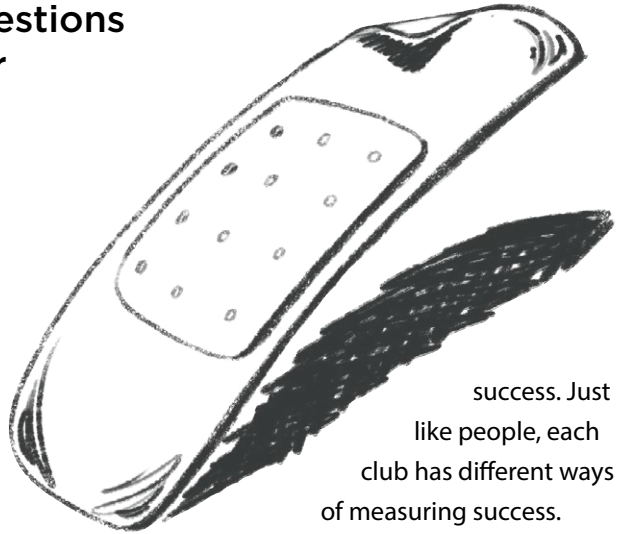
On the road to good health, an apple a day keeps the doctor away, or so says the old adage. In the world of Toastmasters, the golden apple to keep a club healthy is an inviting atmosphere with opportunities for leadership, communication, and growth.

If you're feeling the need to revitalize and reengage your members, then maybe it's time for a club check-up.

Here are some questions to ask as you assess the health of your club.

Have You Evaluated Your Format?

The three tenets of a healthy club are making sure members are engaged, progressing through their goals, and most importantly, attending meetings. There is not a specific "medicine" for assessing



success. Just like people, each club has different ways of measuring success.

Some clubs have a professional meeting tone, other clubs have a more relaxed vibe. Neither is wrong, but the health of your club may rest in finding the right prescription.

Lynn Goodacre of the Thunderbird Toastmasters Club, in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, is a coach specializing in relationships and effective communication. She knows the value of a nurturing environment, and as Club President, she tries to provide both structure and stimulation to inspire the membership.

Goodacre recommends meetings incorporate practical aspects, like using Table Topics to practice handling

interview questions, along with opportunities for creativity, such as having a fun quiz on meeting content at the close. She also suggests a new-member orientation process, where new members receive an introduction to club agendas, meeting roles, and an overview of Pathways.

Do You Have a Strong Mentoring Program?

In the same way that a buddy system can help people achieve health goals, mentors and coaches help members and clubs be the best they can be. Pairing up with someone can inspire you, hold you accountable, and help you feel part of a team.

When mentors and mentees create their buddy system, it is a mutually beneficial partnership. If a mentor can explain and demonstrate an area for improvement, they often improve their own skill sets. Additionally, a mentee may see something the mentor does from a different vantage point and share their thoughts.

"If a club is functioning well, members are learning, growing, and challenging themselves to try new things, so the Toastmasters experience is engaging long-term," says Goodacre, whose club has achieved President's Distinguished for 23

years. "Once someone has been in a club for a while, they may find that guiding other members is the main thing that keeps their love for Toastmasters alive."

Are Leadership Opportunities Encouraged?

Goals and milestones assist in creating healthy lifestyles and the feeling of accomplishment, such as hitting a personal record in weightlifting or running distance. In Toastmasters, keeping goals top of mind will benefit those looking for fulfillment. Leadership opportunities are often a good benchmark.

Matheus Mourao, of Sao Paulo, Brazil, is District 111 Public Relations Manager, and says he appreciates the leadership opportunities in Toastmasters. "Outside Toastmasters, I'm more like a specialist and less like a leader, but in Toastmasters, I'm developing my role as a digital marketing leader, which has enabled me to break through some barriers at my job."

Encourage everyone to run for office, and don't let the same people rotate through the club officer roles. Everyone should understand the skills that leadership positions help develop. By learning what goes on behind

the scenes, members gain a vested interest in the club.

Adnan Dodmani, a member of Infosys Toastmasters, Hyderabad Prakriti, in Hyderabad, Telangana, India, recommends leaders try matching people with club officer roles that suit their background and interests. For instance, if someone is an accountant, they might enjoy being Club Treasurer, or if someone is in marketing, they might like the Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) role. "When you assign the work that members crave, it is done efficiently with enthusiasm and helps them grow in their respective field," he says. "When you show them that the club loves them, they will return the club the love it deserves."

Are You Regularly Recognizing Your Members?

Just as hitting a personal health record and sharing the news with your accountability buddy or on a fitness app creates an opportunity for celebration and recognition, social media platforms help connect and recognize club members. As a digital marketing specialist, Mourao, of Brazil, considers the online platform a place to connect, inform, and engage club members.

His club, Avenida Paulista Toastmasters, has representatives take photos at each meeting and display achievements on a Facebook carousel post. They post photos of members and their stories on Instagram and videos of how members overcame public speaking challenges on YouTube.

Nadia Gilkes, DTM, of Jackpot Speakers and Educationally Speaking, both in Las Vegas, Nevada, recommends regular contact and transparency with members. As Vice President Education, she reached out to every member once a quarter to ensure they were reaching their goals. As VPPR, she conducted a Moments of Truth project at least once a year to incorporate member suggestions, such as highlighting special occasions for strong member recognition.

Infosys Toastmasters, Hyderabad Prakriti club, has a member recognition system that includes the circulation of a digital poster showcasing a member's achievement on a WhatsApp group that reaches club members, the District, and alumni. The poster is shared during club meetings and in their newsletter. Social media posts, as well as certificates, trophies, and prizes, are other ways to recognize members' achievements.

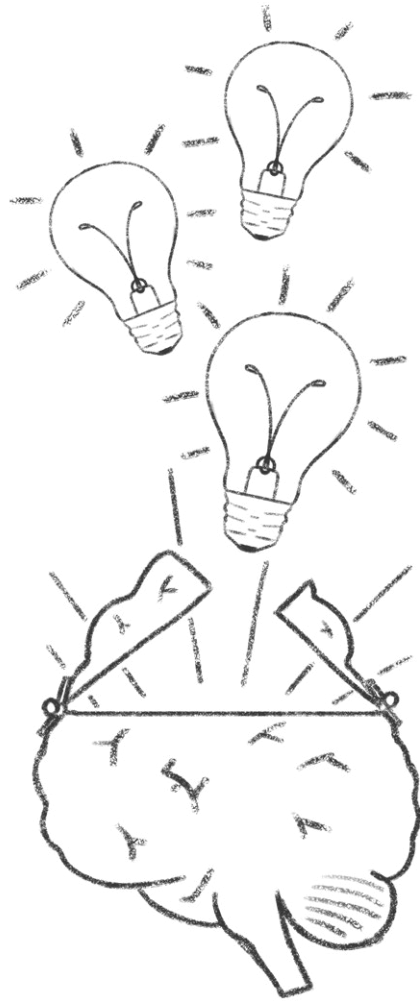
Are You Open to New Meeting Ideas?

As you evaluate the health of your club, don't be afraid to try something new. Sometimes what worked in the past doesn't work months or years later.

When District 111 in Brazil wanted to increase member involvement, it began offering a variety of new events, like debate contests. "A debate helps people respect another point of view, helps them listen better to others, be more engaged in meetings, and develop better arguments," Mourao explains.

Gilkes recommends clubs carve a niche in the market to maintain membership. "Most clubs have a different personality," she explains. "You really have to know what your identity as a club is. You have to find a way that sets you apart. What makes people want to come to your club?"

A healthy club isn't something that just happens. Take its pulse, watch its heartbeat, and adjust accordingly. Go back to the basics on some aspects, and don't be afraid to try something new with others. With the advent of online meetings across the globe, it's easy to pop into another meeting for a fresh perspective and some good medicine.



Adapted from a June 2021 article

Prescription for Productive Meetings

Well-planned club sessions enrich the learning experience.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

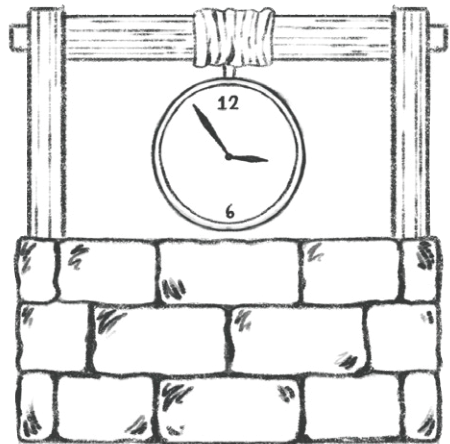
The core of every member's Toastmasters experience is the club meeting. We all share the common thread of Table Topics, prepared speeches, and evaluations, yet clubs structure their meetings in different ways. Consider these tips from veteran club leaders, who are experts at holding well-run and productive meetings. They know how to maximize members' time, help them reach their goals, and maintain a vital meeting culture.

Manage Time Well

"My mantra has always been to get the basics right," says Marc Lottig, DTM, co-founder of City Limits Toastmasters in London, England. However, a typical challenge facing clubs is time management, he adds.

1. Allocate Enough Time.

Too often members create meeting agendas with unrealistic time slots, forgetting about introductions and transitions. As an example, says Lottig, members may allocate nine minutes for three evaluations and believe that's



enough, since evaluations typically last two to three minutes; however, it's important to factor in the 30-second grace period allowed for each evaluation if the evaluator exceeds the three-minute limit. Time is also needed to introduce each evaluator and allow for the member walking to the front of the room and back. That results in at least four minutes per evaluation and maybe more.

The same holds true for prepared speeches and Table Topics. Without accounting for the actual time needed for each session, meetings will run overtime or be rushed.

At London's City Limits, agendas are set with those allocations in mind. As a result, meetings finish on time or even early. "The psychological effect is that all attendees believe it is a well-managed meeting," says Lottig, "which adds to the subjective sense of joint accomplishment. It makes everyone feel that their time is valued."

2. Have a Five-Minute Plan.

"Always start on time, even if hardly anyone is there," says Agnes Boskovitz, DTM, from the University Toastmasters club in Canberra, Australia, and the online advanced club Firebirds Collective Toastmasters.

Boskovitz asks the main role players to arrive early and lines up substitutes for anyone on the agenda who hasn't arrived five minutes before the meeting starts. If a speaker fails to appear, she has a list of educational and fun activities ready to fill the time, such as impromptu debates and dramatic readings.

3. Be Strategic With Announcements.

Some clubs start meetings with announcements, which can bog things down and steal time from the education section. To counter this, the University Toastmasters moved announcements to the middle of its one-hour meeting. Now members pay more attention during announcements and the meeting keeps moving. Some clubs save announcements for the end of the meeting to ensure the education portion receives the most attention and the business portion is focused.

Maximize Member Speaking Opportunities

At each meeting, try to provide a speaking opportunity for every member in attendance. You will challenge members, keep their momentum going, and help them develop their skills and confidence.

1. Assign Table Topics.

Many clubs ask for volunteers to answer Table Topics. Too often, only confident or risk-taking members will try. Instead, follow Toastmasters' guidelines and assign topics by reading the question first, so everyone starts to think of an answer, and then calling on a member to present.

Ideally, only members who don't have a speaking role on the agenda will be called. Boskovitz recommends Table Topicsmasters write down the names of members in attendance who don't have a role to ensure each is given a topic.

She also advises not to offer topics to guests until all members have spoken. "Whilst it might seem hospitable and encouraging to offer guests an opportunity," says Boskovitz, "our first priority is to our members, whom we would be sad to lose and who have, in fact, paid real money for the Toastmasters experience."

2. Work With Members Individually.

To ensure members are moving forward in their educational journey, track their participation to include speeches and meeting roles. By doing so, the Vice President Education (VPE)

can monitor member engagement and approach individuals who haven't signed up for a role in a while or continue to fill the same role, time and time again.

Consider creating a shared online document that everyone can view and update. This helps maintain accurate tracking without overburdening the VPE. It can also serve as motivation. "This will excite members about their achievement and inspire others to do the same," says Dr. Yvonne Leong, DTM, 2018–2019 Program Quality Director for District 102 in Malaysia. "It can also be kept as a record for future references."

Tracking can also help you get new members on the schedule quickly. Don't assume new members will volunteer to sign up for a meeting role.

If you're seeking input from members about the club or any of its activities, it also helps to request feedback in one-on-one sessions. What people are willing to say in front of a group and in a one-on-one chat could be very different.

3. Provide More Opportunities.

If your club membership is so large that attendance far outweighs the opportunities for consistent participation, consider holding more

meetings. You want to avoid members becoming frustrated with the lack of opportunities. Some clubs schedule meetings twice a week at different times of the day to provide options. Holding Speak-a-thons can also help clubs with more speakers than meeting slots.

Members can also present at other clubs, which can test speakers with a new audience and help a club that might need more roles filled. If your club grows too big, it may be time to split into two.

Mentors Matter

“The real leader is the one who forms other leaders,” says André Lins de Albuquerque, DTM, member of Rio Toastmasters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and 2018–2019 Club Growth Director for District 111. A mentoring program, or other systems of formalized support, can be a great asset for clubs.

1. Provide Support to Members.

Mentoring programs help new members understand and work within the Toastmasters program. Mentors can also explain meeting-role requirements, which can involve more duties than expected and are crucial to a positive learning experience. Mentors can also help experienced members

who wish to try something new, such as participating in a speech contest for the first time or running for a District-level office.

Participants in new clubs can benefit too. Even if everyone is new, a “buddy system” can provide a structure for motivating and supporting each other and holding each other accountable for their goals.

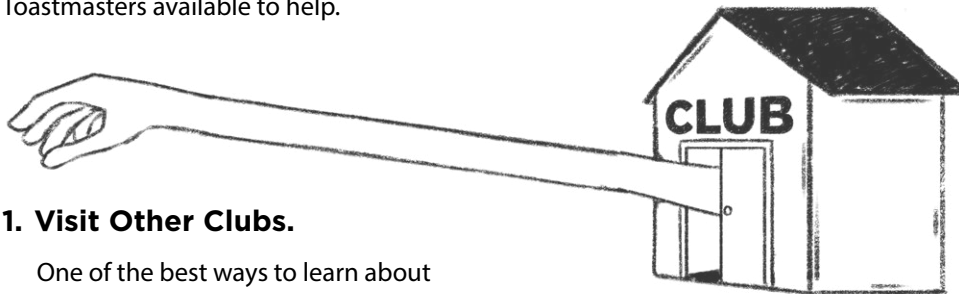
2. Offer Buddies to Guests.

Members aren’t the only ones who can benefit from experienced guides in Toastmasters. Guests can too. “Greeting visitors can be sloppy at some clubs,” says Judith Taylor, DTM, of UWP Toastmasters in Johannesburg, South Africa. It’s important to have a system to shepherd guests through the meeting. Buddies can be there for guests from the initial welcome through the meeting itself to the follow-up. If you designate someone for each visitor, there’s a better chance the guest will join the club as a result of feeling a connection.

Reach Outside the Club

You're not limited to resources within your own club. With more than 16,600 clubs in 143 countries, there are other Toastmasters available to help.

are not used as much as they could be," says Taylor. Gaining an outside perspective about the meeting can shed light on issues the club is not considering.



1. Visit Other Clubs.

One of the best ways to learn about best practices in club meetings is to visit other clubs. While the Toastmasters program is the same worldwide, it's instructive to see the way other clubs organize the experience. Plus, every club's culture is different. Seeing how others approach a meeting can confirm what is working well for your own club and provide ideas for improvements.

"Visiting other clubs also increases your observation and listening skills," says Taylor. "Plus, it extends your Toastmasters network."

2. Invite Others In.

Another way to expose the club to other practices is to invite experienced members from other clubs to speak or serve in meeting roles, particularly General Evaluator. "General Evaluators

Another option is to invite an experienced Toastmaster to attend and provide feedback to the President or Club Executive Committee separately. If you don't know any experienced members from other clubs, contact your Area Director or other District-level officers for help.

"A club does not become the best in its District by accident," says Lins de Albuquerque. Try these tips for productive meetings to ensure your club is doing all that it can to help members strengthen skills, achieve goals, and advance on their Toastmasters path.

Adapted from a July 2019 article

Get Down to Business With Parliamentary Procedure

System of rules ensures structure and fair participation in club meetings.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

Have any of these frustrating situations occurred in your club meetings? An issue is debated and discussed but never decided. One member dominates a discussion, and other members aren't heard. The discussion drags on and on and on ...

Navigating group discussions and facilitating effective meetings can be an art. And one of the essential tools of this art is parliamentary procedure. Parliamentary procedure, particularly Robert's Rules of Order, can keep meetings on track, shorten them, and create an atmosphere of fairness and equality.

The basic tenets of parliamentary procedure never go out of style and are

still undeniably relevant today: majority rule and minority rights. The wishes of the majority are enacted, while the views of the minority are heard and respected.

Benefits for Clubs

A widely accepted standard for parliamentary procedure—though not the only form of it used—is Robert's Rules of Order, based on the manual of the same name. A United States Army General named Henry Robert created the book, first publishing it in 1876. It has since been updated many times.

The main reason for using parliamentary procedure is to maintain structure and order, which can be valuable in Toastmasters meetings and

other kinds as well. In club meetings, members use it during the business portion of the meeting, when club-related items are discussed. Under parliamentary rules, members can make a motion (a proposal to do something), such as take a vote on an issue or ask that the meeting be stopped for a recess, or adjourned. Someone could also raise a “point of information,” which is a request for more information on a specific question, or a “point of order,” a clarification that the rules are not being followed properly.

A “chair” oversees and guides parliamentary discussion. In the context of Toastmasters club meetings, the chair refers to the presiding officer, typically the Club President.

Past International Director Anthony Longley, DTM, is a longtime member of the First Bahamas Branch of Toastmasters club, in Nassau, Bahamas, which practices parliamentary procedure. He says seven fundamental principles of parliamentary law are key to the procedures.

1. Ensure an equal count of all voting members’ votes.
2. Protect the rights of the minority to be heard.
3. Uphold the rights of all members to express their views through fair debate.
4. Respect the rights of the majority to decide.
5. Facilitate smooth business transactions in a spirit of cooperation and harmony.
6. Establish a quorum for the group to conduct business. (A quorum is the minimum number of voting members who must be present to conduct business. For club officer elections, a quorum is a simple majority of club members.)
7. Ensure that the chair remains impartial. If the chair intends to advocate for or against a motion, they should cede the chair to the next member in line of succession.

Using parliamentary procedure in club meetings helps the presiding officers and members conduct the session smoothly, fairly, and transparently. For example, if a member makes a motion that seems irrelevant, and no one seconds the motion, the group does not consider the motion. The purpose of seconding a motion is to show that at least two members want the motion considered. It doesn’t mean that the person who seconded the motion agrees with it, just that they see value in the group considering it.

A member might say, “I move that we change the location of the meeting from

our current location to the public library.” If no one seconds the motion by saying, “I second the motion” or “Second,” the chair will usually ask, “Is there a second?” If no second is obtained within a few moments, then the group does not consider the motion (i.e., it “dies for lack of a second”).

In recent years at the Annual Business Meeting held at the Toastmasters International Convention, a Professional Registered Parliamentarian has advised the chair (the International President) on parliamentary procedures.

Benefits for Individual Members

Toastmasters is like a laboratory for communication and leadership training. It provides a platform for members to acquire transferable skills, such as practicing parliamentary procedure, to apply in the club and their careers. Longley points out that most business school graduates are not taught how to conduct a meeting effectively—a gap that Toastmasters aims to fill.

“A member who understands parliamentary procedure can proficiently structure an agenda, table and dispense of reports, and navigate other business elements with ease and order,” he says.

It might not be easy at first. “Learning parliamentary procedure is like learning a second language. It’s not intuitive,” says

Margaret Hope, DTM, a Past International Director from Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. “It feels backward to most people because they want to talk about something and then decide what to do, rather than make a tentative decision and then go to discussion.”

Knowing how to use parliamentary procedure is a skill that can help you get your voice heard. Years ago, as a new Toastmaster, Hope practiced parliamentary procedure in her club, the Advanced Speakers Club in Vancouver. She says she learned a lot from longtime fellow club member John Noonan, DTM, Toastmasters’ 1989–1990 International President and a Professional Registered Parliamentarian. She recalls Noonan saying, “Learn parliamentary procedure because it gives you power.”

Hope wielded that power in meetings when she was a teacher and her school district was forming a union. “I had to use Robert’s Rules to be heard when they didn’t want to hear me.”

You might even use parliamentary procedure if you are summoned to jury duty. Bob Palmer, DTM, a member of Prime Time Toastmasters in Riverside, California, was chosen as the jury foreman for a trial, during which he set the following rules for deliberations based on parliamentary procedure:

- Jurors will be given permission to speak by the chair (in this case, the jury foreman).
- Nobody can speak twice until everyone has had a chance to speak once.
- Address all comments to the chair, not to each other.

“They saw the fairness of it all and had buy-in for the whole 18 days,” says Palmer. “Peaceful, productive discussions ensued.”

Getting Started

When first learning parliamentary procedure, don't be overwhelmed by all the rules—take it one step at a time. You can start by learning how to state a motion properly. For example, say, “I move that ...,” not “I want to make a motion” So instead of saying to the chair, “I want to make a motion that we adjourn ...,” say, “I move that this meeting be adjourned to (state date, place, and time for next meeting).”

Clubs can get started by including the basics of parliamentary procedure in meetings and club elections. Districts can support learning by holding training sessions on parliamentary procedures.

Most democratic countries use parliamentary procedures, though not all use the same system of rules. People in the United States, for example, mostly rely on *Robert's Rules of Order*, while Canadians

draw on *Bourinot's Rules of Order*, and Australians use the *Guide for Meetings and Organisations*, by N.E. Renton.

The most commonly used guide is *Robert's Rules of Order In Brief*, a concise guide with handy tables at the back of the book that tell you how to state things. You can also purchase a pack of 10 “Chart of Motions” from the Toastmasters Online Store.

Toastmasters founder Ralph Smedley was a staunch supporter of Robert's Rules, even authoring two books about General Robert, including *The Great Peacemaker* (available from the online store). Smedley saw Robert's Rules as a tool to foster clear, democratic communication, a sentiment still valuable to Toastmasters clubs worldwide.

Parliamentary procedure, such as Robert's Rules of Order, is instrumental in promoting fair decision-making and encouraging each member's active participation. As you participate in future Toastmasters meetings, remember that this structured process is not a mere tradition, but a testament to the core values we uphold as members of Toastmasters International: integrity, respect, service, and excellence.

Adapted from a November 2023 article

Speakathons Squeeze in More Speeches

Help more members give prepared speeches and reach their goals.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

When the pandemic began in early 2020, the Dynamically Speaking Club in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, faced a dilemma.

“We went from 24 members just before COVID to having 55 members now,” says Freddi Dogterom, DTM. With so many members, the club needed to determine how to have enough speaking slots.

Their answer? Speakathons.

A Speakathon (or Speech-a-thon, Speech Marathon, or Speak-out) is a Toastmasters meeting dedicated primarily to prepared speeches and evaluations. Its purpose is to enable more members to give more speeches. It opens up new speaking slots.

Dogterom says that Dynamically Speaking holds Speakathons at its regular Thursday morning meetings about four times a year. The club also hosts “value

added” meetings two Monday nights a month: one devoted entirely to speeches and evaluations, the other to Table Topics.

“We had to figure out how to best serve our members’ needs,” says Dogterom, an Accredited Speaker. She adds that each member in their club, new or experienced, has a mentor. “We also record every speech and send it to the members so they can learn from it.”

Achieving Education Goals

Helping members complete their education goals before June 30, the end of the Toastmasters program year, is a primary reason for conducting most Speakathons. Paul O’Mahony is President of Toastmasters4Golf (T4G) in Cork, County Cork, Ireland. The

club, which meets online, organized a Speakathon last June.

"We wanted to help people complete projects and help our club gain education points on the Distinguished Club [Program]," says O'Mahony, also Vice President Education of Blarney Club in Blarney, County Cork. "We also wanted to raise the profile of our club by opening the Speakathon to members of any club in the world."

The T4G club is also planning an "evaluate-a-thon", which will feature one speech (about golf) and as many evaluations as possible.

Speakathons, which may be held in person, online, or in a hybrid format, can only be organized at the club level. But more than one club can be involved: Two or more (from any District) can team up to organize such a program, and members of clubs other than the host club or clubs may be invited to attend and take on meeting roles.

Besides the practical benefit of a Speakathon, there's another component as well, says Paul Arnhold, DTM, of The Morning Cup Toastmasters in Maryville, Tennessee. "It's just plain fun to do," he says. "It adds variety to a meeting."

Clubs should probably do them more often, he adds, because the event "offers

the perfect venue to keep members engaged so they do not lose momentum and leave the club."

Mix It Up

Arnhold also suggests that clubs offer a twist to a traditional Speakathon.

"We have offered pro/con speeches, themes, and a speechwriting workshop," Arnhold notes. "We wanted to offer opportunities to share with non-Toastmasters some of the fun things we do. What a great excuse to personally invite someone to a Speakathon!"

Since 2013, the Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina, has hosted a Summer Speech Spectacular, in which members from throughout District 117 are invited to participate in a Speakathon. Mike Eckardt, DTM, a charter member of Top Triangle, says that most of the club members have at some point been District officers.

"We saw how so many people waited until the end of the Toastmasters year to complete their education goals," he says. "We wanted to encourage members to work on their education goals in the beginning of the Toastmasters year."

The Summer Speech Spectacular (also known as S3) is an all-day event designed like a collegiate debate tournament:

four rooms available for speakers and evaluators, with a Toastmaster and a timer in each room, and three rounds of speeches, each round typically featuring four or five speakers.

Eckardt says many members begin working on their Pathways levels specifically for S3. “It puts the idea in their head to get that level finished and to start at the beginning of the year,” he says. The Top Triangle Toastmasters also hosts a Table Topics marathon each year.

It’s About Time

When clubs hold these speech-stuffed sessions, it is important to be cognizant of time constraints, just as in a regular meeting. “The Toastmaster needs to keep everything running smoothly,” says Eckardt. “This is a good event to learn to develop those Toastmasters skills.”

Timing is particularly key when members give a longer speech. “The club needs to determine the needs of the speaker and adjust the event accordingly,” says Dogterom, the Canadian Accredited Speaker.

Speakathons are a valuable aspect of the club experience. “They serve a good purpose for both larger and smaller clubs,” says Dogterom. “They don’t take away from a meeting—they add to it.”

Speakathon Rules

Clubs organizing Speakathons should keep the following in mind:

- Such events cannot be organized at the District level. Clubs must organize them. Two or more clubs from any District can jointly organize a Speakathon.
- Members of clubs other than the host club or clubs may be invited. (They can take on meeting roles but can’t give speeches or evaluations.)
- Speakathons can be open to the public if the organizing club or clubs want.
- Although these events cannot be organized at the District level, Area, Division, and District resources, such as websites and social media, can be used to promote Speakathons.

Information about Toastmasters Speakathons are in the governing documents under Protocol 2.3: Club Programs and Events.

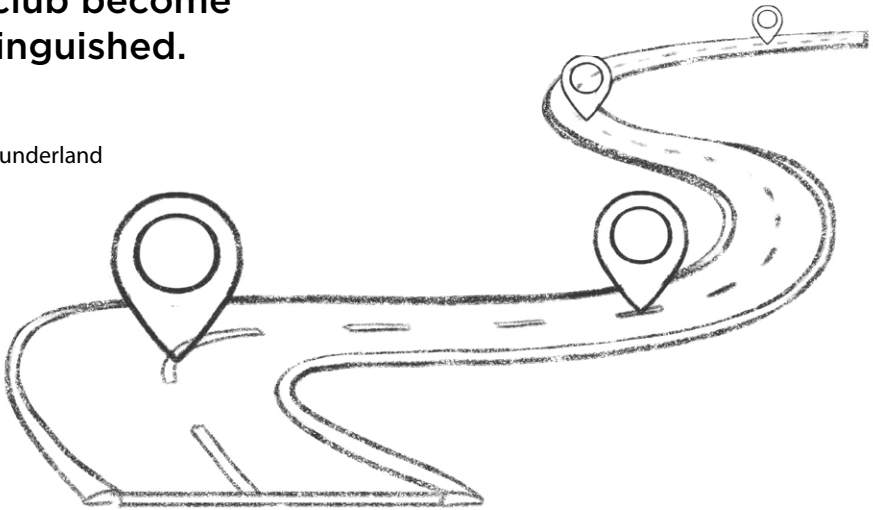
Adapted from a May 2022 article

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

A Roadmap for Club Growth

How I applied workplace strategies to help my club become Distinguished.

By Jay Sunderland



When I became President of the Snohomish City Toastmasters club, in Washington state, our club struggled to get members to attend meetings. The same people filled the officer roles each year, and despite hosting open houses and Speechcraft programs, we still struggled with low attendance. Sound familiar?

Toastmasters has a long history of helping clubs grow; that's part of the purpose of the Distinguished Club Program (DCP). Snohomish City Toastmasters had never been a Distinguished club, and I set out to change that. As a human resources and organizational development consultant, I work to solve organizational challenges. I was determined, as were my club officers,

to create a plan—a “roadmap”—to become Distinguished.

After implementing the plan, we had an 85% conversion rate for first-time guests, a 300% increase in membership in 90 days, and we beat all clubs in the District (most of Western Washington) for every incentive it offered. Not bad for a club that meets at 7:30 on Friday mornings in the small town of Snohomish. Our club reached President’s Distinguished for the first time.

The first part of our plan involved gaining a clear picture of our club’s current condition and the improvements it needed to become a thriving, vibrant club. We had an objective, a mission, and the DCP was the perfect vehicle. By using Moments of Truth as our guide, we developed a list of improvement requirements. By knowing specifically what we needed to do, we developed a plan to make it happen.

We started out by developing a vision to hold the most positive, fun, and uplifting meeting members and visitors would enjoy all week. And that meant running a high-energy club. However, we could only do that if we had enough participants, which we defined as a minimum of 15 attendees at every meeting. If we assume that about 50% of a roster will attend a meeting, that means we need to have 30 members.

We examined our recruiting strategy, and what worked was a simple email campaign. Club members began collecting business cards from grocery stores, restaurants, oil change shops, doctors’ offices, schools, and anywhere else they could find them. They gave them to me, to the Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) and to the Vice President Membership (VPM). I created a simple, short email with the subject line, “Please Be My Guest,” and spent two hours on Saturday mornings sending out invitations to our meetings.

The effect it had of bringing people through the door surprised us all. But getting people to visit isn’t the same as getting them excited enough to join, and stay.

And so we took a page from the guest services industry—in particular from hotels like the Hilton and Four Seasons—and we compared the guest experience of staying in the hotels to that of those visiting our club meetings, all the way from the initial greeting to the meeting to the departure. We walked the walk from the parking lot to the meeting room and considered things that included ease of finding the meeting location, and more. This compelled us to buy two A-frame-style signs sporting the Toastmasters logo and arrows that pointed the way for guests.

We also transformed our concept of greeting and meeting. A club officer would now greet guests as they arrived. I focused on the visitors who had responded to my email invitations. All guests would then be introduced to an experienced Toastmaster who would explain to them the processes and events of the meeting. We never let anyone wander in without greeting them personally when they arrived. We also recognized them from the podium—at the start of the meeting, during Table Topics, and again at the meeting's end.

We transformed the meeting itself, as well. We were getting people in, which meant we had more people to fill officer roles, but who wants to commit to some unknown or ill-defined obligation? We had to de-mystify the club officer roles. We started reserving two minutes at the end of each meeting to ask one officer three questions: *What have you done since the last time you spoke? What are you personally gaining from your experience? And how much time are you spending per week performing your role?* Members responded favorably; we soon received 11 volunteers for seven officer positions.

Another thing that worked was posting progress charts on the wall, indicating each member's success in the manuals. This really surprised us. People started taking note of how they measured

up, and that created some interesting dynamics. We had to extend our meeting from 60 to 75 minutes to accommodate all of our speakers.

We borrowed another best practice—tactile rewards—this time from the sales industry. We purchased plastic trophies from a discount store and handed them out for every “Best of” award. The value wasn't in the trophies; it was in what they did for guests and new members when they relayed their member experience to others. That generated word of mouth advertising and new members started bringing their families, friends, and coworkers to meetings.

Finally, we put a formal communication plan in place. We contacted every member and guest three times a week. Within 48 hours of a meeting, our Club Secretary sent minutes to all guests who attended meetings within the past three weeks, as well as to all members. Midweek, the VPE sent the same group a list of speaking and leadership assignments for the next meeting. The day before the meeting, I sent invitations. This improved member retention by 45% the first year.

The final stages of our work involved creating a website, email address, Facebook page, and Meetup site. We're now drawing guests from those sites, and they tend to join at the end of their first

meeting when the VPM asks, “Would you like to join one of the most successful Toastmasters clubs in the District?”

The best ideas are often already thought of. Creativity is about using those ideas in new and effective ways. That’s really all we did. My career has been about solving problems. I used the tools and techniques I had learned from the field of organizational development to build club membership. That gave our club a competitive advantage.

Note: The Moments of Truth and the Moments of Truth Club Evaluation Chart can be found on the Toastmasters website.

Adapted from an October 2016 article



Chapter 4

Outreach: Marketing, Publicity, and Social Media

Craft a Winning Social Media Strategy

Grow your club—and your skills—by boosting your internet presence.

By Gia Abao

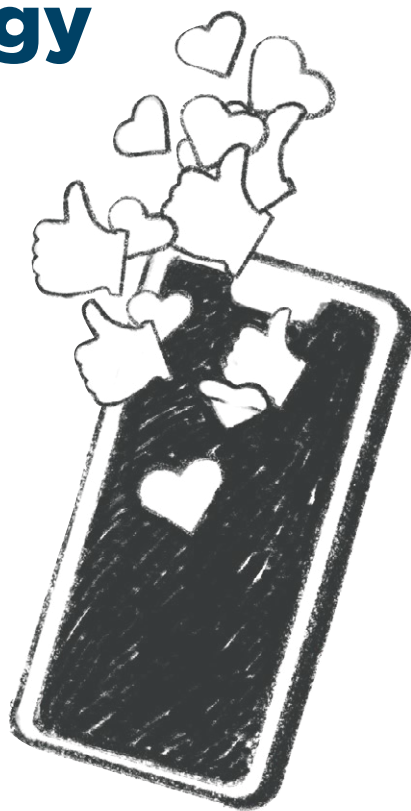
Establishing a social media presence isn't just crucial for content creators—it's an effective instrument for Toastmasters clubs to reach new audiences, attract potential members, and build a community. By deliberately leveraging social networking sites, clubs can share the immense value of the Toastmasters experience and encourage more people to join.

I first discovered this after an early quarter-life crisis at age 22 led me to launch my own business, Touchic, and join Toastmasters. At the time, I could not have known these actions would propel me into a journey of influence-building on social media.

In 2021, I joined Metro Manila Toastmasters Club and later took on the role of Vice President Public Relations (VPPR). At that point, I had no prior

experience in content creation or strategy. I took digital marketing and content creation courses and embraced a hands-on learning approach, both of which helped me build a social media presence for my then club, and laid the foundation for my career as a content creator.

What began as a modest goal to amplify the club's message eventually scaled my personal social media presence



to over 2 million followers across different social media platforms. The skills I honed in Toastmasters, including communication, leadership, and creative thinking, became the pillars of building an online platform.

Here are five key lessons that I learned as a VPPR and content creator to help you transform your club's social media strategy.

1. Understand Your Membership

Building a social media presence isn't just about posting content—it's about providing real value to potential members by understanding their goals, challenges, and what they seek in a Toastmasters club.

Begin by gathering feedback from current members to gain insights into their motivations. Are they seeking to enhance their public speaking skills for professional growth? Are they young professionals preparing for future careers? Understanding these aspirations helps you craft a club brand that resonates with both current and prospective members.

Tailor your content to their needs

Once you have a clear understanding of your ideal members, create content that directly addresses

their challenges. If your members are professionals, post videos on presentation tips or workplace communication strategies. For students, focus on content that helps them build confidence and prepare for interviews.

Dominate a niche

Focus on a specific niche that aligns with your members' core interests. For example, if your club is known for leadership development, create content around that and aim to be the go-to club for aspiring leaders.

Once you've established a strong identity in one area, you can gradually expand to others, such as personal growth or professional development. This focused approach will help your club stand out in a crowded digital landscape and attract followers who are genuinely interested in your club.

2. Have Strong Branding

Your digital footprint is your identity. Creating a consistent type of content, with a consistent message and personality, is called branding. A strong brand helps people remember and trust you, and allows someone to understand and connect with your club in seconds.

Shape your message

Shape your messaging on how you can guide your audience toward success. For instance, rather than saying, “Join our club to improve your public speaking skills,” change the message to something more member-focused, such as, “We help aspiring public speakers build their confidence and manage speech anxiety.” This subtle shift makes your content more audience-centric and relatable.

Use Toastmasters branding

The key to building trust is consistency. Adhere to the Toastmasters branding across all platforms by using the proper color palette, fonts, and brand voice. A consistent brand helps your audience relate to you and recognize your content.

3. Use Research and Planning Tools

High-performing content doesn’t happen by accident. It is driven by intentional research and strategic content planning.

Jump on trends

Participating in social media trends can help your club’s content reach a wider audience. Trends can be recurring audio clips, hashtags, or

video formats that many people are using. To find them, pay attention to what keeps appearing on your feed. If you repeatedly notice certain sounds, styles, or topics, that’s a good indication of a current trend.

For example, if a renowned public figure stuttered during a speech and it’s making headlines, use the clip as a hook and create a post highlighting how Toastmasters can help smooth out your speaking. You could pair catchy audio with a tip on building confidence before delivering a speech. Remember to tie your message into something familiar to your ideal members to make it more engaging and relevant.

Create a content calendar

A content calendar is a tool that helps you plan and organize your club’s social media posts. It helps to ensure you’re posting regularly, which maintains consistency and engagement with your audience.

To create a content calendar, start by identifying at least three key topics or “content pillars” that reflect your club’s core values and the interests of your ideal members (for example, public speaking, leadership, and personal development). These topics will serve as the foundation for your content and guide what you post.

Once you have your content pillars, plan out the posts you'll create each week. For example, one week you could share tips on overcoming stage fright (public speaking), followed by a post on team-building strategies (leadership), and wrap up with advice on goal setting (personal development). You can use tools like Google Calendar or a spreadsheet to map out your posts for the month ahead.

Set aside a specific time each week to review your content calendar and prepare upcoming posts. This will give you time to adjust if something relevant comes up, like a new public speaking trend. Staying consistent ensures that your content is relevant, timely, and aligned with your goals.

4. Leverage Data Analytics to Refine Your Strategy

You'll want to learn how to leverage data analytics to monitor what content resonates with your audience. Use your channel insights to find out what posts get the most response. Then examine those posts and see if there are any trends, such as length of text, number of photos, or the type of information you

are sharing. These analytics can help you refine your content strategy.

Build your strategy

It's important to set clear, realistic goals to track your progress. For instance, instead of aiming for exponential growth like gaining 1,000 followers in three months, focus on smaller, achievable goals like attracting 10 new followers per month.

To facilitate this, create content that resonates with your audience—post weekly tips on improving public speaking or document your club's activities. Offering value in your posts will encourage more people to follow and engage with your page.

You could create a short series of posts titled "Public Speaking Tips for Beginners" or "How Toastmasters Can Help You Lead," making sure the titles are catchy and easy to remember. Over time, as you post consistently and interact with your audience, you'll see gradual growth in your social media presence.

Use analytics to adapt your approach

All platforms offer analytics to help you track your content's performance, which helps you uncover the type of content your ideal audience wants to see. If instructional videos perform better than motivational videos, adjust your content strategy and focus on how-to videos. Assess what's working and double down on your efforts on videos that work.

5. Design Systems for Sustained Marketing Success

Steady social media growth demands effective systems. With sustainable processes, you can engage with your audience and avoid burnout in the process of building your platform.

Build a strong PR team

Leverage the notion that Toastmasters attracts individuals focused on personal development and encourages members to improve skills beyond public speaking. In my club, many expressed their interest in improving their writing skills, so I had them write initial content for posts. Encourage members to join your team by highlighting how they can grow from the experience.

Create content that inspires and informs. Tell stories of how Toastmasters has impacted the lives of your members. Highlight the tangible benefits of becoming a Toastmaster to attract an audience that aligns with your club's values and mission.

A compelling way to promote your club and its impact is by sharing personal testimonials. For example, through Toastmasters, I've learned impactful communication and purposeful leadership—skills that laid the foundation for my success as a content creator and entrepreneur.

To create an effective testimonial, I documented my Toastmasters journey by recording my practice sessions and showcasing my progress over time. This allowed others to witness my transformation, making it a credible and relatable testimonial to share online.

Ultimately, your testimonial should reflect your authentic journey with Toastmasters and highlight how it has empowered you, both personally and professionally. This genuine representation will inspire others to see the value of Toastmasters in their own lives.

Adapted from an April 2025 article

5 Social Media Tips for Club Leaders

Learn how to effectively use social media to gain and retain members.

By Victoria Salem

Is your club using social media to connect with prospective members? If not, is it because you're not sure where to even start? Social media helps foster communication with club members and guests, and if used effectively, can be a member recruitment tool. Through social media platforms, you immediately connect with your audience.

How do you create content and successfully share your message? How often and on which platform should you post?

Alina Paul, DTM, of the Desert Pioneers Toastmasters in Salmiya, Kuwait, outlined five strategies in a social media workshop for District 20. Below are Paul's strategies to effectively utilize your club's social media along with advice from other social media savvy Toastmasters.

1. Set a goal and make a plan.

Ask yourself what your primary objective is. Does your club want to grow your followers or attract new members? "Keep in mind that goal when creating your strategy and sharing content," says Paul. Your goal will change over time depending on your club's needs, and therefore your strategy will also change.

Who is in charge of creating and sharing content for your club? An easy choice is the Vice President Public Relations (VPPR), but it could be another officer or member. Whoever is selected should get help from others. For example, ask one or two people to take videos or pictures during meetings, create design templates, or tackle other tasks as needed.

If you give multiple members access to the platforms, coordinate to keep consistency. Some elements in your posts should remain the same such as the Toastmasters logo, colors, and hashtags. Paul suggests having pre-designed templates. Consistency is key to ensure your audience recognizes your club's posts and where they come from. Sticking to the Toastmasters Brand Manual will help.

2. Identify your target audience.

Your choice of platform depends on your audience demographic. While there is plenty of data on general social media demographics, Chamodith Ranasinghe, professional marketer and VPPR of Oasis Toastmasters in Nittambuwa, Sri Lanka, prefers knowing exactly who is viewing his club's pages. He suggests distributing a questionnaire to the club to learn what mediums work best for your existing membership. Ranasinghe says, "This really helps not only understanding your members' perspectives and expectations but also defining the key success factors for your club and areas of improvement."

Of course, you need a social media account before you start identifying

your audience. When creating an account for your club, be sure to make it a business account, not just a personal page. This will ensure you have access to page insights, which can only be accessed on business accounts and provide valuable information, including your followers' most active times, locations, how they interact, pageviews, likes, etc.

Paul suggests reviewing these often. They are located on the profile page of your social platforms. Get to know who you are speaking to and consider who you are trying to reach. Knowing your audience will allow you to communicate effectively and achieve your goal.

3. Create strategic content.

Meeting details are good to share, but posting about members' achievements, birthdays, contest times, and events can garner engagement.

Georgia Huntley, social media expert and member of the UofG Toastmasters in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, suggests defining three main topics for your posts—your "key content pillars." Her club's pillars are testimonials, working through Pathways, and ongoing club activities.

Sharing your club activities will inspire other members as well as showcase what your club does. Be positive and show how Toastmasters helps members grow, while having fun and building community.

Include photos of club members along with fliers and other graphics. Canva offers many free templates. For video editing, look at FilmoraGo or InShot.

Depending on your platform, you will need to size images differently, and your captions may vary. On Instagram—a visually-driven platform—use less text and be more creative with your images. Huntley recommends portrait size images (1080 x 1350 pixels). “It takes up the most space on people’s feeds when scrolling through.” The images you post shouldn’t be cut off and it’s best that they are high quality and resolution.

On Facebook—a platform meant for social networking—posts are usually more descriptive. Even with more information, it’s important to engage your audience. A good way to grab their attention is to start your post with a question.

Huntley gives three valuable tips for writing posts on any social platform:

- Spend time writing your first sentence. Capture your reader’s attention immediately.
- Use hashtags to help followers find your posts. Huntley suggests up to 30 “smart” hashtags. These are words and phrases consistent to the content you are sharing. For example, #Toastmasters, #PublicSpeaking, #Leadership, #PersonalDevelopment.
- Keep it short and get to the point quickly. “Long-form captions are out,” says Huntley.

LinkedIn focuses on professional development, so try sharing achievements, leadership opportunities and tips, and members’ development. This platform aligns nicely with the professional nature of Toastmasters so if you want to create a paid advertising campaign, opt for doing it on LinkedIn.

A paid advertising campaign requires a schedule, but you should create an agenda for your standard content as well. It is helpful to schedule your posts. Hootsuite is a tool that allows you to link social media accounts and set specific dates and times for your posts to go live. Organize your posts depending on the content, the platform, your goal, and your followers.

4. Encourage activity.

You want your followers to interact with your posts. Tag members so they can see your posts, and their friends and connections will see them too. Use a call to action and invite followers to share your content. Ask members to post on their personal channels about what is going on in your club and about their achievements. They could share a lesson learned at a meeting or a photo when preparing for a speech—remind them to tag the club account.

Another efficient tool for interactions is to ask questions or create polls. You could ask your audience what they would like to see more of or what information would be helpful to them. Your followers need to feel included.

Regularly check the performances of your posts. With the insights tab on your account, you can see the number of people reached, numbers of reactions, comments, shares, etc. This information also helps you discover the best times to communicate with your followers.

5. Get your members involved.

With the help of current members, the Oasis Toastmasters gained nine new members and supported 10

other prospective members with just one campaign!

Ranasinghe, the club's VPPR, created an extensive social media and public relations plan to unite members and attract guests. He customized club members' Facebook profile pictures using the Toastmasters logo and branding. Members shared it on their profile and gained traction with their Facebook friends. Ranasinghe says, "It's all about word of mouth."

The best way to gain visibility while improving your members' engagement and energy is to get them involved in campaigns. Create a social media vote where members compete to be awarded best speech from social media followers. Be creative and check what other clubs are doing to get inspiration from them.

Building a social media presence takes time and effort, but can be rewarding if done strategically. Paul says, "Each post is a new learning experience." By trying things out, like onstage, you discover what is working and what is not. You can then adapt your communication style.

So jump right in and start working on your social media strategy!

Adapted from a March 2022 article

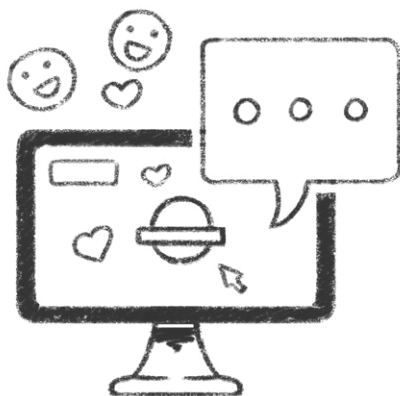
Make Your Club Website a Marketing and Recruiting Asset

How to leave an inviting impression with online visitors.

By David F. Carr, DTM

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

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



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

Appeal to the Uninitiated

Remember that prospective members may not know anything about Toastmasters. Or maybe they have heard of it and think it sounds deathly dull. A home page that emphasizes posed photos of people holding up certificates isn't the best way to change that impression.

Instead, show Toastmasters in action. Use candid photos of dramatic moments from member speeches. Better yet, show video of members giving powerful (or hilarious) presentations. Let visitors know these speakers weren't always that skillful but had the opportunity to learn in the safe and supportive Toastmasters environment. Show with images, show with video, but also put it in writing—about 600 to 800 words is a good target for the home page, both for the reader and to give search engines text to index.

Spell Out the Basics

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

Think Mobile First

The majority of web traffic today comes from mobile phones, not desktop web browsers, so check how your club website appears on your phone. Are the essential details still visible and readable? Are

images squished or not fitting within the browser window? Tweak as necessary to get that right.

Brand Yourself

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

What exactly makes your club so special?

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

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

topical specialty, you want to continue attracting people who are searching for a club within driving distance.

Also, when you design your website, check the Toastmasters Brand Portal to ensure your site meets brand guidelines.

Search Engine Optimization

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

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

Make sure to record your web address in Club Central on the Toastmasters website.

Add Depth to Your Website

A full-featured, multi-page website gives visitors more pages to explore and search engines more content to index. If your website includes a particularly strong article on how speakers can improve body language or how to share slides more effectively on Zoom, that has the potential to rank on Google or get linked to by other websites.

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

The desire to add breadth and depth is what drove me to start the WordPress for Toastmasters project, originally for my home club, Club Awesome Toastmasters, in Coral Springs, Florida. WordPress is web publishing software originally created by bloggers for bloggers, so it’s easy to add articles. WordPress is always evolving and adding features for SEO, social media, and mobile devices. The trade-off is that there is always more to learn.

The Free Toast Host (FTH) web-hosting service supported by Toastmasters International has the advantage of being specifically for Toastmasters. For example, the FTH website of North Side Toastmasters Club in Mounds View,

Minnesota, makes excellent use of the Toastmasters brand colors to ensure its welcome message stands out.

Focus on One Thing

Rather than including a lot of special effects, club webmasters should use fewer. Many club websites use so many different fonts and background colors that the effect is chaotic.

Toastmasters is a volunteer organization. No club webmaster can be expected to be a technical expert, a design expert, and a great web copywriter. Often, maintaining the website is one of many roles for the Vice President Public Relations or another club leader. They can't be expected to make perfecting the club website into a full-time job.

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

Adapted from a February 2022 article

Spread the Word: Getting Press Coverage

How to get press coverage in a disrupted, digital world.

By Corinne Card



Getting publicity is a huge boost for any organization, including your own Toastmasters club. Seeing the club in the media is exciting for members. Publicity can also build awareness for what the club is doing, bringing in new members who could find Toastmasters a life-changing experience.

The biggest question for clubs seeking to showcase Toastmasters' benefits for their communities is: "How can we best work with journalists?"

"If you want publicity for your Toastmasters club, or for anything else in the digital age, you need to get involved in content creation," explains Jon Card, a business journalist and author of *How to Make Your Company Famous*. "Create your own bio—a short, powerful sentence about who you are; learn how to tell your story; have a longer, written profile about

yourself; have lots of images—both still and moving; and become very quotable."

When it comes to digital media—press coverage that gets published online—it's often said that content is king. What this means is that you will need to prepare the stories, pictures, quotes, and data for the publications in which you want to appear.

In this respect, PR and media haven't changed that much, says Chantal Cooke, managing director of PR agency Panpathic Communications in London, England. For Cooke, it's all about creating good and relevant content. "With any campaign, you have to start with the outcomes you're hoping for. What do you want to achieve and who are you trying to reach?"

According to Cooke, the next step is to look at the platforms your target audience will be using and build content that will

likely get published on those platforms—perhaps that means a compelling story, a video, a photo, or straightforward information. She adds, “At the end of the day, it’s always about the content being relevant and right for the publication.”

For example, if your club is looking for new members, consider which news outlets in your area would best reach potential members. Then pitch the kind of stories those news sources and websites are likely to publish. For Toastmasters, this could be your local newspaper, news or radio websites, magazines, and blogs.

I’ve spent my career as a digital PR professional helping businesses promote themselves and have provided five top tips to help you get noticed by journalists and the media in the digital age.

Tip 1: Learn to tell your story.

Every Toastmasters club or individual needs a good story if they want to get press. “Journalists need to know who you are, what you do, why you do it, and how you’re trying to make a difference to the world,” explains Card. “The fastest and most memorable way to do this is to tell them a short story that explains why you are doing this. Why did you join Toastmasters and what benefits can it offer someone else? Why should someone visit your club? Journalists want

to know the human story, the personal motivation—that’s absolutely key.”

When it comes to finding the human story, think of your club members’ achievements, personal and professional goals that were met through Pathways, or a success story of someone who competed in a speech contest.

Tip 2: Conduct your own photoshoot.

The digital age has brought about changes, not only in the process journalists use, but also in the budgets they’re working with. Lower budgets mean it’s less likely a journalist will be able to send out a photographer, even if they like the story. And often, no photo can mean no coverage. The solution? Organize your own photoshoot, aiming for high quality, illustrative pictures that help to tell the story. James Hurley, enterprise editor at *The Times*, a British newspaper, says, “A good picture can bring the pages and a story to life.”

If you don’t have the budget to pay a professional photographer, you can still get good, high-resolution pictures using a smartphone. For best results, go outside for natural light, choose a location with an interesting background, and find someone you know who has some photographic ability to help you out. And always try to illustrate the story you’re telling in your pictures.

Tip 3: Get linking.

A clickable link can be valuable in digital PR. Often, it simply means readers can easily click through to the event, website, or competition you're trying to get publicity for, making it far more likely that you'll get more visits.

Always think about where you might want a journalist to link to and include that link in the article you send them. Just make sure the link is relevant and potentially useful to the reader, because the journalist will need to be able to justify it from their audience's point of view.

Tip 4: Prepare a quote bank.

In the digital age, journalists are more desk-bound, and email interviews are the new normal. You can take advantage of this by building up a bank of quotes, stories, and photos that are available on demand and ready to send out to journalists on any of the topics you might want to speak about. These can be quotes from other members of your club or people who have come to visit, but be sure to get their permission!

Also, if you receive a list of questions from a journalist, it is important to remember that they are attempting to elicit quotes from you. Avoid answering questions with a "yes" or "no"—even if

they are closed questions. Instead, aim to answer each question with a few meaningful sentences.

Tip 5: Time the perfect pitch.

Sending out a press release about your organization is increasingly hit and miss in today's digital era. Even local journalists will often receive upward of 100 email pitches per day, meaning good, relevant stories will get missed if they don't catch a journalist's eye straight away.

Meanwhile, calling up journalists is not generally recommended, as top journalists can no longer deal with the influx. "I have more or less stopped answering my landline at certain times of the day because of the constant bombardment," says Hurley, *The Times* editor. "It's a shame, because it does mean I miss some good ideas."

One way around this is to get ahead of the pack with perfect timing. Look ahead for key newsworthy dates and pitch a story just when journalists will need it. This way, your story's email subject line will stand out from the crowd.

For example, during the holidays, journalists tend to publish holiday-themed stories. Is your club planning a holiday-themed event or special occasion? Send details to the local news at the beginning of December, with a fabulous photo from last year's event, to

show readers what might be in store this year. And look ahead to other calendar dates to see what you could prepare.

Make journalists' lives easier by giving them exactly what they want, exactly when they want it. Follow these tips, and you'll quickly start seeing results.

Adapted from an August 2020 article

The Benefits of Branding

How to best represent and leverage the Toastmasters brand.

By Laura Amann

When you think of the Toastmasters International brand, what first comes to mind? The logo? The colors maroon, navy blue, and gray? The club banner?

A brand is all of these things and more. Having a cohesive brand helps people recognize an organization, a product, or even a person. It's a set of unified elements that shape the perception of that organization, product, or person. It's also how you communicate your vision to your audience.

"Branding is more than just a random bunch of rules," says Ilana Herzberg, brand specialist at Toastmasters International. "It brings a cohesiveness to the organization."

The visual elements are often the most recognizable aspects of an organization or product. Think of a group of restaurants, or a product at a grocery store. There is

something similar enough that when you see it, you know what to expect.

While the most recognizable elements of Toastmasters' branding include the logo and colors, the branding also encompasses the tagline ("Where Leaders Are Made"), the core values (integrity, respect, service, excellence), and even the voice and tone (friendly, professional, and positive).

Everything that a club, Area, District, or region produces—website copy, social media posts, fliers, and contest announcements to name a few—has to follow basic brand guidelines. And all interactions, whether in email, phone calls, or direct conversation, need to convey a clear and warm tone.

Confused as to how to put all of this into action? Toastmasters' Brand Manual and Brand Portal (available on the website

to all members) helps members and leaders understand the guidelines and quickly find information on colors, fonts, logo usage, and more. They also provide inspiration and marketing ideas.

Why Branding Matters

Herzberg points out that without branding guidelines, Toastmasters would just be a group of clubs, each with their own logo, colors, and approach. Having a strong, recognizable brand means that clubs and members have access to the same support system and a proven education program, as well as an overarching website and the ability to find a club.

She uses McDonald's as an easily understood example of the importance of branding. It's the same Golden Arches across the world; there isn't a cowboy hat or Eiffel Tower perched on top. However, restaurants in different regions can customize their menu. In Toastmasters, this works the same way. You can tailor your meetings, but the fundamental elements remain the same.

Having a cohesive brand means that any club you visit around the world, whether online or in person, will have the same meeting elements. There will be a Toastmaster of the Day, speeches will follow the Pathways learning experience, and Table Topics will be intimidating.

Put the Brand Into Action

For some Toastmasters leaders, understanding brand guidelines will be their first encounter with branding, while other officers and leaders may have years of experience. The Brand Manual breaks down the disparity and makes it possible for all clubs and Districts to produce the same polished products.

A common assumption is that if clubs don't use the logo then they don't have to adhere to the brand guidelines. However, it's not the logo alone that makes the brand. "Every material, brochure, web post, and invitation is a representation of the brand, regardless of whether it has the logo or not," explains Herzberg. "It still needs the right colors, fonts, pictures, and tone."

This means that anything your club posts online or on paper needs to adhere. You can't have other decorative elements, such as hearts, flags, or palm trees, for example.

As long as you're creating paper or online promotional materials (with the exception of certificates), if you are following the Toastmasters Brand Manual, you don't need approval from World Headquarters. However, products such as apparel, accessories, videos, and websites need to get approval through a

Trademark Use Request form before you purchase or produce them. And some materials (acrylic name badges, ribbons, pins, and club banners) cannot be either designed or produced locally—they must be obtained through Toastmasters International. This is not only for brand compliance but also for award and recognition consistency. When in doubt, reach out to World Headquarters: brand@toastmasters.org.

Trademarks are particularly important for nonprofit organizations as any material that even suggests a partnership could threaten the nonprofit status.

For this reason, clubs cannot partner officially with other fundraisers. Even a simple walk-a-thon or hospital fundraiser can be problematic. The Toastmasters logo or name might appear on apparel or fliers alongside more controversial or polarizing organizations.

Rising to the Challenge

The first time Shruti Shivhare became aware of the Toastmasters brand guidelines was in July 2020, when she took on the role of Division PR Focal (a position on the District 98, Division A PR team). At the time, most club members in her Division perceived the guidelines as a restriction and an obstacle to their creativity. However, she was determined

to challenge herself and inspire other members by showing what you could do within the guidelines.

She started designing brand-compliant fliers, posters, animations, and videos for Division-level events. “To my surprise, the work started to create an impact, and the materials got appreciated all over the District,” Shivhare says.

She soon realized that rather than looking at the guidelines as a hinderance, the limited options actually increased her level of creativity. She began working with a team to conduct sessions and workshops to familiarize club officers with brand guidelines and help them adapt. “It was a great opportunity to challenge ourselves and put our skills to the test,” she says.

Shivhare also notes that facing challenges is what helps people realize their true potential. “All the guidelines, which seemed to be obstacles at first, were an opportunity to upgrade my skills, and it’s been my pleasure to not only use them constructively but also to bring change to the perspective of others.”

Trisha “Trixie” Hunter-Merrill, DTM, of Eloquent Entrepreneurs in Greenwood Village, Colorado, also embraces the brand guidelines of Toastmasters. “Think of it this way,” she says, “if you have your own business or you’re a star, you have a brand, and you want to protect that brand. If

you did all this work to build up that brand, you wouldn't want somebody else changing the colors and fonts and doing things outside of what your brand is."

Take the opportunity to learn more about branding—expand your skill set, challenge yourself to work within guidelines, and embrace the possibilities.

Adapted from an August 2021 article

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

Using Social Media to Attract Guests

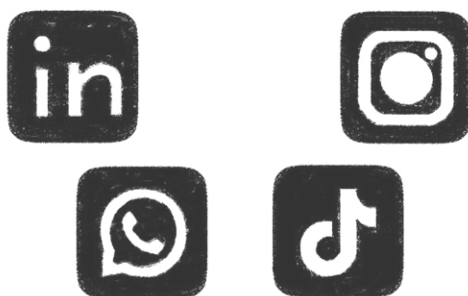
Denmark club designed posts to intrigue “the curious and the terrified.”

By Stephanie Darling

Vibrant visuals, warm personal stories, and the instant connectivity of social media turned out to be a wildly winning combination for the Frederiksberg Toastmasters club, which recently conducted an all-online membership drive that grew the club by 35 members in less than one program year.

The club, based in Copenhagen, Denmark, now has 55 members and is the largest club in the country. Musna Jensen, who was Club President and Vice President Public Relations during the drive, credits its success to the vigorous, consistent use of Facebook and LinkedIn.

“Both platforms are heavily used in the Nordics,” Jensen explains. “They gave us tremendous visibility, credibility,



and ways to showcase our club, along with a way to instantly connect with people who wanted to know more about Toastmasters.”

For the campaign, the club amped up the content of its Facebook and LinkedIn pages and invited the world in for a look at its lively club culture. Eye-catching photos showed members in their element enthusiastically interacting. New videos featured young members inviting guests to join their journey. Each week, Jensen posted intriguing meeting details and made sure all online inquiries were answered in a quick, welcoming manner.

One of her main goals was to “demystify” Toastmasters for potential guests. Many were drawn to the messages

but had little to no idea what the organization offered.

“When I invited guests online, I tried to give them as many details upfront regarding what they should expect on their visit,” Jensen says. “I also answered a lot of questions in direct message. Both strategies drove a higher number of guests.” LinkedIn drew the most response, as many respondents were young professionals, looking to advance their careers with confident speaking skills.

As club leaders prepared their marketing strategies, they discussed why people who didn’t know Toastmasters would want to join.

“We found a lot of people want to improve speaking skills but don’t know where to start or are just too intimidated. And they weren’t clear on how Toastmasters could help,” Jensen says.

“We knew we had to make the club very relatable to spike the interest of the curious and the terrified,” she adds. “Our first job was to educate and elevate.”

Even Jensen was surprised at social media’s power to do just that through posts, reposts, conversations, tagging, and other community sharing. “Trust is a big factor in Denmark and coming to our sites and seeing someone they know, and hearing our members’ stories made us very relatable,” she notes.

The club’s appeal, both online and subsequently in real-life meetings, led many visitors to sign up on the spot.

“A lot of the conversions happened at meetings,” Jensen said. “Guests felt the quality of it all exceeded their expectations—and felt our members gave them a sense of belonging.

“Also, a lot of people’s initial doubts about how exclusive the organization was, or how advanced someone needed to be to join, were quelled when they could see different speakers with varying levels of communication skills take the stage in a single meeting—and all got the same level of support from the audience.”

With new members settling in and starting to set their individual goals, the club is now focusing on a vigorous onboarding program. It lasts six months and sets specific milestones for the mentor/mentee to reach along the way. Jensen wants to be sure there’s never a disconnect from what people see online and the actual club experience.

Their techniques work. Following the success of a recent membership drive, the club had to cap its membership due to limited capacity.

Adapted from a December 2023 article



Chapter 5

Adding Variety to Meetings

Break Away From the Everyday

**Refresh your meetings—
and your members—with
these invigorating ideas.**

By Megan Preston Meyer

Even the most engaged clubs sometimes need a break from their typical meeting agenda. Challenging members with a new activity or leaving the confines of your regular meeting space can bring a renewed sense of energy, as well as fresh challenges.

Trying something different also helps foster a sense of community by asking people to go off course together. Whether it's a game or some type of adventure, you're likely to get laughs and a lightened mood. So don't be afraid to shake it up! A little change may be the energizer your club needs.

Here are some ideas to refresh your meetings.

Reset the agenda.

We Toastmasters love our agendas. Without a minute-by-minute plan, how would the timer know if we were sticking to the prescribed time limits? By this point, most veteran members know the agenda by heart—which is all the more reason to shake things up. Sometimes, making small changes to the order or the meeting format can make a big difference.

MUM

Mum's the word.

In Toastmasters, we learn to think on our feet by actively seeking out ways to incorporate the Word of the Day into our speaking. Why not switch things up

by featuring an Anti-Word of the Day? Instead of introducing an uncommon word that people are encouraged to use, identify a common word (or words) that people are *not* allowed to use. For instance, try giving a Pathways speech without using the word “leadership” or inspiring your audience without using “success.” If someone uses the prohibited word, encourage them to spontaneously reformulate their sentence to avoid it.

In the same way that the Word of the Day expands your vocabulary, an Anti-Word of the Day pushes you to use your existing vocabulary to think of synonyms and new ways to express yourself.

You’re on mute.

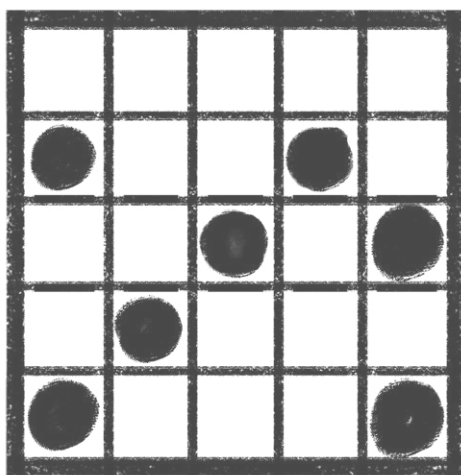
Take everyone’s favorite online-meeting phrase to a whole new level by running an entirely silent meeting. While this seems like it contradicts the Toastmasters goal of improving public speaking skills, it actually doesn’t. A silent meeting provides opportunity to home in on non-verbal communication, which makes up anywhere from 60% to 93% of your message (depending on which research study you consult). Use a silent meeting to deep-dive into body language, facial expressions, stage presence, and visual aids.

It might take a bit of imagination, but with a printed agenda, expressive

gestures and slides for prepared speeches, charades-like Table Topics, and written evaluations, you can focus completely on non-verbal communication. The subsequent improvement in these skills will speak for itself.

Fun and Games

In addition to being educational, Toastmasters meetings are inherently enjoyable; that’s why we love them. If you want to boost the fun factor even more, try one of the suggestions below. Game on!



Bingo!

Take advantage of the standard format of a typical Toastmasters meeting. Create bingo cards and label each square with something that will more than likely happen during the session: An evaluation

speech goes over its time limit, a humorous speaker makes the audience crack up, or a guest visits the club for the first time. Tailor the cards to your club's individual quirks—for instance, if one of your members is known to speak often about a particular passion, one square could read, "Carlos talks about golf," or "Kim mentions her latest travel adventure."

Toastmasters for 200, please.

Test your club members' knowledge with a *Jeopardy!*-themed meeting. The Toastmaster of the Day can be the host; the evaluation team can be the panel of judges. You can play a round or two of trivia during Table Topics, using a tool like JeopardyLabs, or go analog and use flipcharts or construction paper. Participants can choose their clue and answer in the form of a question. This theme lends itself well to educational or training sessions, as well.

A welcome escape.

The last member of your club has just taken their seat and the meeting is about to begin. Just as the President drops the gavel to begin the meeting, the door slams shut—you're all locked in! In order to escape the meeting room, your club will need to solve riddles, crack codes, and perform tasks (or Table Topics!). Can you make it

out before the timer tells you that time is up? Use online resources and your own imagination to create a series of "escape room" activities, and help your club break free of the normal routine.

MYSTERY

Mastery and mystery.

Turn your meeting into a Toastmasters mystery event. In contrast to an escape room theme, this meeting idea requires more lead time—because club members have to prepare in advance. In addition to meeting roles, members are given character roles. They come in costume, dressed for their part, and must deliver the assigned information and clues to other participants while remaining in character throughout the course of the meeting. As the session unfolds, attendees work together to listen for, interpret, and combine the clues, using the communication and leadership skills that Toastmasters teaches to piece together the puzzle and identify the culprit.

MYSTERY

Location, Location, Location

We all need a change of scenery once in a while. One silver lining of online meetings is the ability to attend from anywhere; you can re-create that feeling of freedom by switching up the location where your in-person meeting is held.

Set the stage.

Try holding a club meeting in a local theater or auditorium. Speaking from an actual stage—complete with lighting, microphones, and an altitude differential between you and the audience—feels completely different than speaking from the front of a classroom or conference room. It's an excellent chance to practice the technology and technique needed for larger public speaking engagements, and provides your members with their moment in the spotlight.

Take it outside.

Weather willing, plan a meeting outdoors. Whether it's a local park or a member's backyard, improve your leadership and communication skills while soaking up some sun. Take the Pathways metaphor to a whole new level by organizing a hike or a nature walk, and/or fortify your members for all the personal development they're doing with a picnic or a cookout.

Room remodel.

If it's not realistic to change your location, you can always change your layout. If you typically sit at tables, move them out of the way and set up chairs theater-style instead; if you typically sit in rows, move your chairs into a circle. Relocate the lectern to the opposite side of the space so that the audience is facing a different direction than they normally do—or ask the speakers to move around the room as they talk. It's amazing how changing your physical viewpoint can change your entire outlook.

New Faces

Sometimes, just having a sea of unfamiliar faces looking back at you can be enough to switch things up and move you out of your comfort zone. In addition to the guests and new members that you regularly bring in to your meetings, actively seek out fresh audiences.

A winning combination.

Hold a combined meeting with another club in your area. You'll both enjoy a larger audience, and hear speeches and Table Topics responses from Toastmasters with fresh perspectives. (And there's an added bonus for the guest club: You get the benefit of a new location when you visit the host club's home base.) You also don't have to limit yourself to other

Toastmasters clubs. Organize a joint meeting with the local Rotary club to get the benefit of fresh faces—and maybe even fresh Toastmasters members.

All in the family.

Hold a family evening, where members are encouraged to bring their significant others, children, parents, or relatives. You could plan a special Team Table Topics theme in which families respond as a group—or ask them questions about each other. Not only will this give the visitors a chance to see their Toastmaster in action, but having their loved ones in the audience might bring out a side of your club members that you haven't seen before.

Share Your Success

Once in a while, we all need a vacation, so take a break from your traditional format. From reimagining your agenda to relocating your meeting, from expanding your audience to playing a game, there are plenty of ways to liven things up.

Club leaders can play a role in such revitalizing. "As Toastmasters officers, we need to develop, continually, a creative atmosphere for members to talk about the exciting meeting experience at their club," says Julia Calderon, DTM, a member of two clubs in Illinois.

The ideas listed in this article are just the tip of the ice cream cone—there are plenty more possibilities for keeping your meetings fun and fresh.

Adapted from a July 2022 article

Infuse Your Club With Vitamin C: Creativity!

By Craig Harrison, DTM

Over time, many clubs become a bit stale, with members lapsing into a routine pattern each week. Sometimes it's a result of the sameness of the room, identical meeting formats, or the absence of enough new members to infuse the club with new energy. Over the years I've watched clubs succumb to lethargy. Yet the remedy is as easy as a little dose of vitamin C—creativity.

Administer this vitamin to your club whenever you feel you're in a rut or want to do some team building. Past International Director Paula Tunison, DTM, puts it this way, "Toastmasters is like a love affair. Everything is exciting at first and then, if you're not careful, it can become dull and routine. Changing your meetings helps to keep it exciting."

Here are some ways to spice up meetings with changes of pace, fresh ideas, and a dose of fun to create a renewed vitality:



A joint meeting with another club.

Find one that meets nearby at the same time. You can host them for one meeting, and they can reciprocate another time. It's exciting to entertain guests who already know the Toastmasters traditions. The extra people and energy from this joint meeting doubles your fun! For a truly different experience, schedule a Skype meeting with a club in another part of the country or the world. It will require some creative logistics and cooperation between clubs. For example, a Minnesota club with a connection to a club in Sao Paulo, Brazil, joined a lively charter Skype party for the new Brazilian club.

A grab-bag meeting.

Designate your next meeting as a grab-bag where, upon the arrival of members, all meeting roles are drawn from a bag filled with slips of paper. Use a fill-in-the-blanks agenda, or a flipchart or whiteboard where you write in the

roles chosen from the bag. Any member may end up as Toastmaster, speaker, or evaluator. The drama adds a layer of excitement as even the prepared speeches feel like Table Topics.

The theme's the thing.

Turn a normal meeting into a special event! One club in the United States held an Academy Awards meeting where the Toastmaster wore a tuxedo, the Table Topics questions related to movies, and the winners gave acceptance speeches! Another club honored the American baseball season with a meeting in which each member assumed a baseball-related role: The Toastmaster became the manager, the General Evaluator became the head umpire, speakers became batters, and the Topicsmaster became the pitcher. Members fielded topics. You can do the same with football/soccer—the General Evaluator becomes the referee, the Topicsmaster becomes the goalkeeper, kicking ideas back to members, and the speakers become the offensive line. Add a cheering section!

Other themes may relate to topical holidays or current events of a local, regional, or national nature. Celebrate the Cherry Blossom Festival in Japan, Independence Day in your country, or even a club, District, or company anniversary.

A reverse meeting.

A reverse meeting. Once a year, say on April 1 (“April Fool’s Day”) or January 31 (“Backwards Day!”), you begin with the closing thought, hear speech evaluations before the speeches, and generally reverse the order of your entire meeting. Shaking up the order of meetings draws longtime members out of complacency and gives a fresh perspective on each segment.

A costume party meeting.

People tend to be more relaxed when they’re dressed differently than usual, so a costume party presents a great opportunity to practice composure and professionalism even while wearing a mask or crazy outfit. Think about a celebratory time of year in your country that you could tie into—Halloween, Carnival, Day of the Dead, the Lunar New Year. Just be sure to clearly explain to any guests what you are doing and make sure they feel included. Maybe bring along some extra adornments in case they want to participate!

Alternately, try wearing “uniforms” during Table Topics. Members of the corporate club KT Talkers in Milpitas, California, held a Table Topics session inside their company’s semiconductor

cleanroom, a room almost entirely devoid of airborne particles. They dressed in their sanitized “bunny suits,” which included a head cover, face mask, white suit, blue gloves, and boots. If you’re in an industry with uniform regulations, see if wearing different types of clothing causes you to talk or behave differently.

A time machine.

If your club is ambitious and likes a challenge, tie your costumes or themes to a historical period. Encourage members to dress like a past generation: platform boots and silk shirts with wide lapels for the ’70s, bobby socks and leather jackets for the ’50s, the gangster suits or flapper dresses for the ’20s. You’ll find a new energy comes with such wardrobes. Or go back further: the Renaissance era, Roman or Greek empires, or even the Stone Age. Perhaps you’d rather fast-forward to the year 2058 or 3008? When the time comes, come in character.

In addition to dressing for a particular epoch, try using bits of related language, phrases, and speech topics. Methinks you speaketh the King’s English fits in your Elizabethan era. For the Roaring ’20s, work in a few quotes from F. Scott Fitzgerald or Virginia Woolf. And your Table Topics and speeches can relate to the themes of the era as well. Again, explain to any guests what you are doing and why—in case

they think they need to dress like Antony or Cleopatra next time.

A progressive story.

The Topicsmaster begins the fun, and it’s continued by all the members. Collectively, you tell a story designated by the Topicsmaster. This requires listening skills, creativity, and quick thinking to complete. Each member contributes a sentence or two in the co-creation of a new story.

A debate.

Your Table Topics can have two participants arguing alternate sides of an issue. Or plan a debate with numerous “candidates” for a fictitious election to involve as many members as possible. Another alternative: You can ask Table Topics respondents to argue both sides of an issue. To further develop debate skills, allow a Table Topics responder to rebut the previous participant’s topic.

Debates build both listening skills and persuasive skills, and also challenge listeners to consider a different point of view and think more deeply about a topic.

A television newscast.

Bring journalism to your club. Your Sergeant at Arms can give the countdown until you go live and also be the “voice-

over” that introduces the newscast. Your Toastmaster of the Day is the anchor, with the Topicsmaster and the General Evaluator as your sports and weather co-anchors. Speakers become field correspondents with reports. You can even turn some roles into commercials.

A speech marathon.

Help your members earn their educational awards as you dedicate an entire meeting to prepared speeches. For clubs with a lot of members and the constraints of a one-hour meeting time, this periodic pumped-up housekeeping event helps more members speak and shortens the wait time between speeches. It’s educational for audience members to see multiple speeches in rapid succession. These popular events can be staged at a regular club meeting or scheduled in addition to your regular meeting time and place.

Tap into your senses and conduct your meeting with the lights off.

Members of the ALE HK club in Hong Kong used this experience as a way to practice vocal variety. Without seeing body language and facial expressions, listeners are better able to home in on speaking pitch, pace, volume, and vocal pauses.

Participants loved the creativity of the session and how the darkness forced them to think outside the box when figuring out how to give timing signals. Members had to focus on taking mental rather than written notes and evaluators had to memorize their statements.

Tall tales are terrific.

Once in a blue moon, or on April 1 (“April Fool’s Day”) or April 4 (“Tell A Lie Day”), you can dedicate a meeting to embellishment, aggrandizement, and bald-faced lies. Everyone can get into the act. Your speech introductions, speech theme, Table Topics, and more can play fast and loose with the truth. Make outlandish claims and issue representations of gigantic proportions for comedic effect. Then, just to confuse your audience, throw a complete truth into the middle and see if they detect it! Make Pinocchio proud.

During Table Topics, play Truth or Lie. For some, this is easy. For others, it might be a challenge. Vote after each topic response on whether it was the truth or a lie.

If you’re troubled by fostering lies in a Toastmasters meeting, rest assured that each April 30 you can honor Honesty Day with a meeting dedicated to truth—which is often stranger than fiction!

Go Hollywood!

Themes abound from the world of motion pictures. Whether you take your inspiration from Hollywood, Bollywood, or the movies of Hong Kong, you'll find wonderful ideas from films and TV shows as diverse as *Game of Thrones*, the *Harry Potter* series, or *Downton Abbey*.

Whether you employ these or other ideas to spruce up your meetings, that extra shot of vitamin C will breathe new life into proceedings. While you never want to eschew the educational value of meetings, such variations on our traditional formats will add a new dimension to your Toastmasters training and keep everyone fresh. Any time you apply creativity to your meetings, the results will yield fun, energy and new perspectives. Ready . . . set . . . create!

Adapted from a September 2019 article

Improv-ing Club Meetings

How 3 clubs are getting laughs and flexing their spontaneous speaking skills.

By Stephanie Darling

Improv is a classic dramatic technique, rooted in storytelling, and long practiced in the performing arts, including dance, music, acting, comedy—and even public speaking. After all, Toastmasters have been honing spontaneous speaking talents for decades through Table Topics.

Some Toastmasters believe so heartily in improv that they incorporate it even more fully into club meetings, not just in Table Topics. Improv fosters self-discovery—as well as an exploration into shared creativity, collaboration, and community—something Toastmasters also fosters. The technique is ideally suited to comedy, which is why many Toastmasters clubs enjoy it. It aligns well with Toastmasters founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley's long-ago observation: "We learn best in moments of enjoyment."



The "Yes, AND" rule of improv—where members agree to participate in the exercise, no matter how confident or wobbly they may feel—is an ideal technique for encouraging spontaneity and creativity. Techniques for

incorporating this rule vary widely, from games to sketches involving two or more people. Adding a club role, such as an Improv Master or a Joke Master further helps members collaborate on spirited, imaginative improv scenarios each week.

A common bond is having fun while doing it, club leaders say.

“Our members come to polish personal and professional skills, but also to relieve stress by having fun with a sociable group, or simply to have a good laugh. That last reason is probably underrated in our society, but it’s something truly valuable,” says Xiaocheng Stephen Hu, DTM, with Beijing’s International Improv Toastmasters Club.

Improv sessions can be incorporated into a club meeting in a variety of ways. Here’s a look at how three clubs are sparking spontaneity with members.

Improv Toastmasters

This California-based online club is so committed to the art form that it’s written into the club’s mission statement, according to Thomas Iland, AS, DTM, of Valencia, California, an Accredited Speaker and Vice President Education of the club.

The statement reads: “... every member has the opportunity to develop communication and leadership skills and learn improv and improv-related skills ...”

“Basically, life itself is about improv so in our club, the key is to say ‘yes’ and see where it leads you,” Iland explains. “It has changed so many lives I know, on so many levels.”

He added that many members in this President’s Distinguished Club have gone on to successfully participate in speaking competitions, launch careers as professional speakers, or enhance their careers by boosting spontaneous speaking skills.

The club follows the traditional meeting format but begins and ends with improv games drawing in everyone who wants to participate. “We start and end the meeting laughing,” Iland says.

A popular game style is the round robin, which begins with a question or story thread with each member adding to the unfolding narrative. This practice is especially helpful in developing listening skills, as speakers logically or illogically add their own performance twist, based on what previous speakers have contributed.

Iland says that many club members are new to improv, so he appreciates the “carte blanche” permission it gives to individual expression, which is a foundational building block in Toastmasters’ philosophy, as well.

“Some people come to improv naturally, others don’t. So we encourage

everyone to go at their own pace,” Iland says. “Get comfortable and remember, there are no wrong answers so just go for it!”

Former Club President Rick Randall of Quartz Hill, California, says improv helped reframe his wit, a personal talent he’s always prided himself on.

“Improv has helped me professionalize my wittiness by combining the basic foundation of public speaking with a fast-thinking approach to conversationalism,” he says. “I’m a more refined person because of improv.”

International Improv Toastmasters Club

Improv has always been a “significant part of club activities,” says Belinda Wu, President of International Improv Toastmasters Club, a Chinese-English speaking club in Beijing.

The club’s Improv Master opens the first hour with an activity, which helps attendees to loosen their bodies, throats, and minds, and paves the way for the subsequent hour focusing on speech skills.

“We use all kinds of improv games, including some really dynamic exercises that bring out the body language, vocal variety, and emotions among players. And when someone comes up with a funny

line, the room erupts in laughter,” adds Stephen Hu, DTM, of the Beijing club.

“At the same time,” he says, “these skills can be applied to many real-life situations. When we interact with someone, most of our conversations will be improvised. So a skillful improv player will be able to go with the flow in any situation.”

Both Wu and Hu are convinced that the club’s lively, opening improv session creates an aura of excitement among attendees that carries through the entire club meeting.

“Having been energized by the improv hour, members usually feel more expressive when delivering Pathways speeches. Maybe that’s why our speech reservations fill up so quickly,” they say.

Improv is regarded as a popular teambuilding activity in Chinese corporate culture, explains Hu. “Although perhaps not as popular as stand-up comedy at a national level, there are certainly improv troupes in major cities, performing in Chinese and sometimes in English.”

However, the idea of improv didn’t necessarily come naturally to the club’s Chinese members, he adds.

“When we started, I could feel that our fellow Chinese members needed some time to overcome the apparent challenges of saying ‘yes’ and conjuring wild stories on the spot. At times, I found

myself needing to use my right and left brain, typically used in critical thinking. Now I think all of us are a bit more seasoned and I regard this confidence boost very highly!”

Wu also found improv “uncharted territory” when she joined the club. Her longtime love of spontaneous dance, an art form that has used improv for centuries, won her ardent support for bringing the practice into the club.

Some members are naturally exhilarated by improv’s novel approach for expression; others, like Wu, are initially apprehensive.

“I encourage people to view this as a golden ticket out of their comfort zones and a gateway to uncharted growth,” Wu says. Club support for every participant is a given. “Our improv masters have a keen eye for the quiet souls, easing them into improv that often leads to heartwarming breakthroughs.”

Improv and Humor

This club chartered in 2013 with a specific emphasis on improv training—and met in person for years before they became online-only during the pandemic. The shift drew new members from around the world.

Club meetings open with a 30-minute improv session featuring multi-person

skits and games that strengthen expressive skills—and usually end in laughter. A favorite tactic is to set up improv scenes between two or more people and “use it to practice trust, vocal variety, self-awareness, quick thinking, and much more,” notes Barbara Woo, DTM, a professional actress who joined the club long ago to help her “ace” her auditions.

“The idea is to keep the scene moving, trust your partner, and take chances,” Woo explains. “Part of the thrill is free-falling into a scene knowing your partner will catch you. Just like in real life, exploring the unknown and taking those chances yields unexpected, wonderful results.”

The club creates a weekly theme that provides a tie-in for Pathways speeches, Table Topics, and improv games, setting up a cohesive learning experience for all. Because improv is a fluid art form, members can try out many different forms of expression, generally resulting



in everyone leaving the meeting having learned at least one new thing. That's a continual benefit to members, all of whom have different reasons for wanting to become skilled improvisors, Club President Karen Rae Hannah says.

"We have complete newbies, professional actors, businesspeople, retirees, working professionals, people who are pursuing speaking or coaching careers, people with English as a second language who want to become more comfortable thinking quickly at work and in conversations," Hannah says, describing the member diversity in her club.

Woo, a busy actress, says improv helped her stand out among her peers. "How do you make a lasting impression, so the casting director wants to follow your character out of the room?" she says. Club improv has taught her body movements, facial expression, vocal strength, and the confidence to overcome stage fright.

Ultimately, improv is rooted in stories, told by many people, from many different viewpoints and communication styles.

"Improv is a journey of growth, spontaneity, and a deeper connection with the art of storytelling," Woo adds.

Adapted from a February 2024 article

The Theme of Today's Meeting Is ...

Add a spark to your sessions with a unifying topic.

By Bill Brown, DTM



Over the years, I have been a member of 11 clubs. They are all different. And one of the most prominent differences is in the area of meeting themes. Some clubs have them. Some do not. And those that do, employ them in different ways.

Themes can add fun to your meetings. They can revolve around holidays, end-of-the-year celebrations, cultural events, or universal experiences (favorite vacations, for example).

How do clubs decide their meeting-theme policy? I asked some founding members of my primary club what went into their decision. They all gave me a blank stare and said, "Well, our club mentors said we had to have them." There is nothing wrong, of course, with listening to your mentors, but it's also good to periodically examine and evaluate

if something is beneficial, including how a concept like meeting themes works for your club.

Here are a few considerations.

- **Decide who sets the theme.**

In some clubs, the meeting Toastmaster sets the theme.

In others, the Vice President Education handles the task. When the Toastmaster selects the topic, he or she typically presents short, educational segments related to the theme throughout the meeting. For example, if the theme is "the Academy Awards," the segments might include some history about the event or some tidbits about Oscar-winning films over the years.

- **Choose interesting themes.**

Whoever picks the theme needs to make the topic interesting and entertaining for members. Making material engaging is always a good skill to learn.

Recently, my club's meeting theme was "Nevada." That is not too surprising for a club located in Las Vegas. Our meeting Toastmaster was about to embark on a vacation to some of the most unknown tourist destinations around our state, and his travelogue was fascinating.

Two months ago, another meeting Toastmaster selected "weird bugs" as the theme. Weird bugs? Believe it or not, it turned out to be an interesting topic. She showed us a picture of each bug and then told us which club member it reminded her of and why. It was all in fun, and we were driven to listen for the humor and for what she would say about each one of us.

- **Don't let the theme take over.**

Besides making such segments interesting and entertaining, it's also important to keep them brief or the meeting will run overtime.

Some clubs employ themes only in Table Topics. In this case, the topic is often selected by the Vice President Education or the Table Topicsmaster.

One of my former Southern California clubs uses this approach but adds a twist.

As the Club President opens the meeting, he or she announces the theme and then has everyone stand up, say their name, and briefly answer a question related to the theme. That way no one leaves the meeting without having spoken at least once, even the guests.

In one meeting, the theme was "radio stations" and the question was "What is your favorite station?" In a meeting with a Mother's Day theme, the question was "When you think of your mother, what immediately comes to mind?"

As the club's membership grew, it became trickier to do this activity because of the amount of time it took. But it's a fun way to start a meeting and adds energy right from the start.

Themes can be fun, but they aren't for every club. It all depends on what you—and the members—want. Either way, it is good to know *why* you do what you do. If themes help your club have fun and accomplish its objectives, great! If not, don't be afraid to try something different. After all, the ultimate goal is individual member growth.

Adapted from a September 2019 article

Maximize Your Meeting Role Lineup

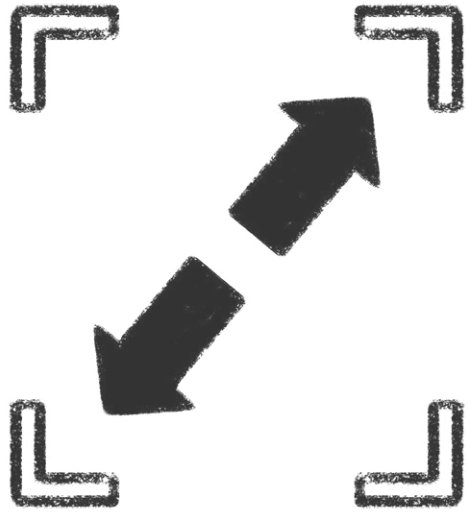
From Quiz Masters to Mystery Greeters, some clubs are adding non-traditional roles.

By Kate McClare, DTM

Visit St. Vladimir Toastmasters in Toronto and you can watch the Quiz Master test members' listening skills. At Friends Club Toastmasters in Manama, Bahrain, the Mystery Greeter will make sure you're welcomed warmly. Sign on to the Online Presenters Club for the Watcher's tips on your use of the virtual meeting space.

You may find members performing similar duties at other Toastmasters meetings, but you won't find these roles listed in *The Navigator* or Toastmasters' other official manuals. They're among many non-traditional roles that add fresh ways of developing members' skills.

There's no requirement that functionaries be limited to the traditional Ah-Counter, General Evaluator, and timer described in the organization's handbooks. If your meeting agenda is



starting to feel routine and predictable, adding a custom role or two is a simple way to spice things up. Here's how a number of clubs add their own signature.

Educational Roles

Speakers Forum, an advanced club in Northern California, is one of many that added the Education Minute Master (EMM). "The EMM gives a short talk, ideally two to three minutes, on some educational topic," says club member George Marshall, DTM. "Topics have included how to write the beginning or

end of a speech, advice on presentation techniques, and explaining some aspect of club procedures.

“The members learn something about the offered topic, and the EMM gets to practice doing a succinct information session. Any member is eligible to do these, but it is usually an officer or one of the more experienced members.”

Speakers Forum also has an Evaluation Leader, a different take on the General Evaluator. The Evaluation Leader facilitates a round-robin feedback session—where all or many members offer comments rather than just one evaluator—after each speaker. Like many other clubs, Speakers Forum also has a Joke Master (more on that later).

Friends Club, the Toastmasters group in Bahrain, assigns a Leadership Evaluator to monitor how well members practice leadership skills. The evaluator chooses a leadership skill such as critical thinking, time management, or mentoring, and gives general feedback on its use in the meeting.

They’ll Be Watching You (and Listening)

Friends Club is one of many that assign members to keep their eyes (and ears) open during meetings. “We have a Mystery Greeter tasked to report if all

members were welcoming and friendly during the meeting,” says Nomel Gilongos, DTM, a Friends Past President. “The Mystery Greeter checks if members help create a positive first impression for all guests and members.”

Center Berlin Toastmasters in Germany has had a Listener role since forming in 2015. “The Listener role is a well-established tradition in Berlin clubs,” says Club President Mascha Logačeva. “It is a challenging role which helps us develop the skill of attention to detail.” The Listener quizzes members to see how well they listened to each speaker. “It brings a lot of energy to our meetings. Everyone shouts out their answers” (after unmuting their Zoom microphones).

Center Berlin Listeners has taken various approaches, including that of one member who structured the session like a game of *Jeopardy!*—the member shared the answers and the rest of the club had to come up with the questions.

Quiz Master is a coveted role at St. Vladimir Toastmasters, in Ontario, Canada, says Club Secretary Matthew Kleinosky, DTM. Near adjournment, members are quizzed about various aspects of the meeting.

“Members enjoy the friendly competitive energy, the creativity of the Quiz Master, and the chance to evaluate their own listening in the meeting,” he

says. The weekly quiz, he adds, “raises the energy of the meeting by encouraging all to participate in answering.”

The member who serves as Quiz Master stretches their analytic skills, says Kleinosky. “It requires quick processing of a significant amount of content to create a wide-ranging, yet concise, set of questions.”

Online Feedback

Many clubs have added a Body Language Monitor to their meetings; Online Presenters, whose founders are based in District 47 (South Florida and the Bahamas), evolved that to a role called the Watcher.

David F. Carr, DTM, a charter member of Online Presenters, says body language may be more limited online, “but there are lots of other issues with how you present yourself visually. How well is your picture framed within the webcam? If you are using body language such as hand gestures, are you keeping them within the frame? How’s your lighting? Is what we see in the background helping or hurting your presentation? If you’re using visual aids, are you using them effectively? The Watcher takes notes on all those things and gives a report at the end of the meeting.”

The Online Presenters club also assigns a Chat Monitor to assist the Toastmaster

of the Day and report technical difficulties as well as interesting, useful, or amusing items. The Chat Monitor forwards questions posted to the chat window for the speakers.

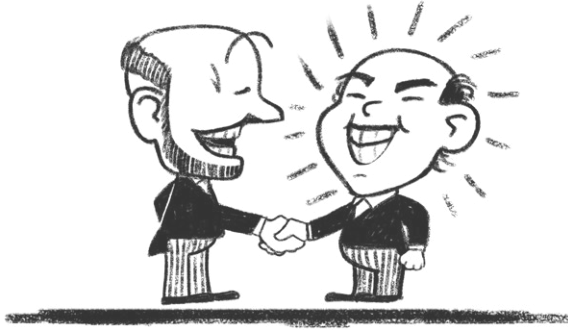
Just for Fun—Mostly

Non-traditional roles like Joke Master, a commonly assigned task, often serve as a simple, lower-pressure role for nervous newcomers. “It gives the member the chance to practice delivering a joke, including delivering the punch line and punch word for best effect,” says Marshall, of Speakers Forum. “Any member can do this role. When the Joke Master is successful, the room fills with laughter, and it does indeed lighten the mood.”

St. Vladimir Toastmasters uses a Joke Master, and also devised The Last Word to go out on a lighter note.

“Each member taking this role prepares a 60 to 90-second speech or final thought that closes the meeting,” says Kleinosky. “Sometimes it is on a subject that the member cares about; sometimes it’s humorous; sometimes it’s informed by things which just happened in the meeting. We find that it is always an interesting, popular, and effective way to end our meetings.”

Adapted from an April 2021 article



Chapter 6

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

Foster Belonging and Inclusion in Your Club

5 practical tips to implement throughout the program year.

By Kristin Arnold

Toastmasters talk a lot about leadership, communication, and club excellence—but but at the heart of every thriving member's experience is a sense of belonging. When members feel seen, valued, and included, they stay engaged. They speak up. They grow. So, how can leaders and members ensure that their clubs don't just run smoothly, but also feel welcoming and inclusive to everyone?

Here are five practical ways for club leaders to foster belonging and inclusion in Toastmasters clubs throughout the program year.

1. Be intentional with member check-ins.

It's easy to assume everyone is doing fine, but assumptions don't build connection. Regular, intentional

check-ins are a powerful way to show members they matter.

- Early in the year (July–August): Reach out to each member and schedule a short one-on-one conversation. Ask about their goals, challenges, and what they'd like from the club this year. This not only sets a welcoming tone but can also uncover hidden needs or talents.
- Mid-year (January): Plan a mid-year pulse check. It could be a survey or informal chats. Ask “How are we doing as a club?” and “What can we do to help you feel more connected?”

Check-ins aren't just for troubleshooting. They're for building trust before issues arise.

2. Celebrate what makes each member unique.

Diversity and inclusion aren't just about background or demographics, they're also about personality, communication style, and life experience. One of the simplest ways to foster inclusion is to celebrate that uniqueness.

- At the first few meetings of the year: Have a "Get to Know You" segment where members share fun facts, cultural traditions, or something they're proud of. Even longtime members can reveal something new.
- Throughout the year: Use Table Topics to invite personal stories. Feature different members in newsletters or social media posts. Assign mentorship pairings that cross generational, cultural, or language lines.
- At every meeting: Kick things off with an icebreaker activity using conversation starter cards, which typically contain question prompts designed to spark meaningful



conversations. Each question should promote inclusivity, curiosity, and connection, helping members discover common ground and celebrate differences.

The more we understand one another, the more we respect and connect.

3. Acknowledge diverse perspectives before conflict arises.

When we proactively recognize the value of different viewpoints, we build resilience against misunderstandings and tension.

- Start of the year: Encourage your club Executive Committee to discuss and define shared values that honor diverse voices. For example, create space for those who process ideas more slowly or who come from cultures where public disagreement is uncomfortable.
- Before difficult decisions: Whether it's changing the meeting format or planning a special event, ask "Whose voices haven't we heard yet?" and "What perspectives might we be overlooking?"

By validating diverse perspectives up front, you reduce the chances of members feeling unheard or marginalized later.

4. Cultivate psychological safety in meetings.

Psychological safety—the belief that it’s okay to speak up without fear of embarrassment or rejection—is essential in creating a welcoming environment.

- At every meeting: Start with a warm, inclusive tone. For instance, have the Toastmaster acknowledge that “every speaker brings something valuable, whether they’re on their first speech or their 50th.”
- During evaluations: Train members to give feedback that’s kind, specific, and focused on growth. You might even revisit the club’s approach to evaluations during officer training or a special club workshop.

When people feel safe to share and stumble, they grow and they stay involved.

5. Make inclusion a visible, ongoing priority.

Belonging isn’t a one-time event; it’s a continuous commitment. Toastmasters clubs are uniquely suited to model this through leadership and communication.

- Quarterly: Schedule “Inclusion Spotlights” in club or District newsletters. Highlight practices or stories that reflect inclusive behavior.
- Throughout the year: Officers can model inclusive language and behavior. This includes introducing pronouns, inviting diverse speakers, and rotating leadership opportunities.
- During contests and events: Consider logistics (location, accessibility, scheduling, language, etc.) to avoid unintentionally excluding some members. Even small choices can have big ripple effects.

Belonging and inclusion don’t just *happen*—they’re built through small, consistent actions by people who care. As Toastmasters, we already have the tools: intentional leadership, thoughtful communication, and a genuine interest in helping people grow.

As you step into this new program year, ask yourself, *What kind of experience do I want members to have?* Then lead with that intention. A club where everyone feels they belong is a club where everyone thrives.

Adapted from a July 2025 article

Confronting Our Hidden Beliefs

Unconscious bias can undermine your message. Here's how to identify and address it.

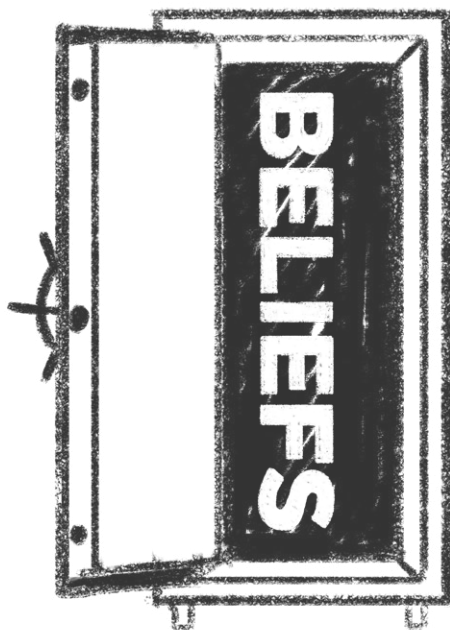
By Greg Glasgow

It happened to Sandra Upton, Ph.D., when she attended a graduation party for the daughter of a coworker.

Upton and her husband sat down next to an elderly white woman who asked Upton, a Black woman, how she knew the father of the graduate. Upton—who serves as vice president of global diversity practice at the Michigan-based Cultural Intelligence Center—replied that she worked with the company's founder and president. The woman looked at her and asked, “Oh, are you his scheduler?”

“When she saw me, it could have been through a number of cultural filters,” Upton says. “As an African American, as a woman—she made the assumption that my role had to be at a support level.”

For Upton, the encounter was a perfect example of unconscious bias—social



stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside of their own conscious awareness. The stereotypes tend to be negative and can involve another's race, gender, age, nationality, skin color, and more.

"The insidious nature of unconscious bias is the unconscious part," says Valerie Alexander, a screenwriter and unconscious bias expert in Los Angeles. "It's that you are not aware you're treating people differently. You have different beliefs about people, different expectations of people, or behave differently toward people because of some inherent trait like their gender or their age or the accent they speak with."

Those biases come from a variety of sources, Alexander says, but they are primarily connected to how we were raised and the types of people we have—and haven't—interacted with in our lives, as well as the types of media we consume.

"Most of us have a lot more media images of people of different races than actual encounters with people of different races," Alexander says. "And how the media portrays those different people determines what we see as a threat."

The portrayals don't have to be threatening, she adds, to create a bias.

"The majority of children's books that have a Black child in them, the Black child lives in poverty," she says. "Think about

the well-meaning white parent who says, 'I want to make sure my kid is reading books with kids of different races.' And that's what they're presented with, is a child who's in poverty."

Be Aware

No matter the source or nature of the bias, experts say, the important thing is to make yourself aware of unconscious bias before it creates negative consequences for you or others. It's a concern that's especially important in public speaking, where you often don't know the makeup of your audience or might be speaking on a topic that could reveal unconscious bias. You don't want to limit possibilities for yourself or your audience.

"Let's say you're speaking to a group of students about how to prepare for college, and you happen to be a white male," Upton says. "There might be individuals in that audience who have a different background from you, and you may bring in some assumptions about that group. Say there are students from an urban community in the group—you might assume that, 'You're probably not going to go to college anyway,' or, 'This might be your first experience going to college.' You're assuming they're first-generation just perhaps from what you've been taught or maybe seen in the media."

We often come at an issue through our own cultural lens and our own perspective. It doesn't mean we're wrong, but it can hinder our ability to communicate our message effectively.

"One of the most important parts of public speaking is having credibility with your audience," says Pamela Fuller, author of the book *The Leader's Guide to Unconscious Bias* and a thought leader on unconscious bias at leadership training firm FranklinCovey. "It's important to recognize what biases you might have about that audience that could chip away at your credibility and have a plan to bridge that gap and to connect with them in a meaningful way."

Tackling Unconscious Bias

The good news about unconscious bias is that you can overcome it with time and practice. One of the most effective methods for doing so is called cultural intelligence—a skill set for working effectively in culturally diverse situations. Upton, who teaches the method at the Cultural Intelligence Center, says it has four components: drive, knowledge, strategy, and action.

Drive, Upton explains, has to do with how motivated and persistent you are when it comes to understanding and

managing your biases. **Knowledge** involves gaining an understanding of the similarities and differences among cultures and how the reality of another's experience may be different from the image in your head.

"I can be motivated and confident about wanting to manage my biases, but now I have to develop some knowledge to help me do that," she says. "The audience that I'm going to give this presentation to—what are some of the cultural differences that might be represented in that audience? And how do I use that knowledge to make sure I'm not forming assumptions about different cultural groups and that my speech is bias-free?"

Knowledge also includes learning all you can about an audience before you speak, so you can keep an eye out for any specific unconscious biases, she says. The **strategy** piece comes in looking through a speech or presentation once you develop some knowledge about your audience, and adapting your presentation accordingly.

Action, finally, is all about behavior change, Upton says. "What behaviors do I want to be mindful of when I'm engaging with that audience? Even gestures—what gestures might be appropriate or inappropriate, or what gestures might I make that could potentially be offensive

to a certain cultural group or that may come out of a bias I might have toward someone from a certain cultural group?"

The nice thing about cultural intelligence, she says, is that it's a skill that can be measured and developed. Once a speaker learns how to use drive, knowledge, strategy, and action when planning a presentation, each area begins to flow into the others.

"Managing those biases is really what it's all about," Upton says. "The [biased] thoughts will come, but how do you manage them? How do you make sure they don't make their way into decisions, actions, and behaviors?"

Learning From Missteps

If unconscious bias does rear its head during a speech, Alexander says, the best thing you can do is to use it as a learning opportunity.

"The two biggest things you have to be willing to do are to examine your own behavior and be open to feedback," she says. "As a speaker, if someone says to you, 'I don't know if you realize it, but that example you used is really insensitive,' your response better be, 'Tell me more. I'm listening.'"

It happened to Alexander recently with a TEDx Talk she delivered that has been viewed hundreds of thousands of times

online. Out of all those viewers, just one reached out to let her know that an axiom she described as a "Chinese blessing" was not in fact a Chinese blessing. Worse yet, Alexander illustrated that portion of the speech with a picture of a fortune cookie, which are not typically served at restaurants in China.

"That was hugely eye-opening," Alexander says. "I followed up with her and we spoke for over an hour. At no point did I defend those choices or explain my intentions; that wasn't the point of the conversation. My only goal was to understand her position and actively work to do better. All feedback is a gift, so as speakers, we should be incredibly grateful for it, even if sometimes it stings a little.

"I don't know of any speaker who doesn't want their audience to be uplifted and motivated and advanced as a result of having heard them speak," she continues. "I know I do. If I leave a speech and I hear, 'Wow, these people felt really excluded because of what you said,' I feel like that's a giant lost opportunity."

For those worried about unconscious bias ruining their connection with an audience, Alexander says plenty of resources exist to ensure you aren't unwittingly offensive. Books, websites, Facebook groups, and LinkedIn groups are good places to start, she says, but you also can consider asking others for feedback.

“You could post on LinkedIn and say, ‘I’m about to give a talk that I think might have problematic elements when it comes to the way I’m discussing immigration,’” she says. “Say, ‘I want to acknowledge everybody’s humanity, and if there’s anybody who would be willing to give me some feedback on this, I would be open to it.’”

All About Awareness

In the end, a big part of managing unconscious bias has to do with awareness. Awareness of your thoughts, awareness of what you’re saying, and awareness of what you’re planning to say. Even the words you use deserve consideration.

“When you’re giving a speech, you tell a story and you get to move the story in the direction you’d like it to go,” Fuller says.

“You get to pick the words that you use. Those words can be inclusive—they can be complete and whole—or you can tell just one story. Be really conscious about whether your word choice is focused only on your own lens, or whether your word choice is open enough and inclusive enough to include everyone who might engage with what you’re saying.”

The earlier in the process you start thinking about bias, the more successful you’ll be at weeding it out, Upton adds.

“As I prepare my outline or begin to fill it in with the content, what assumptions am I bringing to this topic or presentation?” she says. “Just ask yourself that question, and you’ll be amazed at what you see. The focus is never about intent; it’s about impact. It’s, ‘How do I make sure I’m doing everything possible so that this speech has a positive impact on everybody who hears this message?’”

Adapted from an August 2021 article

Supporting Neurodiversity

Toastmasters is the perfect fit for all brain types.

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.



There are many people who 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 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.

Toastmasters has a distinct appeal to people with non-typical brains because 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:

5 Ways Toastmasters Supports Neurodiversity

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.

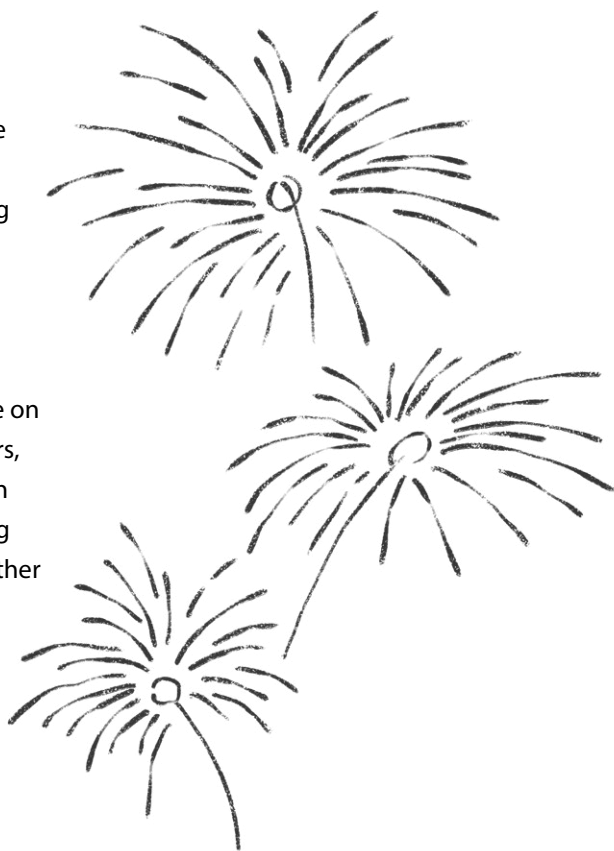
I will add a disclaimer here. While Toastmasters provides the structure and branding, every Toastmasters club has its own culture, energy, and personalities. Visit lots of clubs and find what works for you.

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.

Adapted from a May 2023 article



Reduce Barriers for People With Hearing Loss

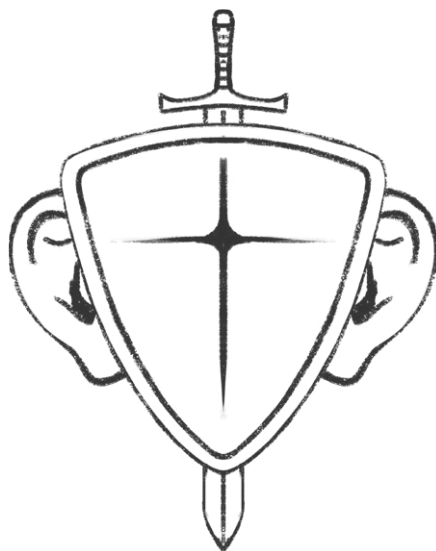
Make your club meetings welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all.

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. Hearing loss often occurs as people get older, but many people have had hearing loss since birth or childhood, which can affect their speech as well.

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 Harry Wolfe, a member of Audible Talkers Toastmasters and Park Central Toastmasters Club, both in Arizona. 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, 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.

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.

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 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 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?

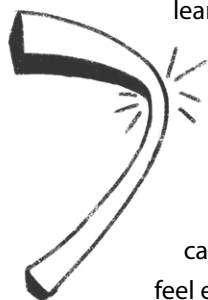
Adapted from a May 2023 article

5 Ways to Make Your Club More Inviting

By Jesse Scinto, DTM

1. Be flexible.

Toastmasters provides a simple framework for professional development, with defined roles, published agendas, and the Pathways learning experience.



While traditions offer stability, it's important to avoid a rigid adherence

to ceremony, which can make newcomers

feel excluded. Toastmasters

is a place for growth, not a secret society. Be willing to invent new traditions and try new technologies.

2. Focus on commonality.

Toastmasters is an affinity group, where people come together out of a shared interest in public speaking and leadership. Avoid labels like "Gen Z" or "millennials." Also avoid jokes about generational differences. No one wants to be stereotyped.

3. Be judicious in your feedback.

New members benefit from hearing other perspectives. But experienced members shouldn't point out every last defect in a newcomer's speech. When it comes time to evaluate, give two or three concrete areas for improvement. Avoid sweeping statements and instead use conditional phrases like "I typically..." or "In similar situations..." or "It may be useful to..." Such phrases allow for the fact that there's more than one way of doing things.



4. Highlight Toastmasters' mutually supportive environment.

Psychological safety is the foundation on which all learning takes place. Let prospective members know about your club's positive environment in your marketing materials. Welcome and reassure them when they walk in the door. Remember what it was like to attend your first meeting. In Toastmasters we share each other's triumphs and challenges.



5. Meet them where they are.

If your club only has older members, consider doing promotion at local universities. (You may need approval from the student activities office prior to posting fliers.) Also explore social media, event-planning sites (such as Meetup), podcasts, and short videos as tools for reaching young people.

Finally, remember that in Toastmasters the benefits we receive are comparable to those we bestow. Millennial Andrew Tsuro, DTM, says, "The biggest thing that Toastmasters gave me has been to understand how service is fulfilling—just serving and seeing transformation in other people."

Adapted from a December 2022 article

The Age of Opportunity

How different generations of Toastmasters can learn from one another.

By Greg Lewis, DTM

In any given Toastmasters club around the world today there can be as many as five distinct generations of members. This means there is a tremendous opportunity for growth and understanding. We learn from our fellow members; we teach, inspire, and encourage each other. Having a wide range of ages in a club brings fresh opportunities to work and learn from each other in a safe environment.

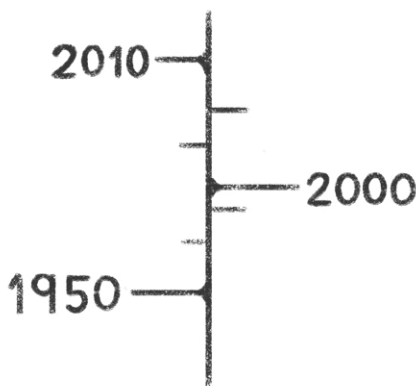
“In our club we have a lot of generational diversity, which is amazing. I am inspired by the passion my fellow club members, both older and younger than myself, have for Toastmasters,” says Eugene Law, 25, a member of Brock Toastmasters in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

When clubs intentionally seek out members with a wide range of ages—and

work to maintain that variety—they gain a depth of experience, along with a solid base of members. Members of different generations offer diverse perspectives and skills, largely based on their life experiences, the times in which they’ve lived, and the culture that has surrounded them.

The generally accepted birth years of the five generations are:

- Gen Z: 1997–2012
- Millennials: 1981–1996
- Generation X: 1965–1980
- Baby Boomers: 1946–1964
- The Silent Generation: 1928–1945
- The Greatest Generation: 1901–1927



Avoid the Stereotypes

If you're a 55-year-old and walk into a Toastmasters club that has members in their 20s, it's understandable that you might feel out of place. However, it's important not to fall prey to stereotypes and assume you won't have anything in common with people in different generations. In fact, you'll likely learn more about some things than you would if you stuck with your own age group.



Certainly, the rise of the internet and mobile phones have had a dramatic impact on the way we communicate. While the rate of adaptation varies around the world, one thing that holds true everywhere is a difference in comfort levels with technology among the generations. Many millennials and Gen Zers have grown up with the internet as an essential part of their lives, and this has shaped and influenced their expectations in a variety of ways. They

may have less experience with face-to-face communication and many may have shorter attention spans.

Different generations might have different expectations and ways of communicating, but no method is inherently better than another. Just because another club member does something differently than you might, doesn't mean they are doing it wrong. For instance, the social media of Gen Z offers new opportunities, but a traditional newsletter has a place as well.

Younger generations also tend to be less formal and more direct. As millennial Andrew Tsuro, DTM, a District 74 leader and CEO of The eHub, an organization that provides professional coaching and training to South African entrepreneurs, observes, "I also recognize that we question a lot of the formalities, like the need to use a gavel at a meeting. Why is that still necessary?" Observations like this present a great opportunity for clubs to ensure the club's practices are meeting and reflecting the needs of their members.

But again, it's important not to make assumptions. Just because a new member is in their early 20s doesn't necessarily mean they "live" on social media. Or that a 55-year-old has no idea how to use TikTok.

Find the Common Ground

Regardless of age, people join Toastmasters with a common goal: to improve their communication and leadership skills in order to gain more opportunities. And no matter what a person's ability or confidence level, Toastmasters provides the opportunity for every member to realize their full potential. Technology may have made a drastic change to the way we

Think of each Toastmasters club as its own team. Everyone on that team brings different skills, experiences, and expectations. There are veterans, rookies, and everyone in between. This spectrum of skills and experience adds greatly to the fabric of the "team."

Like any team, the aim is to achieve your goals (and have some fun along the way). In Toastmasters, the team wins when members reach their objectives. As each member grows and succeeds, the entire team (club) also succeeds.



communicate, but it hasn't changed the mission of a club. This common ground provides a bridge between the generations in a Toastmasters club.

"I am in Toastmasters to prepare myself for every personal and professional assignment I will have to take on in the outside world," says Tsuro, echoing a common goal of members for the past 98 years.

The question is, how can you get all generations to work together, so everyone on the team wins?

It helps to understand the strengths, background, and expectations of each member, and each generation.

Phil Gwoke is a writer, market researcher, and managing director of Bridgeworks, a company that helps people realize the value each generation

brings to the workforce. In his 2021 Toastmasters International Convention presentation “When Generations Connect,” Gwoke points out that it is experiences that shape each generation, not simply age. This goes a long way to explaining the “why” of a member’s actions.

“Different experiences result in different styles of communication,” says Gwoke.

“The more we understand about where people are coming from and what shaped them, the more effective we can be in delivering our message to them.”

This understanding and appreciating of experiences opens tremendous opportunities for growth and development.

Create a Supportive Environment

When looking to attract younger generations to your club, stress the mutually supportive atmosphere. Members are free to make mistakes, thereby learning and growing, without fear of how that may look to their boss or superiors. Clubs also offer a unique opportunity for members of all generations to work together and learn from each other.

Millennial Amanda Mae Gray, the host of the *Yes You Mae* podcast and a member of Toast of Cobb Toastmasters

and Speakers Roundtable Advanced Club, both in Georgia, says, “At Toastmasters you have a whole bunch of support from people of all ages and walks of life.”

She was also pleasantly surprised to find the opportunities with Toastmasters to improve her leadership skills. “It’s like an on-the-job training that you are very supported in.”

Generational diversity also expands the opportunities for mentoring, a vital part of every Toastmaster’s journey. Traditionally, mentorships are seen as an older person guiding a younger person, imparting their knowledge and experience.

However, Toastmasters offers an opportunity for what is known as reverse mentoring. In this situation, a member from a younger generation acts as a mentor to an older member. While the ages may be reversed, the goal is still the same—to help the mentee become more comfortable and confident in a new situation.

Having an open mind in reverse mentoring is vital for both the mentor and the mentee. The benefits, however, are undeniable.

Patrice Gordon, an executive coach and personal development advocate, talks about this in her video for TED’s “The Way We Work” series. “You [the mentee] have to be genuinely curious about learning from that individual [the mentor]

and have to be intentional about the relationship in order to make it work.”

Of course, reverse mentoring works outside the club setting as well, in the workplace and in everyday life. A baby boomer learns how to set up a podcast, or a Gen Xer masters Instagram.

Law shares an example of reverse mentorship he saw in his club.

“We had an older guest attend a meeting. A younger member was eager to mentor and provide guidance to this guest on all things Toastmasters. The older member later delivered a memorable Ice Breaker, and expressed his appreciation toward the younger member for taking time outside the regular meeting time to work with him on preparing his speech.

“I believe that the mentorship from the younger member helped the older member become more confident in delivering his speech and feeling supported and encouraged in the new Toastmasters club environment.”

Each generation brings different experiences and perspectives. By remaining flexible and open to people of all ages, clubs thrive.

As your club grows, so will its members. As Gray, the podcast host, says “I help people get what they need and in return get the help I need. We each bring skills and knowledge to the club, which provide amazing benefits.”

So rather than fear generational diversity, embrace it. Whether you are in your 20s, 40s, or 80s, there are learning opportunities for everyone. When we view our fellow members with openness and a keen desire to learn and teach, we all win!

Adapted from a December 2022 article

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Saluting Toastmasters Centenarians

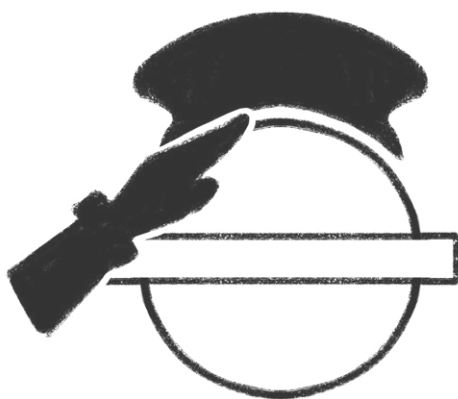
California man and Australian woman still participate in club meetings.

By Paul Sterman

Walter McHugh and Jose Petrick are dramatic proof of the adage that it's never too late to learn in life. One is 100, the other 101, and, remarkably, both are still members of Toastmasters.

The two live on opposite sides of the world—McHugh in Southern California, Petrick in Australia's Northern Territory—but they share a love for Toastmasters and the benefits it provides. They also share the same birth year with the organization: McHugh, Petrick, and Toastmasters International were all born in 1924.

Here's more on these two venerable members.



Walter McHugh

McHugh, who turned 100 in December 2024, became a Toastmaster in 1981, 44 years ago. He is a U.S. Army veteran who served as a radar technician and operator in World War II. After the war, he moved to Southern California to work in the aerospace industry as an engineer, joined the San Pedro Toastmasters Club, and has remained a club member ever since.

"What I think I've enjoyed most is how I've gotten to meet some pretty interesting people along the way," says McHugh in a phone conversation.

He has made many longtime friends of all ages in the San Pedro club, which itself is nearly 90 years old—the club chartered in 1938. McHugh says he has found Toastmasters to be a great place for creativity, whether giving prepared speeches, doing Table Topics, or participating in speech contests, all of which he has done many times. “I like to tell stories,” he says.

McHugh’s speeches through the years have been entertaining and intriguing, says longtime club member Binoy Yohannan. “He often talked about his life experiences—growing up in Mississippi and Arizona, his college experience, his job, meeting his wife, travel, etc.,” says Yohannan.

McHugh, who also worked for 15 years as a math and science teacher, says he still goes to most meetings of the San Pedro club. A caregiver brings him and he participates in a wheelchair. He also attended the club’s online meetings on Zoom during the pandemic.

His son Kevin, who lives in Washington state, has visited the group’s meetings with his dad a number of times over the years. In a visit about six years ago, he taped one of his dad’s speeches. It was about what McHugh said was one of the most valuable books he ever received: the *Boy Scouts Handbook*, given to him when he was 12. It was the source of

great information, he said in the speech, the book becoming “my Wikipedia, my Google, my Siri.”

Kevin said his dad appreciates the camaraderie of the club. “It’s been a very good thing for him,” he says. “I think [Toastmasters] is one of the things he really enjoys and even now he looks forward to.”

McHugh enjoys touting the successes of his club. He said it has helped improve the speaking skills of those in high-stakes professions, including police officers and firefighters. The San Pedro Toastmasters Club has also aided local high school students, helping them hone their communication abilities for academic competitions.

“I’m proud of my club,” says McHugh.

Jose Petrick

Petrick (whose first name is pronounced Jo-zee) is a resident of Alice Springs in Australia’s Northern Territory. She joined the Alice Springs Toastmasters Club in 1993 and has been an enthusiastic and dedicated member ever since, still active in club meetings, say fellow members. In her mid-90s, she dove into Toastmasters’ new education program, Pathways, and advanced to Level 5 in the Presentation Mastery path.

“Jose shows you can be a Toastmaster, still practicing and learning, at whatever your age,” says club member Jill Brew.

Petrick turned 101 in February. Asked about her motivation, she says, “What keeps me going is trying to remember funny sayings and happenings for the Humorist [meeting] role, and working on my next speech.”

Petrick has lived a colorful life. She worked as a registered nurse in her native England, before moving to Australia and working on a cattle farm in a remote area of the country. At 52, she began a journalism career, writing for a local newspaper, the *Alice Springs Centralian Advocate*.

Later, she wrote a popular history book, *The History of Alice Springs Through Street Names*, which tells the stories of the 250 people after whom the town’s streets were named. Before joining Toastmasters, she was a member of the local Toastmistresses club. (Toastmistresses was a separate but similar organization for women that was created in the 1930s, before women were officially allowed to be Toastmasters members.)

For members of the Alice Springs Toastmasters, Petrick’s positive spirit and her wisdom are a gift. “Jose’s speeches about life and experience with World War II are always very captivating,

and her humor is on point,” says Club President June Larchin.

Fellow club member Brew was introduced to Toastmasters by Petrick more than 20 years ago. She marvels at how her friend remains genuinely interested in other people’s lives and stories.

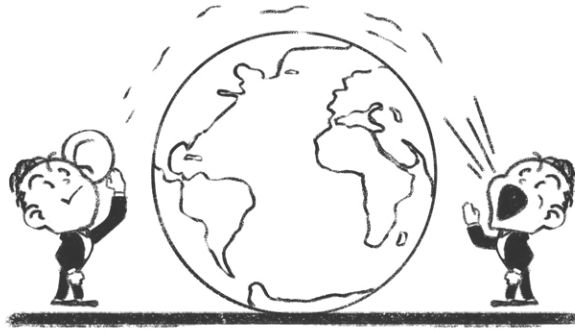
“Jose welcomes interaction,” she says. “She has a smile that draws people in. She also has a great sense of fun.”

Petrick says she loves laughing with her fellow members and takes pleasure in seeing the young members—the “youngies” as she calls them—becoming comfortable in the club and having fun.

“I enjoy seeing the youngies being so pleased to see each other as they come through the door,” she says.

Petrick’s research and writing on local history contributed to her being awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2000, for her service to “the preservation and recording of the history of Alice Springs.” (When the Olympics were held in Sydney, Australia, in 2000, Petrick carried the Olympic torch through Alice Springs.) In 2017, the Historical Society of the Northern Territory published her autobiography, titled *Bournemouth, The Bush ... and Beyond!*

Adapted from an April 2025 article



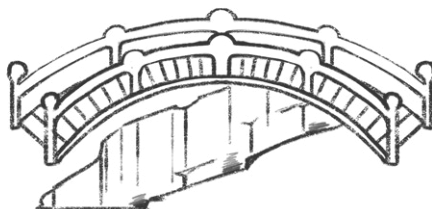
Chapter 7

Communicating Across Cultures

Bridging the Culture Gap

How levels of directness in feedback vary by culture and why that matters.

By Dave Zielinski



Christian Höferle understands the challenges many of us face when communicating across cultures. Born in Germany, he is the president and CEO of The Culture Mastery, a training firm for global leaders in Atlanta, Georgia. He says a common problem in many cross-cultural situations is that “we compare communication styles to what we’re accustomed to and then judge against it. If behaviors aren’t what we consider ‘normal,’ we’re often quick to assign questionable or even bad intent to those behaviors.”

Take giving feedback, for example. “In Germany, communication is often very direct, blunt, and to the point,” Höferle says. When he offered what he considered “normal” feedback to his staff in the southern United States, “we lost

employees because people thought I was mistreating them, so I learned quickly that I had to adjust my style.”

With clubs all over the world, Toastmasters regularly interact with members from other cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds in their clubs as well as in their places of employment. This is particularly true in online clubs. As a result, Toastmasters often give speech evaluations to members from other cultures who may have learned vastly different ways to deliver or interpret performance feedback.

For example, someone from a culture known for its tough, direct feedback style might use an “upgrader” style that’s designed to make negative feedback sound stronger: “This is *fully*

unacceptable,” or “Your analysis *completely* lacked good research and clear thinking.”

Conversely, those from a culture with an indirect feedback style might use “downgraders” to help a speaker save face, to protect their social standing, or to soften their message: “I’m not sure you want to continue doing these things in the future,” or “Your pacing was slightly quick in some areas” are examples. The traditional Toastmasters “sandwich” method of evaluation—critical feedback sprinkled in among positive affirmations—can leave people in some cultures confused about whether they performed well or poorly.

Developing a foundational knowledge of those cultural differences, and striving to suspend judgment as you encounter feedback styles that may be far more direct—or indirect—than you’re accustomed to, can make the difference between evaluations that are helpful or hurtful to club members.

Understanding Cultural Feedback Norms

Höferle says one of the most important traits anyone can bring to cross-cultural communication is an open mind. “This is a difficult thing for us as humans because we’re wired to jump to conclusions,” he says. “When we encounter something we

don’t consider ‘normal,’ our immediate reflex is to either reject that behavior or judge it in some way.”

“Many of us are still guided by stereotypes that we learn through television, movies, social media, or music,” Höferle says. “My impression of the United States was very much shaped by what I was exposed to growing up in Germany. But just like the United States is not a monolithic culture where everyone thinks and behaves in the same way, so too people from Germany, Brazil, Nigeria, China, or any other country don’t always behave in the same way. There are cultural patterns but there are also a variety of behaviors and beliefs within countries and regions.”

While it’s important to understand cultural differences, the act of developing that knowledge without having a greater curiosity can lead to stereotypes, says David Livermore, Ph.D., founder and president of the Cultural Intelligence Center, a cross-cultural training and consulting organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In other words, Livermore says, people need to do more than attend a workshop on how to conduct business in Singapore, Slovenia, or Scotland to be able to effectively provide feedback to people from those cultures.

“It makes sense to teach cultural differences on a foundational level, but

the problem is that's often *all* that is taught," Livermore says. "We overlook things like learning how to suspend judgment, read cultural cues, and stay open-minded." Livermore's organization developed the concept of cultural intelligence, or CQ, as a way to measure four capabilities needed to be effective with people from different backgrounds: drive, knowledge, strategy, and action.

If you have only knowledge, without the other three dimensions, it's easy to get overconfident about your cultural intelligence. "If you just have the knowledge but not curiosity—what we call drive—you are at risk of taking a little piece of someone's identity that may have a kernel of truth to it and then overgeneralizing," Livermore says.

Höferle also considers humility and vulnerability two "superpowers" when it comes to communicating successfully across cultures. "We do our research and often think we know everything about other cultures, but we usually don't," he says. "If you have the humility to say to someone from another culture, 'I haven't fully understood what you meant or said, can you give me more information?' that can go a long way toward developing

rapport and creating good will. Showing your counterpart that you are human, that's when the magic happens."

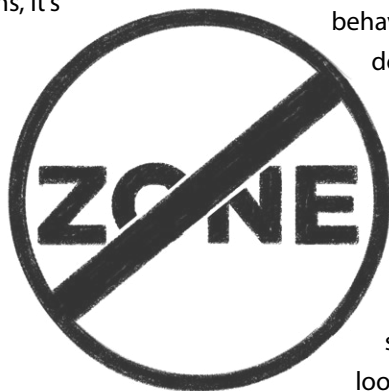
The "Zone of Appropriateness"

Höferle says understanding a concept called the "zone of appropriateness" can be helpful when giving evaluations to Toastmasters from varied cultures. "We all

have a zone of appropriateness in our behaviors, which means we don't just act one way all of the time," Höferle says. While Höferle says Toastmasters shouldn't go to extremes to mimic another culture's feedback style, because it risks looking inauthentic, we should adjust our own evaluation

styles appropriately within the zone to accommodate another culture's expectations or norms. Pellegrino Riccardi, a cross-cultural expert and communications consultant from the United Kingdom, now based in Oslo, Norway, has learned to expand his own zone of appropriateness in 30 years of traveling the globe for his business.

Riccardi has encountered a variety of direct and indirect feedback styles from



his audiences and his students in that span. "People in some cultures are very honest and direct when they evaluate your performance," he says. They "believe it's their primary job to be forthright and that their mission as an evaluator is to help you improve through candor. They feel they aren't being authentic if they don't tell it exactly as they see it."

"While negative feedback can be difficult to hear, the intent in these cultures usually isn't to hurt you," he says. "The feedback is being delivered according to cultural norms in a way that's considered constructive by the evaluator, whose main goal is to help you improve as a speaker."

When Riccardi began giving speeches in Norway, he was taken aback by the neutral facial expressions and body language of many in his audiences. "There was little non-verbal feedback, but I came to understand this was the Scandinavian way to focus and listen attentively," he says. "The intention of the audience was very positive. Part of becoming culturally savvy and not being offended by feedback is to learn to accept unfamiliar behavior."

Adapted from a July 2020 article

“Can I Ask That?”

Learn tips to communicate across cultures and form connections.



By Greg Glasgow

We're fortunate to live in a globalized world where every social outing, business meeting, or Toastmasters gathering has the potential to bring you in contact with people from other cultures and life circumstances.

But along with that increased exposure comes an increased number of questions about what is and what isn't appropriate to ask someone from a culture or background different than your own. How do you balance your own natural curiosity and genuine desire for connection with respect for other people's boundaries and cultural norms?

Experts say there are several steps you can take to authentically engage with others without offending them, including connecting with people as individuals, educating yourself about cultural norms, remaining genuinely curious, and being willing to apologize if you cause offense.

Personal Connection

A good first step is to make sure you engage with the person as an individual, not as a symbol of their race or background, says Fiona Sweet-Lin Price, Ph.D., a cross-cultural communication specialist based in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

"I talk to a lot of people in Australia whose families came to Australia from Northeast Africa as refugees, and they say, 'They mean well, but white people are always asking me about two things: my experiences of racism and being a refugee,'" says Price, a member of Williamstown Club in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. "Can't they talk to me as a person and ask me about things in my life that you would talk to anyone about?"

Price says even though it's tempting and perhaps even seems noble to ask about how hard it is to endure racism

or the difficulties of being a refugee, those topics may arise in a more natural fashion later, once you've established a personal connection.

"They tell me they'd like to be talked to about the things they're doing in their life, the things they're studying, their friends, their interests—talked to as a person, rather than as a symbol of oppression," she says. "Are you a person who plays the guitar? A person who is interested in studying languages? That perception of someone as 'other,' even if it's well-intended, gets in the way of engaging as a human being."

Similarly, Price says, asking someone where they're from, or about their clothes or accent, can be seen as a form of "othering," which can cause individuals to feel as if they are different and do not fit in. This has the potential to put someone on the defensive and hinder a genuine connection. Instead, she suggests asking a skills-based question such as "What languages do you speak?" or a simple open-ended statement such as "Tell me about yourself."

"If someone has recently migrated from another country, that will be front and center in their mind when you ask that, and they will probably bring it up themselves," she says. However, if someone from a different area has been in your country for a while, they

may talk about other things. "That's letting them shape the direction of the conversation. If they want to talk about their experience of immigration or being a refugee or racism, it lets them take the lead, rather than imposing your own preconceptions on them."

Do Your Homework

You don't always know in advance when you'll be interacting with someone from another culture or background, but if you do know beforehand, it doesn't hurt to do some research on the person's culture. Pellegrino Riccardi, a cross-cultural expert from the United Kingdom who now lives in Oslo, Norway, says new technology makes research easier—though you should always double-check its accuracy.

"In the old days, I would have to look up the culture of the country—body language, where you can show the soles of your feet, personal space, dynamics," he says. "Now, I just go to ChatGPT: 'I am talking to someone from this country. Is there anything I should avoid, to avoid cultural clashes or offending?' You've got to learn to prompt it, ask it, 'What's your source? Where did you get this from?' but it's great that kind of information is instantly available."

Researching beforehand can also help you understand the social rules

and norms in different cultures. Experts say communicating effectively across cultures and backgrounds requires both social awareness—the general ability to understand and relate to others and to react to body language and other social cues—and cultural awareness, the awareness that different cultures have different norms when it comes to what types of questions are appropriate to ask.

“I remember when I traveled to India, people would ask, ‘Where are you from?’ and ‘Are you married?’ Those were the first two questions,” Price says. “In Australia, those questions would not go down well. It’s not really a question people ask. Social rules and norms in one culture can be very different from what they’re like in another. A lot of the friction between cultures arises because of where those rules differ.”

Taking time to research and understand different cultures can prepare you for these types of interactions and help you avoid offending someone.

Remain Curious

Although researching is good for background, genuine curiosity is more likely to get a genuine response, Riccardi says.

“You can ask any question about anything, provided it’s done in the right

way with the right intention, the right vibe,” he says. “People love it when you’re curious about them—they really do.”

As an example, Riccardi recalls the time he was seated at an event next to a man from Oman who had two wives.

“You probably should not ask questions about that, but I had to know. I was fascinated,” he recalls. “We were eating together, talking about normal things like family, weather, job, and then I put on my curious face, which is not difficult, because I am really curious, and I said, ‘Do you mind if I ask you a bit of a personal question?’”

What made the conversation possible, Riccardi says, was his genuine curiosity and his ability to employ empathetic listening to remain culturally aware.

“Empathic listening is listening for the emotion, listening for the person behind the conversation, and putting all judgement aside,” he says. “I’m not trying to solve any problems; I’m not trying to convert you or prove you wrong or prove I’m right. There’s none of that. It’s like reading a book and turning the pages: ‘Cool.’ ‘Oh, wow.’ ‘I had no idea.’ It’s that kind of approach.”

The Art of Apology

If you do offend someone with a question you ask, it's important to be just as genuine with your apology, Riccardi says.

"You can say something like, 'I'm sorry. That wasn't my intention.' Sometimes I ask, 'Could you tell me what I said that was offensive?' And if they're willing to tell me, I say, 'Thanks for teaching me. I'm really glad I've learned something new. I'll be more mindful next time.' Humility goes a long way."



It's also important, he says, not to beat yourself up if you upset someone by asking an insensitive question.

"That's how you learn, and that's how you build resilience as well," he says. "By getting things wrong, feeling the discomfort, explaining yourself, and negotiating an interaction with another person."

Price adds that another strategy for dealing with offense caused by a poorly

worded question is to immediately reframe the conversation—defuse the awkwardness by attempting to connect with the person as an individual.

"Redirect the conversation so you're asking questions that you'd ask of anybody, rather than immediately asking questions about their cultural background," she says.

When Traveling Abroad

Much of the conversation around cultural awareness and communication involves speaking with people from other cultures and backgrounds whom you encounter in your everyday life. Similarly, when you travel somewhere—or are in a situation where you're the outsider—make a point of communicating as an "outsider" and notice how people communicate with you.

In those situations, Riccardi says, it's important to enter conversations with a sense of humility and an arsenal of questions that can quickly create connection.

"I often ask things like, 'What's your most important holiday of the year?' or 'What's the biggest day for families?'" he says. "Then I just let them talk. You don't even need to ask another question. You just listen and pick up on things they're saying: 'Oh, tell me more about that.' 'Oh,

that sounds fascinating.' They may ask you a similar question, and now we've got a conversation."

And if you don't speak the language? Try talking about soccer, he advises.

"Soccer, or football, is one of the big icebreakers around the world," he says.

Take the Plunge

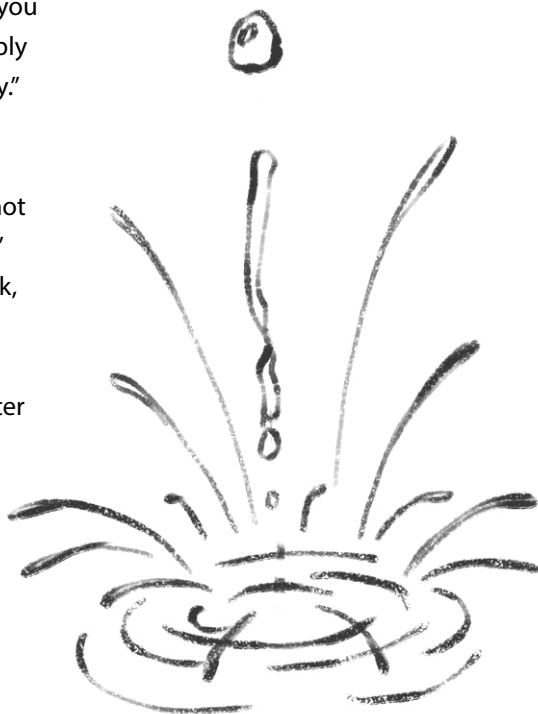
You always have another option when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, Price and Riccardi say: Don't say anything. But if you're not reaching out, you're probably missing out.

"Don't be afraid to ask people things," Riccardi says. "The worst thing is that you might offend them, which you probably won't if you ask with genuine curiosity."

But if you just stay quiet and don't ask any questions?

"You're missing two things: You're not learning and you risk not connecting," he says. "The easy way out is not to ask, but your life would not be richer, and you could potentially miss out on a connection. We are human beings, after all—we are social animals. We thrive on connections."

Adapted from a May 2025 article



Speaking Across Cultures

Top 10 rules for communicating around the world.

By Dean Foster

In today's globalized world of work, crossing borders is easy. Many of us do it almost daily: when we get on a plane for a conference or client meeting abroad, when we jump on a Zoom meeting with colleagues based in different locations around the world, or when we make presentations, in person or virtually, to increasingly global audiences.

But crossing cultures is hard. People think, decide, evaluate, behave, negotiate, manage, and communicate according to hidden rules that differ from culture to culture. Today, as more of us communicate with others around the world, the already complicated task of speaking clearly and effectively becomes even more difficult.

Here are my top 10 rules for communicating across cultures successfully ... no matter where in the world you are.

10. Learn the communication style.

There are two types of communication styles: low context and high context. Low-context cultures communicate in a more direct way, putting all the important information they are trying to say into the words they use. High-context cultures are more indirect, intentionally disguising important facts inside the context of the communication.

For example, my client from the Netherlands, with a low-context culture, might say, "Please tell me what you don't like about the terms of the agreement." However, in a high-context culture, like in Japan, someone might say, "Please understand, there are many fine things about your proposal,

perhaps just a few things need some further study.”

Remember, high-context speakers are not trying to be uncooperative when they avoid direct answers, and low-context speakers are not trying to be difficult when they ask direct questions. This is a difference in how they prefer to share information.

9. Evaluate the importance of relationships.

All cultures value trusting relationships between people, but people in some cultures require this trust before they feel comfortable working with you and your organization. People in other cultures will go straight to the task, and if it succeeds, they will use that success to justify a personal relationship.

In Brazil, a colleague might start by asking you personal questions because they are trying to get to know you in order to feel comfortable working with you. However, a colleague in Switzerland might initially resist spending time getting to know their team members until they have already worked together. They are both communicating according to their culture, just differently.

8. Learn how to socialize.

Taking the time to learn about someone requires more social time together, the details of which can differ between cultures. These details are the “do’s and don’ts” and the “taboos” that you need to know. This includes everything from how to dine, drink, dress, greet, give and receive gifts to the etiquette rules between genders, generations, and ethnic groups. While you’ll be forgiven for not knowing this at first (you are, after all, from somewhere else), you are expected to “get it,” and the sooner you do, the better.

Knowing how the socializing rules change from culture to culture is essential to communicating effectively. But if you don’t know, do not assume it is the same as back home in your culture. Act like the curious student: Communicate your ignorance and seek information. Most people love to talk about their culture, and your genuine interest will go far in building that all-important relationship.

7. Manage time-perception differences.

Some cultures are clock-bound: Time dictates what, when, and with whom people do things. Other cultures are time-flexible: Time—and schedules and deadlines—can, and should, always be ready to bend. This difference will affect how people communicate their priorities. Clock-conscious cultures plan, organize, manage project flows, rely on agendas, and take schedules very seriously. Time-flexible cultures see all the above as important, but not as important as being able to flexibly maneuver around time as situations may change.

6. How important are rules?

There are many cultures that make decisions based on rules, processes, and systems that are universal to all—no exceptions. Other cultures make decisions based on the immediate situation, the people involved, and what kind of obligations they may have with each other, despite the rules. Are rules meant to be obeyed or broken, and under what circumstances? Familiarizing yourself

with the rules of different cultures will help you communicate and work with others more effectively.

5. Respect the need for “face.”

Some cultures prioritize the importance of maintaining a public persona built on respect, which affects how one communicates. For example, throughout much of East Asia, you must be careful to communicate information in a way that enhances the “face” of the person receiving the information, especially when others are observing. This means you are honoring and respecting someone, rather than criticizing or embarrassing them.

4. Learn how people organize information.

Everyone is capable of logic and rational thought, but cultures emphasize how we communicate our thoughts. Deductive cultures organize information according to an underlying process of thinking, which requires facts to be logically connected, leading ultimately to an irrefutable conclusion. Inductive cultures, on the other hand, lead with a conclusion and search for ways to

make it happen (sometimes involving an underlying logical process, but not always).

For example, often my French colleagues will require me to justify my conclusions with logically connected details that substantiate my “argument,” while refuting any possible alternatives. But my British colleagues may ask me for empirical evidence that what I want to do will work. Conversely, my American colleagues welcome “bullet point” synopses of information on why what I want will work.

3. Determine the cultural comfort with risk.

Associated with deductive and inductive thinking is the comfort level for uncertainty. Risk and uncertainty-avoidant cultures communicate information that reduces risks associated with any action. Therefore, they often require a lot of information before starting on a task. Other cultures are more comfortable with risk and uncertainty and will use “just-enough” information to take a giant step. My Korean colleagues may require more and more information from me before responding to my requests, while my Nigerian associates

might suddenly decide, with little information, to move forward with the entire plan overnight.

2. How do they make decisions?

Individualist cultures reward individual initiative, action, privacy, and achievement. In collectivist cultures, teams and groups of people take responsibility for decisions only after building a group consensus. The United States, for example, is a highly individualist culture, where a team is a vehicle by which individuals can advance their own agendas. Japan, on the other hand, is a collectivist culture, where they try to make decisions as a group. It is important for people to keep in mind that communicating with an individual in a collectivist culture does not mean this person will communicate their own thoughts or ideas with you in a meeting, though they may do so in private.

1. Learn how authority is determined.

In some cultures, like Scandinavia and the U.S., authority is determined based on someone’s expertise. For example, someone might

become a manager based on their experience and skill set.

In other cultures, like Korea and Egypt, authority is based on age, gender, ethnicity, tribe, or relationship. Is rank important—or not—and if so, how is it demonstrated? This affects whether you get to communicate with the decision-maker, or just a gatekeeper, and how you and others are expected to behave with authority, whether it's a colleague, boss, subordinate, or friend.

Finally, remember that the communication style of any culture is the result of that culture's particular mix of all of the above. This is what makes cultures so diverse. And that diversity offers an unexpected gift: the possibility of thinking, being, and communicating in new and different ways.

Adapted from a May 2024 article

Celebrating the Holidays in a Multicultural Setting

8 tips to make everyone feel welcome.

By Dean Foster

Your club's success depends upon the hard work of its people, which is why it's important to ensure that everyone feels valued, seen, and respected. This is especially true when bringing people together for special occasions, such as end-of-year holiday celebrations.

Just as having people from a variety of cultures brings new ways of thinking into a club or organization, holiday celebrations can be more interesting when you incorporate new ways of celebrating.

Partying only with Santa and his reindeer-sweatered helpers at a Christmas party does not represent other cultural holidays. Ignoring the different ways people on your team celebrate does not communicate "I understand and value you, and thank you for your

unique contributions to the team." In the workplace, it's important to make everyone feel valued and welcomed.

As someone who has spent more than 25 years as an intercultural consultant, I've gathered some tips to help bring your holiday celebrations into the global 21st century.

1. Understand that holiday symbols vary for different cultures.

While many people enjoy the well-known symbols of the season, such as Santa Claus, red ribbons, tree lights, and decorations, don't assume everyone understands them or is automatically comfortable with them.

Some people might have recently come from a culture where these traditions are not as well-known, and they may be eager to join in the fun ... or they may not. For example, alcohol is often a part of the holiday celebrations in Western cultures but would likely not be in many cultures in the Middle East and Africa.

2. Learn about the various holidays your coworkers celebrate.

When planning a celebration for your club, be sure to reach out to members, and non-judgmentally and sincerely inquire how they celebrate the holidays in their respective cultures. There are likely special foods, traditions regarding gifts, clothing styles, and holiday activities that may be different from what you are familiar with.

Enjoy the opportunity to learn something about your club members that you might not have known before! A small committee can be tasked with coordinating this kind of outreach.

3. Avoid using religious aspects in your celebration.

For many cultures, end-of-year holiday celebrations do not have any religious connotation. Instead, the celebration is more about recognizing the end of one year and sending best wishes for the new year coming up. For other cultures, holidays are celebrated because of a specific religion. However, religious beliefs are personal, so unless someone asks, religious traditions should remain private activities and not be included in your organization's holiday events.

4. Recognize other cultural holidays.

End-of-year holidays are big annual celebrations in the West; however, other cultures have their own major holiday celebrations. For example, New Year's celebrations occur at different times throughout the year in many other countries, such as Iran, Israel, Ethiopia, many parts of Africa, and most of East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam).

Additionally, in India, Diwali is a much more important holiday than New Year's or Christmas, and in most of Latin America, Three Kings Day

is a more important holiday than Christmas Day. Even Christmas itself is celebrated at different times, and with different traditions around the world.

5. Celebrate various holidays throughout the year.

Why wait until the end-of-year holidays roll around? A great way to keep the “Welcome” sign lit throughout the year, and for the organization to benefit from other cultural ways of thinking, working, and solving problems, is to celebrate the different cultural traditions of club members all year long.

Why not gather a team together to find out about the special holidays and traditions that mean so much to your members? Ask them what makes these holidays special. Why are they important, and what should others know about them? Then invite these individuals to participate in an event hosted by the office that celebrates these holidays when they roll around on the calendar.

6. Determine when to host a holiday celebration.

In such a multicultural world, important events can happen year-round. Be prepared to schedule your holiday celebration far enough in advance so a convenient date can be selected that does not conflict with other culturally important dates around the same time. For example, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa are celebrated over several days, often around the time when end-of-year events are held. Ensure the dates and times of your celebration do not interfere with significant holidays, family events, or religious activities.

7. Share the details of the event.

Before the celebration, share details about the event with club members, including planned activities, the dress code, and who is invited. Some people might need to be informed about how to dress for events that are not common in their home country. Additionally, different cultures may also socialize differently. Some colleagues may come from cultures where single men and women do not typically interact at social events.

By sharing the details of the event beforehand, you can help attendees prepare and feel more comfortable.

8. Plan virtual celebrations for remote employees to attend.

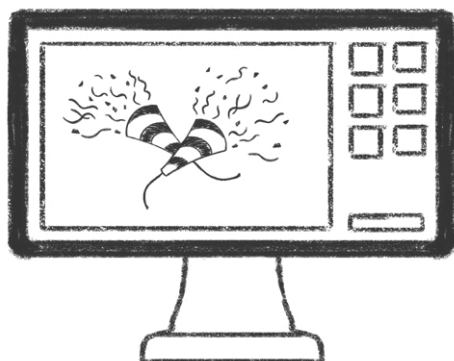
Holiday celebrations are usually in-person events, but in some online and hybrid clubs, members may be thousands of miles away. So, it is important to create holiday celebrations that can be experienced virtually, as well as face-to-face.

With a little planning, you can schedule a virtual celebration around a specific holiday that may be of special importance as a way of building team spirit. Perhaps a

colleague from India might like to share the meaning of Diwali. They could even share a favorite Diwali recipe ahead of time, and suggest participants bring their dish to the online meeting!

Keep in mind that these activities work well for all teams, whether you have a very diverse, multicultural team or not. Having strong cross-cultural communication skills and interactions is vital in today's global world. We will all be working increasingly with people from cultures different than our own, and while they are working hard to understand our ways, we need to assure them that they—and their unique ways of working, seeing, thinking, and being—are welcomed ... and celebrated!

Adapted from a December 2024 article





Chapter 8

Navigating Challenging Members

Annoying People Are Everywhere

Trade irritation for curiosity and watch conflicts dissolve.

By Shari Alexander

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could feel deeply connected to and get along with every person in our lives? Sure it would ... and I also want a unicorn.

Some people will always rub you the wrong way. You're stuck in the office with them. They're in your club meetings. You sit next to them at an event. You painfully chat with them on the sidelines of your child's soccer practice.

Having a game plan for how to deal with annoying people will save you from unnecessary emotional turmoil—and you might find yourself actually enjoying an interaction with someone you never thought you'd like.

Consider what you can—and can't—change.

Start by examining what you have control over and what you don't. Remember: Other people's thoughts and actions are not within your control.

Instead of focusing on what's out of your control, set up scenarios that guide someone to do, say, or even think what you would like them to. That's the essence of influence: manipulating what you *do* have control over in hopes of influencing someone else. So, to not be annoyed by annoying people, you must go straight to what you have control over—namely, yourself. You can control your state of mind, your reactions, your intentions, your approach, and your choice of words.

Think about a person who annoys you. Really conjure a clear picture. See the

person's smug face. Hear their cringe-inducing voice. Now, notice. How do you feel? What expressions surface on your face? When you think about this person, does your nose crinkle? Does your body give an involuntary shudder? Do you feel a surge of contempt? This is the place to start controlling your reactions.

In his extensive studies on marriage and relationships, American psychologist John Gottman was able to predict with over 94% accuracy whether or not a couple would last. His most effective measurement? Contempt. If he sees signs of contempt in one or both partners, it's a good indicator they will be facing each other in court one day.

But contempt can exist in any relationship. That's why it's important to stop this feeling before it festers.

When you feel yourself rolling your eyes or raising your eyebrows, ask yourself:

- What is my first reaction when I see or talk to this person?
- What thoughts (or judgments) automatically come to mind?
- What physical reactions do I experience (tension, change in breath, shift in posture, change in vocal tone or cadence)?

- Are any not-so-hidden sighs of annoyance slipping through my lips?

This is what you're putting into the relationship. You're responsible for your side of the relationship.

Pay attention to your physical response.

In general, when you don't get along with someone, you get a spike in cortisol or adrenaline. Your muscles tense up—you'll feel a tightness in your chest, maybe your shoulders lift toward your ears, or you might just hold your pen a little tighter in your hand. Perhaps your brow furrows or you tilt your head down while your eyes look up at the annoying person (a primitive body language posture that signals bubbling aggression).

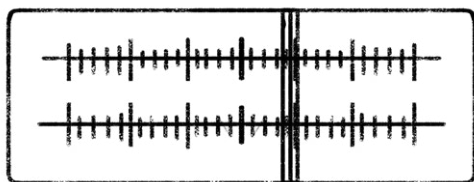
Your disapproval toward that person can be heard as well as seen. You might talk painstakingly slower or agitatedly faster.

Not only does the annoying offender pick up on these cloaked signals, but these physical reactions also amplify your internal negative emotions. Now you're in a feedback loop of annoyance.

The real danger is when your reactions become automatic and you're not aware of them. Mitigate your annoyance level by consciously taking control of your

reactions. Focus on relaxing the tension in your body. Breathe at a comfortable (not annoyed) pace.

Your goal is to adapt a neutral position—physically, emotionally, and mentally—so that you can use a different approach with people who annoy you.



Tune in to your thoughts.



Next, do a thought audit. Consider if you have created certain beliefs about this person. Some examples could include:

- She never listens.
- He always seeks attention.
- He is so egocentric.
- She doesn't follow through on anything.

Once you have awareness of those thoughts, question them. Are they true?

You can quickly identify false beliefs whenever you use the words *always* or *never*. It's unlikely that one person could always do anything or never do another. You can find circumstances in which they have done the opposite of your

always/never belief. Try changing your (judgmental) beliefs by swapping out the words *always/never* for *sometimes*.

Exercise your brain and find a different perspective.

Now that you've captured your automatic thoughts playing on a loop, it's time to find a more helpful thought to replace it. Is there an alternate truth you could use instead?

I'm not talking about lying to yourself or pretending everything is fantastic but rather remembering that human beings are complex, layered creatures, and no one can be defined in black-and-white terms. We only see a fraction of what other people experience.

Keep questioning your assumptions so you can operate from compassion and make stronger connections. Is there a nuance you can add to your thoughts and beliefs about this person that would enhance your relationship with them, rather than build more barriers between you?

For example, a client of mine dislikes his boss. He feels like his boss is always seeking approval from everyone. (Did you catch that "always"?) And because his boss wants approval more than anything else, his boss doesn't like to ruffle any feathers

and, therefore, lets other employees get away with bad behavior.

I asked my client, “How would your boss describe himself? He likely would not say ‘I always seek everyone’s approval.’ So, how would he say it?”

After thinking about it a bit, my client said, “Well, he’d probably say that he just wants everyone to be happy.”

“Yes!” I said. “And now imagine how difficult his job is every day. He’s the boss. And there’s no way to be the boss and keep everyone happy all the time. You have to disappoint people, which sounds like his biggest fear. Every day presents him with a challenge—a chance for him to be disliked. And you (my client) also seem like the type of person who isn’t easily impressed. So, maybe now we can see where the clash is occurring.”

My client paused as he considered this, then exclaimed, “That’s SO BIG! I never thought of it that way!”

After shifting the belief from “he always seeks everyone’s approval” to “he’s really afraid of letting people down,” we figured out ways we could repair and improve their working relationship.

I coached my client to sandwich his criticisms and differing opinions between validating statements, such as, “I like where we’re headed with this. We could improve the process if we integrated this

other system,” or “I think you’ve laid out a great framework for us to work with here.”

By questioning a faulty belief, we were able to find things within his control that could improve the relationship.

Shift to curiosity.

The next time you find yourself tensing your muscles or furrowing your brows, shift your mindset to one of curiosity rather than judgment. In doing so, you change the dynamic in the relationship because judgment closes the door to change. Curiosity opens it.

Adapted from a November 2019 article



Dealing with Challenging Members

How to keep your composure around members with maddening traits.

By Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS



We all know them: the club members who irritate, agitate, and aggravate others. Maybe it's their strong personality or annoying behavior. Maybe they create conflict that pollutes the culture of your club. They are maddening! How do you handle these difficult members?

Some of us respond poorly. We fume quietly, or we criticize, ostracize, or polarize, causing more division and angst. Sometimes we confuse "different" with "difficult" and mistakenly expect others to match our own expectations. A.A. Milne quotes from his iconic *Winnie the Pooh*: "The things that make me different are the things that make me." We can't, and shouldn't, change people. True peace comes from accepting others.

Kind Confrontation

But what about the people with *really* maddening traits who disrupt meetings, cause disputes, or create chaos? What can you do about them? Before we explore specific solutions, consider adopting these general principles:

- Don't take their behavior personally.
- Realize there's always a backstory that led them to where they are now. Have compassion, because you may not know the whole story.
- Control your emotions. The world's top achievers have this in common: They control their emotions under stress—even when dealing with difficult people. Count to 10 before saying something you may regret, or say nothing at all.

- Realize that everyone wants to feel safe and accepted, but some of us just go about it in different ways.

Great leaders know that the place to start is by developing the skill of “kind confrontation.” In the book *Crucial Conversations*, authors Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler explain how developing the finesse of graciously handling difficult conversations can further your career and improve your relationships, organization, and even your health. At the core of that skill is to “start with heart.” Identify what you want for yourself, the other person, and the relationship. Clarify what you don’t want, which is usually conflict or anger. Then dig deep to find a way to accomplish all that. Create an atmosphere of safety by speaking kindly and preserving everyone’s dignity. You don’t need to choose between candor and kindness. You can use both.

Seven types of maddening members and how to respond to them

Here are suggestions to handle seven specific maddening member-types in your club:

- 1. The Over-Talker** talks endlessly, barely stopping to breathe in conversation, unaware that their listener has zoned out and lost interest. They can come across as opinionated, disrespectful, and extremely self-absorbed. When they give a speech, they consistently go overtime.

Solution:

Most over-talkers are simply thinking out loud or are afraid they’re not being heard. Be patient and listen without letting them crowd out everyone else. You can’t eliminate their behavior, but you can minimize their impact on the club by putting appropriate boundaries in place.

If you are talking with a conversation-monopolizer, try to politely redirect the conversation to a different topic, or invite another person to join in. Or exit by saying, “Excuse me, I must get going.” Give your biggest, kindest smile, and then walk away. Or try humor. Smile and say, “Time’s up! My turn to talk!”

If their speeches consistently go overtime, they probably don’t notice the timer’s cards or lights. The timer can be more animated by waving the card or flashing the light. If you evaluate a frequent over-timer, be kind but firm. Stress the *impact* of the action, not the action itself. “Joe, when you go overtime, the meeting goes long. It’s better if

we end on time because people have commitments after the meeting.”

2. The Recruiter is the one who uses the club meeting as a personal networking or proselytizing event to market their own business or evangelize their own faith. Every conversation, speech, and comment is sprinkled with a thinly veiled attempt to gain more clients or converts. If it goes beyond practicing their pitch or sermon, members become uncomfortable.

Solution:

Show respect. The recruiter’s work ethic and passion are admirable, even if their method is pushy. The Club President or Vice President Education can privately ask their intent. “What brings you to Toastmasters? What skills would you like to improve?” If they simply want to sell, explain how Toastmasters is indeed a place to practice a sales pitch, but their speeches don’t sound like practice at all. Promotional pitches with intent to close a sale are not in the spirit of Toastmasters. Encourage them to shift the focus from sales to education to teach club members about their industry instead of pitching them a product. If their true focus is sales, and members don’t buy, they probably will choose to leave.

3. The Googler is the “know-it-all,” the self-proclaimed (and often prideful) keeper of all knowledge—especially Toastmasters knowledge. They usually have a long Toastmasters history, having held several club officer positions or won many contests. They may know a lot of people. They may be name-droppers. They may have memorized every contest rule and every aspect of Robert’s Rules of Order. They protest incorrect procedures, or pontificate about “why we must do this.” They can come across as pretentious and inflexible.



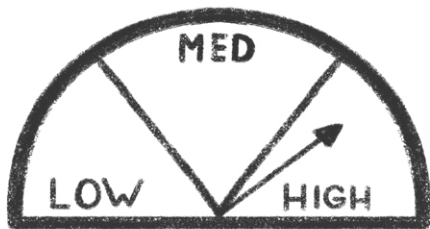
Solution:

Engage them. They may be looking for an ego stroke, but most likely they are simply excited about something they learned, and love sharing with others. Often, they genuinely want to help. Let them. Affirm them with “That’s wonderful information,” “You sound like an expert!” or “I didn’t know that.” A little attention goes a long way.

If their information is crucial to the operation of the club, welcome it. Toastmasters runs well because of

policies. If a member knows them well, they're a valuable asset to the club, helping to preserve organizational integrity. However, don't always accept everything they say as truth. "Made-up" rules and long-standing traditions that seem like rules are not uncommon. Perform due diligence to research and understand the policies and rules yourself.

4. The High-Conflict member is particularly toxic to the club. They exhibit behavior consistent with narcissism and histrionic, borderline, and antisocial personality disorders. They argue, debate, even intimidate. They often initiate, escalate, and perpetuate conflict, usually with themselves at the center. They blame others, and will not take responsibility for their part in a conflict. They think people are either with them or against them, or 100% good or 100% bad. If anyone is against them, they're forever against them. They can be explosive and unpredictable, and will try to gather allies in their conflicts, often creating division in a group.



Solution:

This is one of the toughest personalities to deal with, but deal you must because the damage they can do may be extensive. You cannot change their behavior, but you can change your reaction to it. If you confront them about the behavior, you'll likely create a new conflict or exacerbate an existing one. Bill Eddy, the president of High Conflict Institute, is an award-winning author, lawyer, therapist, and mediator, and an international expert on managing high-conflict disputes. In his book *BIFF: Quick Responses to High Conflict People*, he describes a four-point response. He says if you must interact with this problematic person, keep your response BIFF: Brief, Informative, Friendly, and Firm. Be brief and concise. Give only the facts and not emotions. Be friendly, polite, firm, clear, and direct. If conflict escalates, consider engaging your District or regional leaders. Make it a priority to resolve or mitigate conflict.

5. The Latecomer is consistently late to meetings. When on the agenda, their tardiness causes last-minute role shuffling. Even if they are not on the agenda, their arrival is disruptive and distracting.

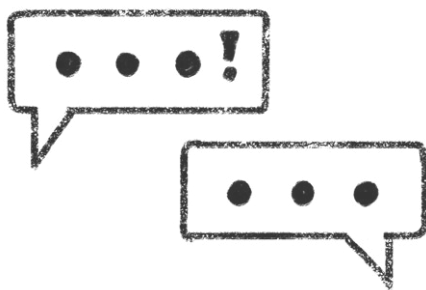


Solution:

Check your room logistics. An entrance in the back of the room is less distracting. Still, a chronic latecomer may disrupt the meeting. The best approach is in a private conversation. Publicly calling them out is usually counterproductive. Start the meeting on time to show respect to the members who are punctual. The General Evaluator can comment on the importance of punctuality, without mentioning latecomers by name.

In private, ask the latecomer if there is a particular reason for their consistent tardiness, and suggest ways to help. Gently point out how being late inconveniences everyone. Remind them of how they are hurting themselves if their role is reassigned because they won't get credit or the experience of performing the role. Seek their agreement and commitment to be on time.

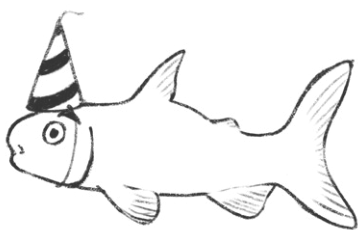
6. The Gossiper delights in passing along “juicy information” about someone else. The information may be true, but it's rarely flattering. Gossips speculate, criticize, and divide. Their words take on a life of their own, spreading throughout the club or District like a pervasive weed.



Solution:

If you hear gossip, don't engage. Shut down the conversation by walking away, remaining silent, or offering kind words of contrast such as, “Maybe she did that because she was tired” or “I need to see that for myself before I believe it.” Always model the behavior that you wish to see. If you are the Club President and the gossip is particularly divisive, you may need to speak privately with the offender to explain the detrimental effect on the club.

7. The Eccentric is unusual, quirky, or peculiar. They just seem out of step with conventional standards. Maybe they dress differently, have an unusual habit, or are hyperfocused on a specific topic. Others may think they are mentally deficient, but they are not. In *Eccentrics: A Study of Sanity and Strangeness*, American-born and British-educated psychiatrist David Weeks writes how eccentrics are often physically healthier and significantly happier than “normal” people. He says they typically exhibit five similar characteristics: they are nonconformist, creative, intensely curious, idealistic, and unconcerned with how they contrast with conventional culture. Yet, their presence in a Toastmasters setting can be unsettling to some.



Solution:

Eccentrics aren't really difficult; they're just different. As long as they don't obstruct club operations or cause conflict, let them be. Accept them as they are, and extend a warm hand of inclusion. Enjoy the diversity they bring to the club.

Seek to Influence

John Hancock, the American Revolution statesman, wrote, “The greatest ability in business is to get along with others and to influence their actions.” Maddening members will always be around us, but we can learn strategies to help us react to them. Conflict is not bad. *Unresolved* conflict is. An excellent resource is the *Resolving Conflict* module of the Toastmasters Leadership Excellence Series. It is filled with practical advice. Embrace the chance to develop these skills.

The beauty of Toastmasters is mingling with a fascinating kaleidoscope of people from different backgrounds, with different perspectives and on different journeys. When your path intersects with another's, consider it an opportunity to impact your world. Winnie the Pooh sums it up with more wisdom: “A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference.”

Adapted from a May 2018 article

Interruption Reduction

**Be respectful, clear,
and firm in resolving
meeting disruptions.**

By Craig Harrison, DTM

We've all experienced meetings that were electric, magical, and memorable. Then, there are those that feel fragmented, frustrating, and unfulfilling.

In deconstructing many "meeting fails," I've found needless interruptions and distractions can quickly derail meeting quality. Of course, some interruptions are necessary, even critical. Think fire, flood, or a club member experiencing an emergency health issue. There may also be legitimate meeting "timeouts" to adjust the agenda, curtail a speaker who has exceeded a time limit, or to correct misinformation.

However, unnecessary interruptions distract speakers, interfere with meeting flow, turn listeners off, waste time, and stifle a meeting's overall energy and impact. And if Toastmasters, who understand what a quality meeting *should* be like feel that way, imagine the

impression guests take home from an unorganized, nonproductive meeting.

As the saying goes, "If something can go wrong, it will," so don't let disruptions rattle you. Handle them with calm confidence, civility, and firmness, and your members and guests will both enjoy a seamless, high-quality group experience.

Tactics to Stay on Track

Luckily, many online or in-person meeting interruptions can be avoided or minimized through careful planning and sticking to accepted meeting rules of order.

Time spent before the gavel drops also allows those with meeting roles to review the agenda timing and responsibilities, confirm handoffs, and troubleshoot technology and other logistics that could create disruptions during a meeting.

Many clubs establish "standing rules" to address issues like punctuality,

politeness, and sharing the floor.

Toastmasters subscribes to the traditional parliamentary principle that allows only one speaker at a time. Reminding members of this rule, in writing or aloud at the start of a meeting, keeps it foremost in everyone's mind. These behaviors become an integral part of club culture, and are appreciated by members and guests alike.

Make sure the timer of the meeting has a timing tool. Online meeting timekeepers often use green-, yellow-, and red-colored backgrounds to alert presenters of elapsed time. Include the name of the color in writing, for those with color blindness. This non-verbal technique alerts speakers when their time is waning or lapsed.

If your club meets in an online or hybrid format, keep in mind that people are joining from a variety of electronic devices and platforms, and some may be using special equipment for their visual or hearing-impaired needs. Naturally, such a mix of methods can bring accessibility questions from attendees, often during the meeting. Make sure all attendees can hear, see, and participate fully in the meeting (preferably before it starts), regardless of location, circumstance, or ability.

Given that interruptions are disruptive, we must always ask if the end justifies the

means. For example, should you handle a meeting glitch on the spot? Could you set the issue aside and address it at a later point during or after the meeting?

Next, who is responsible for managing the interruption? Club officers and meeting role holders help ensure club meetings are timely and consistent in format. In most cases, the person in charge of the meeting at the time of an interruption is the one to intercede, if necessary. It could be the Toastmaster of the Day, the Table Topicsmaster, the General Evaluator, or another person.

What to Say?

The best interruptions, whether questions or statements, are short, direct, and polite. Whether prefaced by a raised hand at an in-person meeting or a raised hand symbol in your online meeting platform, consider the following phraseology:

- Pardon the interruption ...
- If I might interject ...
- I'm not familiar with this (word/example, etc.); could you please explain what this means?
- For the benefit of our newcomers and guests ...
- To amplify what was just said ...
- With your permission, I'd like to clarify ...

- Due to the time, Mr. Toastmaster, might I suggest ...

When speakers are running over time, smile and say firmly:

- I see we're out of time. In the interest of time ...
- And in conclusion/summation ...
- With time running short, let's all give a round of applause to our speaker! (lead applause)
- We look forward to hearing the rest of your story at a future date.
- With a full agenda ahead of us, we need to stop here. Thank you! (lead applause)
- Given our tight schedule we'll need to stop here. Please join me in applauding (speaker's name).
- We see your time has run out. Thank you for yielding control back to (Toastmaster, Topicsmaster, next speaker, etc.).

Use a calm, firm voice to intercede in a disagreement between members:

- I respectfully suggest you table your discussion until *after* the meeting. Thank you for continuing your discussion outside of our official meeting.

- Let's refer this to the committee for further discussion between meetings.

- Recognizing the passion you each have around this issue, let's schedule a special time to resume this discussion in a facilitated session.
- This issue deserves more time than we can allot to it today. Let's schedule a time to revisit this issue when we can hear from all the parties. Please report back your progress/decision at our next meeting.

The ability to manage unforeseen meeting distractions politely yet firmly matters, especially when there are many speakers, a full agenda, and a passionate exchange of ideas. When handled effectively, everyone wins.

Adapted from a May 2021 article



Chapter 9

Mentoring Programs

Build a Rock Star Mentoring Program

Having strong mentors helps clubs and members grow and stay vibrant.

By Marty Dickinson

Is your Toastmasters club struggling to attract visitors and convert guests to new members? Are your established members losing their enthusiasm for attending meetings?

The dilemma of club growth has been a challenge since Toastmasters began. However, the solution has been with us nearly as long: having a rock star-level mentoring program.

People want to join clubs that are growing, that positively impact the lives of their members, and that retain their members. Good mentoring makes all three of those elements possible—it is, in fact, the very glue that holds them in place.

New members benefit from good mentoring by knowing they're not alone in their personal growth pursuit. They



quickly gain confidence when they realize someone can help them overcome challenges they once faced. Additionally, mentees who feel like they are part of a supportive family from day one are more likely to continue their membership for years instead of only a few months.

Current members benefit from mentoring new members, finding a sense of gratitude and satisfaction as their mentees progress in skills and confidence over months and even years. And mentoring is an important skill in the workplace too, helping companies improve employee engagement, have more productive teams, and harness people's potential.

Tips for a Strong Mentor Program

It's never too late to start or revive a mentor program in your club. Over the years, I have mentored hundreds of new members and mentors. When I became the Vice President Membership (VPM) of the Professional Presenters Toastmasters club in Denver, Colorado, in July 2020, our club had recently, and nervously, reinstated our in-person meetings. We had only 12 members but within two years, we had more than doubled our membership.

What was the magic dust that brought us results? A renovated mentoring program. I encourage all clubs to take these three steps to develop a strong mentor program.

Step 1: Appoint a Coordinator

No one person needs to shoulder all the work to start or revitalize your mentoring program. However, at least one person needs to make a total commitment to the project, and to getting everyone excited. It should be someone who has inspirational energy, as in: "Let's do this! We're going to grow this club starting today and the key is deploying a rock star mentoring program!"

The VPM role is the most likely one to oversee a club mentoring program, since

that position already has the responsibility of inspiring visitors to join and current members to stay, and a mentor program aligns with that mission. However, if there's someone in your club who loves to help members support each other and has a gift for recognizing people's talents, consider appointing them as your member-mentor coordinator.

Step 2: Choose Your Mentors Carefully

Of course, you need people who will be mentors in addition to a person who coordinates the program. In my education session at the 2024 International Convention in Anaheim, California, I shared how one member in our club jumped at the opportunity to serve as a mentor. Regrettably, he envisioned meetings with his assigned mentees as an opportunity to force-date our female members. Of course, he was promptly asked to leave the club. Mentors should be carefully vetted and selected.

Look for potential candidates possessing the following traits:

- **Understanding of mentoring responsibility.** Mentoring a new member is an important responsibility that should not be taken lightly. A mentoring arrangement gone bad can cause

the new member to disengage and leave the club. Conversely, a good mentor can inspire an otherwise skeptical member to push through their initial fears and anxiety and continue to grow in their skills for years to come.

- **Adherence to your club's culture.** Good mentor candidates consistently perform meeting roles and observe protocols in line with how the club operates. They show up early to meetings and are seen answering the questions of new members and guests. Recruit members who produce energetic and fun meetings to be your mentors, so that they encourage other members to do the same.
- **Matches well with member.** The right mentor-member match could be life-changing for both people when they share a common interest, background, or challenge. For example, someone who experiences debilitating nervousness when public speaking might benefit from a mentor who once experienced the same anxiety but has since developed strategies to manage it. A new member who has recently been promoted to a

sales position at work would find it helpful to be paired with a mentor who improved their sales skills through Toastmasters.

- **Willingness to invest their time to benefit others.** Possibly the most important trait for good mentors is *wanting* to serve as a mentor. A mentor who's forced or guilted into the role will probably fall short of expectations and neglect their mentee. Good mentors look forward to spending time with those they are guiding.

Step 3: Train Your Mentors and Monitor Progress

Nobody told me I even had a mentor when I joined my first Toastmasters club in 1991. When it came time for me to mentor someone else, I had no clue how to do it right. I had to ask others and formulate my own plan. Avoid letting new mentors figure out what to do on their own. Their role in helping other members is too important.

Here are tips on how to train your mentors:

- **Write a checklist.** Compile a checklist of what the mentor should cover with their mentee. A cloud-based storage platform,

such as Google Drive or Dropbox, makes it easy to continually add to the list and allow it to be shared with others. This creates a set of consistent expectations for all mentors and members.

Some of my favorite areas to include in the checklist are: scheduling a first meeting; discovering the new member's reasons for joining; explaining how club meetings function; helping them choose a Pathways path; scheduling the Ice Breaker speech early; and sitting next to them the first time they perform major roles.

- **Create a timeline.** Divide your checklist into phases of a member's Toastmasters journey, from the first get-to-know-you meeting to first club meetings, meeting roles, and speeches. One idea is to challenge new members to attend every meeting for at least a full year, because that's how long it takes for speaking to become part of you.

- **Define your expectations.** Ensure your mentors know to anticipate that all mentees will need initial handholding. Personally, I will typically invite my mentee out to lunch or coffee so that we really get to know each other. I'll even buy!

After the initial meeting, encourage mentors to be proactive in their communications for several meetings and then to simply be available for questions once the new member has performed all roles. If a new member doesn't think they need a mentor, use the term "onboarding partner," a person who gives short-term assistance for transitioning into the club smoothly.

- **Provide support and inspiration.** One of the most important actions you can take as a mentor trainer is to provide assurance to your new mentors that they can learn to be great at this. Make it a point to check in with your mentors to see how they feel their relationship is progressing with the mentee. How are they getting along with each other? Is the mentee receptive to suggestions provided by the mentor? A good VPM should be occasionally asking similar questions of the new member.

The power of a strong Toastmasters mentoring program extends far beyond meeting roles and Ice Breakers. Good mentoring permeates every aspect of a member's tenure from the moment they see your club listing on your club website to members receiving their DTM and beyond.

Become the catalyst today for your club's mentoring program. Assure mentors are carefully selected and well trained. You will see the rewards almost immediately as more visitors want to join your club. And they'll be in good hands after they join.

Some day they, too, will use what they learned in Toastmasters to serve as a mentor to others. Now that's a rock star member-mentoring program!

Adapted from a March 2025 article

Club Mentor Program: A Win-Win-Win!

**How your club
can benefit from
a strong member
mentoring program.**

By Diane Windingland, DTM

A relationship between a mentor and a mentee offers a clear win-win situation. But what about the duo's Toastmasters club? The benefits of mentorship can create a win-win-win situation for all parties involved. It's a win for the mentee, who gains support and guidance; a win for the mentor, who gains experience communicating and connecting with new people; and a win for the club when a personal connection increases member satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

"Having a personal relationship is very valuable, especially during pandemic lockdowns," says Srianthie Salgado, DTM, of Lyceum Toastmasters Club Nugegoda in Sri Lanka. Salgado is mentoring eight members in her club. "Toastmasters meetings helped us stay connected, and even learn new things together. Those

**WIN
WIN
WIN**

of us who were more tech savvy could personally guide others in learning how to navigate online meetings. Mentoring isn't just checking on progress," she says. "It's more the personal touch."

So, what is the mentoring program in Toastmasters? It's an organized way of pairing a new member with an experienced member to ensure individual goals and development are being achieved. New members are onboarded quickly, with mentors guiding them through club meeting roles and member responsibilities. When both mentors and mentees see growth and strengthened

personal connections, members say they are more likely to continue their club participation.

Read on to discover the benefits of a mentor program for your club, and how to start one.

Mentorship Benefits for All

Aside from the benefits gained by the mentor and mentee, there are significant advantages to organizations. Almost 70% of Fortune 500 companies have mentoring programs to help meet organizational and employee needs. Mentoring has even been found to reduce turnover.

In a case study at Sun Microsystems, retention rates were significantly higher for mentees (72%) and mentors (69%) than for employees who did not participate in a mentor program (49%). Studies also have found that employees who have a mentor are more satisfied with their jobs, and when it comes to inclusion, according to a Cornell University study, a formal mentoring program can be especially beneficial for racial and gender minority employees. They discovered mentoring programs increased minority representation at the management level and improved promotion and retention rates.

And it's not just employees in the workplace who find benefits from mentorship relationships—Toastmasters do too. Salgado says, "Mentoring is a way to encourage leadership skills. A mentor can encourage a member to try meeting leadership roles, club leadership roles, and leadership roles beyond the club as well."

She also points out how mentors can help new members build confidence—from meeting roles to navigating Pathways, and in some clubs, confidence in speaking English. "When your club has members who are not native English speakers, that adds another level of nervousness. Having a mentor helps them build their confidence and feel more comfortable within the group."

A mentoring program also can be a plus in club recruitment, converting guests to members, Salgado says. "At the end of the meeting, we preview what [guests] can expect once they join. We let them know that they'll be assigned a mentor to guide them."

How to Begin a Mentoring Program

Once your club is ready to get started, look to the Club Mentor Program, part of The Successful Club Series. This includes the Mentor Interest Survey,

a one-page guide on managing the program, and more.

You can modify the program to meet your club's needs. For example, the survey recommends giving the completed form to the Vice President Education (VPE). However, for many clubs, the VPE needs to focus on scheduling speakers, so the Vice President Membership (VPM) may be a better choice to monitor the program.

"The VPM converts visitors to members, officially helping them go through the membership application," says Marty Dickinson of Professional Presenters Toastmasters in Denver, Colorado. In his club, the VPM is the perfect officer to take on the responsibility of the mentor program.

And, if you want to call your mentoring program by another name, you can. Dickinson, who has mentored more than 100 members since 1990, belongs to a club whose members are mostly experienced Toastmasters or seasoned professional speakers. Some of the members didn't like the term "mentor" so they changed it to "onboarding partner."

Your club can even create its own unique mentoring checklist. A checklist gives guidance to the mentors and helps ensure that the basics are consistently covered for new members, such as assisting with speech practice and explaining meeting roles. "We have a

checklist of the important information," says Tricia Phipps, VPM of Engaging Humour Toastmasters Club in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. "Mentors help guide mentees through accepting roles at meetings. All new members get a mentor that sticks with them until Pathways Level 1 is done. After that, it's up to the mentor and mentee to decide how much training and time is needed." Each mentoring relationship will be different.

"You should treat every mentee the same, which means that you treat them all differently. Every mentee needs to have the mentoring that they need," says Accredited Speaker Clare Crowther, DTM, of Armada Speakers in Plymouth, England. Crowther created a mentoring program for her club as her Distinguished Toastmaster project. "The key is to listen, listen, listen. Be willing to help your mentee in the way they need to be helped. At the same time, a mentee needs to respect the mentor's time. Mutual respect is important."

Your club may want to approach the Club Mentor Program as a pilot project. "Pilot it with six or so mentors until such time that tangible results can be shared," says Sravanthi Vallampati, DTM, of Diversity 4 Success Toastmasters in Aurora, Ohio. Vallampati, who has mentored more than 30 Toastmasters, is currently piloting two group mentoring programs, one to

provide support in achieving the DTM and another for Pathways support.

While there is a Pathways Mentor Program, it is an entirely different program, and not a requirement for being a club mentor. All that is required to be a mentor in the Club Mentor Program is a desire to help another member improve their skills.

Matching Mentors and Mentees

In the Club Mentor Program, members are paired based on the Mentor Interest Survey, which identifies interest in mentoring or being mentored, at what level of experience, and if there's a specific focus.

"We connect people based on personality type and goals but encourage people to ask any member for help if needed," says Phipps.

As with the rest of the program, the way mentors and mentees are matched can be modified for your club. For example, even if the VPE monitors the program, the VPM can provide input to help assign appropriate mentors. Other clubs might give the mentee a choice in who will mentor them.

"When a mentor genuinely cares and the mentee works hard to lean in, learn, and grow, we have success," says Vallampati.

No matter which method is used to match mentees and mentors, relationships created through a Club Mentor Program can be a win for the mentee, a win for the mentor, and a big win for the club.

Adapted from a March 2022 article

The Value of Virtual Connections

Online mentoring relationships can flourish even when members are a world apart.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

When Misako Yoke became Club President of Buddies, an online Toastmasters club, there were six members. Yoke focused on recruitment, and the club grew. With so many new Toastmasters, she needed help onboarding them. One of those helpers was online mentor Tricia Grow, DTM, a member of both Carlisle Community Toastmasters, in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, and CompetitiveCommunicators.com, an online global club.

“Tricia has been mentoring Toastmasters all over the world,” says Yoke. In the Buddies club alone, members live worldwide, including China, Japan, India, Norway, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the United States. For more than a year, Grow mentored several of Buddies’ new members. She also served as an on-call mentor before the weekly meetings for



people who had questions about their roles or needed support.

Mentoring is a time-honored practice in Toastmasters. Through the years, members from the local level to International Presidents have time and again attributed part of their successes to mentors. Clubs regularly emphasize the role of mentoring, and it is a Level 2 component in every Pathways path. Now, in the online environment, it’s more valuable than ever.

Online Mentoring Benefits

The ability to connect with anyone, in any location, is a major benefit of online mentoring. "Being able to click a button to access a club without having to go anywhere was attractive to me as I am disabled and dislike having to drive great distances," says Grow. "It is also great to be able to immerse myself in another culture."

Svetlana Rakhimova, DTM, agrees. She founded two online clubs—Witty Storytellers Online and Witty Birds—with global memberships. Members prize mentoring relationships; Rakhimova has been a mentor and a mentee.

"I believe online mentoring is more rewarding and convenient than the traditional," says Rakhimova. For rewards, she cites greater cultural interactions and opportunities to help people when there are language and skill gaps. There's also satisfaction in showing people the possibilities of body language and performance within the online environment.

Conveniences include time and money saved because no travel is involved. For online club members, particularly those in remote areas or places far from traditional clubs, a virtual connection might be their main or only mentoring option.

It can also connect people beyond geographic boundaries. Through recommendations, Yoke also recruited two online club coaches—one from the Caribbean and another from northern Canada—to help grow Buddies. "There was quite a variety of clothing in the online meeting room!" says Yoke.

Other benefits include those gained from any kind of mentoring: growth, increased engagement, more in-depth feedback, and shorter club learning curves.

Mentors benefit too. Mentees can spark mentors' creativity, re-energize them, teach them something new, and increase their engagement. And when people are engaged, clubs encounter less attrition.

A Myriad of Mentoring Types

The traditional mentoring arrangement is a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and mentee. Individuals can also be mentored in peer-to-peer engagements where there are no permanent relationships. "It's still one person mentoring another person, but there are as many pairs as there are skills and needs for them," says Rakhimova. Or, like the Buddies club, there can be an on-call mentor for whomever has a need at the time.

Witty Storytellers Online and Witty Birds offer skill banks to connect mentors and mentees. Mentors can offer up to three public speaking skills. Any member who wants to strengthen a specific skill can reach out for help.

“People feel more empowered when they can offer at least one skill they feel confident enough in to serve as role models and mentors,” says Rakhimova. “The same is true about mentees. Their vulnerability becomes a reason for useful communication. And nobody is stuck with a mentor who is no longer relevant or was not a great match.”

Online mentoring can happen in groups too. For clubs that offer mentor-mentee clusters, if multiple mentees want to talk with the same mentor, particularly about the same topic, it can turn into a group session.

Finding an Online Mentor

The right mentor-mentee fit is essential. Mentees should focus on what skills and goals they’re seeking and who can offer relevant guidance. Communication style and personality are also important. For online mentoring specifically, there are practical issues, like time zones, to keep in mind. Both mentor and mentee should establish clear expectations,

goals, and the duration of the official relationship upfront.

Start with your own club. Some clubs, like Witty Birds, have a mentor coordinator. You can also contact District-level leadership through your club’s officers to find someone with the background you’re seeking. Attending Toastmasters events beyond your club can expose you to more members who could be potential mentors.

Online Dynamics

With online mentoring, the concept of “meetings” can become blurred. For example, emails can be even more important and substantive. Mentors and mentees should discuss communication options, and decide what constitutes a meeting and will work best.

There should be agreement about how often to meet and what type of responses are expected. Check in and confirm what’s working. See if adjustments should be made due to changing circumstances, unrealistic expectations, or unanticipated issues. It’s also essential to be patient and flexible, particularly with technology issues, and be mindful of tone.

Yoke said Buddies members always felt Tricia Grow’s warmth and openness come through the screen. “She made us feel

embraced and forget we were thousands of miles away from each other,” says Yoke.

Grow’s dedication and energy were major factors in her ability to convey her personality online. She also positioned her camera at just the right height to look directly into the lens, as if she were looking into the club members’ eyes.

“We felt like we were getting her undivided attention,” says Yoke. “Her nodding, pausing, and tilting her head made us feel like she was at the other side of the kitchen table, talking one-on-one.”

Don’t let geography limit you. If you want a mentor, find the best one for you, whether that person is next door or halfway around the world.

Adapted from a February 2021 article

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT

District Mentoring Programs

2 Districts found innovative ways to expand their mentoring opportunities.

By Caryl Lattot, DTM, and Nina John, DTM

Mentoring is a powerful tool in Toastmasters, benefiting not only mentees, but mentors and other club members as well. Productive mentoring relationships help mentees reach their personal goals and allow mentors to share their knowledge and help members grow. A strong mentoring program strengthens a club as well, by continually engaging and challenging members in new ways.

But what happens when a club doesn't have enough mentors? Or when a mentee requires a skill that no one in their club possesses? That's when Districts can help. Here are two Districts that took different approaches to expanding the opportunities for mentors and mentees to meet each other.

EXPAND

District 31: Meet Your Match!

By Caryl Lattof, DTM

In early 2022, District 31 (Northeast United States) recognized a recurring challenge: How do members find an appropriate mentoring partner when there are none available in their home club? The solution was to create a District-wide system for Toastmasters to mentor or be mentored by members from other clubs.

As the Area 94 Director at the time, I organized a team of Toastmasters with an interest in mentoring. To help members find a partner, we created Meet Your Match! The concept was to introduce potential mentors and mentees through a Zoom event and let the pairs decide if they wanted to work together. Research tells us that self-matched mentoring relationships endure longer than appointed pairs.

The Preparation

Before the event, each participant submitted an application, explaining their needs and goals. Members applying to be a mentee answered questions about their short and long-term goals, ideal mentor expertise, and preferences for timing and frequency of meetings. Questions for the mentor focused on skills and mentoring style.

To promote Meet Your Match!, I emailed information to Division and Area Directors, Club Presidents, and Vice Presidents Education. Program information was also shared at Club Officer Trainings, on the District 31 website, and in the monthly newsletter. We decided to allow a maximum of 15 mentors and 15 mentees at the event.

In order to maximize the opportunity, once we received all applications, each mentor's qualifications were shared with mentee candidates, and vice-versa, one week prior to the event. I asked one mentor and one mentee to serve as General Evaluators, and created an agenda.

I reiterated that the decision to work together in a mentoring relationship was entirely up to the attendees, that the decision did not have to be made immediately, and that post-event conversation was encouraged before selecting a match.

During the Program

During the event, mentors and mentees met through a speed-dating format, with each mentor candidate in a private breakout room. Applicant mentees were allowed five minutes to chat with each mentor, asking questions that would help to decide if this person was a potential match.

In the spirit of Toastmasters, a Zoom Master and timer announced when participants needed to move to the next room. At the end of the program one mentor and mentee shared their perspectives about what worked well and where improvements could be made. Mentees were then encouraged to reach out to mentors for a longer conversation to determine compatibility.

The Results

We successfully held Meet Your Match! three times and spawned 20 mentoring pairs. The feedback from the matched pairs has been overwhelmingly positive, and some pairs decided to extend their six-month commitment because they developed a genuine rapport that remained fruitful for both parties.

District 31 found Meet Your Match! to be a game-changer for deepening the Toastmasters experience. Effective mentoring helps to engage members by connecting them to others throughout the District to identify strengths, build community, and develop leadership skills. Sharing the wealth of talent and expertise harbored in individual clubs across an entire District allowed us to form a bigger pool of potential mentors and mentees to work together.

District 120: District Mentor Pool

By Nina John, DTM

In 2020, District 120 (South India) suffered a double whammy. Our District formed in July of that year after District 82 divided, resulting in many of the more experienced and senior members remaining in the older District. Then came the pandemic, and like Districts around the world, we lost many members. We needed to build up our resources.

Knowing that mentoring is a core activity to encourage, motivate, and guide newcomers, we started a District Mentor Pool. We invited members from each Division who had been in their club for at least two years to join the committee. As an added incentive, those who participated in the project could simultaneously work on completing the Pathways Mentor Program.

We met weekly over Zoom and started by brainstorming questions like “What makes someone qualified to be a mentor?” and “What are the skills needed to be a mentor?”

We all agreed that the first qualification needed was an attitude of sharing and caring, of wanting to help more people benefit from Toastmasters. The second qualification focused on domain

expertise—how much did each potential mentor know about Toastmasters?

Then we mapped out questions new members might have. We divided the answers into categories—is this a skill to be learned or information to be imparted? For instance, organizing a speech requires practicing and learning a skill, whereas understanding Pathways consists of taking in information.

We felt having a basic understanding of the following areas made for a more successful, effective mentor:

- **Pathways.** Understand the different paths and be able to help mentees choose a path that aligns with their goals.
- **Club Meeting Roles.** Know the responsibilities of each role, as well as what the Club Executive Committee does. Ideally, know how to conduct business meetings, and understand basic parliamentary procedure.
- **Toastmasters Hierarchy.** Know the distinctions between and responsibilities of Areas, Divisions, Districts, regions, and the Board of Directors.
- **Contests.** Understand the value of contests, the various types, and how they are conducted. Know

what is involved in running a contest, including the judges' role and the ballots.

- **Speaking Skills.** Be able to offer help and insight in choosing a speech topic, speechwriting, delivery tips, and stage presence, as well as being an evaluator.
- **Advanced Opportunities.** Understand the High Performance Leadership project and the Distinguished Toastmaster designation. Be familiar with District conferences and the opportunities they provide.

Mapping out the skills in categories made it easier to find or identify potential mentors in each club and Division who were interested in and comfortable with certain areas and match them with mentees who wanted to develop those skills. For instance, we found some mentors who preferred to do only speech contest mentoring while others felt happier helping navigate a leadership journey.

We launched the District initiative by having members of the Mentor Pool Committee give a presentation to their respective Divisions and spearhead Mentor Bootcamps if requested. Each club was required to have a Mentor Club

Coordinator who would liaise with the Division Mentor Pool member.

All clubs were asked to match mentees (especially new members) with mentors. If the club had few mentors or none with the category of expertise needed, the Division representative would help find one based on the skills the mentee was hoping to develop.

Having a District-wide pool of mentors gave clubs greater resources to draw from rather than just doing a random pairing among club members.

Mentoring is the lifeblood of Toastmasters, something that benefits both the mentee and the mentor in equal measure, leading to lifelong friendships. There may be a learning curve along the way, but the experience is infinitely rewarding.

Adapted from a March 2024 article

MEMBER EXPERIENCE

The Advantages of an Atypical Mentorship

People asked why, as a seasoned member, I wanted a mentor. “Why not?” I replied.

By Karen Ince, DTM

In September 2019, I was browsing the Facebook Pathways Discussion Forum when a member post caught my eye. Vanessa Hughes, a North Carolina Toastmaster, asked if she could mentor someone outside her club to complete the “Advanced Mentoring” project of the Pathways Mentor Program.

Forum members confirmed that she could, indeed, mentor anyone, even a non-Toastmaster. Vanessa’s question was answered; I could have scrolled on by. But I saw an opportunity and asked if she already had a protégé in mind. She didn’t.

And so, the die was cast. I’m absolutely delighted that Vanessa chose to mentor me out of all the people in the world she could have selected for this six-month

WHY NOT?

assignment. The “Advanced Mentoring” project, the final project of the Pathways Mentor Program, allowed Vanessa to put the final polish on her considerable advising and people skills. Not only did we work well as project partners, but we also became friends.

When the mentorship started, Vanessa belonged to Brunswick County Toastmasters in Shallotte, North Carolina. I was, and still am, a member of Canterbury Communicators Club in Canterbury, England. However, with modern technology at our fingertips, distance was not an obstacle, nor was the devastating pandemic which set in a few months later.

I quickly came to appreciate the fact that she and I represented different clubs, as well as distinct generations, nationalities, cultures, and levels of Toastmasters experience. There is much about our organization that is common across the world—and we welcome that consistency—but there are also subtle differences among us all, depending on our home club and country. For me, this adds yet another benefit to the mentor-protégé relationship, and why I recommend more people give it a try! Even if there are 4,000 miles, or many more, between you.

I earned my DTM in July 2019, and people have asked why I still wanted a mentor. “Why not?” I replied. Yes, I knew more about Toastmasters as an organization than Vanessa. I’ve belonged to several clubs, given dozens of speeches, and served in club and District leadership roles. And I was able to repay Vanessa’s mentoring efforts with some practical knowledge and ideas from my own experiences, while she focused on helping me set and achieve new goals.

Vanessa was excellent at talking me through priorities when health issues required me to make some changes in my life. I feel very lucky to have worked with someone who could brainstorm solutions, listen patiently, and empathize. I sent her my speech videos and she

gave me feedback with a fresh eye. She helped create a success plan, managed evaluations, and—of course—scheduled Zoom meetings. In the six months I was her protégé, I completed Levels 1 and 2 in the Strategic Relationships path and Level 3 in the Motivational Strategies path. We still swap ideas about how to improve our clubs.

Our mentorship felt very balanced and equitable. We are proof that any enthusiastic, committed member can effectively mentor another member when both are open to the experience.

Eventually, both Vanessa and I were on Zoom for each other when we spoke to our respective clubs about our mentor-protégé experience.

Vanessa is now a member of Seymour Johnson Toastmasters at the Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina. She recently led a Speechcraft program, and I attended as Table Topicsmaster for its final session!

Toastmasters is truly international and filled with both similar and distinct individuals who become mentors and friends. That’s a reason to celebrate.

Adapted from a September 2021 article



Chapter 10

Online and Hybrid Meetings

Establishing Online Meeting Decorum

How to maintain orderly meetings and avoid disruptive members or hosts.

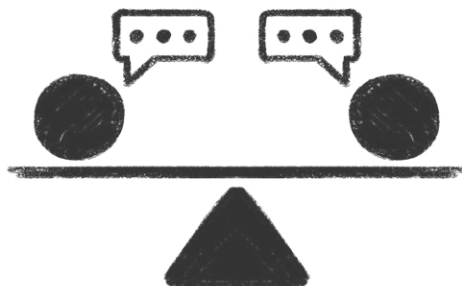
By Laura Mishkind

Online clubs, once only a small percentage of Toastmasters clubs, expanded exponentially during the COVID pandemic, opening up opportunities for people who live in a remote area or in another country to easily attend club meetings in a different location.

Since then, online meetings have become a common in all areas of life – from clubs to work to community events, and even social gatherings.

Online meetings have their own set of etiquette, and while most people are familiar with how they work, it isn't uncommon to find disruptive members or overzealous hosts.

Maybe you've been in an online meeting where someone was eating their lunch unmuted, forcing everyone to tune in to every crunch and swallow. Maybe



there was a child in the background, pestering their parent for help finding a toy. Or perhaps you've been in a meeting where someone was kicked out for a slight infraction, such as forgetting to turn on their camera.

Set Ground Rules

Club officers should discuss and set basic behavior expectations for online meetings. Is it okay for someone to show up to virtual meetings in pajamas or looking like they just woke up? (Unless it's a themed meeting, probably not, and if guests might attend, definitely not.)

Consider adding a new position to your roster of meeting roles: a delegated moderator who can oversee adding

members to the meeting, muting when necessary, and monitoring the chat box. That role might be absorbed by the Sergeant at Arms or it might be a new role, perhaps dubbed the Zoom Master or Meeting Host.

Once the groundwork is laid, have someone (Meeting Host, Sergeant at Arms, Club President, or Toastmaster of the Day) announce these preset expectations at the start of every meeting as a helpful reminder to returning members and important information for first-time guests.

These reminders might include asking members to:

- Mute their microphone if not speaking.
- Be cognizant of body movement, multi-tasking, or background if camera is on.
- Use the chat box for questions and comments (except not while a member is giving a speech since that can be distracting to the speaker).

In a perfect world, these steps would allow for your meeting to run smoothly without any hiccups. But, if we learned anything from 2020, it's that we don't live in a perfect world. Here are a few tips for

maintaining respect and integrity when you need to ask a member to adhere to your club's expectations.

1. It's okay to mute someone, but let the person know.

If a member is doing the dishes or talking to a family member, but forgot to mute themselves, feel free to mute them. This is an easy mistake to make! But do send a private message in the chat feature and diplomatically let the person know why you muted them. This serves as a nice reminder, and the member will be more cognizant of what's happening on and off their screen.



2. Offer a warning for continually disruptive members.

If a member is talking when a speaker or evaluator is presenting, and repeatedly unmuting themselves to do so, it may be time for further action—but only the designated person for this role should do this! Once again, be sure to send a private message first. Give them a polite warning that their actions are hindering progress through the agenda and causing problems for participants. Warn them that if they are unable to meet the club's preset expectations (which were stated at the start of the meeting), you will have to remove them.

3. Remove people only as a last resort.

If you oversee adding and removing participants from the meeting, take a pause before acting. It's easy to forget that an online meeting shouldn't be much different from an in-person one. Often, we forget that there are humans on the other side of our computer screen. So think before you act. Is this something you would do in person? If you are removing a member from a virtual meeting, it's the equivalent of shutting the meeting room door

in their face. Toastmasters should aim to never disrespect one another. If a member continues to disrupt others even after a private message asking them to be aware of their actions, it may be time to remove them. This should be a last resort.

Determining online protocol ahead of time and having a designated person to enforce it—including when and how to mute and remove people—makes it easier to handle any disruption or confusion. It also helps avoid hurt feelings, allows meetings to run smoothly, and keeps your club professional. Just be sure to communicate your club's expectations at the start of each meeting to ensure that everyone knows the rules and understands what would cause them to receive a warning. Of course, remind your Meeting Host to always think before acting. You can't take back removing a member from a meeting, and a private message should always be the first step in coming to a resolution.

Adapted from a January 2021 article

Add Variety to Online Meetings

Banish Zoom fatigue by keeping meetings fresh.

By Megan Preston Meyer

Online meetings: First they were challenging, then fun and exciting, and then, for some, the monotony set in.

When clubs had to adapt to changing circumstances in 2020, Toastmasters around the world responded with enthusiasm. It was an adventure, something new, and we were all in it together.

But now, the adrenaline is wearing off.

When everyone meets on the same screen, rather than in a physical meeting room, there is the danger of each meeting blurring with the next. Chances are you log in from the same place and watch the same people with the same backgrounds.

Luckily, there are ways to shake things up. Here are some ways to keep your virtual meetings fresh and fun, to keep growing and improving, and to keep your members coming back.

Switch up the agenda.

One way to keep people's interest is to make sure things don't get too predictable. "We'll change up the agenda periodically just to keep it fresh," says Krista Rowan of Glen Abbey Toastmasters in Oakville, Ontario, Canada. "We don't deviate from the integrity of what Toastmasters is ... we just give it some spice."

Her club incorporates upbeat music at breaks to keep energy levels high during online meetings. They also get creative with Table Topics, using screen-sharing capabilities to add a personal touch to prompts—for instance, the Table Topicsmaster may display a snapshot of herself on a past beach vacation and ask the participant to describe a travel destination that he's dreaming about—and they have even featured improv lessons, taught by a member.

Add a theme for variation.

Glen Abbey Toastmasters has also introduced themed meetings. Many clubs have embraced this concept, weaving a common thread through the Toastmasters' welcome, the Table Topics session, and the Word of the Day, but online meetings allow you to take the theme even deeper. Encourage members to take advantage of technology by using virtual backgrounds, costumes, and props. Meeting participants can even change their display name to a theme-appropriate alias. For example, if you have a Disney theme, spark some smiles by labeling yourself Ariel and changing your background to an underwater scene, or add an outer-space backdrop and call yourself Buzz Lightyear.

If you're looking for themes, holidays are always great choices. April Fool's Day is a fun option, as are other lesser-known holidays like Pi Day (March 14), World Music Day (June 21), and World Photography Day (August 19).

You can change the way you incorporate themes into meetings, as well. While announcing the next meeting's theme well in advance gives people time to prepare, it could add additional stress to busy members. Try announcing the theme 10 minutes before the meeting

begins. This puts everyone on equal footing and encourages creativity. You'll be amazed at the spontaneous ways your members find to participate!

Play with backgrounds.

At Invicta Toastmasters Club in Porto, Portugal, there is a good-natured competition to see who can come to the meeting with the best virtual background. Taking advantage of Zoom's video background feature, club members create elaborate animated scenes—often featuring themselves. “We record over recorded-over screens,” says Club President Rafael Marques. Notable mentions include a member appearing to row off the screen using an office chair as a boat, “triplets” waving at the camera, and a member bringing himself a beverage in the middle of the meeting.

The creativity entertains current members, and encourages guests to return. “A lot of (new) members come to meetings thinking it's going to be very strict and bureaucratic. When we show that we are having fun, people stay with us,” says Club Secretary and Iberian Toastmaster of the Year Sérgio Águia.

By keeping humor in the foreground, Invicta Toastmasters Club keep members coming back.

Open the room early.

One of the hardest portions of the Toastmasters meeting to recreate online is the part that's not on the agenda: the socialization that happens before and after the meeting or during breaks. One of the simplest ways to encourage chitchat is to simply start the video call 15 minutes before the meeting starts, and leave it open after the formal agenda items are completed. That's what Glen Abbey Toastmasters does. "It's amazing how many people don't drop off. After a two-hour meeting, people still want to talk," says Rowan. Also, if you usually play theme music as people log on, save that music for later on in the meeting to give people time to chat before the meeting officially begins.

Create offline connection.

Members of Invicta Toastmasters Club have found another way to stay in touch, even between meetings. In a group chat open to all members, they talk, share pictures and GIFs, and even challenge each other to informal video or audio "Table Topics" throughout the week. They also keep their website updated with member bios and pictures so that new members can connect with and get to know other members.

Support new members.

Remember your first few Toastmasters meetings? Before you had everything figured out, you likely had questions—and you probably just turned to the person next to you for clarification or asked an experienced member during the break. That type of interaction is more difficult online.

Help new members find and connect with mentors, and encourage open lines of communication. Consider setting up a "New Member Session," during which members can ask questions, get acquainted with the club, and even meet with their mentors in breakout rooms.

Continue to Improve

As you try new ways to energize your meetings and engage members, make sure to monitor the response. Ask your members what works and what doesn't, and make changes accordingly.

Gather feedback.

The best way to keep your members engaged is to make sure you're giving them what they want. Rowan explains the importance of gathering feedback from meeting attendees, especially guests. "When you're familiar with a Toastmaster meeting, you don't have the same perspective as an outsider. It's nice to have guests' feedback of their experience

and perspective. Did they feel value in the meeting and want to return? When you're trying to retain membership and appeal to new members you want to make sure that they're benefiting and leaving with a good experience."

Provide opportunities for all meeting participants to provide feedback, and encourage the General Evaluator to comment specifically on the virtual meeting format, as well.

Focus on the Human Element

Whether in person or on a machine, engage your members to keep them coming back. Connection and communication are more important than ever, and Toastmasters provides opportunities for both. Take advantage of technology to make your meetings fresh and fun, but focus on the human element. After all, "communication is the human experience," says Rowan, "especially online."

Try New Table Topics Tactics

Visual Table Topics: Instead of giving each participant a prompt individually, give everyone the same prompt and allow two minutes of prep time. Each participant looks for an image related to the prompt, and then shares their screen while

giving a brief explanation of their choice. Multimedia communication at its finest!

Reverse Pictionary: Inspired by this idea from Museum Hack, try a game of Pictionary—in reverse! The Table Topicsmaster provides an image to the participant, who must describe it to the audience using geometric shapes. For instance, if the image is a snowman, the participant could ask the audience to draw three stacked circles with diagonal lines coming off each side of the middle circle. She could then instruct them to add two dots, an upside-down triangle, and a curved row of dots to the top circle. Afterward, everyone holds their sketches up to the camera to determine how effective the instructions were—and how creative the audience members are.

Telephone: Val Pramana from Leading Edge Advanced Toastmasters in Brisbane, Australia, suggests a game of "telephone." The Table Topicsmaster reads a short story to the first participant while the others wait "outside" the meeting room. The second participant enters the meeting room, and the first participant recounts the story. The third participant enters the meeting, and the second participant tells them the story, and so on. It's hilarious to see which details are remembered and which are forgotten—and how different the "last" story is from the first!

Adapted from a March 2021 article

The Wide World of Hybrid Technology

How to choose what your club needs, and how much.

By David F. Carr, DTM

Conducting hybrid meetings can be challenging, particularly with all the technology options available. However, hybrid meetings are worth pursuing, as they are a great way not only to connect with members and guests outside your geographic area but also to learn professional skills that are increasingly valuable in the workplace.

Despite the potential benefits, going hybrid is not the right choice for every club, so you'll want to evaluate your options (and have your club vote on the decision).

My home club, Club Awesome in Coral Springs, Florida, began holding hybrid meetings shortly before the pandemic. Perfect timing, because we were ready when so many clubs started transitioning to online meetings. Since then, I've been helping club members and leaders adapt.

Getting People to Show Up—In Person and Online

Of course, none of the technical details matter unless club leaders and club members are committed to making the hybrid format work.

"If there are only three or four people in the room, then you have to ask, 'how many people will come next time? If only that many, should we just meet online?'" says Cajetan Barretto, DTM, Vice President Education, Kuwait Challengers Club in Kuwait City, Kuwait.

Barretto has been active in training on online and hybrid meeting technologies in District 20 and worldwide through his YouTube channel Tech for Toastmasters. He has also run District and professional hybrid events. However, the challenge

is different at the club level, where smaller numbers make achieving the right balance harder.

Agnieszka “Aggie” Ilnicka, President of Framingham/Natick Toastmasters in Framingham, Massachusetts, says when her club first considered what to do, most members said they had been attending too many Zoom meetings during the workday and were eager to attend evening meetings in person.

However, not all members live in driving distance, so the club went hybrid, something fellow club member and Vice President Membership Tracy Eisenman, who lives three states away in Pennsylvania, appreciated. She joined the club when it was fully online. “I felt like they went hybrid to keep me in the club, which was kind of cool,” she says.

Your club will have to find its own balance.

Weighing the Options

The technical elements of the hybrid format are speaker and microphone (audio), camera or cameras along with a TV or projector (video), and, of course, internet access. In general, I recommend going beyond what’s built into a laptop.

Audio

Contrary to what you might think, the audio rather than the visual component of the video stream is what’s most important for effective communication. Common problems include the echo and distortion that occur if multiple people in a meeting room join the online session with their audio turned on. Only one computer should have audio input and output active.

The main audio feed should be clear enough that online participants can hear those in the room and vice versa.

If you’re using Zoom, the “Leave Audio” option (found on the up arrow menu next to the microphone icon) lets you quickly mute both mic and speaker. Or you can change your settings to have Zoom always prompt you whether to activate computer audio.

Both Barretto, of Kuwait, and hybrid meetings expert Markus Seppälä, DTM, of Basel International Speakers in Basel, Switzerland, recommend using a conference room speakerphone placed near the speaking area. My club has a speakerphone but also invested in a wireless microphone. We often leave it on the lectern, but it can be clipped to the speaker’s clothing.

Video

A camera mounted on a tripod will allow you to aim the camera more effectively.

Three options to consider are:

- An external webcam with a tripod mount, which is what my club uses.
- A digital SLR camera that can be connected to a computer with a USB cable. This is what Cam Krook, DTM, who serves in District 69's club promotion coaching and technical support position, recommends.
- A smartphone clamped into a tripod mount. Barretto uses this option with the camera in selfie mode, allowing speakers to see themselves on screen.

If practical, adding one or more additional cameras aimed at the audience can help online participants see what is happening in the room. This can be a smartphone or a tablet.

- A TV or projector to ensure in-room participants can see online speakers. Again, these can be as basic or fancy as your budget allows.

Internet access

Ideally, your meeting location will provide free, fast, and reliable Wi-Fi. If that is not available, or it fails on a given meeting day, it's possible to run a Zoom meeting off the Wi-Fi hotspot built into a member's smartphone. Or consider purchasing a dedicated 5G wireless hotspot device.

Finding the Tech Balance

A good hybrid meeting should be good for everyone, whether attendees are in person or online. A bad hybrid experience tends to be particularly bad for the online participants, who feel left out when they can't see or hear what's happening in the room.

Every club has different needs: A club that meets in a corporate meeting room or university lecture room with technology for conducting hybrid classes will have different needs than a club that meets in a church basement with no equipment. A club with reserves of money will have more options than one that must either collect money for equipment or depend on members to provide equipment. A club full of IT and audiovisual professionals won't have the same hurdles as one made up of technically challenged folks.

Krook, District 69's technical support specialist, is also a business systems analyst, as well as a consultant and trainer in the Agile project management methodology. But he says everything he has learned about audio-visual tech comes from learning by doing in Toastmasters. Before deciding what your club needs, he recommends doing a "needs assessment," where you assess where you are starting from in terms of requirements, meeting venue, existing technology, and the technical skills of your members.

"Preparation is key, as it is in so many situations," Krook says.

Should you keep it simple, using only the camera and microphone built into a laptop? That's essentially what Framingham/Natick Toastmasters has been doing. The club does take advantage of a couple of smartphones (volunteered by members in attendance) acting as additional cameras. Ilnicka, of Framingham/Natick Toastmasters, notes that they started out using a more complicated setup, then made a conscious decision to simplify.

One of their members donated a laptop, making the club's only purchase a \$220 USD projector. External speakers turned out to be unnecessary because the projector had a built-in speaker. The only other gear the club might

consider purchasing is an external webcam, she says.

My club, Club Awesome, has spent upward of \$1,000 USD, because we had the money and club leaders believed we should spend what was required to make hybrid meetings successful. We decided the club should own the essential equipment, rather than being dependent on equipment provided by a member—where if that person doesn't show up, the meeting can't go on. Standardizing equipment as much as possible also helped us get multiple people trained to set up the room and the tech.

Your budget is dependent on your club's needs and situation—you'll need more funds if you're starting from zero, but you may be able to spend less if you get donations, or your meeting venue provides the essentials.

Providing a good experience for both online and offline participants is easier said than done. The technical part is important, but less so than the member experience created by club leaders. Members who feel their presence is valued will be more patient with the technical misadventures that occur along the way and more committed to making hybrid work for the club.

Adapted from a March 2023 article

CLUB SPOTLIGHT

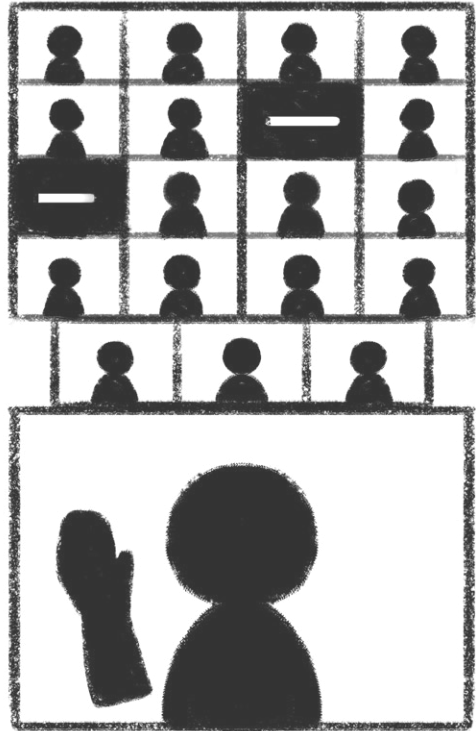
The Path of Earthlings

Club journey highlights diversity, online dynamics, and unique themes.

By Angie Palmer, DTM

For many people, the pivot to online meetings that began during the COVID pandemic has continued to be a mainstay of in many work situations. Knowing how to speak and present effectively online—whether in a job interview, a work meeting, or a presentation—is a necessary skill today.

I work in Hong Kong as a wellness speaker and fitness trainer. I'm also a Toastmaster, and in 2020, I decided to I decided to explore this new online horizon and charter an online-only Toastmasters club with members from all over the world. We would focus on three themes: sustainability, wellness, and veganism. My vegetarian friend Samantha Ng and I chartered Earthlings Toastmasters Club. We chartered in early 2021 with 26 members and grew into a



club with 38 members from more than 10 countries and nationalities, achieving President's Distinguished status in June 2021, and again in 2022.

So what did we do right? Perhaps the story of our global online club can inspire other Toastmasters wanting to charter a new club and launch an exciting and fulfilling journey.

Focus on Unique Selling Points

There were more than 100 clubs in District 89 (China), but there was not one with the style and culture I was looking for. So the first question to ask yourself is, *Why do I want to charter a new club?* There are so many great Toastmasters clubs in the world already, so your reason must be a good one; otherwise, it will be hard to attract charter members.

For Earthlings Toastmasters Club, we decided to have three meetings a month, with each one focused on one of our three themes. The sustainability meetings incorporate anything about going green and being earth-friendly, wellness ones cover both mental and physical health, and vegetarian ones focus on eating a plant-based diet.

I was also adamant about making this club international and bilingual. (We are an “earth-based” bilingual club, with one Mandarin meeting and two English ones each month.) I also put a premium on diversity. We wanted people residing or working—at least part of the time—in different countries to share their unique views in their prepared and Table Topics speeches. Many of our guests and members have mentioned that this was one of the major reasons they were attracted to the club. They

want to listen to different viewpoints, as well as to people who speak Mandarin and English well.

Create a Fun Online Environment

Our members make the most of our virtual experience. We have fun with our online activities like word games and a book club. Members meet in online breakout rooms to talk casually in Mandarin and English—what we call Language Exchange. We have also had an online open house, awards ceremony, and speech contests.

These activities help us connect, as does chatting in the message group or by email almost every day. It is a community, a second family, and a learning platform, so the focus is not about missing a physical stage.

Deciding on Common Platforms

While meeting online can bring together diverse members from different countries, communication platforms and member currencies can also be challenging for the club. China is in a completely different world in terms of social media and communication channels. In order to find common ground with members from various countries, we use the

Chinese app WeChat as the messaging platform and Google Drive for our online library. It means that some of our American, Japanese, Singaporean, and Korean members are trying WeChat for the first time, and Chinese members are using VPN to access Google Drive and our social media pages such as Meetup and LinkedIn.

Handling our club finances can also be complicated. Members submit their dues in three different currencies. We restructured some payment systems to adapt to this challenge.

Fortunately, the members of this international club are usually excited about learning something new and stepping out of their comfort zone.

Set Up to Succeed

To help members of a global online club succeed, we have an orientation for every new member, and pair a mentor with new members to boost their confidence and comfort level. This is a very useful approach. To provide support and resources for our members, we also organize different mini-workshops—about giving speech evaluations, learning how to earn a Distinguished Toastmaster award, and mastering Zoom.

We cannot meet each other and give each other hugs to show love and support, but we have found different ways to let the members know we are still a family, whether it's playing online games or providing consistent encouragement and support to enable members to succeed.

The Earthlings club has taken a unique and exciting path. Throughout this chartering journey, we became stronger, wiser, and kinder. Chartering a club wasn't easy but it was a rewarding and fun learning opportunity.

We want to see more global online clubs sprout and flourish. Toastmasters is a wonderful educational platform, and with more online clubs, we will be able to reach more earthlings—inhabitants of Earth—who want to be better leaders and communicators in their communities. Such clubs can bring more positive learning and inspiring messages to every corner of the world.

Adapted from an August 2022 article



Chapter 11

Advice for Club Coaches

Club Coach to the Rescue

When clubs flounder, experienced members lend their expertise.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

Let's face it: Some Toastmasters clubs struggle. Whether the problem is a lack of members or a lack of volunteers for officer and meeting roles, certain clubs need help.

And help is available. District leaders can appoint one or two coaches to assist clubs around the world. These experienced Toastmasters are there to help the club rebuild its membership, restore a quality environment, and most importantly, reach a point where it is sustainable for many years to come.

Being a club coach has often been described as the toughest job in Toastmasters. It's certainly one of the most important—a mission that ultimately can help many people become better communicators and leaders.

"The journey is bigger than you," says Julie Richardt, DTM, a club coach in the

2020–2021 program year. "Your journey touches and influences others."

Here are suggestions to help make the coaching experience a success, for both coach and club.

Offer Encouragement

Richardt says being a club coach is time-consuming and a lot of work, but if you stick with it, it's a fulfilling journey. "I would tell future club coaches not to get discouraged," she says.

Richardt is a member of several clubs in Charlotte, North Carolina. She and Kayren Cathcart, DTM, teamed up to become co-coaches of the ATD Toastmasters, a corporate club in Huntersville, North Carolina. Cathcart, also a member of several Charlotte clubs, agrees that it's important to maintain a positive

attitude and support members who may be frustrated.

“Club members may perceive setbacks—such as non-renewals, low attendance, or even organizational changes—that affect their participation,” she says.

Bob Harman, a charter member of ATD Toastmasters, says the club started off with a strong membership but suffered during the pandemic.

“We went to Zoom meetings and some people didn’t want that,” he says.

Cathcart says she and Richardt worked with the ATD members to reframe the club’s online meetings “as opportunities to reach *more* people beyond their nucleus, instead of seeing [such meetings] as a setback to not meeting in person.”

Harman says the tactic helped. The club adjusted to online meetings, ultimately considering them to be a positive environment.

Having the club coaches was a great asset to the club, says Harman.

“They were cheerleaders. But they also helped us with ideas to increase participation. We talked about holding an open house, doing a club newsletter, and inviting friends as guests.”

Help Club Officers

Andrej Mazary, DTM, is a member of Slovenski Toastmasters in Bratislava, Slovakia. He became a coach in September 2020 for the Toastmasters Nitra club in Nitra, Slovakia, and found that the officers were suffering burnout.

“I had been a mentor of the club eight years ago after it chartered, so I have an interest in seeing the club thrive,” says Mazary. “The Division Director asked me to help.”

Mazary says that it’s important for a coach to understand what the club members need and want. “I didn’t want to come in as a know-it-all. I wanted to get to know [the officers and the members] as people.”

Daniela Obertova, Club President during Mazary’s coaching assignment, says his efforts paid off dramatically for the club, helping improve relationships among officers and leading to an atmosphere that is “more relaxed, friendly, and open-minded. Chaos was replaced by harmony. Also, the quality of the meetings went up due to better planning and starting to use EasySpeak more effectively.”

Richardt and Cathcart met with the ATD club officers and members several times so that everyone could get to know each other. “We also met with the

officers weekly to offer suggestions and encouragement,” says Richardt.

Keeping the communication flowing is crucial as well. Cathcart says she had to learn how to communicate with members who were more analytical and methodical than she. “I am a laid-back creative type. I had to adapt my communication style to the club members,” she says. “What seemed like resistance was often evidence that they needed more time to process what was being presented.”

Revitalize Meetings and Pathways Participation

Many low-member clubs may meet regularly but not have complete meetings. Having a full meeting with at least one prepared speech, Table Topics, and an evaluation session is a key element to getting a club back on track.

Full, engaging meetings make it easier to meet educational goals in the Distinguished Club Program (DCP). The DCP recognizes club achievements that provide a high-quality experience for members. That’s why one of a coach’s goals is to help the club achieve Distinguished or higher status in the program.

“We encouraged members to complete a level in Pathways,” says Richardt. “We also strongly supported the idea of having a full agenda for a meeting.”

Guests and members are more likely to see the full impact of Toastmasters when a full agenda is available at every meeting. “We wanted the members to see Toastmasters as bigger than their home club,” says Cathcart. “Getting them to visit other clubs, participate in speech contests, was something that I viewed as important.”

Mazary agrees with an emphasis on meeting goals for the DCP. But he says the program results will come naturally when the individuals are happy and enjoying themselves. “The people are the club, there is no club without people,” he notes. “When you’re going to have joyful and fulfilled members, you will have the DCP.”

Obertova, the former Club President, agrees with Mazary’s approach.

“The biggest game-changer that Andrej taught me was to realize Toastmasters is about having fun and trying new ideas, and that it is okay not to be perfect,” she says.

More Ideas

Other suggestions from Richardt, Cathcart, and Mazary include finding new ways to advertise the club, talking with other club coaches for ideas, and not being afraid to ask, “How can we change this?” Since ATD is a corporate club, Richardt and Cathcart stressed to the members how important it was

to get support for the club from the organization's management.

The three coaches' clubs achieved Distinguished status in 2020–2021: Select Distinguished for ATD Toastmasters and President's Distinguished for Toastmasters Nitra. The coaches were thrilled and each says they learned something significant during their journey.

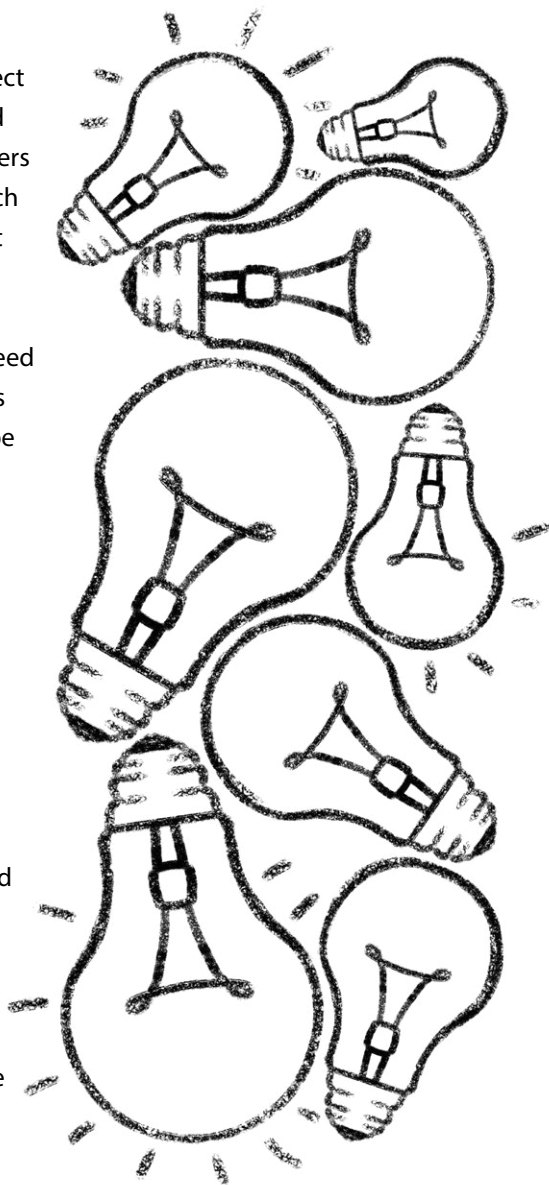
"I learned that I need to approach a club in a positive way," says Mazary. "I need to believe that they can achieve success no matter how discouraged they may be in the beginning."

"We are all learning to be effective leaders and helping others in their Toastmasters walk," adds Richardt.

You also help yourself. Being a club coach is challenging but you learn so much from it, says Cathcart.

"I remember that I was pulling my hair out because we were so close to meeting our goal and needed just one more big push," she says. "Then I realized that the process was more important than the outcome."

"I grew in my leadership and communication skills more than I expected. My confidence also grew. The club coach experience was a blessing."



Adapted from a July 2022 article

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Club Coaches, Learn From My Mistakes

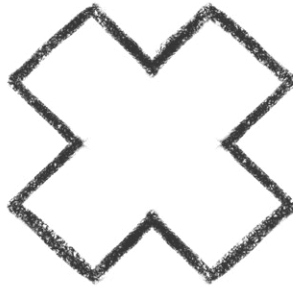
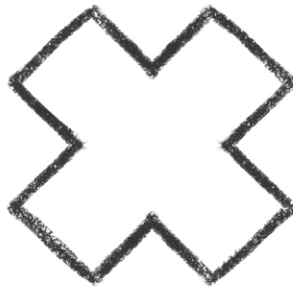
The experience can be transformational for both club and coach—if you go about it the right way.

By Ryan Urie

In true Toastmasters fashion, Sara began her evaluation of my club coach tenure with, “Your coaching was *invaluable*. *Everything* was done extremely well.” But? “You needed to talk to individuals to learn how Toastmasters can meet *their* goals. The group vision starts with individual visions.”

She was right, of course.

Her comments were among the numerous peer and personal insights I gained during my year as a club coach—a year that ended with the club worse off than when I began. Of course, we often learn more from our failures than our successes. But it can be hard



to face our mistakes to discover the wisdom they hold.

I believe being a club coach is one of Toastmasters' most valuable volunteer positions—both for club improvement and for coaches hoping to hone their leadership skills. I was eager to lead, but ultimately, I was not successful. At first, I blamed the club's members. But through self-reflection and feedback from the club and other coaches, I became aware of several subtle ways I had sabotaged myself along the way. Eventually I gained much greater insight into what it takes to connect, motivate, and rebuild a struggling club than I would have if things had gone according to plan.

My Moment of Truth

I became a club coach with a strong personal goal: to receive the required credit toward my Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award.

A fellow Toastmaster helped me find a club that was proactively seeking a coach due to dropping membership. The club's membership had recently dipped to 12, the eligibility point for coaching assistance. Since I had previously helped my own club recruit members to achieve Distinguished status, I felt my coaching role was a simple matter of helping the club grow by five new members to meet

the Distinguished Club Program (DCP) membership requirement.

I began by holding a Moments of Truth session from the Successful Club Series to help the members reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, and goals. The club's responses reflected a positive attitude and strong camaraderie. However, there were also signs of discord; some members complained that others didn't contribute enough. Still, by the end of the session, we had an extensive list of ideas to help strengthen the club.

Overall, I viewed the club as healthy. They just needed to use more branded materials, dust off their guestbook, and get the word out. Within a couple of weeks, the club banner was prominently displayed, guest packets were in hand, and the club website was updated. Things were starting to click.

Then everything stopped.

I encouraged members to implement the strength-building ideas we'd identified but week after week, members failed to complete the assignments they volunteered for. Few guests attended meetings, and even fewer joined.

I pushed them to develop a Club Success Plan. To get them started, I created a simple, two-page document for members to record their aspirations, break them into bite-sized steps, and decide who would do what by when. However,

weeks later the plan was unfinished, and membership was still dwindling.

This pattern repeated through the rest of my term—ambitions to get better, then no action. By the end, membership had dropped from 12 to nine. I'd read all the club coach teaching materials—what went wrong?

What Went Right

For a critical evaluation, I turned to my friend David Mauel, DTM, Past Club President and Vice President Education of Liberty Lakers Toastmasters in Liberty Lake, Washington. He worked with Vision Speaks, a club in Spokane, Washington, that chartered in 2010 and had never achieved Distinguished status. Vision Speaks is open to anyone but tends to operate differently from other clubs because most members are visually impaired. There are no written evaluations, no voting, and little reliance on a written agenda. Mauel quickly realized that he was facing a situation he was not prepared for.

"The biggest thing is, I went in there with a really open heart and a willingness to learn," Mauel said. He recounted wearing a blindfold while serving as Toastmaster to experience the role the same way as the other members. "The only way to actually have empathy for someone is to walk in their shoes. And if

you can't do that if you're not willing to take off your own," he said.

"They were, at first, really nervous about me. They thought I was going to come in, kick in the door, change their universe," he continued. Instead, Mauel began meetings by asking each member about their own reasons for being in the club. This established the trust and safety needed for the members to be open to change.

Mauel didn't focus on the club's weaknesses or obsess over DCP points. Instead, he adopted the role of cheerleader. "I was constantly reminding the club of how great they were doing and building their confidence. If you can create a culture of 'we can do this,' the numbers will come."

Under Mauel's tutelage, Vision Speaks grew from eight to 14 members and achieved Distinguished status for the first time.

No Nitpicking

When Ceitllyn Connal, DTM, District 9 Club Growth Director and member of Cascade Club in Yakima, Washington, was a club coach, she quickly realized that progress hinged on individual relationships and needs. She immediately applied that idea to her coaching efforts with the Greater Yakima Chamber Toastmasters. Nitpicking

adherence to every small program detail could be counterproductive, she said.

“When you get pedantic and say, ‘We have to do this, and this, and this,’ people get frustrated. Instead, you must meet people where they are and show them the best way to achieve what *they’re* looking for,” she explained.

The coach earns many rewards, Connal told me. “To see the members change and take responsibility, to see the light turn on when they realize ‘this is what it’s supposed to be like,’ is incredibly rewarding.”

Reflection

After reading, reflecting, and talking to other coaches, I took my new ideas to the club I had coached to get some feedback. One member told me that while I provided good ideas, what was really missing was honest, open communication. “Leadership is about building connection and trust,” he told me. “Leadership is caring. To make changes, you need to have honest, heart-to-heart communication.”

He added that long-term members were resistant to change and that the other members, afraid to dissent, either left or remained silent. “What we needed,” he told me, “was to get everything out in the open.” Other members expressed similar sentiments.

Lessons Learned

Check your motives. My first mistake was having a personal priority of earning education credit for my club coach participation. I lost sight of the fact that the real purpose of improving a club is not to get a ribbon but to enrich the lives of members. The purpose of earning the DTM is not to gain recognition but to grow as a person and leader. By focusing on the symbols, I missed out on the substance.

Some of the more important lessons I learned:

- **Work through conflict.** My next mistake was trying to sidestep necessary conflict. The resistance to change and simmering discord in the club I coached were the very crux of what was holding them back. By not engaging them directly, I undermined any hope of building the foundation of trust needed to create change, which doomed all my other efforts.

Working through a checklist is far easier than addressing the emotional aspects of team building, but that struggle is where growth happens and is where leadership is often needed most.

- **Make individual connections.**

Coaching a club requires getting to know individuals and understanding how the club can help them. The club coach inspires members to care about their club and feel cared about by their club colleagues. Once members feel engaged and enthused, they will revitalize the club all on their own.

- **Learn and lead.** Once I reconceived my experience as a learning opportunity, valuable lessons began to materialize. First, I realized that blaming is futile, and antithetical to leadership, because it steals your power to drive change. Second, being a leader is more about perseverance than it is about always succeeding.

- **The real prize of engaging a challenge is what we learn and who we become in the process.**

Had success fallen in my lap, I might have my DTM by now. But I've come to value far more the wisdom I gained in failure.

While the Club Coach Program is a specific, internally focused Toastmasters initiative to revive struggling clubs, the concept of coaching—helping others set and achieve personal goals—is an essential philosophy practiced by quality clubs. Whether on a formal or informal basis, Toastmasters regularly embrace the idea of mentoring and supporting their club peers.

Adapted from a February 2020 article

Contributors

Gia Abao

Sharí Alexander

Laura Amann

Kristin Arnold

Peggy Beach, DTM

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

Bill Brown, DTM

Corinne Card

David F. Carr, DTM

Fiona Clayton

Stephanie Darling

Marty Dickinson

Dean Foster

Janet Fuchek

Greg Glasgow

Amanda Mae Gray

Craig Harrison, DTM

Karen Ince, DTM

Nina John, DTM

Caryl Lattof, DTM

Greg Lewis, DTM

Michael Lum, DTM

Kate McClare, DTM

Megan Preston Meyer

Laura Mishkind

Angie Palmer, DTM

Victoria Salem

Jesse Scinto, DTM

Paul Serman

Jolene Stockman, DTM

Jay Sunderland

Ryan Urie

Sravanthi Vallampati, DTM

Diane Windingland, DTM

Maureen Zappala, DTM, AS

Dave Zielinski