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TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL®

9127 S. Jamaica St. #400, Englewood, CO, USA 80112
+1 720-439-5050

WWW.TOASTMASTERS.ORG

CONTACTING WORLD HEADQUARTERS

For information on joining or building a club, visit:

www.toastmasters.org

Article submission:

submissions@toastmasters.org

Letters to the Editor:

letters@toastmasters.org

For general magazine questions:

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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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A Little Grace

Recently, I sent an email and received a message back: “I hope you’ll be patient with me if it takes longer to respond.”

I found myself with a lump in my throat. I knew the struggle behind the words because they came from a member of Toastmasters World Headquarters staff whom I had gotten to know over the years.

The young man who sent it joined the organization around seven years ago, brimming with excitement and full of ideas about how he could serve the organization and its members. He comes from a close-knit family and had just married a lovely young woman. He confided he was looking forward to creating his own loving family with her.

We were so excited when he shared the news of his wife’s pregnancy—and we were blown away when he told us they were expecting twins! Not only would he get the family he wanted, but it would be instant once the twins arrived.

The twins did arrive. Early. And yet, even when they were in incubators in intensive care, he didn’t miss a meeting. He simply moved his office to the hospital so he could be with his bride and babes.



We don’t really know what most people are going through on a daily basis—but we do have control over the way we interact with people.

Finally, after endless doctor appointments and several surgeries, the family felt settled. Life was calm and they were beginning to thrive—and then they were faced with another monumental change. Our headquarters was moving from Southern California to Colorado. Would he move his wife and kids 1,000 miles away from his extended family of loved ones?

They did make that huge move. They readjusted and began again. Then the pandemic hit.

We all remember what it was like to find ourselves homebound when the lockdowns began. Imagine trying to keep up with an inbox full of urgent requests from members around the world while working in a windowless basement covered in insulation and plastic. I wondered, was it cold down in that basement? Just upstairs, the atmosphere was noisy and chaotic as the twins tried to understand why they couldn’t go to preschool or why Dad didn’t play with them all the time now that he was home.

And yet, this staffer never complained. His email time stamps showed he was working around the clock. He was endlessly positive and helpful and offered thoughtful solutions to sometimes unreasonable demands.

All of this history came flooding back when I saw his message. After so much personal sacrifice, he made the small request for a little grace.

The truth is, we don’t really know what most people are going through on a daily basis—but we do have control over the way we interact with people. We can be kind. We can be understanding.

We can offer a little grace.

Margaret Page, DTM
International President

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News

Event Speakers

District, corporate, and community events are more fun and informative when they feature a quality speaker who people can get excited about! Toastmasters has plenty of resources available to support you. You could invite a [World Champion of Public Speaking](#) or review a list of Toastmasters members who have earned the [Accredited Speaker](#) designation. You could also promote the Rotary/Toastmasters alliance by inviting a local Rotarian as a guest speaker. Additionally, there are some [guidelines](#) to help you when selecting educational speakers.

Club Excellence Webinar

In case you missed it, watch this [candid conversation](#) about achieving excellence in clubs, hosted by International President-Elect Matt Kinsey, DTM. In this webinar, you'll learn strategies to help your club add members and ensure it provides quality meetings.



The Toastmasters Podcast Contest Winner

Last month, *The Toastmasters Podcast* celebrated its 200th episode with a contest! Tune in to this [special episode](#) with Pitch Us Your Podcast contest winner Rashmi Ketha from Ledgewood, New Jersey. Once you've listened to the podcast, make sure to [read](#) the article to learn more about *The Toastmasters Podcast*.

Resources

Toastmaster Magazine—Online Extras

In the [April Toastmaster](#), listen to a podcast for inspiration on speaking in another language, learn how to say anything to anyone with helpful techniques from 2021 Virtual Convention speaker Shari Harley, and watch a video with basic tips on how to give feedback.

Articles Added to Level 2

Looking for more reading to support your Toastmasters learning? New articles have been added in Level 2 of Base Camp. Check your Suggested Learning box on the Base Camp home page for a list of articles that complement topics covered in Level 2 or look for the Supplemental Reading subject on the Tutorials and Resources page.

New Member Experience Survey

Are you providing new members with the best possible experience? And if you're a new member, is your voice being heard? Make sure to use the [New Member Experience Survey](#), which should ideally be filled out 30 days after new members have joined a club. This feedback can help club officers understand new members' goals and improve the process of welcoming new members to your club.

Reminders

Openly Recruit

Help your club's marketing efforts by using the [Open House Flier!](#) Invite prospective members to attend a club meeting by hanging up the flier at work or in coffee shops, or posting on social media. You can then download the [Open House PowerPoint](#) to give prospective members a better idea of what they can gain from Toastmasters and what to expect in a club meeting.



International Officer and Director Candidates Nominated

The Toastmasters International Leadership Committee has nominated International Officer candidates for the 2022–2023 Board of Directors and International Director candidates for the 2022–2024 term. Voting will take place at the Annual Business Meeting in August 2022. Find out more about the nominated candidates by visiting the [International Candidates webpage](#).

Level Completions

Make 2022 a year of growth and empowerment. Challenge yourself to complete a path or start a new level in Pathways. Club officers can learn how to view and track members' progress by watching this [helpful tutorial](#).

Traveling Toastmaster



VIOLA DONDO, DTM, of Harare, Zimbabwe, prepares to fly over the Victoria Falls waterfall on the Zambezi River in Southern Africa.



DORIS KUO, DTM, and **HSIEH HUNG YANG**, both of Tainan City, Taiwan, represent Toastmasters after hiking nearly 22 kilometers (approximately 13.6 miles) to the peak of Mount Jade, the highest mountain in Taiwan.

Heard Around the World



Suryadeep Majumder of Kolkata, West Bengal, India, asked members this question:

Describe your Toastmasters journey in one word.

Here are a few of the nearly 320 responses he received on the Official Toastmasters International Members Facebook Group!

Life-changing

Tanya Barad, DTM • Solihull, England

Marathon

Kadisha Currie • Mount Vernon, New York

Uplifting

Amina Bhanji, DTM • Scarborough, Ontario, Canada

Joyful

George Strasdass, DTM • Port St. Lucie, Florida

Rewarding

Julie Dall, DTM • Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Phenomenal

Marsha Armstrong • Saint Lucy, Barbados

Unexpected

Julie Kenny, DTM • Ipswich, England

Enriching

Louise Houdelette, DTM • Rancho Cordova, California

Adventure

Odile Petillot, DTM • Paris, France

Confidence

Svetlana Breum, DTM • Silkeborg, Denmark

Snapshot



Members of Galaxy Toastmasters Club of Muscat, Oman, gather at the Oman Cricket Academy to watch Oman's home team play Papua New Guinea in the ICC Cricket World Cup League. To showcase their Toastmasters pride, they brought the awards they had received from District 105 to take pictures on the field.



Presentation Skills

Start Your Speech Strong!

It's a familiar feeling. You're ready to sit down and start writing your speech, and you think, *How should I begin this? How can I grab my audience's attention right away?*

There are a number of good tactics for starting your speech strong. Among them:

- **Open with an anecdote.** An engaging story—maybe dramatic, maybe whimsical, depending on your purpose—can draw in your listeners.
- **Use humor.** Saying something funny, perhaps a joke or a playful observation—particularly something poking fun at yourself—gets the audience smiling and on your side from the start.
- **Begin with a question.** Example: "Have you ever spent a whole night walking in a forest?"
- **Open with a compelling fact or statistic.** Example: "Did you know that in the U.S. alone, more than 10,000 people die every year in drunk-driving crashes?"

- **Do something different.** [Christine Robinson](#), a three-time contender for the World Championship of Public Speaking®, once started her speech by letting loose with a song!

The opening of your speech sets the foundation for what follows. It also establishes your tone. Do you want to be light-hearted, wistful, theatrical?

It's important to hook your audience early, before letting their attention wander. You want to connect with them in the first 20 or 30 seconds. So choose an opening tactic that fits well with what you want to say and how you want to say it—and start your speech with a bang.



A Club Culture of Inclusivity

Our members, whether disabled or not, embrace differences.

By Ross Marshall, Ph.D.

We all find our way toward Toastmasters for a variety of reasons. I was an experienced but untrained public speaker, used to giving keynote addresses and delivering lectures. Then I lost 80% of my sight, an eye, and my confidence.

No longer did I feel able to stand on a stage, craftily reading my PowerPoint slides out of the corner of my left eye. There was no more glancing down quickly at my notes. Even worse, I could no longer gauge the audience's interest in what I was saying.

I struggled for a while before getting the simple advice: "Join Toastmasters." Luckily, Lincolnshire Speakers had chartered two years earlier in my home city of Lincoln, England. I visited the club to find out more.

Two years later, I am just completing Level 5 in the Dynamic Leadership path. I've won my first Humorous Speech Contest and hold the record for being the worst Club Secretary in history, in terms of minute-taking and organization.

I am now registered blind, with over 90% sight loss, so my fellow Toastmasters are very tolerant about my minute-taking. But they've done more than that for me. With the club's help, I have discovered a more professional speaking style and have developed new ways to prepare and deliver speeches to suit my disability. The evaluations I receive provide more quantitative feedback than ever before.

I am grateful and incredibly lucky to be part of this club. Lincolnshire Speakers welcomes others with cultural and physical differences and has built a commitment to ensure that all members benefit from the Toastmasters experience.

Our current President has hearing difficulties but has taken on the role with a commendable calmness and determination. She strikes fear in hearts when she serves as Table Topicsmaster, asking participants to describe an obscure color or, most notably of all, to silently act out the topic! It's a fantastic lesson in demonstrating the importance of body language. I heartily recommend clubs give this theme a try!



Ross Marshall, with Ollie and Lotta.

Lincolnshire Speakers has built a commitment to ensure that all members benefit from the Toastmasters experience.

Our Vice President Membership suffers from severe physical disabilities but is one of the club's most dynamic members. No visitor escapes her cheery welcome. New members receive a welcome briefing and are pointed toward a suitable club mentor. She encourages everyone to jump straight in by taking meeting roles and planning an Ice Breaker speech.

All our members, whether disabled or not, have taken up the club culture and challenges with enthusiasm. Our group includes experienced executives, young professionals, university students with English as their second language,

new speakers seeking self-development, and veterans who want to continue their Toastmasters journey. All are welcome to [join us](#).

Lincolnshire Speakers Club Insights on Inclusivity

Accommodations to consider:

- Add inclusivity to your club's Core Values.
- Stay attuned to members' communication needs.
- If meeting in person, choose a venue that is accessible to all, offers wheelchair access and parking, and is convenient to public transportation.
- Hold in-person meetings in a quiet room with soft furnishings rather than hard surfaces.
- Provide suitable seating for physical disabilities. Position speakers for lip-reading. Clear the room of all trip hazards, such as cables and cords.
- Provide a language interpreter and/or someone to handle sign language.
- If possible, use a hearing loop sound system for people with hearing aids.
- Send members a large-print agenda before the meeting.
- For in-person meetings, place a large, printed Word of the Day on the floor in front of the speaker to give all a better chance to see and use it.
- Use timing lights with shapes or sounds for visually impaired/color blind speakers.
- Assign member buddies who can assist disabled members if needed.
- For Zoom or other audio visual platforms, use the closed caption option.

Ross Marshall, Ph.D., is Club Secretary of Lincolnshire Speakers, in Lincoln, England. He is a corporate coach and trainer, and director of Leading Green, a United Kingdom-based environmental sustainability company. He is also co-founder of Tallinn Forum, a pan-European think tank for environmental risk assessment.

A Most Important Skill

Accepting and implementing feedback takes more talent than you think.

By Bill Brown, DTM

One fear that many new Toastmasters have is giving their first speech. Another fear is receiving feedback. They dread the report from their evaluator. We tend to think of feedback as part of the process, something you have to put up with, but feedback is good. It is how we grow, and receiving feedback is actually a skill that we need to develop.

Like most skills, there are both basic and advanced skills. The Pathways Level 1 project “Evaluation and Feedback” (available in all paths) does an excellent job of describing the basics. Be sure to review the information.

As we develop in Toastmasters, we will ultimately move on to more advanced skills. Over the years, I’ve learned some specific tips to better receive and process feedback.

First, if you are reluctant to receive feedback, you are limiting your growth. Granted, you might be reluctant at first, and your evaluator should pick up on that and be sensitive in their remarks, but you should strive to move beyond that quickly.

There is a lot that goes into writing and delivering an effective speech. When we first start out, we normally don’t realize that. We think of it as writing and talking. The evaluation provides feedback, but it also makes us aware of the various aspects of speechwriting and delivery. It is, in part, a training tool.

The key is that you have to want the feedback. Get to the point that you crave the feedback, especially from those who are quite good at speaking. Decide that you will become an excellent speaker and work to achieve it—including obtaining feedback.

The second tip is to listen to and evaluate each piece of feedback you receive.

There are four types of feedback for speakers to assess. The first type is feedback that is rel-

vant and important to you right now. Strategies for developing basic speechwriting and delivery skills are in this category, and that is why they are included in Level 1. Understand and apply these ideas right away.



If you are reluctant to receive feedback, you are limiting your growth.

The second type is feedback that is important, but not right away. For example, my primary area of expertise is vocal variety, but advanced vocal variety techniques are not necessary for the new speaker. That can wait for later, as you develop. If you determine that some feedback is in this category, keep the information for later. Put it in a folder where you can find it again, for it is valuable, but focus for now on where you need to grow.

The third category is feedback that is not necessarily valid. The feedback that you receive is someone else’s opinion. Their observations may reflect their preferences, which may not fit

your style. If the feedback doesn’t make sense to you, feel free to reject it, but not before first considering it.

The fourth type of feedback is unexpected feedback. After you’ve given a number of speeches, you will probably notice there is a pattern in the feedback you receive in speech evaluations. The same topics will be discussed as you grow. But occasionally someone will tell you something that wasn’t even on your radar. Years ago, a new Toastmaster pointed out that I had a nervous habit of playing with the pocket flap on my sports jacket. That became something to work on. Had I not been listening for the unexpected, I probably would have missed it.

My final tip is to know where you need to grow. I have found that I am more effective in improving my speaking skills if I concentrate on a specific area or two and work to master them. Those areas may not be evident when you first start out, but they will after multiple evaluations.

Decide which topics are your priorities and dive in. Request that your evaluators pay particular attention to those areas. And if a member of your club is strong in one of those areas, ask them to give you pointers as you progress. In other words, recruit a mentor.

When you are confident in these areas, move on to others. Always be learning.

Bottom line: Look at receiving feedback as a skill that you need to develop. It isn’t just a quick response to an evaluation. It is one of the primary ways that you can become a truly effective speaker.

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette, and Evening Stars Club in Denver, Colorado. Learn more at www.billbrownspeechcoach.com.

Toastmasters Expands Its Language Base

New District program offers more options to native speakers.

By Stephanie Darling

See the latest District maps.

New translations of approved Toastmasters material, many in languages that have never been available before, are coming online through the District Translation Program.

The program, which began as a promising pilot project in 2020, is now official. Districts have the opportunity to translate the Pathways learning experience and other approved resources into Toastmasters' 11 existing languages or into additional languages chosen by the District. It's a program that will make Toastmasters more inclusive and give many members a new opportunity to learn with confidence in their native language.

Districts organize and work with their own translation teams; World Headquarters provides project support and approval. Flexibility is key. Districts work at their own pace and have the ability to work with other Districts or external partners, such as universities. Final translations are posted to www.toastmasters.org or to Base Camp for use by all members.

District 110 (Central and Eastern Europe) has translated all 11 Pathways paths into Romanian, while many Pathways projects are now available in Hindi, Italian, and Polish. Nine Districts are working on additional translations in Italian, Polish, Hungarian, Slovak, Dutch, Malayalam, Swedish, French, and Simplified Chinese. Among the potential new languages: Thai, Greek, and Urdu.

"These translations will help Districts in the long term, and the experience is wonderful," says District 110 Director Calin Gilea, DTM, a member of the Timisoara Toastmasters Club in Romania.

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

How It Works

The program sets out a detailed process for cooperative efforts between District translation teams and World Headquarters. Once a project is approved, Districts set the scope of work and project timelines.



District Role

- Reach out to World Headquarters for authorization prior to commencing
- Organize translations teams to coordinate translation of approved materials into existing and/or additional languages
- Translate a language-specific glossary and style guide provided by World Headquarters
- Translate project files provided by World Headquarters

World Headquarters Role

- Evaluate translations and review requests
- Assign project to District translation teams; provide instructions and guidance
- Manage the centralized maintenance and quality control of translated items
- Make translated materials available on the Toastmasters website and Base Camp

Districts in Action

A diverse translations library has been on the mind of Gilea for at least the past five years.

"I noticed the need for translated materials in my country because most of the clubs here conduct meetings in our native language—Romanian. This was during the era of the traditional education program," he recalls.

"In 2018, I started to contemplate translating Pathways into Romanian as a pilot project when Pathways was rolled out in our region. That was the moment I started to build a translation team."

District 110 now has teams working on translating Level 1 of Pathways in Hungarian and Slovak. Gilea admits the translation work is rigorous. It took almost two years to translate 63 Pathways education projects into Romanian, with a small team of proofreaders, layout specialists, and quality control reviewers, he says.

The translations will be a robust addition to District education materials. Currently, around half of the clubs in the District are conducting meetings in native languages, none of which are English, Gilea explains.

Be the True You

Supercharge
your authenticity.

By Joel Schwartzberg

Authenticity is vital in effective business communications to establish critical trust and relatability. But with so many strategic decisions to make during a presentation, and many colleagues reviewing or contributing to it, how can leaders ensure they're communicating authentically?

Here are five tactics to ensure you're being the true you when sharing your ideas.

1 Don't Say Things That Don't Sound Like You

Let's start with what makes a leader sound inauthentic. At the top of the list: words and phrases that don't match the leader's speaking style or vocabulary. Whether they write their own speeches or not, leaders should reject wording that sounds more like a press release or poet laureate than themselves.

A phrase that reads authentic may not actually sound authentic when spoken aloud. Use the "Read Aloud" feature under the Review tab in many versions of Microsoft Word (or another text-to-speech program) to hear what your written text sounds like when spoken.

As a speechwriter, I once proudly turned in a manuscript that included a very fresh and creative phrase. I thought I nailed it. But the client crossed it out and wrote, "I'm not this clever." He was right; I was wrong. In authentic expression, personal always comes before poetic.

2 Skip the Script

If you want to create an authentic connection with your team, the last thing you want to do is write a speech and read it to them word-for-word. Reading turns a presentation into a performance: focusing on a script and words versus your audience and your points. If you're hyperfocused on giving a "perfect speech" and think having a script is the best way to achieve that, remember that you're not in a public speaking competition. Your job is to engage and inspire, not impress. And in the speaker's job, spontaneity and authenticity eat precision for breakfast.

Instead, create limited notes that focus on your outline and details you might otherwise forget. Keep it tight—like a cheat sheet—because to maintain authenticity, your notes should support you, not script you.

3 Tell Stories

Authenticity is conveyed particularly well through personal stories and examples. These short narratives don't need to be monumental events in your life. Even minor details—like a hobby, a pet, or a funny parenting moment—can humanize a leader as effectively as a

life-changing incident. Because they are so relatable, stories are also more effective icebreakers than simple jokes.

True stories are compelling because you're using "I" and "my," which are authenticity superconductors. In fact, any executive statement can sound more authentic merely by starting with the words "I believe that."

Use "I" only when relatability and trust are critical values, such as in stories and personal declarations. Most other leadership communications should begin with "we" to reinforce that success hinges on the entire team, not on the leader alone.

4 Be Unafraid to Make Mistakes

Another authenticity superconductor is imperfection. To err is indeed human! This doesn't mean you should intentionally make mistakes, just forgive yourself if you do and know it can make you seem more human. And keep in mind that many people may not even be aware that you made a mistake.

Some speakers hyperfocus on perfection, overestimating how much their colleagues or audience cares about a forgotten detail or a word fumble—or even a shirt stain, bad hair day, or a sudden cough. Psychologists call this hypersensitivity to perceived personal errors "the spotlight effect," and warn it can lead to crippling anxiety or excessive apologizing, which erodes your credibility.

When you make a mistake, remember that the authenticity points you gain are more valuable than the perfection points you lose. If you make an error, don't apologize, which calls attention to the error. Quickly correct yourself and move on.

5 Be Mindful With Your Truth

Being authentic doesn't mean revealing everything there is to know about you. Make revelations purposeful, not just personal, and don't share opinions or details you wouldn't want to be repeated to your entire staff or shared with local news media.

Authenticity is a leadership virtue but remember that it's exhibited as much by your communication as by your behavior. Conveying authenticity through conscientious messaging builds the levels of trust and respect that are essential to successful leadership and inspiration. **■**

Joel Schwartzberg is the senior director of strategic and executive communications for a national nonprofit, a presentation coach, and author of *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team and Get to the Point!* *Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter.* Follow him on Twitter @TheJoelTruth.

7 Tips to Attend a Bilingual Toastmasters Meeting

How to have a great time and practice your second language.

By Gwendydd Jones

Hallo!

Oi!

Привет

Bonjour

Hi!

When I joined Toastmasters Sevilla, I'd been living in Spain for more than 15 years. I grew up in the United Kingdom and completed a bachelor's degree in French and Spanish at university there, and moved to Sevilla after graduating. To earn a living, I taught English as a foreign language. After meeting the Spanish man who would later become my husband, I went on to earn two master's degrees in translation and became a freelance translator.

With all that language experience behind me, you'd think I wouldn't worry about giving speeches in Spanish, right? Wrong. It was a relief when I discovered that Sevilla is a bilingual club and that I'd have a chance to work on my public speaking in English once a month.

I encountered people far braver than me at those bilingual meetings. All members, whatever their level of English, were speaking up, and most of them were struggling. But we were all having a great time, while improving speaking our second (and sometimes third) language.

With the growth of online and hybrid meetings, you can easily practice your second language while connecting with Toastmasters from other countries. I encourage you to face the fear of attending a meeting in your second language. But before you rush off to find a club, here are my top tips to help you get the most out of your visit.

1 Set yourself up for a positive experience.

It's your job to ensure you get to practice speaking. Help yourself by telling the club that you are planning to visit and that you're nervous. The members will make an extra effort to welcome you and make you feel at home.

2 Get your motor running.

Take 15 minutes before the session to watch an online video in your second language. This will get your brain warmed up. Arrive early and introduce yourself in your second language to break the ice.

3 Don't compare yourself to others.

Perhaps someone else is a more proficient speaker than you. Don't use that as an excuse to stay quiet. Remember that self-shaming about mistakes never stops, even with language proficiency. Every time I speak in Spanish, I berate myself for the tiniest mistakes. I'm getting over this by trying to be more forgiving of myself.

4 Understand that silences aren't about you.

If you find the members subdued, don't interpret this as hostility. It's far more likely that they're all quietly stressing out about their meeting roles. They may be speaking in their second language and fretting about it, just like you. Break the silence if no one else does.

5 Know that the worst thing already happened.

Silences, funny mistakes, awkward moments—other members have likely already experienced these fears.

In our club, there have been instances of members attempting to answer a Table Topics® question and sitting in silence because the words wouldn't come. One day, a member finished her speech in English and then, thinking her camera and microphone were off, pressed her fingers to her temples, shook her head, and told herself in Spanish how terribly she'd done. Everyone laughed, reassured her, had fun, and learned together.

6 Commit to participating in Table Topics.

When the meeting starts, use the chat function to ask the Table Topicsmaster if they can give you an easy question. When it's your turn, keep things simple. Use the Word of the Day for inspiration.

7 Be real about how the other attendees are seeing you.

Rather than assuming everyone thinks your speaking is rubbish, ask yourself this question: What would you think about someone brave enough to do what you're doing at one of your club meetings? Well, that's what others are probably thinking about you. It's admirable to go out of your comfort zone to improve your skills.

And there you have it: preparation, participation, and positivity. If you still need convincing, I can tell you my Spanish has taken a leap forward since I realized the only language barriers were in my head.

Gwendydd Jones is an experienced translator, course creator, copywriter, and member of Toastmasters Sevilla in Sevilla, Spain. She blogs and offers courses for translators at [The Translator's Studio](#). Her club welcomes any Spanish learners who'd like to visit their hybrid meetings.



Setting Students Up for Success

By Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM

University-based Toastmasters clubs offer a higher education boost in learning.

In September 2019, when Devam Sisodraker started at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, Canada, he sought out Toastmasters. As a student of computer science and mathematics, he says, “Being able to speak confidently and simplify complex ideas is what separates people in very technical fields, and I wanted to be able to do that with ease.”

His father had told him about Toastmasters initially. Then during the university’s clubs day—a time to learn about campus organizations—he

spoke with members of UBC Toastmasters. He joined the university-based club the next week.

Student-Focused Clubs

Sisodraker likes the convenience of having a club that’s integrated with his life as a student. He also likes the club’s format. “The meetings and content are geared toward a younger audience that many students can relate to,” he says.

Although anyone is welcome, the club membership is mainly students, with a small percentage of alumni. Sisodraker says people outside those two groups don’t stay for long; instead, they join other nearby clubs.

UBC Toastmasters was chartered in March 1979 and is one of the oldest university-based clubs in the world. It started as Walter Gage Toastmas-



ters, named after a past university president who was known for his public speaking. The club changed its name in 2020 after realizing the old name was causing confusion with a residence hall named Walter Gage. Many thought the club was just for people living there.

According to Sisodraker, the key to the club's longevity is fun. Speeches and Table Topics® are focused on shared experiences and common university culture, such as a favorite first-year experience. "Our club aspires to be

Telangana, India. She joined Toastmasters during her first year of studies. She likes the convenience of attending meetings on campus and the fact that the university pays half of the dues for every member.

The club membership is almost entirely composed of students and, like UBC Toastmasters, focuses on creative and fun meetings. "Sometimes we organize debates or have fun themes like recreating *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*," she says. The club also hosts university speaking contests and holds meetings with special attire, such as Halloween, Christmas, and various Indian festivals.

Tadikonda joined to overcome stage fright. "On the first day of my university life, I was asked to stand on the stage and speak a few sentences to introduce myself," she says. "The moment I stood on the stage, my legs and hands were shivering. My mind went blank. I could barely speak."

Then she joined Toastmasters. Six months later, she had another opportunity to stand on a stage and introduce herself. "This time, I nailed it," she says.

She also became Vice President Education for her club and can see herself transforming into a leader. Through Anurag Toastmasters, she can make mistakes in a safe environment, learn a wide variety of new topics, and network with Toastmasters in different clubs, cities, states, and countries. She doesn't believe she can get that experience from a course or another campus club. "All the other clubs in my college are restricted to the compound walls of my college, but Toastmasters isn't one of them," she says.

Staff- and Faculty-Focused Clubs

There are also university-based clubs for just staff and faculty, like Boston College Toastmasters in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. The college established the club for staff and faculty as a welcoming and safe place for peer learning.

Lavette Scott-Smith, IT training and event specialist, attended an open house to learn more about Toastmasters and felt comfortable immediately. She joined and started participating right away.

Scott-Smith appreciates the fact that the club members are only staff and faculty. She describes the club environment as "a space not dependent

There is a natural connection between universities and Toastmasters through the shared understanding of the value of experiential learning.

a place where people can get away from stress," he says. It's also a nonjudgmental and inclusive space.

Although university public speaking courses are available, Sisodraker says they focus too much on presenting slides. Through Toastmasters, he's learning to think on his feet, adapt to the situation, and keep an audience engaged. "Toastmasters is well-rounded, and we offer a positive and friendly environment where all members learn public speaking from every angle," he says.

Vaishnavi Tadikonda of Anurag Toastmasters agrees. Tadikonda is pursuing a mechanical engineering degree at Anurag University in Hyderabad,

on position or rank, where people can be authentic and grow together and develop deep relationships." Because everyone is familiar with the campus culture, the club feels family oriented.

She also values the chance to gain exposure to skills, tools, and education that can be applied to her job. In addition to her ongoing meeting participation, Scott-Smith accepted a club officer position, which is strengthening her leadership skills. The club started a quarterly digital newsletter in June 2021 to help with communication, outreach, and membership retention, and she learned a new communications platform to distribute it.



Anurag Toastmasters of Hyderabad, Telangana, India, pose with certificates.

The club chartered in March 2021 with students, staff, and faculty. The university’s goal is to offer students, who make up more than half of the membership, an opportunity to develop public speaking and leadership skills.

Student Services Department Head Sekh Nazimul Islam joined to be a better communicator with his students and engage with them. He has experienced progress in his goals and more. “I have so far been able to enhance my managerial and leadership capacity vividly,” he says.

Through the meeting roles, such as evaluator and Ah-Counter, he has strengthened his critical-thinking and active-listening skills. “It has equally taught me an effective way of giving constructive feedback,” he says. He’s also achieved leadership success as Club President by motivating and engaging members in the Toastmasters program.

Campus Community Clubs

Then there are clubs like Key Toastmasters at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah, with members from the broader campus community. The membership comprises graduate and undergraduate students, staff, faculty, and local residents.

Chartered in April 1964, Key Toastmasters started as a community club and transferred to a university-based club in 2008. School of Medicine Research Associate Wang Zm attributes Key Toastmasters’ longevity to its diverse membership composition, success in developing members’ skills and increasing their self-confidence, convenient location, and family-like group.

Zm joined the club to improve his communication skills in English. Table Topics has been particularly helpful for him. “I don’t fear an impromptu public speech now,” he says. “Although Table Topics is a very short speech, it works well for building confidence, quickly organizing a talk, and handling an awful situation.”

He sees everyone benefitting from Toastmasters’ structure and holistic learning approach—something people wouldn’t get from a public speaking class. In particular, he cites Toastmasters’ system of feedback as a differentiator from university courses. “Toastmasters helps students in job interviews and members in their careers, such as promotion, communication, and collaboration,” he says.

Skyline University Nigeria Toastmasters in Kano, Nigeria, also has a diverse membership.

Why University Clubs?

There are approximately 500 university-based clubs active around the world. Over half of these clubs are in Asia, with 25% in India alone. One-third are in the Americas, including 25% in the United States. Throughout the year, three to six university-based clubs charter each month.

There is a natural connection between universities and Toastmasters through the shared understanding of the value of experiential learning. Toastmasters can also fill a void in curricula that don’t offer communi-



Key Toastmasters of Salt Lake City, Utah, meets on Zoom.

cation and leadership courses, especially in technical fields. Plus, in a university setting, there are built-in channels for communication and marketing.

It's beneficial to develop communication and leadership skills and confidence at any age, but the earlier the better. In addition to the Pathways education program, Toastmasters provides volunteer and team management growth opportunities—something not all students might have access to.

Members are also surrounded by other motivated people. They can connect with individuals they would never interact with on campus or know outside the classroom—meeting new and diverse people in their clubs and through the global network. University-based Toastmasters clubs tend to be more inclusive, especially of younger members. Lastly, for students especially, convenience makes a difference.

University Club Challenges

Like most clubs around the world, university-based Toastmasters clubs changed to online meetings when the pandemic hit. For some, meetings continued as scheduled. Others struggled in the transition. Anurag Toastmasters and Key Toastmasters both saw a shift in membership. Their student members were less likely to attend online meetings. Some clubs are moving back to in-person meetings or offering a hybrid option, and students are returning.

The regular academic calendar also presents a challenge. During exams or breaks, students often don't attend meetings. Clubs with significant student membership can see higher than average turnover, as students' schedules change each semester, and they tend to move away after they graduate.

For clubs with a mix of students, staff, and faculty, there can be power dynamics to navigate. Faculty can be difficult to recruit as members because many feel they are already good speakers and may not want to be in a club where they are evaluated by the very students they are teaching.

University Clubs Best Practices

For some clubs, opening to all campus community members or expanding to alumni and local residents provides more membership stability. Having a department sponsor the club can help with any monetary barriers to joining or meeting space issues.

Some clubs hold meetings on different days and different times of the day to adjust to the academic calendar. They offer flexible and creative programming and avoid scheduling meetings during key events or breaks. As Sisodraker notes, a strong officer team is a must.



UBC Toastmasters of Vancouver, Canada, dress up for Halloween.

“Toastmasters helps students in job interviews and members in their careers, such as promotion, communication, and collaboration.”

—WANG ZM

It's also important to use relevant marketing approaches for member communication, engagement, and recruitment. In addition to including standard sections—such as club meeting information—Boston College Toastmasters' quarterly e-newsletter helps people get to know each other through new member introductions, member spotlights, and birthday celebrations. Scott-Smith's favorite section is Skills Corner, which offers members challenges, tips, or tricks. A recent edition included a tongue twister to practice.

UBC Toastmasters posts fun announcements and video clips on the club's Instagram and Facebook accounts. Officers contact people who follow the accounts to see if they'd like to visit a meeting or join.

University-based clubs help members get started on the right course of lifelong learning and growth. “Toastmasters is a confidence booster,” says Tadikonda of the Anurag club in India. “This transformation will help me in my career.” 

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is a member of 5 Star Toastmasters in Arlington, Virginia, and a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine. Learn more at www.jenniferlblank.com.

Harness 110 Speaking Skills

Dive into the details of how to effectively combine your strongest characteristics.

By David JP Phillips

Why is she tilting her head when listening? Why does he stand stiffly while speaking? Why did he step backward when asking the audience a question?

I had been a public speaking coach for about eight years when I started noticing patterns in peoples' speaking behavior. I saw that when having everyday conversations, leaders, speakers, and salespeople often displayed common behaviors—both good and bad. I started to wonder why, and to consider whether changing these behaviors would render different results in communication.

I began the journey of writing down the positive characteristics, which I came to call “skills.” After about seven years and 5,000 speakers, I was able to distill these behaviors into 110 core skills—and even more subskills that

skill with empowering head movement, like nodding and affirming people's questions while listening. Also: If you know the answer, don't answer immediately—credit the person for asking a good question by moving your eyes upward or downward to signal that the answer needs some consideration before responding. Just like that, my client started receiving more questions every time they presented. These behaviors signaled that they truly cared about the questions and could effectively deliver answers.

I was able to clearly define and guide my clients with core skills that represented the fundamental building blocks of their personal communication. In addition, I had discovered that not only were there 110 core skills, but there were also three interesting layers that emerged from the research.

Not only were there 110 core skills, but there were also three interesting layers that emerged from the research.

wonderfully bolstered and supported the development of communication. These subskills represented various features, such as different ways to make sounds with your mouth, like clicking and whistling. I categorized these under the skill of creating sound effects.

I began noticing other useful behaviors. For example, the skill of dramatization, which combines using words effectively with subskills like singing, roleplaying, screaming, and any extreme vocal characteristics.

So there I was, with 110 core skills and hundreds of subskills, and my dream was coming true. My aim was to coach more people and deliver better results, and I started to develop my 110STEPS course. Suddenly, I knew how to resolve challenges my clients were facing, such as, “I don't get questions after my presentation—what should I do?” I could advise my client to use an empowering head angle, a skill that involves tilting your head to the left or right to show that you care about any and all audience questions.

I could also share insights into handling questions from the audience. One example: Combine the above

1 Skill-Chains

The concept that certain skills benefit from being launched in a particular sequence is a skill-chain. For example, here's a skill-chain that is powerful when ending a talk, or when you need to generate absolute attention: *You start moving toward the audience, you lower your body, slow down the pace of your words, switch to a soft timbre, lower your volume of speech, focus your eyes, and launch an effective pause as the audience drools, patiently waiting in anticipation of your final words.* Combining these seven specific skills will create a wonderful effect and keep your audience's focus.

2 Interconnected skills

The second layer refers to interconnected skills, meaning one particular skill directly impacts several other skills. I consider these more focused skills “mother skills” since many others branch off from this starting point. A clear example of this is the skill of base volume, which is the volume you generally speak at, from which you can

110 Steps of Communication

NERVOUSNESS		VOICE			BODY LANGUAGE					FACIAL EXPRESSIONS			LANGUAGE		ULTIMATE LEVEL
1 Swaying	7 Register / Pitch	16 Up-Down talk	25 Filler sounds	33 Confident posture	42 Shrugging shoulders	51 Pointing	60 Progression	69 Horizontal movement	76 Neutral	85 Adapted	94 Hexacolon	103 Loves presenting			
2 Squirming	8 Slow pace	17 Volume increase	26 Prosody	34 Neutral Posture	43 Intensity variation	52 Volume/Size	61 Empowering head angle	70 Bent knees	77 Matching	86 Flow	95 Tricolon	104 Role playing			
3 Irrational movement	9 Fast pace	18 Volume decrease	27 Melody	35 Base Pace	44 Functional	53 Regulators	62 Unfunctional head angle	71 Amplification	78 Dramatising	87 Strong rhetorics	96 Repetition	105 Total intensity transition			
4 Stroke / Fidget	10 Base pace	19 Unfunctional pauses	28 Articulation	36 Affect	45 Smooth	54 Rhythm of speech	63 Standard head angle	72 General eye contact	79 Mouth	88 Filler words	97 Anaphora	106 Acts out the obvious			
5 Flight / Freeze	11 Timbre	20 Relaxation pause	29 Voice climax	37 Feet	46 Distinct	55 Signs	64 Amplifying head movement	73 Sweeping	80 Eyebrows	89 Negations	98 Epiphora	107 Present and authentic			
6 Unbalanced feet	12 Emphasis	21 Strategic pause	30 Dramatising	38 Hips	47 Adapted size	56 Imaginary props	65 Stage Presence	74 Focus	81 Forehead	90 Repetitive words	99 Alliteration	108 Synchronicity			
	13 Playful emphasis	22 Effect pause	31 Language change	39 Angle	48 Standard pace	57 Drawings	66 Anchoring	75 Attire	82 Eyes	91 Absolute words	100 Correctio	109 Contrast			
	14 Base volume	23 Vocal Fry	32 Sound effects	40 Relaxed	49 Adapted pace	58 Affect display	67 Vertical movement		83 Self laugh	92 Strategic	101 Climax	110 Visualisation			
	15 Varied volume	24 Elongated vowels		41 Dramatizing	50 Full out	59 Sounds	68 Power areas		84 Straight face	93 Valued	102 Anadiplosis				

David JP Phillips' matrix of the 110 speaking skills can also be found at www.davidjpphillips.com.

either increase volume or lower it. This would impact over 21 other skills, like confident posture, distinct gestures, and sweeping eye movements. If a speaking coach doesn't know about these interconnected skills, they would coach the person in those 21 individual skills, which would be a waste of time because the mother of these interconnecting skills is base volume. The mother skill is the answer to effective coaching. A few other important mother skills to mention are eye focus, horizontal movement, and functional gestures.

3 Synchronicity

Imagine walking into a room, meeting a person you have never met before, yet enjoying their presence. You feel relaxed and are able to open up instantly and with great ease. Now imagine the same room and meeting a person who you just don't like or trust. You are not sure why, but you are unable to connect with them and you feel uneasy. This speaks to the third layer I discovered, which has to do with

synchronicity. It comprises five levels: body language, facial expressions, voice, gestures, and words. When all five levels of communication are aligned to help you deliver one message, you achieve ultimate synchronicity. These five layers will dictate the ways in which you connect with others and the theory is simple: It is important to effectively use all of the layers, otherwise, you won't fully connect with your audience. To master the five layers of synchronicity, practice until they are an extension of yourself and speak with emotion to enhance it further.

So as with all systems, we have to ask the question: What are the flaws of the model? While there are great advantages, the model cannot be used on everybody. Once in a while, you see a person who has a truly unique style, and that style and behavior should never be changed. It also isn't accurate to say that the model molds all speakers to present the same way. Everyone has unique characteristics, expressions, and personalities that blend into

the 110 skills in different ways—rendering unique results. Understanding how to use these characteristics should help you refine your skills, ensuring that you convey your message clearly and creatively.

What's the next step for you? Look at each of the characteristics and begin to systematically practice each skill until you achieve fluency in each one. Practice it in your everyday life so that when you are onstage, it becomes second nature to you.

Irrespective of which path you take, becoming an excellent public speaker requires careful consideration of individual skills and identifying your greatest strengths while being mindful of your greatest potential. This will set you apart and allow you to deliver a powerful message. **T**

David JP Phillips is the founder of HeadGain Academy and a TEDx speaker. He presented on his 110 skills at the 2021 Toastmasters Convention. You can connect with him at www.headgain.com and on [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), and [Instagram](#).

Managing and Resolving Conflict

Strong communication skills can help you defuse thorny disagreements.

By Peggy Beach, DTM

“Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for resolving conflict.”

—American journalist Dorothy Thompson

John and Mary, a couple married for more than 20 years, received a larger than usual tax refund. They disagree about what to do with the money. John wants to put it in their retirement fund, while Mary wants to use it for their annual vacation. The couple have had several arguments and are not sure how to resolve the issue.

Jack, a graphic designer, has asked his boss, Lily, for a raise. Lily, however, does not feel he has earned it. Jack believes he has worked extra hard on getting new clients in the past year. Both now feel awkward around each other at the office.

Sam was recently elected President of his Toastmasters club. He is concerned that Sharon, the new Vice President Education, is not handling all her responsibilities: Several members have not had their Pathways level-completions accepted and the club did not hold a speech contest this

should be done, how money should be spent, or what an end result should be.

While it may be tempting to ignore the situation and hope it goes away, or get angry about the situation, or gossip to others, researchers have found that straightforward communication is key to resolving conflict. And *how* you manage and communicate your message is the most important factor.

What are some strategies to resolve conflict? Here are three points to keep in mind.

1 Conflict may not be a bad thing. Change your perspective.

Humans tend to see conflict in negative terms—war, confrontation, divorce, anger, combat. But conflict itself doesn't have to be viewed that way, says Amber Hill Anderson, an attorney and former Toastmaster from Denver, Colorado, who frequently uses mediation and negotiation in her cases. “Conflict is an opportunity. ... Conflict is helpful when utilized to reflect, reimagine, and re-create.”

“It is very important that you be curious, be open, and be receptive. Don't judge. Listen.”

—CHRIS FORD, DTM, TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT, 2007–2008

spring because Sharon put off assigning a speech contest organizer until it was too late. Sam is irritated and Sharon has not been communicating with him.

When you are in a relationship—of any kind—you will find that conflict isn't unusual. For most of us, such situations can be uncomfortable and upsetting. But they don't have to be. If you look at conflict from a different perspective, listen to the other person with respect and understanding, and tackle issues early, and directly, the results might be better than you imagined.

Why Do We Struggle?

Conflict happens when people perceive things differently, such as in our examples at the beginning—how things

Reimagining a conflict—viewing it from a different perspective—is a good way to settle a disagreement, says Dana Caspersen, author of *Changing the Conversation: The 17 Principles of Conflict Resolution*. Instead of responding in anger or with an attack when someone criticizes or disagrees with you, see the conflict as an opportunity to further develop your relationship with the other person. If you are making things worse in the conflict, stop, she suggests. Appeal to the other person's best self. A key solution is to assume undiscovered options exist. This allows both parties to find solutions that each can support.

Kory Floyd, a professor of communication at the University of Arizona, says that working in a constructive manner on a conflict can help relationships. Often, the



In Jack and Lily's case, perhaps they could establish tangible guidelines on what constitutes the kind of job growth that warrants a raise. That way, there is clear and mutually agreed-on proof of Jack's progress. Or maybe there are other factors to consider regarding a raise, such as the company's financial picture.

Ford also says that conflict resolution does not have to be a lengthy process—it can be informal.

"Effective leadership intervention is what leaders do," he says. "It is insufficient to shrug it off, hoping that it will go away, or refer it to someone else."

By seeing conflict in a more positive way, by listening to others and opening a dialogue, we can resolve the conflict as well as repair and strengthen our relationships. **T**

Peggy Beach, DTM, is a Past District 37 Governor. She is a member of the Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina, and the Hi Rise Toastmasters in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is a freelance writer and a communications instructor. You can contact her at writereditorpeggybeach@gmail.com.

Resources

Chris Ford, DTM, 2007–2008 International President and an expert on conflict resolution, recommends these books for insight on the topic.

- *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher and William Ury, and for the second edition, Bruce Patton of the Harvard Negotiation Project
- *Dealing With Difficult People: 24 Lessons for Bringing Out the Best in Everyone* by Dr. Rick Brinkman and Dr. Rick Kirschner
- *Conversational Intelligence: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results* by Judith E. Glaser
- *Mediating Interpersonal and Small Group Conflict* by Dr. Cheryl A. Picard

parties believe that their goals are incompatible when in fact there is likely a workable solution. He specifically cites finances as a key source of conflict in marriages.

In the earlier example of John and Mary, the two are arguing over how to spend a tax refund. While they may see the goals as incompatible, both parties want to spend the money wisely. They could decide to divide the money in half for each of their goals or spend the money on another goal. The solution is there. It just has to be found.

2 Understand the other person's point of view.

Conflict does not have to be a zero-sum game where one party wins and the other loses. Both parties can win if each understands the other's viewpoint.

Chris Ford, DTM, Toastmasters International President from 2007 to 2008, has taught a class for Toastmasters officers called *Conflict is Inevitable—Combat is Optional*.

"It is very important that you be curious, be open, and be receptive," says Ford. "Don't judge. Listen."

Anderson, the attorney, admits that it is often hard to understand the other person when in the middle of a conflict. However, she stresses the importance of understanding the other person's perspective. "Considering the arguments, experiences, fears, emotions, and interests of others opens up the realm of solutions and does not need to involve abandoning one's own interests," she says.

If Sam and Sharon want their Toastmasters club to be successful, they need to understand each other. Sharon may feel overwhelmed with the role of Vice President Education and need to establish committees to help with her various responsibilities. She may also need additional training. Sam may need to set clearer timelines and expectations, along with finding the best way to communicate with her on a regular basis. Understanding what each other needs will go a long way to a productive working relationship.

3 Get to the conflict early. Don't wait to resolve.

Ford, a member of Manotick Toastmasters in Manotick, Ontario, Canada, uses the acronym ELI: Early, Local, and Informal. It also stands for Effective Leadership Intervention.

"For a conflict to be resolved successfully, get to it as early as possible," says Ford.

Floyd, the communications professor, has a similar outlook. He notes in his book *Interpersonal Communication* that humans tend to avoid conflict because it can be uncomfortable. But waiting to cope with conflict, says Floyd, will not solve the problem—it will only escalate it, making it harder to resolve.

Ford suggests that not only should leaders attempt to resolve conflicts early, but they also should do it locally without involving a higher authority, if possible. For example, Jack and Lily should see if they can resolve his request for a raise on their own before taking the issue to Lily's boss. The fewer people involved, the better.



How to Have Those Awkward Conversations

You really can say anything to anyone when you're prepared.

By Shari Harley

We've all been there. Someone does something irritating, off-putting, or upsetting, and we must decide to speak up or say nothing. We ask ourselves—is it worth it? Will the conversation make a difference? Will the behavior change? Do I even have the right to say anything? If I speak up, will I damage the relationship or make the situation worse?

If someone's behavior is negatively impacting them, your organization, or you, it's okay to say something. I regularly give speeches on the [subject](#) and even wrote a book on the topic, *How to Say Anything to Anyone: Setting Expectations for Powerful Working Relationships*. That said, there are a few things to consider before having an awkward conversation.

Who Are You Talking To?

First, ask yourself if you have the kind of relationship to give this person feedback. People are more receptive to negative feedback when they trust the person providing it. If you don't have a trusting relationship, it's very difficult to give feedback without damaging the relationship.

Second, evaluate whether the person is open to hearing the feedback. If they aren't, it's better to say nothing. When there is a lack of receptivity, you'll be faced with resistance and won't see behavior change. You can give feedback to a senior person at work, a fellow Toastmaster, a family member, or a friend, provided you have a trusting relationship with that person, and they are open to your feedback.

Let's say the criteria for giving feedback are met—there is a significant impact on the person, on the organization, or on you; the person trusts you and your reasons for speaking up; and the person is open to your feedback. When all these things are true, how do you say what you want to say, and where and when do you have the conversation?

Preparation Is Key

If a conversation is going to be particularly difficult, write out what you want to say. Then save those notes as a draft and come back to them the next day. Your message might be different a day later when you're feeling less emotional. Never give feedback when you're upset.

Next, practice what you're going to say out loud. Speaking words out loud and "saying" them in your head are not the same thing. Use your notes to guide you. Typed, bulleted notes, double spaced, with large font will help if the conversation becomes emotional or tense. Your handwritten notes will not help you during times of stress.

always start difficult conversations by telling the person the reason I'm speaking up. It could sound something like, "I care about you and your career. I'm seeing something impact you negatively and I want to tell you." Or "I care about you and our relationship. Something is impacting our relationship and I want to tell you about it." Or "I need to talk with you. This

In my book, I call vague feedback Cap 'n Crunch. Vague feedback is just like the children's breakfast cereal. It contains no nutritional value and leaves you feeling hungry 10 minutes after eating. Vague feedback leaves people confused, defensive, and wanting to know more. If you really want to help a person or alter a behavior or situation, you'll be specific.

If someone's behavior is negatively impacting them, your organization, or you, it's okay to say something.

If you aren't sure what to say, ask for help. Everyone but you will do a better job planning a hard conversation because other people aren't emotionally involved. It's our emotions that make feedback conversations difficult. If the situation is work related, ask for help from people outside your organization. Change the name of the person involved. Don't increase the gossip that is pervasive in most organizations.

Time to Talk

Once you've typed out talking points, reviewed your notes when you're not upset, practiced out loud, and possibly received some help planning the conversation, you're ready to ask for time to talk. The location and timing of awkward conversations are essential to being heard, strengthening relationships, and seeing behavior change. Ask the person for time to talk. Always give negative feedback privately. Make sure the person can focus on the conversation and isn't distracted by looming deadlines, an upcoming meeting, a vacation, or a sick family member. If the recipient is distracted, you're talking for yourself and won't see the receptivity or change you're looking for.

You can give feedback in person, over the phone, or via video. Any of these mediums will work. Pick the medium that will allow you to provide feedback within a week or two of the event you want to address.

If the timing is right, you are both in a private place, and you've planned your conversation, it's time to deliver the feedback. I

might be awkward for both of us, but I'd rather you hear this from me than from someone else." A phrase like this explains why you're talking. You're planting little seeds of trust. Because when people trust your motives, you can say anything. When people don't trust your motives, nothing you say will get through.

Say This, Not That

Now it's time to give examples. When you give feedback, provide one to three specific examples of the behaviors you saw the person exhibit. If you can't give an example, you're not ready to give feedback. Saying, "You hurt my feelings," without telling the person what they said or did that hurt your feelings, only creates paranoia and defensiveness. Vague statements violate the purpose of giving feedback—which is to be helpful to another person.

Instead of saying, "You're sleeping on the job," say, "You volunteered to run this year's team builder. Our retreat is in 10 days, and I haven't seen a plan yet. Is there something going on?" Instead of saying, "You're taking advantage of our hospitality," tell your house guest, "We love having you here. We're happy to host you for the week. After that it would be best to find a hotel." Instead of telling someone they're a gossip, say, "I heard that you were talking about me to others in the club. This makes me feel like I can't trust you. What's happening?" Helpful feedback provides just the facts. Skip the subjective judgments, which increase defensiveness. Instead, focus on observable behaviors.

On the Defense

Now, let's talk about defensiveness. Most people say they avoid giving feedback because they don't want to hurt another person's feelings, or they're afraid the person will quit a volunteer or paid role. But what if we, the feedback provider, just don't want to deal with the person yelling, crying, being angry, or giving us the six-months-long silent treatment?

Human beings get defensive when they receive feedback. Defensiveness is a normal, natural, and even healthy response to feedback. Human beings want to be seen as competent. Negative feedback calls our competence into question and the brain reacts, defending itself. When you give feedback, your job is to tell it how you see it. The listener's job is to defend themselves. Defensiveness is a normal and predictable part of the feedback process. Instead of avoiding the person's defensiveness, plan for it. Use your notes to bring the conversation back on track when the listener takes the conversation offtrack.

You really can say anything to anyone when people trust your motives and are open to your feedback. Prepare. Make typewritten notes, practice out loud, get help when you need it, and gather your courage. You can say more than you think you can. **T**

Shari Harley is the founder and president of *Candid Culture*, a Denver, Colorado-based training and keynote speaking firm that aims to bring candid conversations back to the workplace. A keynote speaker throughout the U.S. and internationally, she spoke at the Toastmasters 2021 Virtual Convention. Learn more about Shari Harley and *Candid Culture's* training programs at www.candidculture.com.



Listen to an exclusive *Toastmasters* Podcast interview with Jozse Piranian.

From Silent Stutterer to Stand-Up Comedian

Jozse Piranian faced his fear of public speaking with a bold first step.

By Shannon Dewey

For 25 years, Jozse Piranian not only feared public speaking, but he went out of his way to make sure he wouldn't have to speak at all, especially while taking classes at university. It was more than just nerves or standing up in front of his peers—he had a lifelong stutter that left him ashamed, and ultimately silenced.

Originally from Lebanon, Piranian left his home country at 18 to pursue his business and psychology undergraduate degree and master's in Canada. It was in his second year at university that he begged his professors to exempt him from all his presentations. His objective was to get into a research-oriented field that required little to no speaking. He reached that goal and became a research analyst.

You should hear him now. Piranian, 32, currently lives in Toronto, Canada, and delivers motivational speeches to big-name companies like Google and Tesla; he's spoken in four languages across multiple continents, given

an inspirational TEDx Talk, and has even taken the stage as a stand-up comedian. But his rise to public speaking success didn't happen overnight. And while Piranian still grapples with a stutter, it no longer stops him. He said it all started with taking an important first step—joining Toastmasters.

Keep reading to learn how Piranian expanded his comfort zone and faced his fear head-on.

What were your biggest hurdles growing up with a stutter?

Growing up in Lebanon with a stutter was not easy—I avoided speaking every time that I could. When I couldn't avoid it, I felt shame and embarrassment. Why engage the world, I thought, when I could hide in the isolating and yet comforting cocoon of my own silence? Considering that all humans have an innate desire to fit in,

being “different” was particularly challenging in my teenage years as well as in my 20s. I have so many stories involving avoiding speaking situations out of the fear of being judged for being different.

Can you talk about the turning point that led you to start speaking up?

After asking several professors to exempt me from both my presentations and any requirements to participate in class discussions, I realized that fear was controlling my life. For what seemed to be a radical obstacle, I needed a radical solution. And that solution was ... you guessed it.

Someone in my speech therapy program had mentioned they joined Toastmasters. I looked it up online and was pleased to find out that the university I went to in Montreal had a club [McGill Club at McGill University]! While I was absolutely terrified of going, I did end up taking that step.

What was your experience like in Toastmasters?

During one of my first meetings in 2009, I recall having severely stuttered on a word and then apologizing for it. During the evaluation segment of the meeting, one of the members told me something I’ll never forget: “You struggled. Don’t apologize when you’re onstage, though—it’s your time to shine.” I haven’t looked back since!

Quite frankly, I wouldn’t be where I am today had it not been for that initial step



Tell us what life is like for you now.

Today I speak professionally at various organizations (including Google, most recently), conferences, and educational institutions. I give speeches about my journey from avoiding speaking to performing stand-up comedy all around the world. In terms of audiences, it has ranged from small groups of five to 10 people all the way up to large venues with thousands of attendees.

The truth is, it’s an ongoing journey that requires constantly expanding my comfort zone. One of the exercises I had done for several years, before the pandemic, involved going to the mall or other public places where I would challenge myself by talking to 100 complete

ever I was shying away from social interaction, listening to stand-up comedy performances on the internet or even on my old iPod provided a source of comfort. I have performed most recently in Arabic while in Beirut. It still feels surreal to look back and see how far I’ve come.

What kind of comedy do you like to incorporate? Can you give us one of your best lines?

Besides my observational humor, I joke about having a stutter and the absurd situations and social reactions that happen as a result of being different. I start every performance by telling the audience that I’m going to take a while ... and that they might as well cancel all of their plans for the next 48 hours!

How would you encourage others who may have a stutter, or speech impediment, to follow in your footsteps and face their fear?

I would encourage people who have a stutter, speech impediment, or who are different in other ways, to own their uniqueness. It took me a very long time to come to the conclusion that it’s okay to be different! Use fear as a compass. Once you find that thing that scares you the most, do it. And then, do it again and again and again. Also ... join Toastmasters if you haven’t yet! 

Quite frankly, I wouldn’t be where I am today had it not been for that initial step of joining Toastmasters.

of joining Toastmasters. I’ve gained lifelong friendships, collaborative opportunities, and my fellow club members not only made me feel comfortable, but they also taught me valuable lessons about effective public speaking and leadership skills.

I’ve had the pleasure of being a member of different clubs, including McGill Club, Pitchmasters in Toronto, and both Speakers & Leaders and Pro-Toast Club in Beirut, Lebanon. I’ve also visited many clubs along the way, from Canada to Jamaica to Mexico!

strangers ... every single week! This exercise, that I first learned in my speech therapy program, proved to be transformational.

What led you down the path of stand-up comedy?

When I started stand-up, I expected it to be a temporary hobby. Fast-forward a few years, and I’ve performed on three continents and in four languages [English, French, Spanish, and Arabic]. It helps that I’ve been a huge fan of stand-up comedy since my teenage years. When-

Shannon Dewey is the digital content editor for the Toastmaster magazine.

The Value of the Vice President Membership

VPM's efforts and enthusiasm help recruit and retain members.

By Diane Windingland, DTM

When the question “Who is responsible for recruiting new members in a club?” is asked in Club Officer Training, the typical response is “every member!” While having every member building membership is ideal, there is one club officer who focuses on member recruitment and retention: the Vice President Membership (VPM)

The VPM role is critical to club success in one of the most challenging aspects of sustaining a thriving club: membership. It's also a role that can be very rewarding.

“I have been a Toastmaster for 23 years and served in many officer roles multiple times,” says Starlett Drader, DTM, a member of the Speak N’ Eagan Club in Eagan, Minnesota, and an Area Director. “VPM is my very

Relations (VPPR), and training members on how to invite guests. Recruiting new members does not have to be solely the responsibility of the VPM.

“I've learned in my role as VPM to lead everyone in learning how to invite guests [to meetings], invite them to be members, and together make sure we are meeting members' needs,” says Pat Croal, DTM, of the Saturday Morning Live! Club in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

2 Initiate contact with guests and make them feel welcome.

Sometimes the VPM may communicate with first-time guests prior to a meeting (for example, when a guest initiates contact with the club, or the VPM is copied

“VPM is my very favorite officer position because I get to meet potential members, help them see why Toastmasters can help them, and then watch them grow and shine in their newfound confidence and abilities.”

—STARLETT DRADER, DTM

Resources

Learn more about the Vice President Membership role:

- The Toastmasters [Club Leadership Handbook](#)
- The [Club Officer Tools](#) page on the Toastmasters website
- A one-page [overview](#) of the role

favorite officer position because I get to meet potential members, help them see why Toastmasters can help them, and then watch them grow and shine in their newfound confidence and abilities.”

In addition to being a crucial part of others' growth, VPMs grow their own communication and leadership skills in several areas, including:

- Marketing
- Networking and relationship building
- Strategic planning
- Collaboration

These skills are built through thoughtful execution of typical VPM responsibilities:

1 Recruit new members.

Recruiting new members can involve direct personal invites, collaborating with the Vice President Public

on a communication with a prospective guest). In those cases, the VPM might email or call the prospective guest to encourage them to attend and to provide information ahead of time.

When guests arrive at the meeting, the VPM can welcome the guest, and ask what brought them to the meeting. Knowing *why* a guest is at the meeting (e.g., a desire for skill development, a member invited them, etc.) can help customize the follow-up to them and how the benefits of membership are presented. The VPM can also ensure that the Club President welcomes the guest at the start of the meeting by providing the President with the guest's name ahead of time.

3 Provide information to guests.

The VPM should be prepared to answer questions regarding membership and to provide information to guests. Even if a club has physical guest packets, a Toast-



masters [virtual guest packet](#) should be provided in a follow-up email (and possibly in the chat in an online meeting). In addition, clubs might want to supplement the Toastmasters guest packet with unique information about their club, especially how to join.

4 Manage the process of converting guests to members.

The process of [converting guests to members](#) should be seamless. Consider evaluating your current process and creating a “Guest to Member” checklist, including:

- ☑ Following up with a guest within one to two days after the meeting (and even *during* the meeting, with a guest breakout room in online meetings).
- ☑ Filling out the membership application for a new member and submitting their dues.
- ☑ Communicating with prospects prior to the next meeting (contact former guests and invite them to an upcoming meeting).

- ☑ Ensuring that the new member is added to the club website and other club communications (calendar invites, newsletter, etc.).
- ☑ Handing the person off to the Vice President Education (VPE) for the scheduling and assignment of a mentor. The VPM could also be the officer who manages the Club Mentor Program.
- ☑ Getting the new member started in Pathways (if the mentor doesn't).

5 Conduct membership building programs.

The VPM, along with other club officers, organizes and promotes the club's participation in the Toastmasters [membership building programs](#): Smedley Award (August 1–September 30), Talk Up Toastmasters (February 1–March 31), and Beat the Clock (May 1–June 30).

The VPM can take the lead in organizing open houses or special events during each of the membership program time periods. They can ask members to specifically focus on invit-

ing guests, even finding out from members the names of people who they plan on inviting. To increase the likelihood of guests becoming members, hold the guest-focused events at the same time and location as the typical club meetings.

Another approach to membership building and retention is to consider every meeting a special event, and to create a high-quality experience for both members and guests.

“I prefer to focus on making every meeting an extraordinary experience,” says Lucinda Harman, DTM, currently the VPM for the Modikwa Toastmasters in Steelpoort, South Africa.

For many clubs, combining high-quality meetings with a few open houses (and getting members committed to invite specific guests), along with consistent follow-up, is the winning recipe for success.

Additionally, consider aspects that make your club unique, and target your invites to guests for whom your club culture would resonate.

6 Work with other club officers to strategize solutions to member challenges.

Having club officer executive committee meetings at least monthly to discuss member challenges and make action plans early and regularly will help the club avoid panic and despair later in the Toastmasters program year. Consider conducting a [Moments of Truth](#) or a [member survey](#) to find areas to improve your club's quality and to make your club one that members want to stay in and guests want to join!

DaWane Wanek, DTM, District 50 Director and a member of the Tyler Evening Toastmasters in Texas, encourages VPMs to show their enthusiasm and embrace the role. “Own it,” says Wanek. “Don't be afraid to engage prospects and make them feel like they want to be part of something special.” **T**

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

Weasel Words

When joining in the public conversation, it's always best to have an exit strategy.

By John Cadley

You ask a friend if she would like to come to your party on Saturday night. She replies, "Saturday? Around seven? Sure, I can probably make it." Your friend has just turned into a weasel. I know that sounds harsh but who else uses weasel words? If it talks like a weasel, it's a weasel. The word I'm referring to, of course, is "probably."

The second she said that, you thought, *She's not coming*. How did you know? Because it's the same thing you would have said to avoid *her* party. "I can probably make it"? What does *that* mean? It means she's accepted your invitation without accepting it. What she really said is, "It's possible I'll come, but given that I don't drink, hate small talk, gag on stuffed mushrooms, and go to bed at 9 p.m., the laws of probability are against it." She weaseled out.

We say this is a bad thing, devious, insincere, sneaky. We say she should have told the simple truth, which, in this case, would be, "No, I'm not coming to your party." Any party-givers out there want to hear that? Everybody's a cheerleader for the truth until it's about them. Then we'd all like a little sugar coating, a little weaseling, if you will. So let's forget the truth. It's a nice idea but if all we ever did was tell it, we'd have no friends, no spouse, and a possible prison sentence.

But we can't be outright liars, either. There has to be a middle ground between the harsh, blinding light of TRUTH and the gray, misty valley of MAYBE.

That's where weasel words come in. Yes, they make us weaselly, but weasels have a bad rap. They're called sneaky, when they're actually highly intelligent animals that can figure out how to slip into places specifically designed to keep them out, like chicken coops. They are vilified as vicious carnivores who kill more than they can eat at one time. This is because they have a very high metabolism rate and



must eat frequently. What humans call wanton slaughter is what weasels call grocery shopping for the week.

I come, then, not to bury weasel words but to praise them—and to help you use the right

"With all due respect" is
the best way I know to tell
someone they're completely
wrong while making it
sound like flattery.

ones. "Um" and "ah" may be vague and non-committal but you can do better. "That being said," for instance, are first-class weasel words: "Yes, your honor, I embezzled forty million dollars from my company. That being said..." There are a hundred ways to go with that, any one of which could knock two or three years off your sentence easily.

"With all due respect" is the best way I know to tell someone they're completely wrong while

making it sound like flattery: *You're misinformed, harebrained, and ignorant—and I respect that.*

"Could" and "might" are other weasel word classics. Saying you *might* buy the car, or you *could* clean the garage, gives the listener a reason to hope. You haven't cut them off or dashed their reason to believe. They can keep their hope alive, and you can keep avoiding the issue indefinitely—a clear win-win.

If you really need to weasel, fine print is your friend. No matter what the big words say, you can add so many qualifiers, conditions, and disclaimers in the small print that no court in the land could hold you to your word.

And let's not forget the passive voice, a plethora of opportunities for the weaselly minded. For instance, "The design was presented to the client." Who was the presenter? Nobody, which is exactly what you want if the client hates the work. Compare this to "I presented the design to the client." That's the active voice. *Never* use the active voice. It marks you with a big red X that says, "Looking for someone to blame? That's me!" Yes, you could take one for the team, but it's not the weasel way.

If you like to give unsolicited advice, try the subjunctive mood: "If I were your stockbroker, I'd recommend a buy on Xenotic Tech." Only you're not his broker, so if he loses 10 grand he really has no legitimate reason to slash your tires.

The whole point is not to get pinned down. Life is just too unpredictable. We all need a little wiggle room. Being weaselly might not fit your self-image, but it's better than an insect stuck to a piece of cardboard inside a specimen case. That's pinned down. You don't want to be an insect. 🐛

John Cadley is a former advertising copywriter, freelance writer, and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Learn more at www.cadleys.com.

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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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