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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL MISSION:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE™

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Reflect on Your Leadership Role

Most evenings when my father came home, we would engage in a similar conversation:

“What did you do today?”

“I was planting vegetables in the garden.”

“How did that go?”

“Mom wasn’t happy when I dug up her flowers to plant old potatoes.”

“What could you have done instead that might not have upset her?”

I would think briefly before answering. I didn’t realize it, but my dad was teaching me the value of reflective practice. It’s a tool I’ve been grateful for in leadership positions.

In Toastmasters our personal growth comes through learning by doing. We progress through our Pathways projects and reflect on our own growth in the relevant competencies. We have evaluators who give us feedback on our performance. Both help us acknowledge our growth and identify areas where we want to continue to grow.

When we take on a leadership role, we don’t have a formal evaluation process. However, we can reflect on our experiences and outcomes, as well as the impact of our leadership, to understand how we are growing as leaders. Insights from mentors and team members can further complement our understanding of our personal development.

I believe leaders are learners. There will never be a time when I know everything about leadership. I am eager to learn how to become more effective as a leader. Who we are now does not limit who we will be in the future if we are willing to learn.

In learning as leaders there are three important aspects: patience, perseverance, and perspective.

It takes time to develop and grow as a person and as a leader. We see those who are more experienced and may think we will never get there. Be patient and maintain commitment to your personal growth.

Perseverance helps us overcome setbacks and maintain our motivation in the face of failures or disappointment. Giving up on yourself will not help you grow, but keeping on despite challenges will.

Finally, having a realistic perspective on your growth enables you to see your progress and gain confidence in your abilities. While gathering others’ perspectives is worthwhile, developing your own perspective through reflective practice adds even more value.

The transition out of a leadership role is a great opportunity to patiently reflect on your experiences, and the skills and attitudes you have gained or evolved. Identifying the valuable lessons you’ve learned in Toastmasters will grow your self-confidence, which is something you can apply to your everyday life, enabling you to see just how far you’ve come.

Be a leader in learning!

Morag Mathieson, DTM
2023-2024 International President

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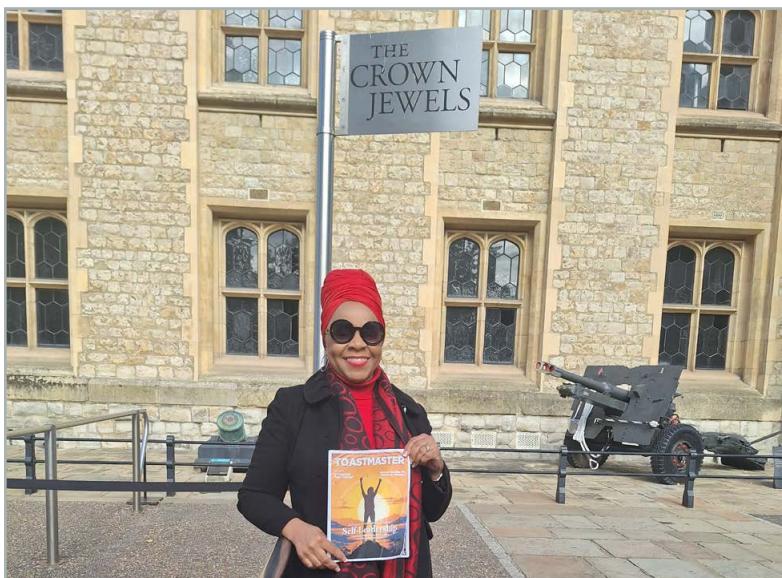
Snapshot



Members of **USI TOASTMASTERS CLUB** in Tsaotuen, Taiwan, participate in Sun Moon Lake's annual International Swimming Carnival, a 3-kilometer swimming challenge in the center of Taiwan.



Traveling Toastmaster



ELIZABETH THOMAS of Milton, Massachusetts, holds a printed cover of the magazine while touring the Tower of London in London, England.



JERRY FER DAMIAN of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, poses with the *Toastmaster* while visiting Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

500 Lunches With Strangers

How one Toastmaster's personal growth project changed his life.

By Laura Mishkind

I've learned that if we want to lead happy, successful, and fulfilled lives, we need to be the driver rather than the passenger."

-NICK BENDEL

In 2019, Nick Bendel, a Toastmaster since 2016, set a goal to have lunch with 500 strangers in five years. He was inspired by Kaley Chu's book *100 Lunches With Strangers*. "Kaley's book made me realize that meeting a large number of strangers would help me improve my social skills, strengthen my mindset, build an incredible network, and attract more opportunity into my life," explains Bendel. So he got to work on what he calls a "personal growth project."

His first lunch was with the author herself. However, Bendel lives in Sydney, Australia, while Chu lives in Melbourne, about 440 miles (710 km) away, so his first lunch involved a plane ride. She encouraged him to follow through on his plan and said it would change his life. According to Bendel, this has proven true.

As of April 1, 2024, Bendel, a member of Dynamic North Shore TM Club, has had 376 lunches. He says, "I've become more proactive and open-minded. I've improved my leadership skills and social skills. I've also realized how much we can achieve if we aim high and take charge of our life."

So why lunch? He chose lunch as the activity because coffee would be too short, breakfast too rushed, and as he says, "inviting strangers to dinner would have seemed too forward." Bendel typically has two lunches a week—sometimes more. The most he's scheduled in a week is six.

He primarily uses LinkedIn to connect with the strangers he'd like to meet, explaining, "Sometimes, I'll actively search for someone from a particular background; at other times, I'll stumble upon someone who has something interesting or unusual about them." Occasionally, he cold-calls people and has been introduced to others through mutual friends. Now his lunches are becoming well-known in Sydney, and people contact him via LinkedIn.

In 2020, the pandemic prevented Bendel from in-person lunches, but he took the opportunity to have virtual lunches with those abroad. He met people from Canada, England, New Zealand, and Singapore. In 2023, he visited Singapore and had lunch in person with someone who was introduced via a mutual friend—this was his only face-to-face lunch outside of Australia.

The Toastmasters Connection

Bendel has had lunch with a few Toastmasters, though it was a coincidence. "I didn't know about the Toastmasters connection until discovering it during lunch," he says.



Nick Bendel meets Jemi Jeng for his 358th lunch on his quest to 500.

He has given a few club speeches about his project and spoke about it at a District conference, but Toastmasters really comes into play in how he is perceived by those he dines with. "During my seven years in Toastmasters, I've become a much better communicator, which has helped me have quality conversations with my lunch dates," Bendel explains. "I often get complimented on how well-spoken I am, which has a lot to do with my Toastmasters training. And I often get complimented on my listening skills as well, which I've honed through years of giving evaluations and answering Table Topics questions."

Life-Changing Lunches

After every lunch, Bendel publishes an article about it on LinkedIn and [his website](#) and keeps in touch with many of his lunch invitees—though it's become harder as the number of people has grown. "I look for opportunities to keep the relationship warm, which can involve something minor such as liking a person's post on social media, texting them or emailing them, or something more involved such as calling them or meeting with them again," he explains. He even organizes a meet-up every three months and shares what time and day he'll be at a local café if people want to stop by.

"I've learned that if we want to lead happy, successful, and fulfilled lives, we need to be the driver rather than the passenger. That means taking charge of our lives by being proactive, asking for things, and striving for things."

Bendel says these lunches have forever changed his life and made him a better person. But it doesn't have to be lunches that change your life. Bendel says, "If any of my fellow Toastmasters want the same benefits for themselves, my suggestion is to set a goal that is meaningful for you—whether that's 50 coffees with inspiring women or 200 lunches with people in your industry—and follow through. By the time you get to the end, your life will have been transformed."

Laura Mishkind is associate editor for the *Toastmaster* magazine.

Untie the Knots

Do your nerves get the best of you? Try these simple tricks.

By Joann M. McCabe

Have a strong opening and closing and use them to build confidence and effectiveness in your presentation.

Do you get nervous before a speech? Your heart pound? Your stomach turn to knots? Do you wonder how other speakers deliver speeches so effortlessly? Some even seem to enjoy the experience.

Here are some tricks they have learned to free themselves of that fistful of knots in the stomach.

Before Speech Day

- **Organize your speech logically.** Decide on an order for your presentation that allows you to move smoothly from one idea to the next without relying heavily on notes or memorization. If the flow of the speech makes sense to you, you are less likely to forget or worry about forgetting what comes next.

- **Memorize the opening and closing.** Have a strong opening and closing and use them to build confidence and effectiveness in your presentation. Open with a punch and end with a bang. Commit the beginning and ending to memory.

- **Concentrate on the message.** Make the subject of your speech the most important idea that you must tell the audience. Focus outward, not inward.

- **Picture success.** Before you fall asleep at night, imagine yourself giving a successful, confident speech to an enthralled audience. Envision the room, the listeners, the words you speak—even the applause at the end.

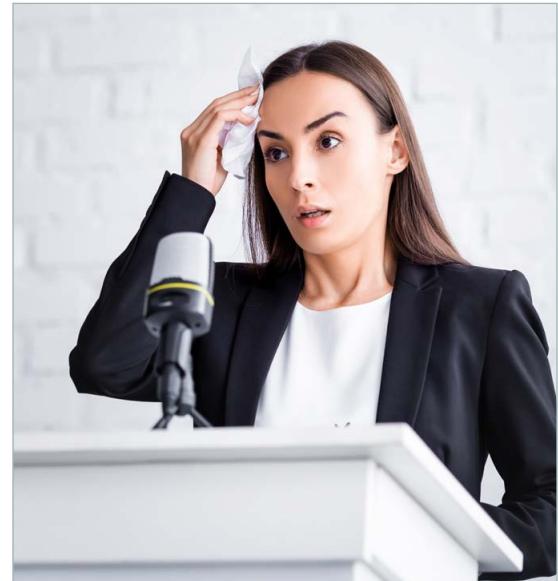
- **Use visual aids to prompt you through your speech.** Use visual aids to walk you and the audience through the presentation, such as a handout, PowerPoint, or prop. Express your main points with visual prompts such as a simple outline or a triangle that shows the three main points of your speech.

- **Befriend the three P's:** Practice, practice, and practice! There is no substitute for the confidence adequate preparation gives you.

On Speech Day

- **Wear clothes that help.** Choose clothing that is comfortable and professional looking. Feel good about how you look so when those eyes are on you, you can be sure that nothing takes away from your message.

- **Find a quiet place to gather your thoughts and relax.** Use your time in the car driving



to the venue or right before you log in for an online presentation to focus. Take the opportunity. Turn off the radio or take out your headphones and practice one last time out loud, at least the opening and ending.

- **Familiarize yourself with the room.** Visualize yourself speaking, then find space to be alone. The less outside stimuli, the easier it is for you to focus on your message. If it is not possible to isolate yourself for a few minutes, regroup mentally wherever you are, even in a crowd, and gather your energy.

- **Release tension while you wait to give your speech.** Clench your fists and hold for three to five seconds, then release. Repeat three times. Notice how releasing your hands relaxes your shoulders and jaw. Before the introduction, breathe deeply three times. Try it right now. Inhale slowly, exhale completely. Feel your belly rise and fall. Let your whole body relax.

- **Take advantage of nerves.** Use them to give an enthusiastic, high-energy speech!

One Last Hint

If direct eye contact breaks your concentration, focus just above the heads of the people in the audience. It will appear as though you are looking directly at them. When you're giving a speech online, look directly at the camera, not at the people on the screen. Imagine your entire audience is sitting right behind it.

Your audience will wonder how you untied those knots and turned them into beautiful bows.

Editor's Note: A version of this article originally appeared in the July 2004 issue of the *Toastmaster*.

Joann M. McCabe is a former member of Hilo Toastmasters Club in Hilo, Hawaii.

A Toastmasters Family

How my membership inspired my daughter.

By Todd Bryant

One evening as I tucked in my 6-year-old daughter, Cambrie, she asked, "When can I come to a Toastmasters meeting, Daddy?" I've been a member of Citrus Toastmasters in Orlando, Florida, since 2017, so Cambrie and her 4-year-old brother, Colton, have grown up with some of Daddy's Toastmasters ribbons in their rooms.

Years ago, a fellow club member brought his daughter to a meeting, but she was much older than mine is. Was Cambrie ready to attend a Toastmasters meeting? I decided she was. After all, she's had the gift of speech and language skills from a very young age. And from dance, to tumbling, to cheerleading, Cambrie has yet to shy away from a stage in front of large groups.

In that way, she's like me. I have always been comfortable onstage in front of an audience. From giving speeches in high school and college to speaking at my alma mater, the University of Central Florida, I've loved the rush of getting in front of a crowd and saying something meaningful. I've seen the impact that being able to speak effectively has had on my life, and on others'. Even though it would be years before she would be eligible to join, I wanted my daughter to get comfortable speaking in front of a group at an early age.

Building my financial practice now takes top priority in my professional life. However, public speaking has continued to be a passion of mine, and speaking to groups is a big part of what I do. Toastmasters helps with that. A year after I joined Citrus Toastmasters, I advanced to the District level of the International Speech Contest.

Cambrie and I talked a lot about Toastmasters leading up to the big day of attending a club meeting. We had dinner at the club where our Toastmasters meetings are held, and we practiced giving a speech in the empty room. There were quite a few times she said she was too nervous and didn't want to go. I told her there was no pressure and we didn't have to go if she didn't want to.

Although Cambrie was still nervous about speaking, she wanted to push forward. She

showed up, shook hands with other Toastmasters, and looked them in the eye as she introduced herself.

When it came to Table Topics®, she knew this was the big moment she had prepared for. Cambrie was the final person picked and she bravely walked up to the front of the room. The question was about her favorite television show. Cambrie went on to delight the crowd with a story about *Bake Squad*, a baking-competition show. At the end of the meeting, she won the ribbon for best Table Topics speaker!

The best part was she even beat her old man, who also participated in Table Topics that day. I was so proud of my 6-year-old in a room full of businesspeople.

When I joined Toastmasters, I did so to further my professional career. However, I had no idea that Toastmasters would also further my role as a father and produce such a wonderful memory between me and my daughter.

Now more than ever, I feel the benefits of Toastmasters. Being able to speak eloquently in front of others is a skill that will never go away, and practicing public speaking from an early age can put our children ahead of the curve personally and professionally. The various club meeting roles, including timer, grammarian, and evaluator, have also taught me important multi-tasking and time-management skills, which have translated well to parenthood.

Cambrie looks forward to attending future Toastmasters meetings and joining when she's



Todd Bryant and daughter Cambrie Bryant

Practicing public speaking from an early age can put our children ahead of the curve personally and professionally.

older. But within the competitive Bryant household, her younger brother, Colton, is waiting in the wings. He has seen his sister's Toastmasters ribbon proudly displayed on her bookshelf, and he will undoubtedly be ready when his time comes.

Todd Bryant is a financial advisor in Winter Garden, Florida, and a member of Citrus Toastmasters.

Good Enough Isn't Good Enough

Discover 4 factors to take your speeches to the next level.

By Bill Brown, DTM

If you are a sports fan like me, imagine that it is late in the game and your team is behind, but within striking distance. One good play could win it. What do you want to see? Your best player with the ball, right? What if the coach puts in the worst player, perhaps the equipment manager? Would you be happy? No. You want the best in that situation.

I recently attended a Toastmasters club meeting where the speaker gave a speech about being good enough. When the evaluator gave some suggestions, another member spoke up and said, "It was good enough."

Now, maybe your speaking skills are good enough for how you are currently using them, and you are using your club participation to keep them at that level. That is fine. But let me give you something to think about.

If you work for a company and they are trying to win a big contract, who do the managers want making the final presentation? The company's best speaker or merely someone who is "good enough"?

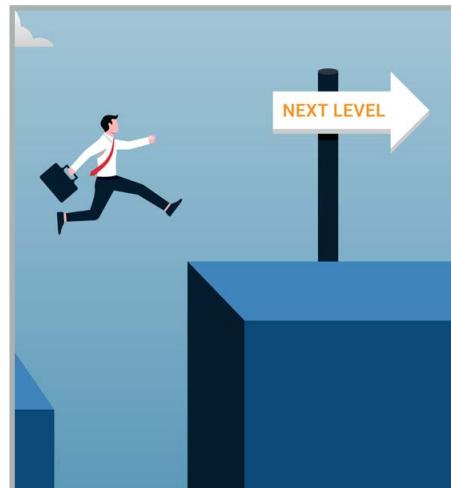
If you work for yourself and you are in a similar situation, do you want to begin your presentation knowing that you are the best speaker the customer will hear, or are you comfortable being "good enough"?

My challenge to you is to be the person people want giving that final presentation.

That takes work because we can always get better. But what are we working toward? While there is a lot involved in being that best speaker, let me suggest four areas for your consideration.

The first is confidence. This includes confidence in your speaking ability and your message. If you are selling a product or service, you need to have confidence in your company and the product. But you also need to have confidence in yourself.

This is one reason that many people join Toastmasters. The Toastmasters program is



**My challenge to you is
to be the person people
want giving that
final presentation.**

particularly effective in helping a person gain confidence.

But all too often, once a member reaches a certain level, they plateau. They have reached their goal, and that is fine. But once you reach the level where you can stand in front of people and talk, there is a whole new level that is available to you, and that is where you convey confidence to your audience. Where you create confidence in their minds regarding you, your product, and your company. That is a level that, all too often, is not attained.

A second factor to consider is poise. While confidence is internal, poise is external. It is your bearing. It is your command presence. It carries with it a certain gravitas, a seriousness, a

competence. It says, "I have something important to say."

A third factor that can make you that go-to speaker is clarity. The listeners need to clearly understand your message. Not only does this involve making sure that your message is not confusing, but it also involves making it obvious to the listener. You want them thinking "of course, that makes perfect sense." It involves being able to explain your message in simple, yet compelling terms.

The fourth area is the effectiveness of your words. If you are giving a sales presentation, is it persuasive? If your goal is to inspire your audience, does it inspire? It is easy for me to think that my words are persuasive. After all, it seems persuasive to me. But is it to my audience?

Don't overlook the effect that your delivery has. Are you conveying the importance and the underlying emotion of the message by your voice?

When I heard that Toastmaster's "good enough" speech, I realized that most of the people in that room had plateaued. But then I had to consider the question: although I am a speech delivery coach, am I also plateaued? This has encouraged me to take my skills to a whole new level.

I ask you, are you plateaued? Are you that go-to speaker that you want to be at the end of the game, pushing for a victory or accomplishing an important goal? Or are you one of the ones sitting on the sidelines? Wherever you are, I challenge you. Do not settle for your current level of speaking. And do not settle for only minor improvement either. Strive for a whole new level in your capabilities. Because "good enough" isn't good enough.

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

Take Your Toastmasters Skills to Work

How to leverage your club skills in workplace presentations.

By Victor David

Improving public speaking skills and overcoming stage fright are probably the top two reasons people join Toastmasters. Your club can help you with both, but transferring those skills to your daily workplace—with its often more intimidating and high-stakes environment—might be tougher than anticipated.

Toastmasters clubs provide a safe, supportive environment, with a clear framework and specific tasks. Your primary goal with a club speech is to deliver something engaging, thought-provoking, moving, and entertaining, often with emotional personal touches and sometimes even small props. You receive applause even for filling a minute with erudite speech when answering a Table Topic®.

Work presentations are different. First, there is likely no applause, and often the goal is to simply get a list of points across. When someone asks you a question, they expect a clear and concise answer, not an entertaining response between one and two minutes.

That doesn't mean your Toastmasters skills don't translate to everyday questions or work presentations. You just need to use the skills differently and adapt to a different type of audience. Here are some helpful tricks to ease the transition.

Don't Jump Into the Presentation

Work presentations are mainly informational, and in fact, may need to contain so much information that they become unwieldy. On top of that, you may not feel you have time for the storytelling and motivational techniques, or the subject doesn't lend itself to incorporating them. However, you still want to start by finding a way to engage your audience and draw them in.

A good way to do that is to pare down the nonessential elements, even to just a sentence, while still leaning into the speechwriting structure you've learned. You can begin with a strong opening statement, such as mentioning the larger goal you are working toward, a new finding, or the concept you'd like to discuss. Then add a hook, such as a rhetorical question or interesting finding; sprinkle in a short personal anecdote; and begin your presentation.

It may look like this: You briefly mention what the meeting is about and why it is important (opening),

sprinkle in an intriguing fact to get their attention (hook), and then explain how you or your team is passionately involved in it (the personal story). After that, you present the actual points, organized in a clear manner with transitions between each one.

The opening and the hook are two important speech components that often get overlooked in work presentations. However, even though attendees likely know why they are in the meeting, it helps to refresh their memory and ensure you're all focused on the same issue. By adding a hook and a personal anecdote, you capture their attention and get them engaged right away.

If you are completely out of inspiration or your presentation topic is not that suitable for personal stories, you should still take the time to mention why the meeting is important and entice the audience with what they are going to learn or discover, instead of dropping in agenda items.

Acknowledge Any Preconceptions

Don't feel that a dry topic is an obstacle—Toastmasters has given you the skills for that situation as well. If you need to present something that you know your audience will deem a bit dull, pull out some Toastmasters tools to make it more engaging. For instance, if you anticipate the audience may find your points a bit abstract, address that head-on at the beginning with humor. Mention that you aren't Einstein either, but compared to working through string theory, this meeting is going to be a breeze! Or, provide a brief intro describing how each point relates to the other ones, to draw your audience in and make them feel acknowledged.

Similarly, if you anticipate there are so many points to get through it could lead to attention fatigue, address that directly and assure your audience with a smile you would also like to end the meeting on time. This helps acknowledge their concerns, while recognizing that everyone wants to get the most out of the meeting yet also has other commitments.

Remember Your Pauses and Gazes

One very effective skill you learn in Toastmasters is the pause. Pauses are rarely actively practiced in workplace



situations; however, they are remarkably effective at bringing attention to the points you want to make. Often a pause brings more emphasis than any powerful phrase or tone you use. And they are certainly better than raising your voice. Pauses can give you an air of authority and make your audience lean in and listen to what you have to say, regardless of your seniority level or relative importance of your project.

Another highly effective yet underutilized skill is focusing your gaze. When looking into the room, use the Toastmasters skill of pairing “gaze with a phrase.” Rather than talking to the middle wall or only looking at your manager, try addressing one side of the room for one point, and another part for a different point. This technique helps everyone in the room feel addressed and included.

You can also play with your vocal variety. When you have an important point to make or want to bring attention to a crucial detail, either increase the enthusiasm in your voice or lower it slightly and slow down. Of course, you don’t want to sound too theatrical, but a bit of tonal variation helps break up a monotonous presentation.

Don’t Neglect Body Language

After your speechwriting skills, effective body language is the next most powerful tool to make your presentation more professional. Even knowing such basic guidelines as not standing with crossed arms helps convey the right image.

Use deliberate hand motions, like you would in a club speech, and rather than pacing, walk across the stage or floor with purpose.

If you need to present something that you know your audience will deem a bit dull, pull out some Toastmasters tools to make it more engaging.

Practice your presentation ahead of time so you don’t end up reading word for word from the lectern. Instead, try to internalize your speech or write down the main points and refer to them if that feels more comfortable. An audience feels more at ease when you feel at ease, and not stressing about the exact wording helps in that endeavor. If there is a particular quote or phrase you need to get right word-for-word, feel free to read just that part out loud from the paper—in fact, doing this can help grab an audience’s attention as the break in presentation style signals something important.

Lean on Table Topics Techniques

If there are any questions at the end of your presentation, use some Table Topics®

strategies. For instance, the simple Toastmasters trick of repeating the question in your initial response not only buys you time, it also confirms you understood the question. You can do the same at work, perhaps adding something along the lines of “that is a good question, and it indeed relates to ...,” which also address the quality of the question and buys you more time to actually answer. Where appropriate, you can add an example relating to your answer just like you would do in your Toastmasters response, but, of course, avoid being unnecessarily wordy.

Toastmasters is a fantastic environment to grow your confidence, techniques, and experience, all of which are directly applicable to workplace presentations and situations. Your Toastmasters skills of speechwriting, body language, effective pauses and gazes, and touches of humor help engage your audience and make it easier to understand and absorb your points.

So let your Toastmasters skills flourish not only inside, but also outside of Toastmasters. And the next time someone praises your presentation prowess, let them know about your secret weapon of Toastmasters membership.

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

The Benefits of Beginning

Mastering a new skill can foster personal and professional fulfillment.

By Sara Mayer, DTM

Do you want to learn a new language? Are you interested in pursuing project management or video production? Maybe you'd like to banish your black thumb and become a gardener or learn to play the trumpet. Whatever your goal may be, it likely ties to a skill that you'll need to master. Mastering a new skill, truly being a beginner and moving into high proficiency, is a transformative investment for you, beyond the acquisition of knowledge.

This journey builds your resilience, adaptability, and dedication to continual improvement. Challenges along the way foster your perseverance, instilling a sense of confidence. Mastery opens doors to opportunities, enhancing both personal and professional fulfillment for you. Embracing this process enriches not only your skill set but also shapes you into a more capable, confident, and resourceful individual, ready to navigate the complexities of various endeavors.

Mastering a skill is not a quick task that you can simply mark off your to-do list, and deciding what skill to master is something you should put thought into. When you choose a skill aligned to your personal or development goals and have a compelling reason for why you want to master the skill, your chances of success will increase greatly.

To do this, narrow down your goals to pull out a skill that could be a focus. For example, if one of your goals is to get promoted and one part of the job is to speak at quarterly meetings, you may want to master public speaking. To drill down further you may want to focus on an inspirational style of speaking that compels employees to act.

Back to Beginner

Learning involves the acquisition of knowledge, while mastery involves moving past the basics into a sustained commitment to the refinement of skills. To become a master, you must first start as a beginner. You will need to make a deliberate decision to step outside your comfort zone, embrace the challenges and uncertainties, and learn from the five stages of development.

- The beginner stage is all about getting familiar with and understanding the basics, the foundations.
- The novice stage is about repetition and gaining confidence on the foundational tasks.
- In the intermediate stage, more complex techniques are added that expand the knowledge base and increase proficiency. Be careful moving into this stage too early; if you don't truly master the foundations, you will face challenges as you move into more complex techniques.
- The expert stage is when you can consistently perform advanced tasks.
- The final stage, mastery, is obtained when you not only know how to do the skill effectively, but you also could teach someone the steps to complete the skill. At this level, you understand *how* to do it and *why*.

Going back to a beginner mindset is not a regression but a progression—an acknowledgment that true expertise is built upon a foundation of continual growth. It signifies your commitment to honing the fundamentals, refining the basics, and laying the groundwork for proficiency. This intentional return to a state of openness and curiosity allows you to gain fresh perspectives, identify overlooked nuances, and ultimately elevate your skills.

One skill you may have a desire to master is public speaking. Take that broad topic and narrow it down. Are there particular skills under the public speaking topic you wish to master? In the public speaking example, you may want to deliver a humorous speech. One skill you could focus on first is learning how to craft a speech that is humorous. Keep asking yourself questions about the skill until you capture the various components of mastering it. Mastery is a building process, and all the tasks and learnings then lead to your mastery. You cannot skip building the foundation.

You don't need to have every step determined from the beginning. For example, if you add every step to becoming an author on your list, you might be instantly over-



whelmed and never start. Begin with the first couple of steps to mastering the skill and then build on that.

Ask yourself, "How will I know when I have mastered this skill?" It's critical for you to define mastery for yourself before you begin. For example, if you are learning a new language, you will know you achieved this when you are able to hold a conversation over dinner entirely in the new language.

Bridging the Gap

There is a gap when you stretch yourself to master a new skill. Maybe you need to learn a basic step, unlearn something, build a new habit, or find a resource to complete it. That gap from where you start to where you are going is filled with obstacles.

For instance, you may want to become a master at gardening. First you would need to learn how to turn raw land into usable land for gardening—this is a gap between where you are starting and where you want to go. As you start this process, you might find out you don't have the correct soil balance—that is an obstacle. Nothing worthwhile is easy and you will need to build resilience to keep going. Staying on track with your plan that outlines your steps can be difficult.

Embrace the challenges and remember you are on a learning journey. Seek advice from others who can provide valuable insights and guidance. Reach out to people you follow online, buy a book, or listen to a podcast. You don't necessarily need to have a one-on-one

uncomfortable, this is where true growth happens. Create a process to regularly review your progress. It is crucial to achieving the goal and mastering your skill. As you review your work, examine your calendar and the time you spend working on your new goal. Examine if you have truly dedicated your time.

As you add a new complex goal to your life, you will experience competing priorities. Often, especially when you are faced with an obstacle, you will choose the road of least resistance. Critically think about these crossroads. Make sure you do not shy away from being uncomfortable as a beginner by choosing the easy road and not work on your skill development.

Embarking on the journey of mastering a new skill, especially as you return to a beginner's mindset, is transformative.

conversation to learn from someone else's journey. You are likely trying to master something others have mastered—learn from their mistakes and seek their wisdom with the resources available to you.

Continue the Journey

Staying on course when mastering a new skill, especially as you go back to being a beginner, is not always easy. Get comfortable with the

Remember, you can do this! Embarking on the journey of mastering a new skill, especially as you return to a beginner's mindset, is transformative. This intentional process will shape you into a capable, confident, and resourceful individual.

Sara Mayer, DTM, is a strategic business consultant and host of the Bold Goal Crusher and Impact Unleashed: The Nonprofit Edition podcasts. Learn more at saramayer.com, and grab a copy of her [Goal Reflection worksheet](#).

Bring Your Speech to Life With a Story

A well-crafted narrative can help you connect with your audience.

By Caren S. Neile, Ph.D.

Let me tell you a story. I wrote for TV news and magazines for many years. I also loved novels and wanted to learn how to write a good one. So I returned to school, where I discovered dozens of effective techniques for improving my writing.

By the time I graduated, many of my sentences were positively shimmering. But I still couldn't publish a novel, much less come up with an interesting plot. Most of my fellow students couldn't, either. Several of us had agents who gave us up when our books didn't sell. I knew I was not the only one who felt like a failure.

Around that time, I attended an adult storytelling performance. I was blown away. Listening in awe, I realized how exciting it would be to get the instant feedback of telling my stories to an audience. So, I joined Toastmasters.



To be human is to
be a storyteller.

I learned what a story is, and how to tell one. I also joined several storytelling organizations, received storytelling coaching, and read a lot on the subject. And I began, slowly, to perform stories, first on the club level, and then eventually in public.

In the course of all of this, I noticed that when I listened to speeches, my mind wandered much less often when the information they contained was presented in the form of a story. That, I discovered, is because certain areas of our brains respond to the descriptions and emotions in stories so deeply that we fall into what's known as a "storytelling trance." For all intents and purposes, we are living the stories in our brains, taking a journey along with the storyteller, experiencing what the storyteller describes, and feeling what they, or the characters in the story, feel.

That, in turn, not only forges a connection between storyteller and listener, but also helps the listener retain what is said. What's more, storytelling helps us find meaning in our lives, because stories remind us that actions have consequences. That what we and others do matters.

And I thought: Wow! No wonder politicians tell stories on a regular basis, and U.S. presidents have been referred to as "storytellers-in-chief." Stories are incredibly persuasive. So persuasive, in fact, that the ancient

Greek philosopher Plato—a storyteller himself—banned them from his vision of a perfect republic. He, too, knew the power of a good story.

The more I pursued my craft, the more I learned.

What is storytelling?

A story is a causal sequence of events—that is, one event leads logically into another—that have occurred to a real or fictional character or characters at a specific time and place. After introducing the main characters in their habitat, the storyteller presents some sort of problem for them, or question, or itch to be scratched.

Generally, the more difficult the problem, the more empathy we have for the characters, and the more invested we are in the story. The same goes for how hard the characters must work to resolve this tension; this is what evokes emotion in listeners and makes the story interesting. The problem is resolved at the end of the story in a relatively unexpected way. Otherwise, why tell the story?

And finally, the main characters, as well as the listeners, are transformed in some way as a result of the experience.

To be human is to be a storyteller. In fact, it's said that the ability to tell and understand a story, to see our lives both as a series of stories

Certain areas of our brains respond to the descriptions and emotions in stories so deeply that we fall into what's known as a "storytelling trance."

and as an overarching narrative, is one of the characteristics that makes us human. Unfortunately, in Western culture, we are often taught that stories are childish things, and that as we mature, we need to deal in hard, concrete facts. So we lose what many of us once had instinctively: the ability and the confidence to tell effective stories. The good news is that there are ways to learn how to tell stories again.

How do you create engaging stories?

The easiest way to learn to create stories is to make a habit of narrative thinking. Say someone asked, "How was your evening?" You could simply say, "I had a flat tire, and the towing service came and fixed it." And that would be that. Or, you could tell a story.

"My worst fear," you might say, "has always been having a flat in the middle of nowhere. So I have done everything I can to avoid it. I get my

tires checked regularly. I learned how to put on the spare. I even have a spray that plugs holes. Then last night, I drove over some debris on a dark, lonely road. Soon I realized my front passenger tire was thumping. Holding my breath, I pulled over and got out my spray can. But this was a tear, not a hole, so it didn't work. With my heart thumping as loudly as the flat, I opened the trunk to get the spare. But it wasn't there. I was shaking. Tears welled up in my eyes. Then, by chance, I noticed a towing service sticker on my windshield. I reached for my phone. Could I get a signal? Would they come quickly? Yes, and yes. I was back in business 15 minutes later. And all the way home, I thought: *I did it. I survived my worst fear.*"

Did you notice how the context ("my worst fear") helped you begin to care about, identify with, or perhaps admire the character, who was responsible enough to try to prevent being stranded? Did you notice how we saw what she saw, heard what she heard, and maybe even began to

How to Use Stories in Speeches

In his winning speech presented at the 2000 Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking®, Ed Tate told a story. Called "One of Those Days," the speech made a strong point, but it also helped the audience—and judges—see, feel, smell, hear, and taste the experience Tate described. That's how it helped him prevail over some very tough competition.

Crafting your entire speech as a story is one way to use stories in public speaking. To some extent it depends on the subject matter, but most subjects can be approached narratively.

You could also just lead off with a brief story, such as something that happened to you or someone else, or a folktale, or even a simple narrative joke. Ensure the meaning is clear enough that the opening segues easily into the rest of your speech. And keep it brief, so you have time for everything else you want to say.

Or, you can tell a story or two in the course of your speech to vividly illustrate points. You might simply pause before you do, as long as it's clear that's what it is—a pause. You could also say, "Let me tell you a story," then pause when it's over.

Finally, you might end with a story. This is probably the least common use of storytelling in speeches, unless you add a "clincher" line of your own afterward to wrap everything up.

When you choose a story, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Will I feel comfortable telling this story to any audience, no matter their age, gender, class, or ethnicity? Should I alter it a little depending on the audience?
2. Does the story clearly make the point that I intend it to?
3. Is the story so long that the audience loses track of what is going on in the speech, and if so, can I shorten it?

By the way, Ed Tate ran out of time before he could tell the moral of his story. When he told me that afterward, I said he was lucky. The speech clearly worked better without it. No moralizing needed. If your entire speech is a story, give the audience, and yourself, the benefit of the doubt that you crafted it well enough that they will understand your meaning.

Just as when you tell a joke, you get the strongest response when you leave the interpretation to the audience.

—Caren Neile

Extra Tips From Contest Winners

Jim Key, DTM, 2003 World Champion of Public Speaking

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

Anita Fain Taylor, DTM, 3rd place in 2018 World Championship of Public Speaking

Storytelling can be therapeutic for the speaker and the audience. Most recently, I shared a personal challenge I’m experiencing. Through self-reflection, I turned a negative situation into something positive simply by putting myself (and the audience) in someone else’s shoes. I wanted the audience to reflect on themselves and (hopefully) approach life differently. They were listening to my speech, and so was I, because I needed to hear it for myself, from myself to myself.

Mas Mahathir Mohamad, 3rd place in 2022 World Championship of Public Speaking

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

Editor's Note: Find additional storytelling advice from these contest winners and more in this [September 2023 article](#).

—Toastmaster magazine staff



How do you tell an engaging story?

Creating a story is not the same as performing a story, of course. Toastmasters can help a lot with that. In the Level 3 Pathways elective project “Connect with Storytelling,” we see how the same skills that you use in other kinds of public speaking, especially those related to clarity, vocal variety, eye contact, gestures, and audience awareness, are essential in storytelling.

Also important: Describe the story as it plays out in your mind rather than memorizing the words. And as with public speaking in general, the three most important things to remember are practice, practice, and practice.

I'm grateful that I discovered the power of storytelling, and for how it's informed my life and what I have learned and shared because of it.

Now, everywhere I look, I see a story. It has made my life feel more meaningful, and it has made for some very successful speeches.

Caren S. Neile, Ph.D., has taught storytelling studies at Florida Atlantic University since 2000 and has performed and presented in 13 states in the U.S. and in seven countries. She is the former chair of the National Storytelling Network and a co-founding editor of the academic journal *Storytelling, Self, Society*. Contact her at cneile@fau.edu.

feel what she felt? Do you see how the problem kept compounding, how it was solved in a way the character hadn't expected, and how she gained confidence when she solved it?

Ready for a Career Change?

Tips for transitioning into a new position.

By Greg Glasgow

Jennifer Patterson was just a few months into her college career studying computer engineering when she realized the field wasn't a good fit.

"When I went into computer engineering, I was very hopeful about what the experience was going to be like, but then I started taking courses in college, and I hated every class," says Patterson, a member of BNY Mellon Toastmasters Club in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Either it was a disappointment, or I was really struggling because the work was so difficult. Sadly, engineering never ended up being what I was looking for."

After a short engineering internship that confirmed her distaste for the field, Patterson transitioned into user experience (UX) design, creating digital products that provide enjoyable experiences for users. This specialty ended up being much more in line with her interests and skills.

"It was a nice mix of my external hobbies and what I was already learning in school," she says. "I found some mentors online and started networking with people. Then I took it by the reins throughout the rest of college, doing well enough that I could pass my courses while focusing on my passion for this new field."

Patterson is just one of many people who have successfully changed career paths. In recent years, making some type of switch has become a growing trend. According to the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, the average person will have three to seven different careers before they retire—and younger workers are more likely to undergo five or more career changes.

Why Switch Careers?

The reasons for changing careers are varied, and they differ among age groups. Some people may want fresh challenges, more pay, better work-life balance, or even a shorter commute. Others may feel burnt out in a career field they've been in for decades. For some workers, changing careers may be the involuntary result of layoffs

or downsizing. For others, a transition may be spurred by a desire to spend more time at home.

"Priorities change over time," says Patterson, who now works as a senior associate UX/UI designer. "Sometimes you might care more about your career; other times maybe you care more about family. Priorities may change, your interests may change, and that's totally okay. You have to follow what your heart is feeling."

"You also have to put in the work, though. Some people think it's a magic thing or you can do it quickly. But it does take time and effort to be able to make a transition."

Putting in the Work

The effort to transition into a new career often begins by taking a hard look at your current position, says career coach Jennifer Blanck, DTM. She suggests not only looking at the things you don't like that are pushing you toward a new field, but also recognizing the things you do like in your job that can inform your next move.

"When people are ready for a change, they usually can identify the negative things in their current situation," says Blanck, a member of 5-Star Toastmasters Club in Arlington, Virginia, and AAMC Toastmasters in Washington, D.C. "What I advise people to do is think about the positives. What would you like to keep? Is anything working? Are there certain aspects of your position that you love? You might know what you don't want, but it's also important to know what you do want. The first step is to assess yourself and be really honest."

Some people know which field they want to transition into, Blanck says. Others may need to engage in a little introspection to find out where their future may lie.

"What are you reading about? Where do you spend your time? What do you get energized about when you're talking about it?" she asks. "Once you've identified a field, go talk to people in those jobs, in those industries, at those organizations, and learn more about what it means to work there and what it takes to get there."



Networking, the Toastmasters Way

Networking is a good way to learn more about different careers and industries you are interested in. This is likely to come more easily to those with a Toastmasters background, Blanck says—people who are used to having conversations with others, whose Table Topics® experience makes them experts at talking off the cuff. Toastmasters may also already have access to people in fields in which they are interested in simply because they are part of the same club.

“Table Topics are fantastic opportunities to practice for interviews because you never know what question you’re going to get,” says Blanck, adding that everything in Toastmasters is great preparation for job interviews. “You want to give a concise answer—opening, body, and closing. And being involved at meetings helps keep you active and interacting with people on a professional level.”

Of course, along with networking comes research. Go to LinkedIn and read the job descriptions of different positions. Find profiles of people who are successful in those fields and figure out what makes them tick.

“It’s important to take the time to do the research,” says Amy Krymkowski, a career coach

Although making a career transition may seem daunting, with some effort and careful thought it can be not only realistic, but also very fulfilling.

who specializes in transitions, and a member of Cream City Communicators in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. “When you’re exploring industries, it helps to home in on three to five companies as targets. Look at their position descriptions and learn more about the companies you’re interested in.”

The Next Step

You know it’s time to make a change, and you’ve identified the field you want to transition into—so what’s the next step? There are several things that prospective career-changers should do as they begin the process, Krymkowski says, starting with making a list of things that are important to them.

“Often, when people begin looking at opportunities, they want to make a decision based on what the opportunity affords them, instead of starting with themselves first,” she says. “What are the things that are important to you from a job standpoint? The fit of the job, the work itself, the responsibilities—what’s going to be important to your career? What are your goals? Rather than getting attracted to all the bells and whistles of some great opportunity, ask yourself if it lines up with what you’re looking for.”

From there, experts say, it’s important to make a plan and stick to it. Will you need additional training or education? If so, where can you obtain it, and how much will it cost? Outside of Toastmasters, look to other sources for referrals and networking—family and friends, professional associations, the alumni association at your alma mater.

“When I made my first career transition, I said to myself, ‘I will do one thing a day to move myself forward,’ Blanck says. “That could have been writing a draft cover letter, reaching out to someone for an informational interview, or searching through job announcements. You’re treating it in a very structured way, and that keeps you on track.”

Although making a career transition may seem daunting, with some effort and careful thought it can be not only realistic, but also very fulfilling.

“Changing careers is a very personal thing,” Patterson says. “You have to think about what your strengths are, but also think about what you’re interested in. It’s important to find that balance or the bridge between where you are now and where you want to go. That’s the hardest part, but it’s very doable. Once you have that connection, it makes it so much easier. You don’t feel like you’re starting from scratch, because there are always transferable skills from one career to the next.”

Greg Glasgow is a Denver-based author and freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster*. His debut nonfiction book, *Disneyland on the Mountain: Walt, the Environmentalists, and the Ski Resort That Never Was*, was published in September 2023.



LEAD LIKE A

Master Gardener

Successful teams need the same 12 conditions

as healthy plants in order to thrive.

By Lauren Parsons, DTM

LEADING LIKE A MASTER GARDENER

You can't force plants to grow. They have to do that themselves. However, a skilled gardener can create the ideal environment and shape the conditions to help plants thrive. Ensuring healthy soil, protecting plants from disease, and weeding regularly allow plants to reach their highest potential, producing vibrant flowers and abundant fruit.

As a leader, think of yourself as a master gardener, helping people flourish so they can perform at their best. Much like an orchard of trees, teams of people need structure, nurturing, protection, and space as they grow and develop.

If tended well, a healthy orchard will live for generations, surviving and thriving through the seasons. Similarly, leaders who intentionally cultivate a healthy team culture will see the fruits of their labor over the long term, be that in your Toastmasters club, workplace, or community group.

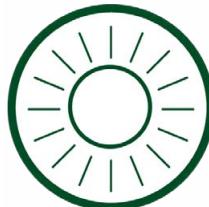
Here are 12 tips leaders can glean from master gardeners:

1 Light = A Clear Vision

People need to be inspired by a well-defined vision. Team members have to understand their organization's purpose and be strongly aligned with it in order to do their best.

Toastmasters International's mission statement, "We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders," describes the purpose and goals of the organization. A vision statement is similar but describes the aspirational ideals and goals. When I was President of Talk of the Town Toastmasters Club in New Zealand, we adapted the organization's mission statement to create our club vision: "To be a warm, supportive, fun, and inspiring community that develops people's communication and leadership skills." Each adjective helped us foster the environment we strived to provide, and the word "community" was vital to the strong sense of connection and belonging we created.

- Give your team a clear vision that motivates and galvanizes them. When developing a vision statement, ideally get input from team members, and make sure it aligns with your company's or organization's overall mission. Share your vision statement at every opportunity, such as in team meetings, during one-on-ones, as part of performance reviews, and when speaking about your team to others.



2 Water = Positive Feedback and Appreciation

Just like plants without water, without appreciation people wither. Team members need regular watering with specific praise and encouragement to bolster their confidence as they develop and grow. People also do more of what they're praised for.

Praise must be delivered in the right way and at the right time so the person receiving it can soak it up. While some people enjoy a private word, a thank you note, or an email, others prefer public praise, such as receiving a gift or an award in a team meeting, or being thanked in an all-staff email. When you can speak someone's language of appreciation, your feedback has a greater impact.

Toastmasters' founder, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, understood the importance of positive feedback and it has been a part of every meeting since the first one in 1924. Smedley advocated for emphasizing what the speaker did well, followed by constructive feedback on ways to improve.

- As a leader, get good at catching people doing things right and offer immediate, specific praise. Ask team members how they like to receive praise and record this on their personnel file, along with a running list of their accolades and accomplishments. This is handy to refer to at performance review time.



Leaders who intentionally cultivate a healthy team culture will see the fruits of their labor over the long term.

3 Fertilizer = Coaching Feedback

This is the stuff that speeds our growth. Timely, corrective feedback that's delivered in the right way helps people learn and progress. Left to their own devices, plants will grow, but not nearly as vigorously as when they receive fertilizer.

Great orchardists understand that nutrients need to be balanced and given at the right times, just as effective leaders understand the best style and delivery of feedback to suit their team members. Knowing someone's personality profile helps you understand whether to be more or less direct, so your feedback lands well.

- Offer effective coaching feedback to help your people grow into their potential. Praise people's strengths and share specific ways they can lift their performance. For example: "I really liked the effort you put into gathering those statistics for today's presentation, it was really eye-opening. I think that if you can link those statistics to the differences those changes will make for customers, it'll be even more compelling in next month's meeting. How do you feel about that?"



4 Stakes = A Good Induction Period

Newly planted trees are staked to help them get established, providing support while they put down roots. Similarly, a good induction period helps support people as they grow their confidence.

Have a clear plan for onboarding a new team member and help them acclimate. You can assign a buddy for the first two weeks, hold an office gathering in their honor, include a question of the day at weekly meetings to build connection, and schedule regular check-ins.

- Ensure good support to keep new people centered through any challenges that come their way until they can stand firm in their own ability.



5 Training = Systems and Professional Development

Just as an orchardist places frameworks, cords, or cables to train a plant to grow in the desired way, staff need clear direction. Well-defined manuals, checklists, and procedures set clear expectations, and when combined with training, they prevent staff from doing things haphazardly, or letting standards slip. Best practices include having standard procedures written down, setting clear timeframes, and holding regular progress checks and post-project debriefs to reflect on learnings and potential improvements.



- Make sure you have the right systems and regular training to underpin people's progress.

6 Wind Protection = Psychological Safety

Wind can harm otherwise thriving trees, especially when they're getting established. Ensuring a psychologically safe environment means people aren't battered by negative influences. They're not constantly second-guessing themselves or worrying how the day will go. Instead, they can put their energy into doing great work, without fear of putting their fruit (their ideas and work results) on display.

- Take care to create a safe environment where people can fully express themselves. Encourage people to speak up. Make it okay to share conflicting ideas and celebrate learnings. One example is to have "failure parties"—getting together over cake to discuss what went wrong and what can be learned from it.



7 Disease and Pest Protection = Prevention of Bullying and Harassment

Disease and pests can cause major and sometimes irreparable damage. Similarly, it's critical to protect your people and keep them safe from negatives such as bullying and harassment. If such behavior is left unchecked, it can sabotage a productive environment, damage your organization's reputation, and cause you to lose good people.

Have a zero-tolerance policy and actively champion being an upstander, not a bystander, when smaller offences occur, such as inappropriate jokes or insulting behavior. Have conversations in team meetings about the way things are done and the behaviors you will and won't accept.

- Be vigilant to eradicate any signs of unsavory behavior, early on. Proclaim your zero-tolerance stance regularly and thank people for maintaining a positive environment.



8 Regular Weeding = Staying on Top of Issues

It's much easier to pull out weeds when they're small, before they become deeply rooted problems. Underground, out-of-sight weeds can steal precious nutrients and undermine growth. Just as a master gardener mulches around their plants to prevent weeds, have systems in place to proactively prevent problems that can impact development and success.



If you notice problems popping up, such as someone skipping steps or ignoring policy, talk to them straight away. Ask open questions and get them back on track by ensuring they understand why it's important.

- Address things as soon as you spot them to prevent issues from growing.

9 Pruning = Prioritizing

Pruning defines a tree's shape and direction of growth. When a tree is pruned, it puts energy into the key branches that remain. The word "decide" comes from the Latin word *decidere*, which literally means to cut off. When you make decisions and communicate the top priorities, you cut off alternatives and clearly show people where to spend their time and effort.

Prioritizing at work is vital to avoid bogging people down with too many ongoing projects. Have a weekly catch-up to check in on your team members' workload and clarify their top priority. If you think it's x and they think it's y, you'll both end up frustrated.

- If people are overwhelmed, help them understand what's really critical, and agree on realistic timeframes to achieve it, so they can focus their energy.

10 Space = Autonomy

In an orchard, trees need adequate space to grow, with gaps between their branches for airflow and sunlight, and to allow birds and bees to pollinate. Equally, staff need time and space to pollinate new ideas and the freedom and autonomy to get on with their work rather than feeling they're being micromanaged, which only leaves them feeling stifled and disempowered. Orchardists allow sufficient space so trees don't knock into each other. Similarly, team members need to give one another adequate space to avoid unhealthy friction.

- Ensure good role clarity and empower people with the autonomy to get on with things.

11 Good Soil = Your Workplace Culture

A tree cannot flourish if planted in poor soil. Consider your team culture to be like healthy soil—it's vital to people's growth and performance. Creating a positive environment not only nourishes people it also allows them to put down strong roots.



Create rituals in team meetings, such as having each person share an inspiring quote, a joke, or a life hack to bond team members together.

Get input from staff on the sorts of social events they'd like. Rather than getting together for drinks after work, consider more inclusive outings like a family picnic, a scavenger hunt, or a volunteer opportunity in the community.

- Focus on cultivating a connected team who have a deep sense of belonging.

12 Orchard Layout = Structuring Your Team

Master gardeners understand the importance of creating harmony when they design their orchard layout. They treat their trees like a team, taking each one's individual characteristics and the conditions that help them flourish into account.

A gardener will plant smaller trees in a spot where sturdy and larger trees can protect them from the wind and harsh sun. Similarly, great leaders place people in roles that highlight their strengths. A charismatic, creative person will be assigned different roles than a detailed, task-oriented one. This creates a positive, symbiotic team dynamic where everyone can flourish.

- Structure your team to maximize each person's strengths, so they can achieve more as a whole.



Go out and cultivate a thriving team culture in your Toastmasters club and workplace, and see the difference it makes to those around you as they thrive and succeed.

Lauren Parsons, DTM, is a business coach and the founder of Lauren Parsons Wellbeing, which focuses on creating a positive work environment and boosting productivity. She was named 2023/24 New Zealand Keynote Speaker of the Year and is the author of three books. Lauren is a member of the PN Advanced club in Palmerston North, New Zealand. Learn more at LaurenParsonsWellbeing.com.



Preparing for Successful Networking

Take these steps to build your connections.

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

You're told to network because it's important. Maybe you're searching for a job, building a business, learning something new, conducting a campaign, applying for a program, or making connections for another reason.

But many people don't like networking. It can often feel superficial and insincere. Or maybe you've tried to network and you're not making the right connections or reaching your goals.

Successful networking requires preparation. The more you prepare, the more authentic you can be, and the more successful you will be. For Lee Hwa Ching, DTM, District 51's Program Quality Director, from DTM Toastmasters Club in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, it started with a clear mission.

Start With a Goal

When Ching was establishing herself in her career, she noticed certain people were advancing in jobs and careers before others who were just as or more qualified. She discovered strong networks were an important factor.

As she grew in her sales and marketing career, she studied networking and found her mission. She wanted to help youth achieve their dreams and objectives. For years, she wanted to write a book about networking to share what she knew and help others succeed.

After joining Toastmasters, she found the opportunity to achieve her dream. Using the High Performance Leadership program—a practical project that enables you

to hone and demonstrate your leadership skills—to propel her forward, she wrote her book, *Everyone Can Network*, with another author in three months.

She also leveraged her Toastmasters network while researching her book to gain insights from others. "I wanted to know what people needed from networking," Ching says. "I told people my dream, and they supported me. Sharing my story made people feel they were part of my mission."

The key is understanding why you want to network. "If you don't have a purpose, it's not worth it," says Ching.

Do Your Research

Once you have a clear goal in mind, it's time for research. In her book, Ching divides networking into three phases: "Find, Win, Keep." Find is all about preparation and involves four steps: sources, qualifying, pre-action, and action call. Throughout this phase, you identify potential contacts, establish criteria for screening them depending on your goal, conduct research on the sources and the networking opportunity, and secure your connection by reaching out to them.

Victor David, from City Tattersalls Toastmasters Club in Sydney, Australia, also emphasizes the need for research. Before any networking event, David reviews the attendee list, if one is available. When using online platforms, he looks for people in the same industry or with common interests. "You need to be aware of the potential of the relationship," says David. He notes that potential

The more you prepare to network, the more authentic you can be, and the more successful you will be.

could range from a friendship or mentorship to an introduction or referral to a sale.

From her book research, Ching learned people are afraid of starting a conversation and don't know how to keep it going. She recommends preparing some Table Topics®-style questions based on the common interests you discover during your research to help establish a connection.

Focus Your Energy

Research will also help you decide if a networking opportunity is the right one for you. "Don't network without purpose or in the wrong place," says Ching. You want to make sure your time and energy—and any money you may have to spend, such as an event fee or travel—are worth it.

Teresa Dukes, DTM, Past International Director, from the Speak Easy at Martlesham Speakers' Club in Martlesham, England, agrees. As an executive coach and trainer, she advises clients they need to choose the right stage—literally or figuratively—to ensure they're in front of the right people.

If you're attending an event, she recommends developing a plan to connect with people there and then scheduling a one-on-one meeting with them at a later date. That allows you to meet more key people during the event and have separate quality time to get to know them better. "You only have a limited time at the event," says Dukes. "Prepare more effectively, and you can be more efficient and effective with the time you have."

Develop Your Pitch

To be most effective, it's important to know your pitch going into an event—some strong points about you that are relatable. David has heard too many people try to cram in everything they do into one sentence. "People will only remember one or two things about you when you are asked 'what do you do,' so consider which points you want to be remembered for," he says.



When Dukes meets new people, she doesn't give her title. "People don't care what your title is; they care what you can do for them," she says. She recommends telling people explicitly what you do, such as "I help people ..." With a polished, succinct opening line, she says they'll ask for more.

When helping clients fine-tune a networking pitch, Dukes uses a formula she calls OCD, which stands for "Opening, Clients, and Differentiating." Opening describes what you do. For Clients, you share stories of how you've helped others—examples of who you've worked with, including who they are and the problems you helped resolve. During Differentiating, you share why you are the best person for the job. The more conversational you can make it, the better it will be received.

Be Authentic

In addition to being conversational, it's important to be authentic. David enjoys networking, but many of his colleagues don't. He's seen a lot of people become hesitant, clumsy, or awkward while trying to connect with others. "People would be happy to go to a friend's barbecue and meet new people," he says. "Because networking has a business label on it, it gets a bit itchy."

He created an online training to help people learn how to network better and advocates reframing the opportunity to connect. "Don't view networking as difficult or think you have to be someone else," says David. "Just view it like you're being introduced to people at a friend's party—but in a professional environment."

Ching describes networking as a competency. At its core, it's about building relationships and developing real connections. "You must build rapport. Then you build a relationship. And

then you build trust," she says. "Many people will kill the relationship by just going in and trying to 'sell.'" She says it was her sincerity and belief in her dream that made all the difference when she networked.

Remember These Tips

It's important to remember that networking is a two-way street. In fact, Dukes approaches it as helping others. "I think about it as a chance to help someone else," she says. "It's not about what you can get; it's about what you can give."

Writing down your goals can help solidify them. It can also keep you focused when making decisions about where to spend your time, energy, and money for networking. Dukes has a vision board to keep her goals visible.

Establish an organizational system ahead of time so you can keep track of your contacts and how you will follow up. "Follow-up will reap you more benefits than anything else you do," says Dukes.

Networking benefits aren't always evident right away. Oftentimes, you will realize them later. You may also receive unexpected benefits. David connected with two people who became his unofficial mentors.

The more you prepare to network, the better you set yourself up for success. As Dukes says, "You can't just show up and wing it. That's the worst thing you can do. The better prepared you are, the more you'll benefit from it and others will, too."

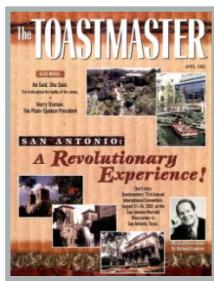
Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is a member of 5-Star Toastmasters Club in Arlington, Virginia, and AAMC Toastmasters in Washington, D.C., and a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. Learn more at jenniferlblanck.com.



The Toastmaster Magazine Through the Years

A look at the life of the 91-year-old publication.

By *Toastmaster* magazine staff



When the *Toastmaster* magazine debuted in April 1933—nine years after the Toastmasters organization began—it was a very modest package: less than 20 pages long, measuring only 6 inches by 3 inches, with news items about the mere 12 clubs that existed then.

But it was the start of something big. Since that time, the magazine has chronicled the ever-evolving world of Toastmasters, and now reaches more than 270,000 members in 148 countries. Over the years, the publication has spotlighted countless members and clubs around the globe; provided insight on wide-ranging, relevant communication and leadership topics; featured a creative expanse of photographs, graphics, and illustrations; and produced digital content that continues to expand in exciting ways.

For the first 70 years of its existence, the publication was called *The Toastmaster*. In 2004, *The* was removed and it has since been *Toastmaster* magazine. At the start, the magazine came out four times a year; in 1942 it became a bimonthly magazine, and has now been monthly since 1946.

What was in that debut issue of *The Toastmaster*? Mostly items about the existing clubs, a few short editorial pieces, a Critique Sheet (an early version of a speech evaluation form), and a column dubbed “Gavel Splinters,” described as exploring “the good and bad points of [Toastmasters] International, with some occasional ‘backdoor’ philosophy.” There was also a baby announcement of sorts, under this headline: “Seattle Club: Mr. and Mrs. Seattle are Proud To Announce the Birth of Their First Toastmaster’s Club.”

In its initial years, the magazine included a complete roster of clubs, a smattering of jokes and humorous anecdotes, quizzes, and articles. A column by the Toastmasters founder, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, was also a mainstay. What’s interesting is how similar the topics of that time are to what members still talk about today. Early articles looked at taming nerves, how to treat guests, choosing effective speech topics, how to add variety to Table Topics®, and highlights of the year’s International Convention. One story was on the timeless question of how to properly end your speech: “To Thank or Not to Thank.”

Editorial Leadership

The magazine’s editorial direction has been charted by a long list of talented editors, including Smedley, who

guided it for more than 20 years. Among the many who followed him was Suzanne Frey, who took over in 1987 and edited the *Toastmaster* for nearly 35 years. She gave it a more contemporary feel, and as a native of Sweden, brought an important international perspective to the publication, making it a mission to feature more stories on members outside North America.

Artwork in the magazine also evolved through the years. In the early decades, most visual imagery came in the form of illustrations, including magazine covers.

By the late 1980s, color print and photographs were used on two or three of the main articles in each issue. Then in 2002, the magazine began using color throughout the entire issue, sparking even more visual creativity in subsequent years. With her innovative layout designs, longtime graphic designer Sue Campbell has left her visual imprint on the magazine.

With the rapid rise of online publications, the magazine adapted as well, and by 2011, members could enjoy a PDF flipbook online, followed two years later by a tablet app. In October 2016, the magazine launched its first [web-based edition](#), and has continued to evolve the last eight years.

In 2020, COVID posed unanticipated challenges for Toastmasters. The magazine quickly began publishing scores of articles related to online communication, such as tips about virtual club meetings and how to present on Zoom. In addition, the print edition was suspended—the first time in the organization’s history—for financial and logistical reasons, and the focus turned to the digital edition. The magazine now is published online every month, along with a PDF version that is laid out like a magazine.

After more than 90 years of publication, and thousands of articles, the *Toastmaster* magazine still aptly reflects the core principles that Smedley laid out for the magazine years ago, including this goal:

“To produce a magazine which would be of maximum help to the clubs and to their individual members.”

To browse the archives of the *Toastmaster* magazine, go to toastmasters.org/Magazine/Explore and filter by Year.

In honor of Toastmasters International’s 100th anniversary, this is the fourth in a year-long series of articles commemorating historic milestones.

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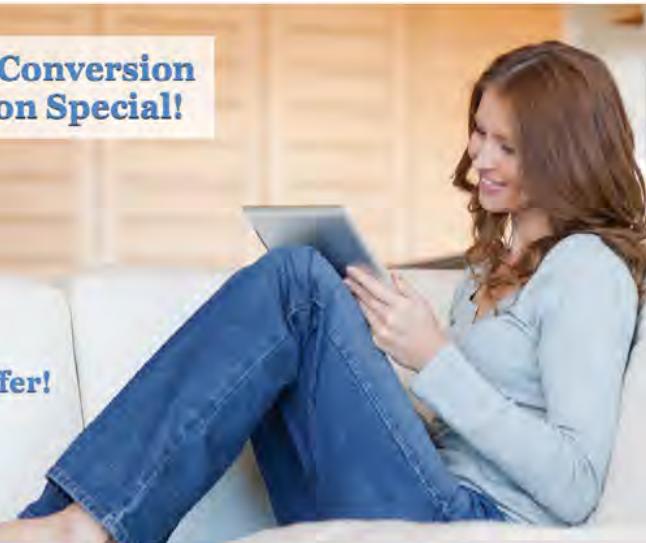
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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood"? Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at



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