

# TOASTMASTER®



## What's Your Club Culture?

When learning is fun, achievement soars.

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# Cross-cultural Communication



In Dr. Smedley's time, the term "cross-cultural communication" was hardly used, nor was it in the general consciousness. Today, as the world has shrunk, cross-cultural communication is common and worth study by any speaker or leader. This is especially true in our organization, where a full 42 percent of our members live outside the United States. Even the U.S. represents different cultures, with a large proportion of its population being foreign-born. I was awed when conducting district visits in the U.S. and Canada recently by how multicultural our organization has become.

For example, members of the Microsoft Speechmakers club, who meet at Microsoft's headquarters near Seattle, Washington, represent a proverbial melting pot of cultures.

When I searched online for cross-cultural communication, I came upon the strategy of "LEARN," which stands for:

- L – Listen to what a person is saying**
- E – Effectively communicate**
- A – Avoid ambiguity**
- R – Respect differences**
- N – No judgment**

It occurs to me that the LEARN strategy is equally applicable to all interpersonal communication. This underscores the fact that each individual represents a unique culture made up of personality, character and life experiences. We even speak to different "cultures" within our own families when we speak to our spouse, parents and children. This is why communication, whether interpersonal or cross-cultural, is so challenging. As human beings, we are born with the unique gift of sophisticated communication ability; however, to truly master this skill is a lifelong endeavor.

At least when we communicate cross-culturally, we are aware of speaking in a different context and we understand that the listener holds a different understanding. However, when we speak to another person in our own culture, we tend to assume the listener is a replica of ourselves. This couldn't be further from the truth.

There are four keys to cross-cultural as well as intercultural communication.

- 1. Build self-awareness**
- 2. Listen with empathy**
- 3. Take an Attitude of Equality**
- 4. Bring assumptions out into the open**

One thing is certain, as our world shrinks inexorably, cross-cultural communication will become increasingly important. Bernard Baruch, American financier and adviser to U.S. presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, observed a century ago, "We didn't all come over on the same ship, but we are all in the same boat." ■

**GEORGE YEN, DTM**  
International President

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P.O. Box 9052, Mission Viejo, CA 92690 U.S.A.

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**"Thank you for offering me the opportunity to perhaps pique people's interest in finding out more about Tourette Syndrome."**

— Cara Wasden, ACB, CL

### In Tune

Emiko Hori hit the high note in Craig Harrison's article, "A Musician's Mindset" (January). Ms. Hori credits her public speaking success to her music training, through which she mastered skills like preparation, performance, self-evaluation and goal setting. She used those skills, thinking of a speech as a music score, rehearsing its rhythms and cadence on her journey from her Ice Breaker to becoming a professional speaker.

As a musician myself I have often credited my success in Toastmasters to the very same principles that Ms. Hori brought forth. The speech takes on the feeling of a music composition. The words become notes, the sentences a phrase, the paragraph a verse. Each part must flow smoothly with the next. We become aware of tone and articulation, shading and accents, all the stuff that help make for a good speech and delivery. But a word of advice here: Just as a musician must practice to maintain skills, so must we as public speakers.

Jonathan Bailey, ATMB  
Babylon Babblers club  
Babylon, New York

### Tackling Tourette's

I'd like to thank Mary Nesfield for doing such a wonderful job in writing the "Rising Above the Stigma" article about me in the January *Toastmaster*. My brother is an eighth-grade English

teacher, and he has a student with Tourette Syndrome. He showed the young boy the article and it made the boy's day. Hearing that made my day, too. Thank you for offering me the opportunity to perhaps pique people's interest in finding out more about Tourette Syndrome.

Cara Wasden, ACB, CL  
Toast of Petaluma club  
Petaluma, California

### A Positive View

I get excited about life. I get excited every day when I open my eyes and have a chance of living another day. Living ... do we take it for granted? I asked this question after reading John Cadley's article ("Happy New Year?") in the January *Toastmaster* magazine. I know many individuals who (like Mr. Cadley) don't drink alcohol, live in upstate New York, have few hobbies and don't frequent the gym. The one thing they have, that Mr. Cadley might choose to add to his life, is a positive outlook. A new beginning—is it too much? It sure beats no beginning.

Kathy Barlow, CC, Ed.D.  
Lunchtime club  
Albany, New York

### Going Blank

As speakers, we all fear that terrifying moment when our brain shuts down and the words we're searching for simply aren't there. I experienced "brain freeze" recently while giving my 23rd speech.

Two sentences into the speech, I went totally blank. With complete composure, I said to my fellow club members and guests: "This has never happened before ... I've lost my train of thought." Unfortunately, I had left my notes at my seat and considered walking over to get them, but decided to trust that the well-rehearsed words would return—and they did. The moment I relaxed and admitted my lapse, the words came.

I learned two lessons: Always bring notes to the lectern, and know that you can recover when your mind goes blank.

Donne Davis, ACB, CL  
Menlo Park Toastmasters  
Menlo Park, California

### A Tip for Grammarians

I read the "Club Survival Tip" about the grammarians' role (in the Around the Globe section, January). On the whole, I agreed with the tips, but it did not recognize that most Toastmasters speak English as a *lingua franca* [a language used to make communication possible between people not sharing a mother tongue]. Research shows that "proper grammar" does not automatically make communication clearer. English is a versatile language that allows for a surprising amount of errors before communication suffers. I recommend that grammarians only note errors that may cause misunderstandings; this could include the overuse of native expressions.

Laura Murto-Lindén, CC  
Stadi Talkers  
Helsinki, Finland

### DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write it in 200 words or less. State your name, member number and home club, and send it to [letters@toastmasters.org](mailto:letters@toastmasters.org). Please note: Letters are subject to editing for length and clarity, and may be published in both the print and electronic editions.



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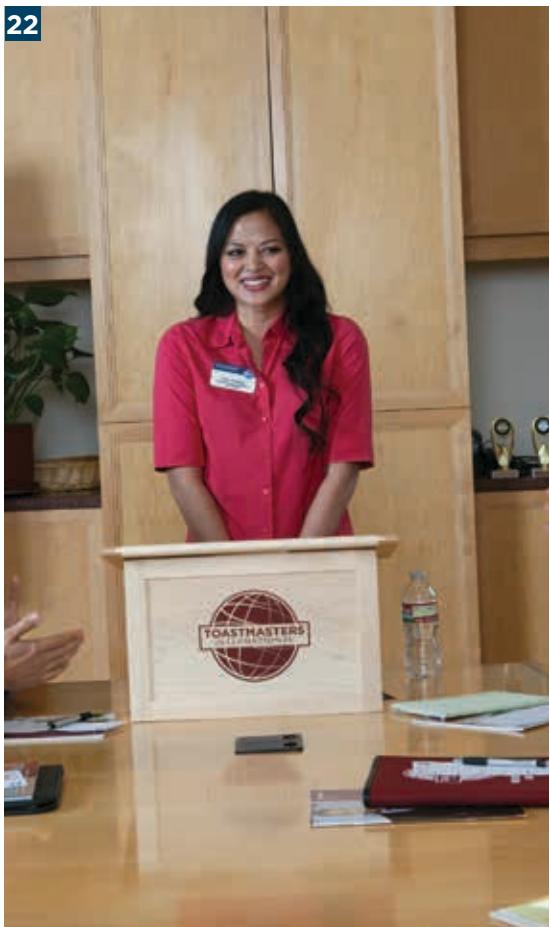
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## 3 Ways to Interact with the *Toastmaster*

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\*The April issue will be available soon.



### April Digital Content Highlights

- See the five winning club videos in the Toastmasters brand contest.
- Watch a video clip of the speech that earned Shurooq Albanna a place in the top three at the 2013 World Championship of Public Speaking.
- Watch renowned speech expert Paddy Kennedy talk about how to reduce your accent to be better understood.

# AROUND THE GLOBE

## MEMBER MOMENT



### A Most Enthusiastic Host



*Yat Seow Low, DTM, past District 51 Governor*

When Kuala Lumpur was selected as the site of the 2014 International Convention, Yat Seow Low, DTM, volunteered to chair the host district committee. Yat Seow, who lives in Kuala Lumpur, is a past District 51 governor and a member of D'Utama Advanced Toastmasters club in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

Yat Seow received a Toastmasters Presidential Citation in 2012 for his contributions to the organization, which include chairing many district conferences and speech contests. He holds an MBA, with degrees in civil engineering and business computing, and is a general manager for a real estate developer.

#### Why did you volunteer for this role?

I volunteered for the position because (1) I have benefited from Toastmasters International in so many ways since I joined in 1996, and this presents a great opportunity for me to serve the

organization in return; (2) I enjoy working with a team of committed Toastmasters in a journey where we can enhance friendship and bonding, as well as strengthen our love for the organization; (3) this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity; and (4) it's a chance to promote Malaysia to the rest of the world, especially since 2014 is "Visit Malaysia Year."

#### What's the greatest challenge in preparing your district to host the convention?

It is to get enough volunteers from District 51 to serve at the convention.

#### What do you think will surprise attendees about the city?

The multicultural heritage of Malaysia and the warm hospitality of its residents. I am confident that convention attendees will find Malaysians very friendly. Most Malaysians speak English. A variety of food is available 24 hours a day at a very reasonable price.

#### What is the No. 1 tourist attraction in or near Kuala Lumpur?

I recommend seeing Batu Caves, a limestone hill with a series of caves and temples that houses a Hindu temple and shrine. The limestone formation of the caves is said to be 400 million years old. The main temple rises almost 100 meters above the ground. After you climb 272 steps, the stunning skyline of Kuala Lumpur unfolds before you.

**What are some helpful phrases for attendees to know?**  
Greet someone with the words *selamat datang*, meaning "welcome." Ask someone how he/she is doing with *Apakah kabar?* Express your gratitude by saying *terima kasih*, which means "thank you."

**What Toastmasters skills have prepared you for this role?**  
The skills to communicate effectively as a leader, to listen to the views of others and to make better decisions based on sound evaluations.

## In Brief

### TUNE IN

Listen to the Toastmasters Podcast for tips and laughs. Each one includes an informative and entertaining interview. [www.toastmasters.org/podcast](http://www.toastmasters.org/podcast)

### POWERPOINT RESOURCE

Check out presentation expert Dave Paradi's blog for advice on creating effective PowerPoint slideshows. [pptideas.blogspot.com](http://pptideas.blogspot.com)

### GRAMMAR GUIDANCE

Want to fine-tune your grammar? See a list of common errors in English usage at [www.public.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html](http://www.public.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html).

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## SNAPSHOT



**1 | Batu Caves:** Climb 272 steps to see this sacred Hindu shrine.

**2 | KL Bird Park:** This eco-tourism park is billed as "the world's largest free-flight walk-in aviary."

**3 | Central Market:** A gifts emporium offering a variety of handicrafts, art, textiles and other authentic Malaysian souvenirs.

**4 | Putra Mosque:** Located in Putrajaya, Malaysia, this gem of Islamic architecture is located next to the Perdana Putra, which houses the Malaysian Prime Minister's office.

## INTERNATIONAL INTERPRETATIONS

### KL's Culinary Treats



*Nasi lemak. Char siew. Sago gula melaka.* These are merely three of many sumptuous dishes popular in Kuala Lumpur. If you seek gastronomic adventures, this Malaysian city is the place for you! The site of the 2014 Toastmasters International Convention, Kuala Lumpur offers widely diverse fare spiced by Malay, Chinese and Indian flavors. The city is known for its range of both roadside food stalls and acclaimed high-end restaurants. *Nasi lemak*, considered the unofficial national dish, is made of rice cooked in coconut milk and flavorful pandan leaves. Many variations exist, but *nasi lemak* is typically served with fried anchovies, sliced cucumbers, a fried egg, roasted peanuts and chili sauce. Kuala Lumpur's local food hub is Jalan Alor, a street that offers a vibrant scene with food stalls luring visitors with popular offerings like honey-glazed *char siew* (barbecued pork) and stingray grilled in banana leaf. For a traditional Malaysian dessert, try *sago gula melaka*, made of sago pudding, coconut milk and a palm sugar syrup.

What to drink? One of KL's most popular beverages is *teh tarik*, a tea prepared with condensed milk that offers a frothy texture and sweet flavor.



*Nasi lemak* is the unofficial national dish of Malaysia.

## AROUND THE GLOBE

### WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

#### What are the secrets of success in bilingual clubs?

"Many clubs in and around Montreal, Canada, are bilingual.

The HEC Toastmasters club conducts the first hour of its meetings in English before moving to a French or bilingual session. English-only sessions start first, since many members are international MBA students who know English well, but are less fluent in French. Those not studying at the university usually have day jobs, so they are more likely to arrive later for a bilingual experience in which French usually prevails as the main language."

**David Rowley, ACB**  
HEC Toastmasters and Outremont Mile-End Plateau clubs  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

"In 1996, we chartered The Europeans club, an English/French bilingual club in Paris. Members must at least *understand* both languages, but it is better if they are fluent in both. We have two grammarians at each meeting, one for French and one for English, with each one proposing a word of the day. Members may speak in either language, but if they begin a presentation in one, they must complete it in that same language (no "franglisch" allowed).

If the Table Topicsmaster asks a question in one language, the speaker can answer in the other language. The same thing goes for a speech and its evaluation. The club has been functioning this way for 15 years, to great success."

**Odile Petillot, DTM**  
Past District 59 Governor  
Expressions club and The Europeans club  
Paris area, France

### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The only reason to give a speech is to change the world."

— John F. Kennedy

### PRESENTATION TIP

## How to Introduce a Speaker



Every speaker deserves a thoughtful and gracious introduction—it helps the audience feel good about the speaker and sets a positive tone for the speech to come. Although it's usually less than a minute long, the introduction still has all the elements of a full speech:

- An opening. It grabs the audience's attention (perhaps with an intriguing fact about the speaker's topic) and highlights the importance of the subject.
- A body. It explains why the speaker chose the topic and why it is relevant to this particular audience. The speaker's credentials and expertise on the matter should also be briefly cited here.

■ A conclusion. It paves the way for the speaker to begin the presentation. When introducing a speaker, try to be graceful as well as witty if appropriate. Make your words fun and lively! But don't steal the show—make it all about the speaker. And leave out claims that the speaker is especially brilliant, successful or a "good speaker." The goal is to end the introduction just as the audience's interest is piqued.

If you are the speaker, don't assume the person who will introduce you will do it well. To be safe, send the introducer an advanced copy of an introduction that you write yourself.

### LEARNING FROM OUR PAST INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENTS



**PAT JOHNSON, DTM**  
Past International President  
2010–2011  
*Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*

## A Memorable Moment: Life Goes On

I woke in the middle of the night to the sound of sirens, flashing lights and fire engines. A police officer was banging on the door, screaming, "Get out, get out. Your barn is on fire."

When the flames finally died and the sun rose high in the sky, we learned we had lost eight prized show horses that night, along with our tack, our equipment, our horse feed, our livelihood.

I sat and stared at the smoldering ash, when suddenly a feeling came over me as if I could feel the spirits of the horses rising from the devastation. And in that moment I knew life would go on. The strength of the human spirit rises above tragedy—like a spirit from the ashes. Yes, life does go on.

## MEET MY MENTOR



# Dale Grieves, DTM

No one has the potential to influence a member's experience like a mentor. Trish Appleton, CC, is a financial comptroller and member of City Centre Toastmasters in Prince George, British Columbia, Canada. She shares how her mentor, Dale Grieves, DTM, has helped her.

### When did you first meet your mentor?

In 2007, I was taking some college courses that required quite a bit of role-playing and presentations. At about the same time, Dale and I began working together in the same office at the Prince George School District. That was when she began mentoring me, although I was not yet a Toastmaster.

### How did Dale mentor you?

She listened patiently as I expressed my fear of speaking in front of my college classmates and reassured me that I had the skills needed to succeed in my assignments.

Each time I updated her on my successes, she gave me the kind of smile that said, *There was no doubt in my mind that you could do it.* Dale spent many hours mentoring me, and in 2011, I finally felt ready to join Toastmasters.

### Why did you join Toastmasters?

I joined because I had been unsuccessful in securing a position that aligned with my career goals. I'm a bit of an independent introvert, and I wanted to learn how to network and lose my fear of voicing my opinion. I needed to become more assertive, while remaining respectful. I needed to set boundaries and increase my confidence in my abilities.

### How has Dale helped you?

Because I was a new Toastmaster, Dale guided, supported and encouraged me as I worked my way through the *Competent Communication* manual and most of the *Competent Leadership* manual. She offered honest feedback on my speeches and club meeting roles.

### What goals have you accomplished since joining Toastmasters?

Helped by Dale's expertise and professional demeanor, I reached a level of confidence in public speaking that previously seemed like a fairy tale. I also became financial comptroller for a nonprofit organization.

### What is your one favorite thing about your mentor?

Dale has many admirable attributes; if I had to pick just one, I'd say it is her sincere enthusiasm.



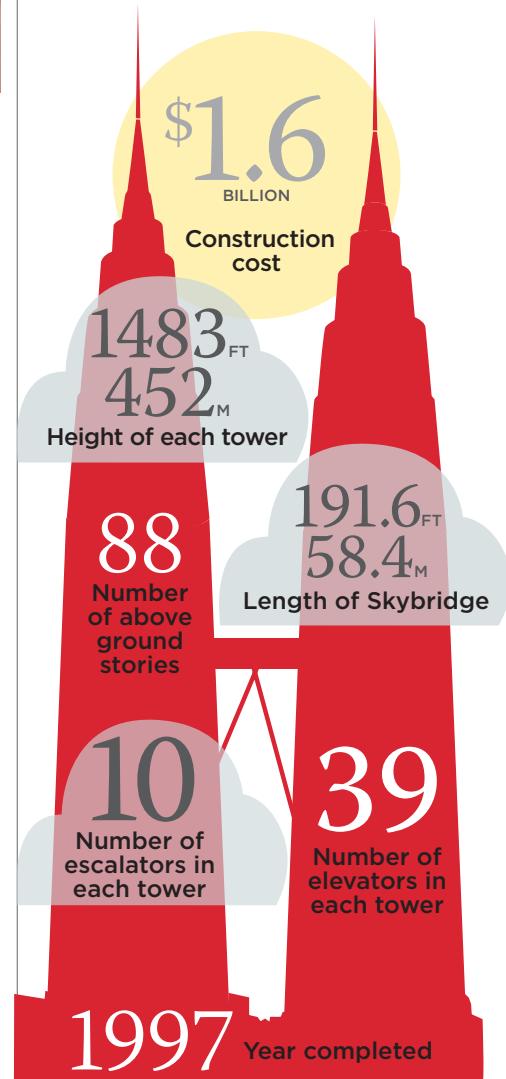
**FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:** Trish Appleton, CC, and her mentor Dale Grieves, DTM.

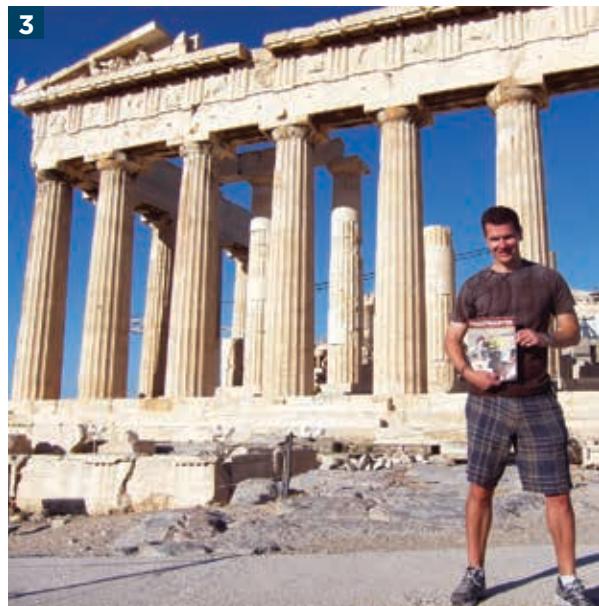
## FACTS WORTH KNOWING

# Kuala Lumpur's Famous Skyline

If you attend the 2014 International Convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, visit the Petronas Twin Towers—the sixth tallest buildings in the world, according to the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat. A popular tourist attraction, the towers house 8 million square feet of shopping and entertainment facilities. Designed by Argentine-American architect César Pelli, each tower's structure forms an eight-pointed star, a design inspired by traditional Malaysian Islamic patterns.

Get a free ticket to the Skybridge connecting the twin towers at the 41st floor, or pay to access the eastern tower's observatory on the 86th floor for a spectacular view!





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# From Tragedy to Triumph

How education helped me become a catalyst for change in Haiti.

BY SEPHORA PIERRE-LOUIS, DTM

**W**hen I was 19 and living in Haiti, my mom—the pillar of my life—suddenly passed away. She was 45. In a heartbeat, I was left to care for my 9-year-old brother while working full time and going to school. Mourning my loss, I struggled with class presentations and my new position as an assistant manager for a manufacturing company. I felt angry and unfocused at work, and I lacked the basic communication skills to perform my job.

My boss had just joined the Flamboyant Toastmasters club in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, and she invited me to visit. I loved the spirit of encouragement and professionalism displayed by members, and I joined right away. Little did I know that Toastmasters would become the centerpiece of my education, helping me succeed in my career as well as aid my fellow Haitians in a time of crisis.

As I expanded my network of mentors and friends, I gained confidence and began healing from my pain and mourning. Jean Robert Lebrun, DTM, past division governor of District 81 and one of the pioneers of Toastmasters involvement in Haiti, became my mentor. I joined his team to help sponsor and charter new clubs in Haiti. My confidence grew further, and at work I could now hold effective meetings, communicate with clarity and motivate my team to reach its goals. Eventually, I was promoted to marketing and sales manager.

In December 2009, six years after I joined, I became a Distinguished Toastmaster. Although I continued to mentor clubs and new members, I felt that my time in Toastmasters was coming to an end. Then in 2010, catastrophe struck. A 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti. More than 200,000 people perished in 45 seconds, and millions were left with nothing. I mourned the families and friends who died. And I became an active member of Partners of the Americas, an international grassroots network that helps others in need. I volunteered on several projects, helping children, elders and people with disabilities, and using the communication and leadership skills that I honed in Toastmasters.



*After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Sephora Pierre-Louis earned a master's degree and founded FormatAide to help Haitian business owners.*

But I wanted to do more: I wanted to help Haitians gain greater access to education, and I wanted to provide small-business entrepreneurs with more training. So I applied for scholarships and pitched business ideas. In 2011, I was granted a Fulbright Award to be used to obtain a master's degree in business administration in the United States. I moved to attend Mills College in Oakland, California, but with some trepidation—I was going to start a new journey in a new country with two young daughters, in a place where I didn't know anyone.

My family and I were welcomed by several Toastmasters from various clubs. The support I received was tremendous. For example, when we first arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area, our apartment was not yet ready for us; but Bill Young, ATMS, a member of the Lakeview club in Oakland, opened his home to us until we could move into

our new home. I quickly joined two advanced clubs in the Bay Area, Heart2Heart and LaughLovers, to practice my English-speaking skills and build self-confidence.

My support team, especially Area Governor Randie Ellington, ACS, ALB, played a huge role in my journey as a student. I graduated from Mills College last year with honors. Improving my education allowed me to increase my value in the marketplace, and I am now better able to give back to the Haitian community. I established FormatAide to provide training to Haitian business owners, to help them lead and grow their companies to become independent and self-sustaining.

Toastmasters continues to provide me support through its worldwide community. It is a gift that continues to give, and one that helps me give back. ■

**SEPHORA PIERRE-LOUIS, DTM**, is a project manager and a member of several clubs in the Oakland, California, area. She is founder and executive director of FormatAide ([formataide.org](http://formataide.org)), an organization dedicated to leading the regrowth of the Haitian economy.



## Shurooq AlBanna: Speaking From the Heart

Arab Toastmaster reflects on her rise to third place at the World Championship of Public Speaking.

Three years after her friend Wafa Alnakhhi, CC, introduced her to Toastmasters, Shurooq AlBanna, of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, made Toastmasters history, becoming the first Arab woman to advance to the World Championship of Public Speaking. Not only did she reach this level (the final round of the 2013 International Speech Contest)—she came in third place.

“What I really like about AlBanna is her commitment and her ambition,” says Alnakhhi. “Whenever she decides to do something, she will do it, no matter how much that thing will cost her.”

AlBanna works for the Noor Dubai Foundation, a nonprofit organization with a mission to eradicate preventable forms of blindness. She manages the foundation’s charity Art 4 Sight, an

**One lady told me: “You made Arab women proud, you were our voice.”**

annual art exhibition and auction. AlBanna, who speaks Arabic, English, French and Spanish, has a master’s degree in strategic marketing from the University of Wollongong in Dubai.

A member of the Lagoon Toastmasters in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, she won her district’s Humorous Speech Contest in 2012. At the 2013 International Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, AlBanna delivered her championship-round speech wearing a “shayla” (headscarf) and “abaya” (a black long-sleeved robe or garment). Titled “Finding the Pearl,” the speech urged listeners to look beyond the superficial qualities of people—and appreciate the good that each individual possesses.

### **How did you learn about Toastmasters?**

I came to know about Toastmasters while obtaining my postgraduate degree but I did not make much of it until a work colleague invited me to a club meeting. She was presenting a speech and I only went to support her, but I was in awe after her performance. Before that, I never realized how much more there is to public speaking than what we see on television or through the media. My interest to delve into the art of public speaking and master it was ignited then, in that meeting, as my colleague presented her speech.

### **What kind of attention did you receive as the first woman from an Arab country to advance to the championship?**

My achievement was celebrated in several countries. I sensed pride in everyone I met who was aware of my achievement, especially the ladies. One lady told me: “You made Arab women proud, you were our voice.” This excites me, and humbles me at the same time.

### **Do many women in your district enter speech contests?**

Definitely. I’ve been in Toastmasters for only three years but I noticed that many women of different nationalities participate in speech contests in District 20, which I find beautiful.

### **In a recent interview you said, “I’m not who you think I am.” Please tell us more about that.**

I am not who you think I am and *nobody is who we think they are*. It is the key message in many of my speeches. Often, we make judgments about other people and stereotype them based on our cultures or experiences. More often than not, people surprise us with their humbleness, humility and kindness, and we regret our initial judgment. It’s my way of reminding people to give others a chance to prove themselves.

### **Do you have any role models when it comes to public speaking?**

Not really. I get moved and inspired by random people in my everyday life. For example, I might be attending a medical or humanitarian conference and be inspired by a doctor who is presenting a case but delivering it with his heart and soul. I also find myself trying to pick up on certain techniques, altering them to make them my own. You are very likely to find the gems under the most unlikely rocks. I am inspired by teachers, lecturers, doctors and even CEOs who use their words wisely to change the world.

### **In your championship-round speech, you spoke about the importance of finding the good in people. How has that approach benefited you?**

I try to use this approach in my everyday life. It is impossible not to clash with people, but how do we deal with it? By reminding ourselves that despite the actions of others, those people are still



*Shurooq Albanna competes in the World Championship of Public Speaking last August.*

good. They have their own struggles, and there is a good reason why they behave in a certain way. This is why it's best to just let it go and take the high road. Forgive them and move on.

#### **Was 2013 the first time you came to the United States? If so, what was that like for you?**

That was my second visit to the U.S., and I loved it. During my visits, Americans have been so kind and hospitable. I felt comfortable. It proved to me that regardless of race, humanity and kindness are found everywhere.

#### **Do you alter your presentation style when speaking to Western audiences?**

Altering the presentation style to fit the audience is key to reaching out to other cultures, especially when it comes to humor, as it does not translate well. I alter my presentations because I don't want to see puzzled faces in the audience as I speak.

#### **What is the main difference between Arab and Western communication styles?**

The main difference is in body language. I noticed Arabs accentuate their hand gestures a lot more. The choice of topics is also different, but then this applies to all different cultures.

#### **How is your approach to communication and public speaking similar to, or different from, other Arab women?**

I rarely compare myself or my style to others; neither do I spend hours studying other speakers. I have a firm belief and I stick to it: Deliver in your own unique style simply by being yourself and speaking from your heart. Being true to yourself allows you to create your own style. I dislike mimicking other people because then I become more like them and less like me. It works for me every time.

#### **Does your traditional attire limit your gestures?**

Not at all. In fact, it helps me. It controls my body language so I do not exaggerate my gestures and how I walk on stage. It also reminds me that I am a proud Arab woman who should always be graceful in my words and actions. My traditional attire is part of my identity, and it empowers me when I speak.

#### **Do you see yourself as a role model for Arab women?**

I sure do hope so. My main aim is to inspire others to work hard and achieve their dreams and not to be hindered or frustrated by the perils that face them. I hope many are inspired by my nine-month journey to the World Championship, and that they use that inspiration to fulfill their own wishes.

#### **You used humor well in your championship-round speech. How do you make your humor relevant to an international audience?**

I am very careful when it comes to using humor. I seek help from my friends in a specific culture so that my words translate well and do not offend anyone. With my championship-round speech, I was lucky to understand American humor as I grew up watching American sitcoms like *Friends*, *The Golden Girls* and *Frasier*.

#### **What was your topic when you won the district-level Humorous Speech Contest in 2012?**

I tackled an issue that every girl across the world faces. Regardless of the culture or the means, every woman is set on finding her "Mr. Right," and so am I. Instead of being frustrated by the process, I decided to inject humor into a normally stressful situation. I am delighted that so many women, and a few men, identified with me.

#### **What are your plans for the future?**

I have many, but the most important one is to take a "chill-pill" and practice what I preach. I don't want to be sucked into a hectic lifestyle and miss out on the simple joys and special "moments" that we take for granted. I aim to nourish my mind, body and soul. This includes practicing other languages, eating well and being very sincere in my prayers. □



# Show Off



## Five winning clubs share their enthusiasm for the brand.

Congratulations to the winners of Toastmasters International's Video Brand Contest. From August 1 through December 31, 2013, members from around the world captured their enthusiasm for Toastmasters and for their clubs on video. The top 10 club videos for each of those months were selected and entered into a drawing, and one of the 10 clubs was drawn to become that month's winner.

Since 2011, when the brand refresh was introduced, clubs have made great strides to transition to the new brand. And help is on the way for many clubs with insufficient funds for purchasing branded materials.

The contest will run through December 31, 2014. So if your club needs help branding, enter the Toastmasters monthly brand video contest to win a banner, lectern or popular marketing materials for your club. Best of all, the winning videos are seen by thousands of members and potential members. What better way to promote your club than to show your enthusiasm in a creative way?

For more information, visit [www.toastmasters.org/brandportal](http://www.toastmasters.org/brandportal) and scroll down to see, and be inspired by, the latest winning video submission in the Video Brand Contest.



**August: San Luis Obispo Toastmasters, San Luis Obispo, California**

**Founded in 1955;  
24 active members**

*The Toastmasters brand represents decades of experience. It signifies the caring and supportive nature of the organization, which is dedicated to making each member throughout its global community a better speaker, communicator and leader. The new logo's bold and bright color palette mirrors the organization's forward momentum.*

— Rachell Newburn, CL



**September: Toastmasters Club of Pune, Maharashtra, Pune, India**  
**Founded in 2008;  
42 active members**

*Toastmasters International is associated with quality: The quality of its educational program and the quality of its evaluations. We love the consistency of the meeting structure across the world!*

— Prasad Sovani, DTM  
District 41 Governor

# Your Club Video!



October: Camanava  
Brunch Toastmasters Club,  
Quezon City, Metro  
Manila, Philippines  
**Founded in 2005;  
22 active members**  
*We aim for high quality.  
We aim for excellence. And  
with excellence, everything  
else that we aim for follows.*

— Eduardo R. Catayoc, III,  
ACS, ALB



November: Peace Speakers  
Toastmasters,  
Louisville, Kentucky  
**Founded in 2005;  
12 active members**

When brainstorming the concept for our club's video, we thought of adjectives describing the Toastmasters brand. The list grew long. In 12 words we concluded that Toastmasters is: Transcultural, Organized, Affirming, Supportive, Thorough, Meaningful, Accountable, Successful, Transformative, Encouraging, Rewarding and Spectacular. The Toastmasters logo and tagline, "Where Leaders Are Made," are inclusive to these adjectives, as are several more. If only "Toastmasters" had more than 12 letters!

— Robin Rueff

December: Walter Gage Toastmasters,  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada  
**Founded in 1979; 40 active members**  
*The new Toastmasters brand has a refreshing and more contemporary look that shows how Toastmasters continues to evolve. Although there is much to respect of the previous emblem, the new logo allows for greater diversification of the organization. Whereas we have previously, and continue to be known for our public speaking, a simplified and unified emblem can draw in both the leadership and educational features of the organization, and put them on the forefront*

— Cassandra Chan, ACB 



# Presenting in Your Second Language

How not to get lost in translation.

BY DENISE GRAVELINE

More and more, speakers around the world deliver talks in their second or even third language. And thanks to globalization, that second language is most likely English. United Kingdom-based speaker coach Max Atkinson, author of *Lend Me Your Ears: All You Need to Know about Making Speeches and Presentations*, explains in his blog the role of the English language with a story about a lecture in Italy presented in English by Italian novelist and scholar Umberto Eco:

*He had just started his lecture when a group of locals demanded to know why he was speaking English in an Italian university. His response was impressively democratic and he asked the audience: "How many of you can only speak English?"*

*I was one of a tiny minority of five or six native speakers of British and American English who raised their hands. In response to which Eco quickly rephrased his question: "For how many of you is English the only foreign language you can understand?"*

*The vast majority of hands now went up, to which Eco turned to his compatriots and said: "As my lecture was advertised to be in English and the only language most people here understand is English, I shall give my lecture in English"—at which point, the rebellious Italian minority walked out.*

Using a second language for your speech or presentation, then, is all about the audience and what the majority of your listeners will understand. But that doesn't mean your audience understands English *fluently*, nor does it mean that you do. It's a big challenge for any speaker. Here are suggestions from speakers and speechwriters living and working in countries as varied as Belgium, Canada, South Korea, Spain and the United Kingdom to help you prepare for the challenge:



*Italian novelist and scholar Umberto Eco lectured in English at an Italian university because he discovered that more people in the audience understood English than Italian.*

**1 Keep it simple:** “When people want to impress an audience, they overcompensate,” says Canadian speechwriter Amélie Crosson, who has written speeches in French and English for bankers, prime ministers and parliamentarians. “A lot of people think plain English is a sign of ignorance—they’ll say ‘utilize’ instead of ‘use.’ Relax. Keep it simple.”

Speaker coach Florian Mueck, ACG, a member of Prestigious Speakers in Barcelona, Spain, agrees. “Having a small vocabulary isn’t a disadvantage,” says Mueck, a native speaker of German who also gives speeches in English and Spanish. “Less is more in public speaking, and often native speakers could [simplify their language] and say less.”

**2 Don’t get lost in translation:** Use humor, metaphor and analogy sparingly. Mia Doornaert, a former speechwriter

to the prime minister of Belgium, says, “Beware of jokes and humor and figures [of speech] that may not translate, or may resonate very differently in other languages and cultures.”

U.K. speaker coach Atkinson warns that popular culture metaphors can cause confusion in a second language—something that is even true when the speaker is using American English versus British English. In his blog, he notes, “As a native speaker of British English, I often find myself bemoaning the fact that we have imported so many baseball metaphors from American English, even though it’s not a game that’s played or understood by most British adults. .... Cricketing metaphors may be fine for speakers of English in Australasia, the Caribbean or the Indian subcontinent, but they’re not of much use in the United States, or indeed in the rest of Europe.”

**3 Think short:** Crosson, the Canadian speechwriter, recommends “thinking short” in every way: short words and short, declarative sentences. She says, “You don’t want to have a long speech, because speakers in their second language tend to speak slower. You need to make your words count.” She notes if your audience includes a lot of people for whom English is a second language, they will have learned a simple sentence structure: subject—verb—object.

Doornaert agrees: “If you don’t want to get lost in translation, keep sentences short.” At the United Nations she heard the story of a French simultaneous interpreter from Germany who, during a long German sentence, was heard to implore desperately: “*Le verbe, le verbe s’il vous plaît!*” (The verb, I beg of you, the verb!)

## LOOKING AT LANGUAGE



*Practice is the best way to improve speaking in a nonnative language. Record yourself to hear how you sound and join a bilingual Toastmasters club.*



### The Benefits of Being Bilingual

You can easily make a case for the benefits of speaking two or more languages in a globalized world. And any speaker with a multilingual audience can guess that his or her own bilingual skills can help listeners better understand a message, but does being bilingual benefit the speaker once the presentation is over?

Yudhijit Bhattacharjee notes in the *New York Times* that “being bilingual, it turns out, makes you smarter. It can have a profound effect on your brain.”

Researchers observe bilinguals in every age group, from babies to the elderly, and their studies suggest that when bilinguals encounter challenging tasks, they may be able to complete them faster or more efficiently than monolinguals. It also appears likely that adult learners of a second language can also reap the cognitive benefits.

Bhattacharjee likens it to a cognitive workout for your brain’s executive function, which controls your ability to solve complex problems, stay focused on a task, pay attention, switch between tasks, and plan. And research also indicates that older bilinguals appear to be able to put off the start of dementia or Alzheimer’s disease.

**4 Use each language's special strengths:** Doornaert speaks several languages herself, and noted that as a speechwriter she wrote in three languages: in Dutch (her mother tongue) and French (two major official languages of Belgium) and in English for international speeches. “I really felt how every language has a personality, a genius of its own. I would switch a kind of ‘language button’ in my head. For instance, a French speech will have a different rhythm and flow than one in Dutch or English.”

In an article in *The American Scholar* magazine, William Zinsser, author of *On Writing Well*, says the definition of “good writing” depends on which country you are from, thanks to the innate differences in languages. Speakers can benefit from his advice to writers seeking to switch from another language to English:

*I once asked a student from Cairo, “What kind of language is Arabic?” I was trying to put myself into her mental process of switching from Arabic to English. She said, “It’s all adjectives.” Well, of course it’s not all adjectives, but I knew what she meant: it’s decorative, it’s ornate, it’s intentionally pleasing. Another Egyptian student, when I asked him about Arabic, said, “It’s all proverbs. We talk in proverbs. People say things like ‘What you are seeking is also seeking you.’” ... Now I think it’s lovely that such a decorative language as Arabic exists. I wish I could walk around New York and hear people talking in proverbs. But all those adjectives and all that decoration would be the ruin of any journalist trying to write good English. No proverbs, please.*

If you are writing in your second language, Zinsser recommends aiming for clarity, simplicity, brevity and humanity.

**5 Pay attention to sounds:** Before you even consider pronunciation, basic sounds might trip you up. Canadian

speechwriter Crosson notes that English poses different problems for different language groups when it comes to speaking certain sounds aloud. She points out how troublesome some sounds in English can be, including *h* and *th* for French speakers, *j* and *y* for Spanish speakers, *w* and *v* for Germanic or Nordic speakers, and *l* and *r* for Asian speakers.

"If you don't know how to pronounce a word, don't use it," says Crosson. Speakers also need to consider how a multilingual audience will hear what they're saying. She suggests staying

**"A speech is a spoken art. If you're speaking in a language that's not your own, you have to hear your voice and record yourself to see how you sound."**

—speechwriter Amélie Crosson

positive and avoiding contractions such as *don't*. English speakers can hear the *t*, but non-English speakers often miss hearing it.

**6 Practice:** "A speech is a spoken art," says Crosson. "If you're speaking in a language that's not your own, you have to hear your voice and record yourself to see how you sound. Find the words that trip you up."

The Japanese English Bilingual Toastmasters club (JETM) in Seoul, South Korea, among other bilingual clubs, gives members lots of practice speaking foreign languages. Club President Taeryeon Jung says their group helps members speak two languages—Japanese and English—without using their native Korean language. At meetings, members speak in Japanese for one hour and in English for another hour. Jung says JETM members "share their stories and experiences from different cultures and fun episodes from small mistakes." The group has met jointly with the Tokyo Metropolitan Toastmasters club in Tokyo, Japan.

**7 Use all the tools:** To make sure the audience understands you while you speak in a second language, you'll need more than just words and pronunciation. Experts recommend emphasizing gestures, movement, inflection, posture and other tools to get your point across. And while many speakers rely on text while delivering talks in their second language, it's important that they use those tools to ensure a connection with the audience.

"As soon as people talk to a piece of paper, they begin losing," says José Iturri, a

*woman.blogspot.com*. She chaired the 2013 European Speechwriter Network Conference in Brussels, Belgium.



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--Scott Ginsberg, *The Nametag Guy*



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**DENISE GRAVELINE** is a Washington, DC-based speaker coach who blogs about women and public speaking at *eloquent*

# Vive La Différence in Club Meetings!

Does your club need a Snack Master or Posture Peeler? Variety brings fun and excitement to meetings.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

*"New members see that this is a fun, exciting place, and established members find something different each week."*

— Percy Roland, ACS, CL, vice president education of the Achievers club in Marbella, Spain

**H**ave you ever heard of a Listener/Quizzer, Posture Peeler or Snack Master? I had never heard of these Toastmasters meeting roles until I moved to a new country. My eyes opened to a new variety of club traditions.

In August 2013, I prepared to move from Washington, D.C., to Budapest, Hungary. I had never lived outside the United States and I didn't speak Hungarian. My new job would be in an English-speaking environment, but my life outside of work would not. With no family or friends in Budapest, and a totally new environment and language awaiting me, I thought about Toastmasters. I had been a member of Georgetown Toastmasters—which I founded—since 1995. While searching the Toastmasters website, I was excited to find four clubs in Budapest. One was even affiliated with my new employer, and the club met close to my new office.

After my move, I didn't wait long before attending my first meeting of the Budapest Toastmasters club. As I hoped, the meetings were conducted in English. In a world where everything was new to me, this was the one place where I knew what to expect. Or was it? The meeting followed the regular format: prepared speeches, Table Topics and evaluations. However, it started off with something new to me—a warm-up round where the Toastmaster of the day posed a question to everyone in the room. Depending on the question, the answer could be one word, one sentence or a brief reply. The goal wasn't to give a speech, but to have everyone talk.



*Toastmasters meetings around the world provide common ground, but traditions can vary from club to club.*

This reminded me of the time I visited the Deloitte Toastmasters club in Sydney, Australia, while on holiday in 2010. The meeting's structure was similar to what I was used to, except in one area—Table Topics. All Table Topics responses were evaluated, just like prepared speeches.

These are just two ways that clubs differ. While they all offer the same core program, the more I talk with other Toastmasters, the more I learn about creative and fun new roles and approaches that clubs adopt all over the world.

### New Meeting Roles

Abbas Kudrati, CC, ALB, president of the Desert Pioneers club in Salmiya, Kuwait, incorporates three new roles into club meetings: Listener/Quizzer, Round Robin Master and Joke Master. At the end of each meeting, the Listener/Quizzer tests the listening skills of attendees by asking them questions relevant to topics discussed during the meeting.

Similar to the Toastmaster at Budapest Toastmasters (who begins meetings with a warm-up round), the Round Robin Master

at the Desert Pioneers club also starts meetings by giving everyone an opportunity to speak when a new topic or story is started, and everyone gets to build on it.

To set a positive tone and energize the group, the club's Joke Master shares a joke or funny story at the beginning of each meeting. This is another opportunity to grow as a speaker. "Telling a joke effectively—building the tension and delivering the punch line successfully—is one of the most challenging forms of public speaking," says Percy Roland, ACS, CL, vice president education of the Achievers club in Marbella, Spain, which also has a Joke Master.

## The more I talk with other Toastmasters, the more I learn about creative and fun new roles and approaches that clubs adopt all over the world.

At the Budapest Toastmasters club, the Joke Master role involves identifying the most humorous speaker of the meeting.

The Kuwait Advanced club in Hawally, Kuwait, adds an Anchor Evaluator to its meetings. As club vice president education, Kudrati explains how the Anchor Evaluator first evaluates the speaker and then serves as moderator while other members provide feedback. He also introduced the Posture Peeler role at the Bohra Toastmasters club in Manama, Bahrain. At the end of each meeting, the Posture Peeler reports on distracting mannerisms or irrelevant and incongruent body language. Kudrati also has heard of an Inspiration role, in which a member delivers a personal story, quote or reading after the welcome message to amuse, provoke or inspire.

Gloria García Ordoñez, CC, president of Malaga PTA in Malaga, Spain, shares how her club conducts debates at every meeting. "The Debate Master follows the Table Topics Master and prepares one or two motions, usually based on current affairs." One member is assigned to each side of the

argument. Similar to Table Topics, debates are improvised and timed at two minutes.

Past District 36 Governor and member of nine clubs in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, Mary Ann Guerra, DTM, notices differences in her clubs. Humorously Speaking in Chevy Chase, Maryland, has a Humorator who presents a Best Humor award at each meeting. Capital City Speakers in Washington, D.C., assigns a Snack Master to bring refreshments.

The Achievers club in Spain also asks a volunteer to bring refreshments for attendees to enjoy after the meeting. "Socializing is an essential part of our club meetings,"

in Laurel, Maryland, named in honor of a man who had a talent for recruiting new members and building new clubs, has an Observed Jim Whitney Moment immediately before the meeting adjourns.

Some clubs take the "toast" in Toastmasters literally. Capital City Speakers gives toasts at every meeting. Guerra says, "The Toastmaster of the day offers a toast after opening remarks and then opens the floor to two or three more toasts by members."

The Vienna Toastmasters club in Vienna, Austria, incorporates a toast during a dinner meeting break. Club President Albert Frantz says, "This sort of 'Toastmaster' isn't an official role in our club; we simply let our members decide. Very often someone volunteers, announcing the toast in the usual fashion by tapping on a glass with a spoon."

### Distinctive Learning Experience

While the core of the Toastmasters meeting is the same all around the world, all clubs have their own personality and provide members a fun, distinctive learning experience. They provide common ground, but new roles and approaches offer variety, creativity, fun and increased awareness during meetings, which means more growth for members. Roland, of the Marbella club in Spain, says, "New members see that this is a fun, exciting place, and established members find something different each week."

As Kudrati of the Desert Pioneers club in Kuwait says, "Toastmasters is all about give and take, and experimentation. You are free to make mistakes and learn from them."

This is true for members, as well as clubs. *Vive la Toastmasters différence!* ■

Roland says. "It helps to create the mutually supportive environment of Toastmasters."

### Different Meeting Elements

Keith Ostergard, DTM, PID, has visited a multitude of clubs worldwide. He found the core program the same, where "anyone would feel quite comfortable with the meeting structure."

However, Ostergard noticed small differences due to local culture and customs. "In the club I visited in London, it was quite common for members to interject comments and observations while you were giving a speech. At first I thought this was heckling, but realized it was just the custom of the club." He found another London club with this same custom. "After watching Parliament ... I think this may be where members picked up this habit," he says.

According to Guerra, the Dale Schallhorn club in Chevy Chase, awards a traveling trophy to the member who made the greatest contribution or demonstrated the most courage in stepping out of his or her comfort zone. The Jim Whitney club

**JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM,** is a member of Budapest Toastmasters in Hungary and the founding Director of Career Services at the Central European University's new School of Public Policy. She's a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.

# Taking the Pulse of Your Club

A culture of caring, service and integrity is critical to success. Build it and they will come.

BY CRAIG HARRISON, DTM, PDG

Many factors influence a club's success: membership numbers, renewal rates and education achievements, for example. But an intangible and often overlooked factor may be the most essential contributor to a club's long-term success—its culture!

Culture, in this case, refers to the club's environment—that blend of location, members, values, customs and practices. The easiest way to describe it is to say, "It is the way we do things around here." Culture can be easier felt than measured, yet it's what causes members to remain active in their club. It's the magnet that attracts guests to come back and join. Isn't it time to take the pulse of your club's culture?

## The Fun Factor

People do business with those they know, like and trust. There is a similar formula for popular clubs. Friendly and inviting clubs that provide an enjoyable experience and generate positive energy attract new members. Long ago, Toastmasters founder Ralph C. Smedley asserted that people "learn in moments of enjoyment." How fun is your club? Just because members have fun doesn't mean they aren't serious about improving their communication and leadership skills. When learning is fun, achievement soars. Club meetings and member experiences should be both fun *and* fruitful.





*Friendly and inviting clubs that generate positive energy attract new members.*

James Ware, an adult-learning expert and executive director of a research and advisory firm called The Future of Work ... unlimited, says, "Learning can be exhilarating, eye-opening and empowering." But he adds that learning can be stressful and even threatening, because it can require changing long-held beliefs, mastering new skills, doing new things and facing the possibility of failing. "Making [learning] fun along the way increases the possibility that members will value it, enjoy it and feel good about themselves," he says. "And if they experience those feelings, they will only want more."

#### A Helping of Hospitality

First impressions count at Toastmasters meetings. How you greet guests speaks

volumes about your club and its culture. Do you shake hands, invite visitors to sign your guest register, issue them a nametag and introduce them to club leaders and other members?

Friendly and inviting clubs seat guests next to veteran members who then explain meeting procedures. Introductions are made early and guests are formally welcomed with applause. Gina Cefalu, ACG, of Danville Toastmasters club in Danville, California, relates a best practice from her club: "At the beginning of meetings, we engage in round-table introductions—everyone present, including guests, announces their name, where they live, how long they've been in Toastmasters. They also answer a question related to the theme of the

day—for instance, a favorite vacation spot or a New Year's resolution."

Time should also be allotted at the meeting's end to answer guests' questions and gain feedback about the club. A culture of caring is critical to the success of any club.

#### Do Your Evaluations Elevate or Deflate?

One telltale indicator of a club's culture is the way evaluations are handled. If speech evaluations are negative, destructive or mean-spirited, guests and members alike will feel uncomfortable. They are less likely to take risks and try new approaches for fear of exposing themselves to criticism. When evaluations are supportive and encouraging, speakers are more inclined to

## CLUB CULTURE



Members of the Tokyo Toastmasters club in Japan embrace diversity and celebrate each others' successes.

experiment. This doesn't mean telling a lie or giving only positive feedback, it means tempering the negative with positives and making sure critiques are constructive, with an eye toward helping speakers improve.

### The Role of Club Officers

Officers are the leaders of Toastmasters meetings—they set the tone and establish the practices that define the club experience. Are your leaders professional? Are they personable? Do they work well together as a governing body? Teamwork bodes well for the entire club. When club officers show a genuine interest in visitors, these potential members feel valued and are more likely to join the club. Officers who model hospitality, generosity and friendliness set the best tone for a club, and all members can follow suit.

### Good Will to All

Most clubs comprise a mix of men and women of different ages, professions, backgrounds and beliefs, yet the members all come together to improve communication and leadership skills. Each club is a treasure trove—all members have stories, experiences and special skills to share. All clubs can embrace membership diversity and prosper by

celebrating the different styles, backgrounds and sensibilities of its members. When recognition and appreciation are lavished on members for their achievements and contributions, more achievements ensue! Everyone wants to get into the act. Clubs that mute differences, overlook members and play favorites ultimately lose out.

Odile Petillot, DTM, past District 59 governor for continental Europe (which encompasses 17 countries and 10 distinct languages) well understands the value of diversity. A Toastmaster for 24 years, she views district conferences, speech contests and clubs with cultural diversity as opportunities to mingle with people from many different backgrounds, cultures and religions.

"These are laboratories where we can practice empathy and understanding," says Petillot, "and where members can open up, share their opinions, listen to other viewpoints, and discover other habits, traditions and ways of thinking and behaving."

### Tales of Two Tongues

A vast amount of clubs are bilingual today. Many divide each meeting's time between English and another language, whether it's French or German, Japanese or Spanish, Tamil or Afrikaans, Mandarin or Cantonese

Chinese. In the San Francisco Bay Area, District 4 hosts one division-level speech contest where members compete in one of three rooms, speaking in Vietnamese, Japanese or Mandarin Chinese. At the district level the following month, the winner's speech is given in English.

Petillot is a founding member of the first bilingual English-French club in Paris. The club's eclectic mix—with French residents wanting to learn "the American way," English speakers improving their French, expatriates and immigrants—fosters an environment for learning about other cultures.

For Canadian David Rowley, ACB, of Montreal's HEC Toastmasters club, diversity is also the order of the day. "Our club was founded by MBA students who come to study at Hec Montreal business school from around the globe," he says. "Last year's club president was from Austria, and is now working in Italy." Its membership also includes French Canadians, English Canadians, Americans and immigrants from Africa and Asia. As such, says Rowley, "We are lucky, because there is no single dominant culture." Together the members are forging their own club culture, whether they are speaking English or French.



## Accent-uating Native Tongues

Last year, the MIIS Toastmasters club at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, in Monterey, California, held a speech symposium to showcase the diverse languages spoken by members. The club's hosting institute is ranked as one of the best

## Culture is the magnet that attracts guests to come back and join.

translation and interpretation programs in the United States. District 4 Public Relations Officer Will Heilbut, CC, CL, a student at the institute, says, "The speech symposium had seven speeches delivered in four languages (Russian, Spanish, English and Mandarin). All speeches were simultaneously interpreted into and out of Mandarin, English, Japanese, French and Spanish."

The club invited other clubs in the community to participate, and recruited their evaluators. All evaluations were given in English and interpreted into the four other languages. "We not only highlighted the language diversity of our club and our school, but also the complexities of working with an interpreter," Heilbut says. "It was interesting to experience how the

communication process changes when a speaker's vocal variety and body language does not match with the speech content and vocal variety coming through the headsets. It challenged our evaluators in a completely new way."

The event was enriching for members and guests, and it had great public relations value too, as it coincided with the club's 25-year anniversary.

## Milestones, Rules and Rituals

The Toastmasters experience is full of milestones to celebrate, and rituals to observe. Many clubs decide that each member who completes an Ice Breaker speech receives a membership pin to acknowledge their achievement. Similarly, a ribbon and short ceremony celebrate members' achievements after giving their 10th speech.

All clubs have anniversaries of their formation. Are you celebrating yours? Reach back and invite charter members to return. Invite spouses, partners and loved ones to join in the festivities surrounding your club's anniversary or its achievement of President's Select, Select or Distinguished status each year. These events build pride, boost member's self-esteem and show the power and glory of the Toastmasters

experience. Invite recent guests to hear testimonials so that they may feel the confidence that is exuded by club members.

While all clubs are guided by operational bylaws, clubs can also create their own rules of engagement for members and meetings. For instance, some clubs pay the attendance fees for officers who attend semiannual district conferences. Others cover the cost of a club president's breakfast at semiannual leadership events. Clubs that meet over a meal at a restaurant sometimes establish the custom of treating a first-time guest to a meal. You can bet it leaves a nice aftertaste in the visitor's mouth.

When a new member joins Tokyo Toastmasters in Tokyo, Japan, he or she is inducted in a ceremony in which the new

member reads a customized version of the Toastmasters Promise aloud, followed by other club members from Japan, Korea, India, the United States and other countries who also read it out loud. This sharing of vows, not unlike in a marriage, bodes well for all parties.

Winners of the Best Table Topics or Best Speaker contests are sometimes awarded a club trophy for the duration of the event, but some clubs give them the option of bringing the trophy to work for the week—or until the next meeting—to showcase a member's success to co-workers. This practice also ensures the member's return to the next meeting, if only to return the trophy, or perhaps to defend his victory! It offers recognition for a job well done, and helps the recipient feel valued.

## Tools

How can you assess your club's culture? Among the best resources to guide you is the Moments of Truth self-evaluation tool. Use this tool (Item 290 in the Toastmasters Online Store) to work through a checklist of features to determine your club's performance and practices. It will help you identify areas for improvement in operations and efficiency, and even in friendliness—all key elements of a club's culture.

The late New York City Mayor Ed Koch was known to always ask his constituents, "How am I doing?" You, too, should be asking this question about your club. Ask new Toastmasters and veteran members about their experiences. And don't underestimate the value of your guests' observations. Visitors arrive with fresh eyes, and it's essential to your club's future to appeal to these guests. Welcome them and meld your club culture with what's important to them—not just to sustain your club, but to grow it too. ■

**CRAIG HARRISON, DTM, PDG,** of *Evening Stars club in San Francisco, has founded a variety of specialty and advanced clubs in his 21 years of membership. Find free resources at his website, [www.SpeakAndLeadWithConfidence.com](http://www.SpeakAndLeadWithConfidence.com).*

# Flubs, Flops and Solutions

What to do when the unexpected happens.

BY COLLEEN PLIMPTON, ACB, CL



*Club meeting mishaps are inevitable. It's how you handle them that makes all the difference.*

It wasn't his first speech to our club. The middle-aged media consultant had given his Ice Breaker and had done well, but this time he was clearly struggling. While speaking, he lost his train of thought and apologized. His voice dropped as notes slipped from his fingers. In a failed attempt to open his laptop and read from there, he apologized again. His words grew disjointed as his face turned red.

We in the audience squirmed in empathy. What could we do? What *should* we do? The speaker mumbled a final apology and left the lectern—and the room. We sat in silence until the next speaker was introduced. The unspoken question among us was, *Should we have done something?*

These and other uncomfortable situations sometimes arise at Toastmasters meetings. How should they be handled?

## Stage Fright

Eileen Palsson, CC, ALB, a member of ReadSoft Toastmasters in Kista, Sweden, recalls an incident in which a member was unable to continue with his speech and left the room. The Toastmaster of the meeting followed and gently encouraged the individual to take the floor and start over. The speaker agreed and was applauded loudly as he re-entered the room. After a second introduction he completed the speech. During the evaluation, kudos were awarded for his persistence. The member went on to earn a Competent Communicator award.

Palsson was impressed and inspired by how the Toastmaster saved the day. "As far as I could tell, she didn't use words to encourage the speaker to start over—she just gently coaxed him back to the door

using a calm hand signal, and started the introduction from the beginning." With graceful actions, she demonstrated how Toastmasters is a safe place to fail. There is much to be learned from that type of leadership. "I thought about how I wanted to be able to project that reassuring presence—with my fellow Toastmasters, my kids, and with anyone who is panicked or upset," Palsson says.

Bruce Cornwell, CL, a member of two clubs in Connecticut, relates a similar episode, although the speaker did not leave the room after abandoning her speech. The member sat back down and Cornwell, the Toastmaster of the meeting, thanked her for her efforts and reassured her there would be no evaluation for her incomplete speech. During a break, members expressed empathy to help the

speaker feel supported. Weeks later she successfully delivered her speech.

### Unfilled Roles at Meeting Time

Sometimes, for whatever reason, one or more roles don't get filled at a club meeting. It's good practice for the vice president education to send a reminder to members with a role to play several days prior to the meeting, along with a request for confirmation. It's important that the Toastmaster arrive early to the meeting, with a completed agenda in hand, to allow time to arrange replacements if roles remain unfilled.

## With graceful actions, she demonstrated how Toastmasters is a safe place to fail.

However, all club members should be prepared to assume any role appropriate for their level of expertise. In smaller clubs, members may need to take on multiple roles. The Toastmasters website has software to assist with this ([www.toastmasters.org/software](http://www.toastmasters.org/software)).

### Hostile Evaluations

A key aspect of the Toastmasters program is the no-pressure atmosphere of club meetings, and effective evaluation is at the heart of the learning experience. This demands positive, constructive assessments of a speaker's ability. Most evaluations are just that. However, in rare cases, an evaluator can deliver destructive and harmful comments rather than encouraging and positive feedback. If this happens, the General Evaluator or Toastmaster can soften the criticism. After the meeting, a club leader should approach the evaluator to discuss the issue. If a pattern of negativity develops, the individual must be redirected and re-educated.

Consider presenting evaluation learning sessions and encourage attendance at

evaluation contests. Emphasis should be placed on evaluations given by experienced Toastmasters and the message in *Effective Evaluation* (Item 202, available at the Toastmasters Online Store).

### Timing Errors

To avoid this situation, speakers should confirm their speech length with the timer. I once failed to do this. As I swung into the heart of my keynote address (from the *Professional Speaker* advanced manual), I glanced at the timer and in disbelief saw she thought I had only 30 seconds left to speak. This miscommunication could have

been avoided. I could have interrupted my speech to correct the timer or I could have skipped a portion of my speech and gone directly to the conclusion (which I did). I later spoke with the timer so we both understood what had gone wrong. As always, a little communication goes a long way. Consult the Toastmasters website ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)) for easy-to-follow explanations of all roles.

### Space Not Available

Despite a club's best efforts, a meeting room may become unavailable at the last minute and an executive decision needs to be made. This is an opportunity for leadership. Every club should have a backup plan, but all a Toastmasters meeting really needs is a place for people to stand and sit. An adjoining room, cafeteria, or even a wide space in the hall can be used. And consider the outdoors, weather permitting, as an interesting option.

### Interruptions

Occasionally, guests or new members speak out of turn. It is incumbent on the meeting's Toastmaster to gently redirect

the individual to the appropriate manner of address. This takes confidence and tact. The Toastmaster, for example, could say: *Thank you for your thoughts, Kevin. There will be an opportunity after the meeting to ask further questions. As for right now, we are under time constraints and need to allow the meeting to progress.* After the meeting, a club executive committee member should spend a few minutes with the questioner to answer his queries or comments.

### Inappropriate Presentations

Mentors, or the vice president education, can help new members determine what types of topics are appropriate for that particular club. While each club can determine what is considered appropriate, the particular ethos of the group must be respected. It must be made clear to speakers that disrespectful, off-color or offensive speech is unacceptable. Toastmasters International is a professional organization and ill-mannered material is never appropriate.

Whew! Thankfully, most of these mishaps aren't common in Toastmasters meetings. But, like a Boy Scout, it's good to be prepared with good organization and leadership.

As for the distressed individual of the first paragraph, I'm happy to report that subsequent to his failed speech he received much support from fellow club members and was able to deliver his speech a month later. He eventually completed the *Competent Communication* manual and is now a source of support for newer members. Another Toastmasters success story! ▀

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**COLLEEN PLIMPTON, ACB, CL,** is a member of Barnum Square Toastmasters in Bethel, Connecticut. Her most recent article for the *Toastmaster* was "Lessons from a Garden Speaker" in the August 2013 issue. Visit her website at [www.colleenplimpton.com](http://www.colleenplimpton.com).

# Do You Dread Receiving an Evaluation?

Don't fear the feedback you get — it's only meant to help.

BY JAMES CLARK, DTM

Why do prospective members hesitate to join a Toastmaster club, and why do some new members drop out early? My guess is many of them worry about how their communication skills are received by other club members.

After all, people usually join with the hope of making a good impression on others and building friendships, as well as gaining professional development. Those who become discouraged in the early stages of their membership may not have been adequately prepared to receive feedback on their communication skills. New members are generally the most sensitive to constructive comments and the least familiar with the kind of feedback to expect.

If an evaluation is given in accordance with Toastmasters guidelines, receiving it is generally a positive experience. Club members know just how difficult it can be to speak before an audience, and they empathize with the new member's nervousness. Ideally the evaluator should consider the speaker's sensitivity level and provide feedback that praises strengths and offers suggestions for improvement. A properly delivered evaluation leaves the speaker feeling encouraged and aware of his or her assets as a communicator.

To help the evaluation process go smoothly, review these points with new members—and evaluators:

**■ Toastmasters evaluators always offer suggestions for improvement.** In other words, speakers should never expect to receive only praise during an evaluation. The Toastmasters philosophy is, "No speech is perfect." With so many key issues involved



## Tips for Improvement

To avoid making some common speaking errors—and hearing about them in the evaluations you receive—follow these basic do's and don'ts.

### Don't:

- **Begin your speech with any kind of apology** (e.g., "Sorry I'm late/unprepared") or any other expressions of humility ("I'm really nervous," "I'm not a good speaker," etc.).
- **Include lengthy introductory material in your speech.** Any information regarding the history of the speech or why you are giving it—unless it contributes to the entertainment value or primary objective of your project—should be given to the Toastmaster of the meeting for his or her introduction of your speech.
- **Wear noisy jewelry or a badge during your speech.** These items are distractions for the audience.
- **Disrespect a fellow member** or any group (religious, ethnic or otherwise) audience members may be part of.
- **Leave the lectern unattended.** At the conclusion of your speech, wait for the Toastmaster to come up to you, shake her hand, pass behind her and take your seat.

### Do:

- **Read your manual carefully before preparing the speech.** It tells you what aspects of your speech the evaluator will be primarily focused on.

■ **Talk to your evaluator.** Let him know if you do not want feedback on specific aspects of your presentation and what you may want to discuss privately. You might tell the evaluator something like, "Yes I know I have a problem with \_\_\_\_\_, but let's discuss it after the meeting, OK?"

■ **Time your speech before giving it.** The few minutes you have to fill will go faster than you probably realize, and you will likely need to trim less important material. Your primary goal is to fulfill your project objectives without going overtime.

■ **Remember not to be offended by any feedback.** Comments to you sometimes serve as reminders to all Toastmasters of mistakes we routinely need to avoid.

■ **Be creative.** This is your opportunity to try ideas before a friendly audience. Many evaluators appreciate speakers who take risks.

■ **Enjoy giving the speech.** This is how you set a positive tone and increase the audience's enjoyment of your presentation. As the late Helen Blanchard, DTM, PIP, once said, "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right."

— James Clark



in the art of public speaking, no speaker is expected to master them all at once.

**Evaluators are offering their own opinion about a speech.** Experienced evaluators will typically touch on common issues, but even so, evaluators often disagree in their reactions to a speaker. Because of that, they should remember to preface suggestions with phrases such as, "In my view ..." to remind the speaker that the evaluator's comments are subjective. Members likely will benefit from carefully considered feedback, but none of us, no matter how experienced, is correct in presenting ourselves as an authority who speaks for the rest of the group. In my view, the more an evaluator forgets this rule, the more listeners may want to take his or her suggestions with a grain of salt.

**Giving an effective evaluation is probably the most challenging job at a club meeting.** Remember, an evaluation should be positive and acknowledge the speaker's assets while at the same time tactfully suggesting improvements. So demanding is this task that new members are generally not asked to attempt an evaluation until after they have completed a number of their own manual speeches and have heard numerous evaluations.

Ideally, new members are evaluated by senior members who know how to be appropriately sensitive. Because no system is perfect, and because delivering a good, considerate evaluation is so tricky—even for experienced members—the goals of an ideal evaluation are rarely met. Maybe the evaluator finds it difficult to observe anything significant and resorts to nit-picking.

Perhaps the evaluator is actually trying to be witty; the joke falls flat, and the speaker misinterprets a comment as ridicule.

For whatever reason, all of us from time to time can expect to feel some sting from feedback. Such is life. But in enduring even that, we benefit by developing a thicker skin, which is part of what we should be seeking anyway. ■

**JAMES CLARK, DTM,** is a member of Toastmasters of the Cove in La Jolla, California. He is a former division governor and has been a Toastmaster for 27 years.

*This is an updated version of an article that originally ran in the Toastmaster in February 2007.*



## Can Your Club Beat the Clock?

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# Vaccination Reservations.

Or, one flu over the cuckoo's nest.

BY JOHN CADLEY

I opened the window and in-flu-enza. Ha, ha. It's an old joke and I laugh every time—until I have to get a flu shot. Then it's not so funny. Influenza is serious business. It can make you feel like you've just been through the Battle of Stalingrad in your underwear. (Influenza comes from the Latin *influere*, which means to flow in, specifically from the stars. It was thought ethereal liquid flowed from the heavens to influence human destiny. So when people say they're inhabited by aliens, they probably have the flu.)

Anyway, the flu can kill you. So I get the shot. And then worry about getting killed. It's all because of that handout I'm given while I'm waiting for the injection: *Influenza Vaccine: What You Need to Know*. I don't need to know. I'm the kind of person

If a person nearly died from his last shot and he's coming back for another one, he doesn't need a nurse; he needs a psychiatrist.

who skips right to the bad parts, like the section titled "Risk of a Vaccine Reaction." It says, "Like any medicine, there is a chance of side effects. They are usually mild and go away on their own." That's nice to know—except I always read it on the day when CNN is reporting about the one person in a million *who died from a flu shot!* The handout, developed by experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), says these "mild problems" can include cough, fever, aches, headache and fatigue. Wait a minute. Aren't those the same symptoms for the flu? It seems like the experts are telling me the shot won't give you the flu; it will just make you feel like you have it. The difference eludes me.

I could also get brief fainting spells, so I should "sit down to prevent injuries caused by falls." That would be interesting. They stick me in the arm and I fracture my hip. "If these problems occur," the handout continues, "they usually begin soon after the shot." This means that immediately after the vaccination I go

into crippling anxiety mode waiting for "soon" to be over with. This could take several days.

Mind you, I've never had a reaction to a flu shot. So why do I continue to worry? Because they *change* it every year! "Flu viruses are always changing," the CDC experts write. "Each year's flu vaccine is made to protect you from viruses that are most likely to cause disease that year." Translation: We're taking another guess and you're taking another chance. Have a nice day.

Of course, there are those who really shouldn't get the injection, like people who have had a "life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of flu vaccine." If a person nearly died from his last shot and he's coming back for another one, he doesn't need a nurse; he needs a psychiatrist. You also shouldn't get a flu shot if you've had Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). I always ask what this is and they tell me, "If you have to ask, you've never had it. You'd know." How would I know? Maybe I just got it this morning. Could they test me for it before I get my flu shot? Then I read a little further and see that there's a slight possibility that the flu shot could actually *cause* GBS. Great—I can get the flu shot because I've never had GBS, but if I *would* like to get it, this is my chance.

Finally, "If you are not feeling well, you should wait until you feel better." Does hyperventilating from fear that this might kill me qualify as not feeling well?

The CDC handout offers this final note: "It takes about two weeks for protection to develop after the vaccination." Let me get this straight: I've just been sitting in a waiting room exposing myself to people who are sneezing, coughing and hacking because they already have the flu. I get a shot to prevent this from happening to me, but it won't take effect for two weeks. So if I got the flu in the waiting room, the shot won't do me any good. In fact, I shouldn't be getting it at all because now I'm sick! I'm a dead man.

On the other hand, I did get the flu once and I wished I *was* dead. Maybe it's me who needs a psychiatrist. **T**

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JOHN CADLEY, a former advertising copywriter, is a freelance writer and musician living in Fayetteville, New York.

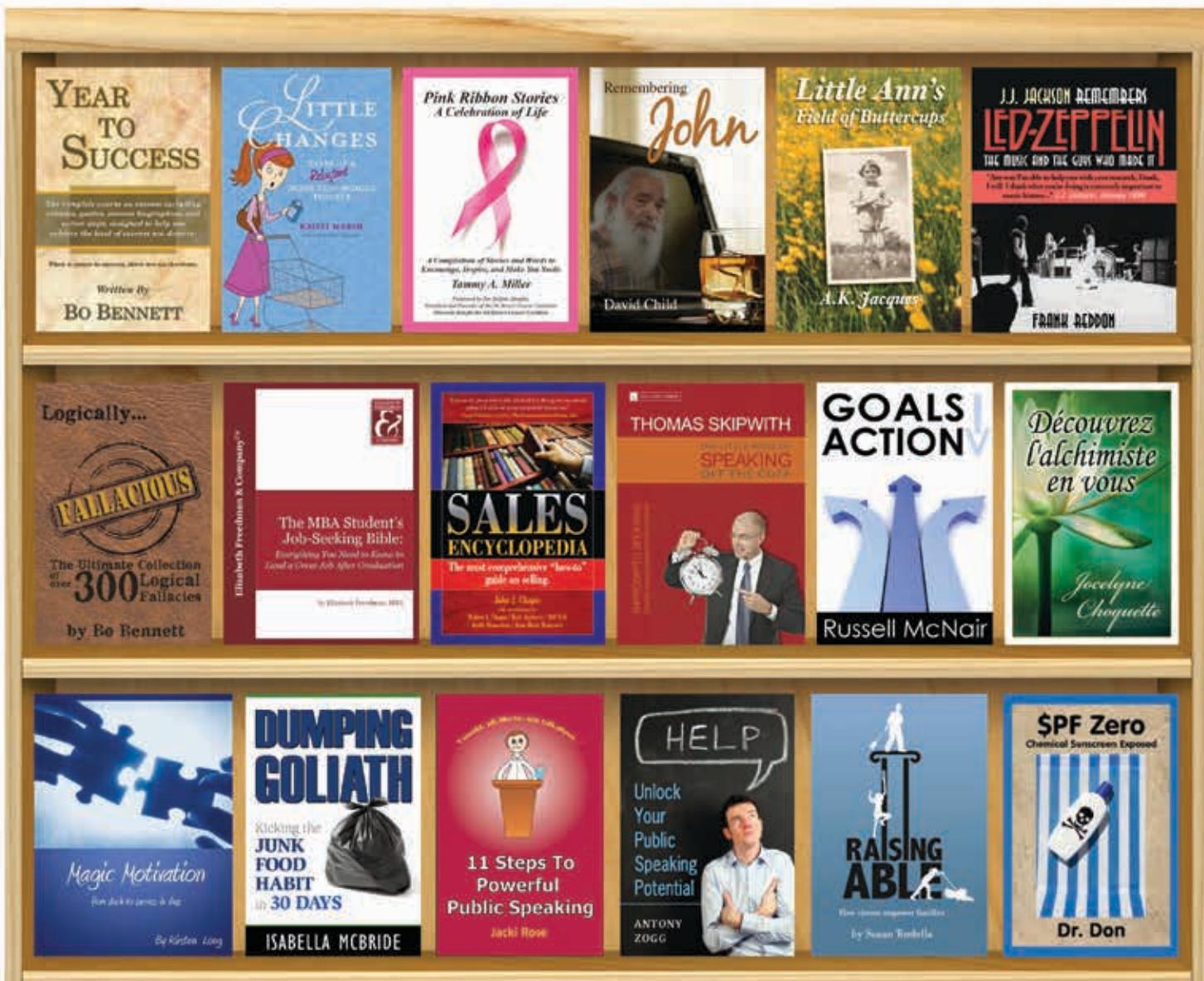
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