

TOASTMASTER®

December 2009

Talk Smart at the *Holiday* Office Party

Speaking to Children

How professional speakers
work with younger audiences.

Tips for a New Year's Eve Toast

Speaking About Social Responsibility



The Secret of Your Success

† When my employer and mentor, United States Senator Mark Hatfield, retired after 45 years in public service, he was asked by many people what his secret was to longevity and success in politics. His reply: Building personal relationships. Not education, or intelligence, or financial resources. The secret was people.

Of the many benefits we receive in Toastmasters, one of the greatest is the people we meet and the friendships we form. Our network of Toastmasters friends can help us in all aspects of life.

This is certainly true for me. Earlier this year I was between careers. When I attended the Toastmasters Board Meeting this past February, in California, Past District 5 Governor Sheryl Roush took my photo and posted it on Facebook, a Web-based social networking site. Lynn Peterson, a commissioner for Clackamas County in Oregon, is a Facebook friend of mine who saw my Toastmasters photo and sent me a message asking if I had applied for the job of Clackamas County public affairs manager. I was not aware the job existed. Because of Toastmasters – where I met Sheryl – and because of Facebook – where I was connected to Lynn – I found my current career. Thank you, Sheryl and Lynn!

Our Toastmasters friendships can also lead to love. My friend Naomi invited me to my first Toastmasters meeting. I joined Toastmasters because of her encouragement. Many years later, I introduced Naomi to my Toastmasters friend Doug, who later married her. You never know where your Toastmasters associations will take you!

These are just a few examples of how Toastmasters, and our connections to others, change our lives, and in so many different ways!

At your next club meeting, look around at your fellow members. Are your best friends there? Does the meeting include mentors who guide you, speakers you emulate or leaders you learn from? Our involvement in Toastmasters is much more than improving our personal communication and leadership skills. Toastmasters offers us the opportunity to build our network of friends, learn from our peers and discover the rewards of helping others.

Perhaps the club members sitting next to you will help you find your next job, introduce you to your future spouse or support you when you need it most. That is the power of relationships. That is the potential of Toastmasters. Your journey of building relationships starts now!

Gary Schmidt, DTM
International President

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The Toastmasters Vision:
Toastmasters International empowers people to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Through our member clubs, people throughout the world can improve their communication and leadership skills, and find the courage to change.

The Toastmasters Mission:
Toastmasters International is the leading movement devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality.
Through its member clubs, Toastmasters International helps men and women learn the arts of speaking, listening and thinking – vital skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding, and contribute to the betterment of mankind.
It is basic to this mission that Toastmasters International continually expand its worldwide network of clubs thereby offering ever-greater numbers of people the opportunity to benefit from its programs.

Do you have something to say? Write it in 200 words or less, sign it with your name, address and club affiliation and send it to letters@toastmasters.org.

Enjoying the Fun for the Long Run

It was quite refreshing to read the letter written by Steve Richards from Luxembourg ("Am I the Only One?", June). There are members out there, like Steve and I, and hopefully many more, still enjoying the Toastmasters experience out of sheer fun. This is my first year in a Toastmasters club and I love to attend the friendly meetings. Not only have I met lovely and supportive people with whom I can easily chat – I also go there for the fun and laughter.

Last but not least, I go there to gain confidence in public speaking. While I understand that for some the professional benefits brought to them by Toastmasters are outstanding, for many others the benefits of social interaction, the enjoyment of listening to the stories of their fellow Toastmasters, and the laughter and fun far exceed any other expectations.

Andrea Daniel • Western Lectern Toastmasters
Baulkham Hills, Australia

A Note of Praise

As soon as I noticed the headline "In Defense of Using Notes" on the cover of the August *Toastmaster*, my heart rate increased. Cheers for Bill Matthews' article, "The Script as Friend and Foe," for his guiding points on using full notes for public speaking. It's about time someone stepped outside the Toastmasters' mantra-like call for speaking away from the lectern and avoiding the use of notes.

As I teach a yearly course on public speaking and presentation skills, I always encourage writing out a full script and speaking from it (even when using a PowerPoint presentation). I show how to print out your script at 18-20 point size, and I urge bringing a horizontal and

vertical printout, because some lecterns are very difficult to use.

For over 40 years I've tried just about every style Bill Matthews mentions and settled on the use of full notes, as it gives me power over the creative use of word choices. To "turn a phrase" while ad-libbing is very difficult. Thanks, Bill, for the four tips for success. They are noteworthy.

Larry Hurley • Bay of Quinte Toastmasters • Trenton, Ontario, Canada

Looking from the Outside In

I was captivated by the article "Know Thy Culture" (October). So many articles about understanding cultural differences contain recycled, heard-it-all-before information. This was a great look at listening to a "typical" American speaker from an outside perspective. I laughed, learned a lot and came away feeling enriched for having read the piece.

Thanks for an A+ article.

Dena Harris, ATMB • Blue Moon Toastmasters
Greensboro, North Carolina

Remembering Cory

My congratulations to you for another exciting issue of *Toastmaster* magazine and to Corin Ramos for her fantastic article, "Cory Aquino: The Philippines' Plain-Spoken Leader" (October). I was moved and impressed by the content. It was a tribute to our dear president Cory

Aquino, and showed how inspiring it was that even a plain-spoken person can make a difference in the world, earn the admiration of great speakers and be respected by others.

This article is a good motivator to speak up, and where else can we find a safe place to practice other than in a Toastmasters club, with people around us who are dynamic, encouraging and supportive.

The article made us Filipinos proud. Cheers!

Maribeth Young • El Presidente Toastmasters
Mandaluyong City, Philippines

Ecstatic About Evaluation Article

Carol Dean Schreiner's article "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (August) is the best magazine article I have read since I joined Toastmasters in 2006.

I read it twice in one go with great interest as it capsulized the essence of the Toastmasters evaluation process. Immediately, I scanned the "Handy Evaluation Checklist" that ran with the article, which I could use for my future evaluations of impromptu as well as prepared speeches. Being the current VPE of my club, I will promptly adopt Ms. Schreiner's suggestion that evaluating the speech evaluators become a standard feature of the General Evaluator's meeting role.

Gamini Senanayake, CC, CL • Wayamba Toastmasters
Kurunegala, Wayamba, Sri Lanka

Professional Photographers Needed

We're seeking professional photographers' submissions for use in Toastmasters publications and PR materials. Please submit photos of real Toastmasters speaking at a lectern, applauding in an audience, pounding a gavel, answering Table Topics or performing other TI-related activities. For more information, visit www.toastmasters.org/prophotos.



Surviving the roller-coaster ride of that first speech.

My Ice Breaker

† Okay. Here I go. The Toastmaster of the Day has completed my introduction and the last few precious moments of safety are gone. It's time to rise and walk to the podium... I mean, lectern.

I feel a sensation. I recognize it as the same feeling I get when the guard rail clicks in front of me on a roller coaster just before it starts to move. Whatever happens, I am now committed to seeing this speech through. Feelings of excitement, fear and acceptance of the inevitable well up within me.

I scan the audience of eager faces full of anticipation. They all look at me, smiling with encouragement.

That's right, smile – I should do that. Now words. I should say some words. What was that clever introduction I had written out? I can't remember. I stare at my notes and they look like ants crawling on a page. Time is ticking by. Say something!

"Hello, my fellow Toastmasters..." Not original, but good enough. It ended the silence.

The words are starting to flow. They are similar to what I wrote and rehearsed, but not exactly the same. I keep paraphrasing all the eloquent and meaningful sentences I had labored to perfect. I was not expecting that, but it's okay. I am speaking. Yes, actually speaking! I was doing what I thought I could never do.

A few weeks ago, after months of watching others speak, I finally worked up the courage to give my first speech. Between then and now, I've paddled through swells of enthusiasm and tidal waves of self-doubt.

But now I am speaking, and it's not bad. I can talk and the audience

seems to be listening. It's time for the joke. I've rehearsed this joke. It is perfect and will really put me over the top. I tell it. Blank expressions from the audience. Polite laughter maybe, but mostly no laughter. What happened?

I remind myself not to panic. Keep going. I look at my notes, trying to find the right spot. Just keep talking; get back into the rhythm.

Okay, I'm back on track.

Suddenly, my mind goes blank. Everything is gone. The universe stops and empties. It refills with audience. Lots of audience, but no words. I can only blink.

"Uh... um... you see... like... uh," my mouth continues

saying, while my mind tries to figure out what to do.

Stop! Calm down. Breathe. Breathe deeper.

Time is ticking. Expectant faces keep looking at me. Those encouraging smiles reappear. I look at my notes again and pick another spot. "Another thing is..."

Awkward, but it will have to do. I missed some important points, some great stories, but it can't be helped now. At least the words are back and flowing.

The audience is engaged again. I'm feeling it now. The words are coming easily and I am going in a direction I hadn't planned to. A joke comes out of nowhere. Everyone laughs loudly. How did that happen? I tell another joke and they laugh again. This is great! I have them in the palm of my hand. Abe Lincoln has nothing on me.

Red. I see a flashing red. That means something. I am out of time. How?! I just started, and I want more time.

"In conclusion..."

Unoriginal and awkward. Again. Maybe I am not Abraham Lincoln yet.

I leave the lectern, exhale in relief and decide that speaking is really like riding a roller coaster: It's scary and thrilling at the same time; full of ups and downs. And just like all great roller-coaster rides, I want to run back in line for another go. But maybe with a better planned joke.

"The important part is realizing that you have something worth saying."

That's the story of my first Toastmasters speech. Now I'm the president of my club, but parts of that experience have been repeated in nearly all my speeches.

When new members ask me for advice about their Ice Breakers, I tell them not to worry about sharing pearls of wisdom, because that's not the important part. The important part is realizing that you have something worth saying, and saying it will not kill you.

So don't be discouraged when your speech stalls as your mind goes blank or a joke falls flat. It happens to all of us and we all know what it's like. ■

Richard Stanley is president of Fluor Discovery Toastmasters and a process engineer at Fluor Corporation in Irvine, California. You can reach him at rstanley943@gmail.com.

How TI gave a humanitarian the courage to transform the world's orphanages.

By Julie Bawden Davis

As if They Were His Own

For Jim Luce, a trip to Indonesia to help a friend changed his own life. On a drive through the countryside in 1995, the former Wall Street investor made a fateful visit to an orphanage.

"I'm not sure why I stopped, but I felt compelled to do so," says Luce. "The facility was clean but visibly struggling with poverty. There were six volunteers to care for 200 children."

One of those children, a 10-month-old boy, stood up in his crib and reached out his arms when he saw Luce. "It was incredible," says Luce. "Energy flowed between us, and it was as if he was saying, 'I'm your child.' I fell madly in love instantly." Right then and there, Luce decided to adopt the child, who he named Mathew. Nine months later he took the boy home to New York City.

As excited as he was about adopting Mathew, Luce felt haunted by the other 199 orphans he had left behind. After telling his mother, a child psychologist, about his feelings, she suggested he stop complaining and do something about it.

"To humor my mother I began working on a feasibility study regarding orphanages, which ended up being 350 pages and took two years to write," he says. "She agreed to edit the proposal, which looked at how orphanages are built traditionally and how they can be designed differently so that the occupants can bond with adults and become more mainstreamed into society. The document also addressed the idea of

starting a nonprofit to build orphanages around the world."

Just two weeks after he finished the proposal, his mother died suddenly. Luce was stunned to learn that she had willed him part of her estate so that he could start an organization for orphans. Not long after, his brother, Rick, who had been struggling with cancer, also passed away. But before he died, he made Luce promise that he would realize his dream.

"On his deathbed, Rick said he took my vision seriously, and he was leaving money in his will for the project. He also made me promise to become a Toastmaster so that I could learn to effectively communicate my vision." Keeping his word, Luce joined the Roosevelt Island Toastmasters in New York City, where he was a member from 2001 to 2008.

Taking Action

Today, Luce credits Toastmasters for giving him the direction and courage to make his dream a reality. He heads up the New York City-based nonprofit Orphans International Worldwide, which has opened orphanages around the world in countries such as Haiti, Indonesia, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, the Dominican Republic and India. The group's mission is to help orphaned and abandoned children grow to become solid citizens of the world, and its basic principle is simple: Everyone involved in the organization must treat each child in their care as if he or she were their own.



Linda Stanley is a Chicago-based officer of Orphans International, as well as a past member of the Roosevelt Island Toastmasters. She says the speaking and negotiation skills Luce acquired in Toastmasters help him on a regular basis.

"Jim is very positive and animated when he speaks, and he inspires confidence while sharing difficult issues facing orphans," Stanley says. "For instance, he is in Sri Lanka today writing for the *Huffington Post* from personal interviews he is doing with children's aid workers from the civil war conflict zone. His speaking and listening skills are carrying him through these challenging discussions."

Luce ran the organization while working on Wall Street, but in 2004, when Northern Indonesia was devastated by an offshore earthquake



Jim Luce, with youngsters in a Haiti orphanage. The former Toastmaster heads up Orphans International Worldwide.

that created the deadly Indian Ocean tsunami, the need for orphanages skyrocketed.

“Two weeks after the 2004 tsunami, I was in Indonesia standing in the mud trying to figure out what to do with all of the orphans,” he says. “We found a village that wasn’t hurt, talked to the village elders and got them to agree to build a project there.” During that trip he realized that he could no longer divide his loyalty between Wall Street and helping orphans, so he made a life-altering decision to quit work and donate all of his money, including his 401K, to Orphans International.

“I wanted to commit myself to helping orphans for the rest of my life, and I couldn’t do so halfheartedly,” he says. “By giving away all of my money, I knew that I was in it all of the way.”

Initially, Luce created orphanages from small homes that could house

four children. While these were successful, he eventually found that a full-care model works better in many countries. Such a system incorporates extended family caretakers in a community-center setting that includes vocational training for the caretakers so that they can theoretically afford to pay for the children in the future. Health support is also offered, as well as computer literacy and English language training.

Luka Martin is director of Orphans International Tanzania. A native of the country, he has been impressed with the organization, and especially Luce. “Jim is a great man,” he says. “He is open to everyone and has offered his life to help others. The world needs a lot more Jims.”

Learning Compassion Early

Born and raised in Ohio, Luce was – not surprisingly – the type of kid who picked up stray animals; his first was a mutt that he got from the animal shelter when he was 7. Both of his parents were highly active in social change: His father led protests against the Vietnam War and was involved in Habitat


for Humanity, while his mother was a leader in the Civil Rights movement.

Luce’s energy and capacity to help others seems to know no bounds. Stephen Chen, co-founder of Green-Soul Shoes, which strives to put shoes on underprivileged kids throughout the world, says Luce has been a mentor and a powerful influence.

“I’ve been inspired by Jim’s passion and his mission,” says Chen. “The fact that he took a vow of poverty is amazing in itself. I admire his concept of global citizenship, which really resonates with me. He has a good macro-view of the world, and he’s as adventurous today as when he started.”

When asked what keeps him motivated, Luce says, “If this were merely academic, I would never be able to sustain the energy needed to move forward. But it is all too real. I have come out of airports around the world, and been greeted by a dozen kids holding banners that say ‘Welcome Home, Uncle Jim.’ To know these children when they come into Orphans International – often in poor physical and emotional health – and see them year after year, growing into happy, well-adjusted individuals, is my greatest reward.

“My ultimate dream is to see an end to orphanages in my lifetime, with all children in need placed with extended families.”

For more information about Orphans International Worldwide, visit www.oiwv.org. The James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation www.lucefoundation.org funds the administration of orphanages. For information about Jim Luce, visit www.jimluce.com. 

Julie Bawden Davis is a freelance writer based in Southern California and a longtime contributor to the *Toastmaster*. You can reach her at Julie@JulieBawdenDavis.com.

The remembrance of a loved one provides comfort and closure.

By Theodore Lustig, DTM

The Most Difficult Speech: the Eulogy

Even for those used to speaking in public, delivering a eulogy can be overwhelming. If the deceased is a beloved relative, close friend or co-worker, personal emotions can cloud clear thinking and self-control. But if asked, it is an honor and a challenge that should be accepted.

At many funerals, the religious leader presiding over the service is the person giving the eulogy, yet too often it's painfully apparent that this person, though well-intentioned, did not know the deceased well – or at all. Thus, his words may offer little comfort or closure to grievers. A more personal and knowledgeable approach is required. But how does one choose the words and demeanor that will fulfill the purpose of a eulogy?

Having given eulogies for both my father and mother, and perhaps a dozen close friends, I know how

life (youth, working years, old age, etc.) or a particular characteristic (sense of humor, generosity, artistic ability, etc.), can help in finding a focus.

The best eulogies are sincere in thought, purposeful in language, well paced and just long enough to achieve your desired goals. Meaningful anecdotes drawn from your own experience, or from family and others who knew the person, add valuable perspectives.

Provide Insights, Not Chronology

A eulogy should be an evocative remembrance of the deceased's life. Avoid presenting a simplistic chronology from birth to death; rather, talk about what that life meant to those who loved or




improved the organization or the workplace environment.

You, as the speaker, should accept that the audience is not there to judge you, but rather to pay respects to a loved one or friend. Your delivery should be brief, but clear; appropriate, but not trite. If you are so overcome that you can't continue, there is no shame in stopping to regain your composure. As Shakespeare once wrote, "Tears water our growth."

"Don't worry about delivering a perfect speech," writes Garry Schaeffer, author of *A Labor of Love: How to Write a Eulogy*. "No one expects you to have the delivery of a great orator or the stage presence of an actor. Just be you; that is enough."

"Writing and delivering a eulogy is a noble gesture worthy of thought and effort," adds Schaeffer. "This is an opportunity to make a contribution to a memorial service; a contribution your friends and family will remember for a long time."

"Think of a eulogy as a gift to yourself and others. Embrace the opportunity to brighten an otherwise dark time." 

Theodore Lustig, DTM, is a member of the Round Rock Chambermasters club in Round Rock, Texas. He can be reached at tlustig@austin.rr.com.

"No one expects you to have the delivery of a great orator or the stage presence of an actor. Just be you; that is enough."

daunting this responsibility can be. Here are a few suggestions for delivering what may well be the most difficult speech one could ever give:

As with any other type of speech, how you organize the eulogy is critical. Among the first things to decide is the purpose you wish to achieve. To best attain that purpose, should the tone be solemn, light or something in between? Sometimes a unifying theme, built around a specific period in the individual's

knew the person. In one of his last speeches, Martin Luther King Jr. prophetically noted that, "the quality, not the longevity, of one's life is what is important."

If you're a relative, address the individual's contribution to family life, stressing what characteristics or personal qualities will be most missed. If you're a friend, talk about how the friendship started, its basis and what you gained from that relationship. If you're a work colleague, illustrate how this person

A speaker without a book is like a suit without slacks...

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Speak to Children

By Linda McGurk

Brutally honest and easily distracted, children have a way of unnerving even the most experienced speakers. But professional classroom speakers know that with the right preparation and an open mind, there's no need to fear a young audience.

Speaking to Children

How professional speakers work with younger audiences.

So shed your adult clothes, bring out your best props and get ready to entertain. This is how you speak to the primary-grade crowd and have fun doing it.

Whether you're considering a career as a motivational speaker for kids or just want to make an occasional presentation at your local elementary school, many lessons can be learned from those who specialize in speaking to children. They'll tell you that young audiences can be unpredictable, boisterous and demanding. More often than not, the kids are only attending your presentation because they have to and, unlike adults, a group of first-graders are unlikely to pay attention to you or laugh at your jokes out of sheer politeness. That doesn't necessarily make them a more difficult audience, but definitely a different one.

Put Yourself in Their Shoes

If you're like most adults, you probably don't remember what it was like to be seven years old and dreaming about becoming an astronaut or a pop star. When we're young, we have the whole world at our feet, but as we grow older and are bombarded by messages about what we can and can't do, our youthful innocence slowly dissipates and we start living our lives in our heads rather than following our hearts. If you'll be speaking to elementary-school children, then reconnect with your kid instincts, advises Richard Paul, an award-winning motivational speaker and ventriloquist.

"When you talk to kids, you've got to think like a kid. You've got to be a little goofy and take off your adult hat," Paul says. "Remember what it was like to be a kid and let it come out through your adult self. You want

them to feel like you're an equal, but not like you're trying to be like them."

Paul has presented his anti-bullying and character-building school assembly programs to more than 600,000 children, and says his own kids, who range from ages 11 to 21, have helped him develop his puppet show over time. By stepping into their world – watching shows on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel, finding out what music they listen to and doing a lot of research on the Internet – Paul has been able to create school-assembly programs that kids relate to and that effectively tie in with the appropriate age group. He also stays up-to-date with new technology and communicates his message through a Web site, a Facebook page, a blog and Twitter. Keeping up with the times, he explains, is absolutely necessary if you are to succeed when speaking to children.

"You've got to keep your eyes and ears open for what's going on. For example, my characters don't talk about CD players anymore – they talk about iPods," Paul says. "When I started out, Power Rangers were really big. Today it's SpongeBob SquarePants."

Make It Fun and Use Visuals

Kids are ready to be entertained and are more likely to take your message to heart if they're enjoying themselves in the process. And frankly, they don't have the attention span required to sit quietly and listen to a stranger tell his story from behind a lectern. Jim Jordan, a motivational speaker specializing in educational school-assembly programs, says a sense of humor is essential for anybody wanting to succeed as a speaker in an elementary-school setting: "Kids love to laugh. They laugh like 200 times per day, while adults only laugh 15 times a day. When I come into the classroom, the first words that come out of my mouth are, 'I hope you guys are ready to have fun!'"

Jordan was a professional clown for 20 years before becoming a motivational speaker, and he uses magic tricks to get his message across because they help keep the younger children stimulated and entertained. "For K-3 students, pretty much everything is visual, because if you speak to them for two or three minutes on end they'll end up in a coma. As the age bracket moves up, I use less magic." However, Jordan points out that the magic is only a tool to communicate his character-building and anti-bullying messages, and he is careful not to sacrifice content for entertainment.

Jerry Jacoby, a professional speaker also dubbed, "the Kid Motivator," uses comical stories and music to deliver his program "Real Character is No Accident," which teaches children about honesty, integrity, respect and responsibility. "My contents are never presented in a serious, teaching way. The kids don't want to be preached at,"

he says. “My pieces are all short and full of comedy. You don’t want to give the kids too much time to think.”

Keep It Moving

One of the primary differences between a presentation geared to kids in a school assembly and one for adults in the workplace or corporate conference is the pace and energy level. As a general rule, the younger the audience, the faster the program needs to move and the more animated the speaker has to be. “If I have a character out, I use it for four to five minutes and then I move on to something else,” says Paul, the ventriloquist, about presenting to kids in the primary grades. “The stories are shorter and I get to the point more quickly.”

“Kids love to laugh. They laugh like 200 times per day, while adults only laugh 15 times a day. When I come into the classroom, the first words that come out of my mouth are, ‘I hope you guys are ready to have fun!’”

While adults may happily sit through a 90-minute presentation, Paul usually caps his elementary-school programs at 45 minutes, and keeps it even shorter than that if the presentation is outside, where he has to compete with more distractions. The key is keeping the program action-packed and varied. “Never stop talking and never go backstage to get something, or you’ll totally lose the kids,” he says.

Keep in mind that moving the program along swiftly doesn’t equal speeding up your speech. In fact, the average adult speaks at a rate of 160 – 170 words per minute, whereas children from ages five to seven only can process about 124 words per minute, according to a study by Ray Hull, an audiology professor at Wichita State University. If you speak too quickly and don’t articulate the words clearly enough, you risk overloading children’s central nervous systems and impairing their ability to absorb and process new information. That means a child who appears inattentive could, in fact, be having difficulty understanding you.

Let the Kids Participate

Kids are egocentric, and successful speakers often tap into the youngsters’ desire to be seen and heard. Engaging the children in the presentation is one surefire method to grab and keep their attention. It can be done in any number of ways.

When Jacoby enters a school assembly, he’s already got a student lined up to help introduce him. Then he’ll

plunge right into his program, telling real-life and fictional stories, playing the guitar and singing songs that tie into his character-building and anti-bullying themes. “I get the audience involved with echoing [the messages], and I bring a lot of kids up to help me. That’s always a winner; they love to volunteer. I never pick a child who doesn’t want to participate,” Jacoby says. “I always want the first row of kids to be seated close, about five feet in front of me. I prefer not to be on a stage, unless there’s a huge audience. Most of the time I’m on the floor, because I want the kids who are supposed to help out to be able to come up really quickly.”

Jordan also uses audience participation to reiterate his message. For kindergartners, for example, he illustrates how to *rise above* the other schools and *glow* in the community by letting the kids pass around a magical floating ball. For the primary-grade students, he’s found that quizzes work well for reviewing the message, and the kids love the animal balloons he hands out for prizes. “It’s got to be about them, you’ve got to dangle a carrot in front of them,” he says, because “they ask themselves, ‘What’s in it for me?’”

Tell Them the Rules

A common fear among those who don’t have experience speaking to kids is that the audience will become distracted or rowdy. This problem can be avoided by taking two actions: Keep a good command of the stage and be prepared to present yourself with authority. Kids need boundaries and it’s important to let them know in advance what the rules are, and that you will be the center of attention during the presentation.

“I tell the kids that if they want to say something, they need to raise their hands,” says Melanie Jones, a professional classroom speaker and founder of the non-profit organization Speak to Children. Jones, who left a corporate career 10 years ago to speak to children about personal values, adds that she asks the kids to keep their hands on their desks and their eyes on her.

During the presentation, Jones moves around the classroom and makes frequent eye contact with the children to make sure they are paying attention. “Sometimes you’ll have kids who are unhappy, maybe because their parents are going through a divorce, and they’re acting out. A child might throw a fit and you don’t know why. When I have kids who don’t follow the rules, I give

(Continued on page 18)

When toasting, remember your ABCs.

Tips for a New Year's Eve Toast

As a professional magician I'm constantly asked, "Can you show me a magic trick?" I smile and consent to conjure up a miracle or two. It's an occupational hazard. Toastmasters are constantly faced with requests for similar command performances – for instance, to stand up and "say a few words" at family gatherings, or holiday meals, or to give a toast to the New Year. To avoid a real-life, spur-of-the-moment Table Topics test, remember to be prepared and follow the ABCs of toasting. To begin a well-thought-out toast, consider the following three A's: *audience, agenda and ability*:

Audience

Parties and gatherings are a melting pot of ages, genders, relationships, educational levels and ethnicities; all these folks carry high expectations for Toastmasters to speak with poise and confidence. Feeling the pressure? Take a deep breath... exhale. Release that mental stress by asking yourself some questions beforehand about the audience you'll be facing. Answer those questions and your anxieties will vanish as fear of the unknown dissolves, especially when you stress the positive.

For example, you might ask, "What is the age range of this audience?" Answer: 20- to 40-year-olds. So you say to yourself, "Yeah, no kids!" Or you ask, "What's my relationship to the people here tonight?" Answer: They're friends and family. So you say to yourself, "Great – no co-workers or boss!"

In addition, the more you know about your audience, the easier it is to create the appropriate content for your toast.

Agenda

Toasts are most engaging when three primary elements are clearly defined: Why are we celebrating? Who are we honoring? And what is the point you as the toaster want to make? Knowing what you want to say keeps you calm, even while standing in front of a party of people with all eyes focused on you.

Use a succinct sentence to explain the agenda and set the foundation for your toast. For example, "I find when families pause their busy lives to gather from five different cities and share stories, our holiday meal times become magical."

Ability

Whether you're an executive used to talking to a crowd or just starting out in Toastmasters, be sure to evaluate your skill level. Practice one or all of the Special Occasion Speeches (Item 226N) at your club and you'll no doubt receive valuable feedback. Some people get very nervous when they have to talk in front of a group. Even seasoned

"Say something pithy and spirits remain light; say something serious and people become reflective. Take advantage of this precious time and use it wisely."



speakers frequently talk too fast, causing spectators to ask their neighbor, "What did he say?" By honing in on your skills through practice, you can build the experience and self-confidence necessary to communicate effectively.



As the author of the book *Tasteful Toasts*, the question I'm asked the most is, "How long should a toast be?" In a word: short. Be as brief as possible. It may seem like a cliché, but leave them wanting more. If you are going to speak for as long as five minutes, you'd better be outstanding and bring

your Grade-A material. For first-time toasters and experienced speakers alike, I recommend following the three B's: *be brief, be bold, be done*.

Be Brief

Two minutes is a terrific target time for a tasteful toast. Keep your remarks short and simple and your toast will have a greater effect. If you hit five minutes, the snore bore alarm will begin to sound.

Be Bold

Enunciate clearly and project your voice to the back of the room to ensure everyone can hear your words. Display poise and confidence.

Be Done

When finished, sit down. Avoid the urge to take a bow or return for an encore performance. Remember, the purpose of a toast is to shine a gentle spotlight on, and pay tribute to, a specific person or event. Say your toast and then return the attention to the honored guest and festivities.



Dec. 31 will soon be here and Toastmasters across the globe will be called to convey, with conviction, a reflection on 2009 and a

vision of prosperity for 2010. Yes, I am referring to the New Year's Eve toast. And as promised, it's as easy as A, B and now C: *communicate, commemorate* and *celebrate*.

Communicate

Your first remarks before the midnight hour will slow the hands of time, and party participants will gather round for a message of inspiration. A short joke will bring laughs followed by a few seconds of silence. These golden ticks of the clock are when people will look to you for your next witty comment – it's human nature. In this pivotal moment you control the room and set the mood. Say something pithy and spirits remain light; say something serious and people become reflective. Take advantage of this precious time and use it wisely. Know what you want to say before you say it.


Commemorate

The new year means a fresh start for many people. It's a time to remember the past before stepping into the future. It's also a time to acknowledge the struggles you've encountered and obstacles you've overcome. Place your thoughts on paper and you will be poised with words that honor the sacrifices and commemorate the victories.

Celebrate

When both hands of the clock point to 12, you can celebrate the fact that everyone's goals will be established and resolutions made. Give a toast to motivate listeners to be better in their personal and professional endeavors and to face the future with confidence. Raise your glass to celebrate the achievements to come.



Merely reading this article will not make you an expert or smooth-talking toasting machine, but it will start you on the right path. Similarly, I can read how to perform a magic trick but it requires practice until polished to a quality performance level – that's no illusion. Make a resolution to follow the three ABCs of toasting and practice in front of friends or family, and your audience will cheer as you bring in the new year. 

Michael Varma, ATMG, ALB, is a member of BergenMeisters Toastmasters club in Orange, California, and the author of the book, *Tasteful Toasts*, available from www.toastmasters.org/shop. Reach him at www.michaelvarma.com.


Speaking to Children

(Continued from page 16)

them a choice: They can either stay or leave, and I tell them that we can talk about it afterward."

The good news is that a speaker who's engaging, entertaining and energetic rarely needs to worry about losing the kids' attention or respect, at least not on the elementary-school level. Speaking to children definitely requires a certain

mindset and may not be for everyone, but successfully using your talent to help kids make the right choices in life can be a rewarding experience. "Go out there and have fun," Paul suggests for those who want to tackle a young audience for the first time. "Know that you touched the heart and soul of a child today. If I can get a kid to stop bullying or to want to do something with his life, then I have accomplished my goal."

Whether your aim is to talk at a local elementary school or become a professional motivational speaker for kids, these tips will help you get your message across. You can help young people grow up stronger, smarter and better prepared to face the future. 

Linda McGurk is a communications specialist and freelance writer based in Indiana. Reach her at www.mcgurkmedia.com.

By John Cadley

FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT!



How to be first-rate when you celebrate.

Clink, Clink, Clink. (Gulp)

When you tell someone you're a Toastmaster, they might reasonably conclude that you are a master at giving toasts. And yet what Toastmasters really give are speeches, and Rule No. 1 of toasting is that it should never be a speech. Those listening are poised with various libations that they are eager to drink, and if you talk for more than a couple of minutes you are very likely to become toast yourself.

Lest any Toastmaster suffer that fate, I offer here a few brief observations that may prove valuable the next time you're asked to perform this time-honored ritual.

First, you need a festive occasion.

You can't toast, say, a dehumidifier. Weddings, anniversaries, retirements, baby showers – anything that denotes both a joyous achievement and the promise of still better things to come. I've always thought divorce fits that description nicely but you don't see divorced people toasting each other, for some reason.

You also need an audience.

You can't propose a toast in an empty room. It shows you've missed the point.

Make sure everyone has a glass.

It looks funny when nine people are raising one glass, and even more comical when they all try to drink out of it at the same time.

Know what you are going to say ahead of time. A memorable toast rarely starts with, "Boy, you've really caught me by surprise, here..." It does, however, usually contain some little-known fact about the honoree that helps those assembled to see

him or her in a new light, such as, "Most of you probably don't know that Jack is a CIA operative..."

Technically, you're not supposed to write your toast out and read it from the paper, but I would encourage you to do it anyway. Then if you faint, someone else can read it and you'll still get the credit.

Don't try to be funny. Humor requires talent and timing, which I have noted to be in short supply among the general population. Don't try it. I once attended a wedding where the best man gave what he thought was an uproarious monologue about the groom's past romantic exploits. The bride was furious, her mother was in tears and her father was making a phone call to have his future son-in-law's kneecaps broken. That's not funny.

And please, don't cry. Yes, it is an emotional occasion but sobbing is not something people like to watch while they hold crystal champagne flutes over their heads, especially when your nose is running and you have nothing to wipe it with. What's worse, it makes the toast about you, and it's not about you.

Avoid clichés. Standing up and announcing, "I would like to propose a toast" is like saying, "Hi, folks, I'm standing up here in rented, ill-fitting formal wear performing a task I couldn't avoid, although I did briefly consider leaving the country." People know that. Say something original. (And when you do say something original, please tell me what it is, since – in the

459,368 toasts I've heard so far in my life – I have yet to hear so much as an original syllable.)

Finally, honor your butterflies.

Everyone says not to be nervous, but what are the chances of that? It's like standing in front of a firing squad and having someone say, "Relax, this will only take a minute." Besides, the very custom of toasting came into being precisely *because* of nervousness. This was back when poisoning was in vogue among Greek royalty. If the King felt threatened, he'd lure his suspected enemies to the castle under the guise of a friendly feast, slip a little arsenic into their wine, and have them carted off to the bone yard. Consequently, any invitation for a meal with the Big Guy was greeted with a certain...nervousness. This led to the guests insisting that the King take the first sip. You see, in those days, "a drink to your health," had a far more literal meaning. Even the clinking together of glasses was originally meant to spill some of your wine into the next guy's, so if he was poisoning you, you could return the favor.

Hence, if you have to give a toast, here's my toast to you: May your verbiage lack verbosity, may your sentiment be unsentimental and may your words sparkle like the champagne (or cider) you're dying to drink. **T**

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Talk Smart at the Holiday Office Party

By Don Gabor

As a Toastmaster, you know that all speaking is public speaking – whether you are giving a Table Topics presentation at your local club or making small talk with colleagues and clients at the holiday office party. Of course, if an “ah” or “um” slips into one of your speeches, probably no one (except perhaps another Toastmaster) will ever know.

However, make one of the following conversation faux pas at the holiday office party and your career and professional image could be headed for trouble. Here are the most common career-crunching mistakes:

1 Making inappropriate comments – even in jest

Nothing can ruin a budding or even established career faster than, “letting your hair down,” in a way that keeps your colleagues whispering, “Can you believe what he said?” Using sexual innuendo or telling off-color jokes at the holiday work

party is a sure-fire way to attract attention, but not the kind that will boost your career. This blunder can quickly send your prospects for advancement into a downward spiral. Never forget that the office party is a business – not social – situation, where most of the rules of business etiquette apply.

2 Not shaking hands when the opportunity presents itself

If it is a part of your culture to shake hands when introducing yourself or greeting people you know, do you hesitate to extend

Stay clear of conversation faux pas that can derail your career.

your hand when you meet a member of the opposite sex? You might be surprised, but plenty of people are confused about this critical part of introductions at office gatherings. Blame it on decades-old etiquette that instructed a gentleman to wait for a lady to extend her hand first, but that is as passé as a lady dropping a hankie to start a conversation with a handsome passerby! Today, not offering to shake hands with a member of the opposite sex will peg a man as sexist and a woman as unsure of herself. Therefore, at office celebrations and everywhere else, for that matter – excluding for religious, cultural or physical reasons – both men and women should take the initiative to shake hands with *everyone* they meet.

3 Talking only with your officemates

Chatting for a few minutes at seasonal office gatherings with your work buddies is all part of the fun, but if you stay ensconced in your closed circle of friends for too long, new co-workers, prospects or others will quickly cast you and your colleagues as cliquish, disinterested and not open to outsiders. Staying in one place too long, whether you are talking to someone or nibbling on the appetizers, will also give the impression that you're shy, self-conscious or lacking confidence. Instead, chat with your buddies for a few minutes and then move to different areas of the room to introduce yourself to others you want to get to know better.

4 Asking more than three closed-ended questions in a row

"Do you work in our office?", "How long have you worked here?" or "Who is your supervisor?" Yikes! You're at a holiday office party – not a job interview or an interrogation. Asking three or more closed-ended questions in a row will certainly stifle conversation and make others feel uncomfortable. Instead, show attentiveness and a desire to find common ground by asking open-ended questions that encourage others to elaborate and reveal free information. Begin questions with "Why..." or "What do you think about..." to accomplish this. Then based on what you hear that interests you, respond with follow-up questions and information of your own.

5 Talking too much or too little about yourself

"So, enough about my job! Let me show you a picture of my kids (cats, car, etc.!)!" Sure, people love to talk about themselves, their pets, kids and grandchildren, but if you are the one doing all the talking at the office party, you could quickly

become a bore to the other guests. On the other hand, if you are too tight-lipped, then people may see you as secretive, defensive or lacking interest and enthusiasm.

"The holiday office party is a great place to make small talk, establish rapport and build better relationships with your colleagues, acquaintances and clients."

The remedy is to exchange information about various light subjects at about the same rate so that you both know what the other enjoys and likes to talk about. Offer some information and then allow the other person enough time to fully respond with information of their own.

6 Complaining or gossiping about colleagues or clients

You might be tempted and it may even be well-deserved, but never get involved in a gripe session about a colleague or client while attending a holiday office party. As obvious as this faux pas is, people seem to do it all the time, especially after a few drinks. Even if you're not the one making the crass remarks, if word gets back to the "offending person" you will still pay the price long after the party is over. If possible, politely excuse yourself from the conversation as quickly as you can. However, if you find yourself stuck with this group, then take the initiative and bring up something that moves the discussion to a more positive topic.

7 Talking about politics or controversial subjects

It never fails – there always seems to be at least one person at the office party who likes to snag colleagues into heavy political "discussions" or offer long-winded

lectures about his or her pet social issues. The trap often begins with the seemingly innocent words, "Don't you think that...?" or "In my humble opinion..." However,

if you rebut with even a few words you'll be in for an earful – and not the kind of conversation that most people at parties enjoy. Furthermore, discussing controversial topics in this situation often polarizes people who otherwise get along. The best thing to do when someone brings up a political or controversial subject is say, "I never discuss such topics at parties." Then it's up to you to change the discussion to a less volatile subject.

Holiday Office Parties Offer Golden Opportunities to Hone Your Communication Skills

The holiday office party is a great place to make small talk, establish rapport and build better relationships with your colleagues, acquaintances and clients. As long as you focus on upbeat subjects that lead to sharing common professional and personal interests, goals and experiences, you'll have plenty to talk about while boosting your career and honing your communication skills! **T**

Don Gabor is a professional speaker and author. His newest book is *Turn Small Talk into Big Deals: Using 4 Key Conversation Styles to Customize Your Networking Approach, Build Relationships, and Win More Clients* (McGraw-Hill Professional). Reach him at www.dongabor.com.

Use your communication skills to inspire, educate and help others.

By Heather O'Neill, CC

Speaking About Social Responsibility

What is the difference between Superman and Bizarro? How about Wonder Woman and Catwoman? Spider-Man and Venom? All of these comic book characters have similar powers, but the hero in each pair uses those amazing powers for good while the villain uses his or hers for evil. While I'm sure that no Toastmaster uses their speaking abilities for dastardly deeds, we might want to ask ourselves: "Am I doing enough good with the skills and resources I've been given?"

We have a responsibility to ourselves and to our audiences to take our message to a new level – to help people grow, give, be...better. As U.S. President Barack Obama said in his inaugural address, "What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility – a recognition... that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world..."

Whether you speak to corporations, small businesses, local libraries, schools, others in your own company or simply to those at your Toastmasters meetings, there are ways to incorporate an altruistic message.

These days, corporate social responsibility is highly valued in the business world. Many companies strive to be environmentally conscious, donate to a roster of charities or ask their employees to volunteer for various nonprofits. Can you use your super speaking

powers to save the environment, or is there another worthy cause you can champion? Ask yourself how you can encourage, educate, inspire and motivate people with your presentations. Here are a few ideas to consider for your company or for you, personally:

Serve the Community

If you work for a company, give a presentation that encourages your fellow employees to band together on a project you are passionate about. You could center your talk on positive ways to benefit your community. The camaraderie, - positive energy and constructive results will stimulate future action. When people work together, the possibilities are endless.

Help Those in School

You can help people not just by the speeches you give, but by the actions you take. For example, many have drawn on their Toastmasters experience to work with young people, volunteering as teachers, tutors and mentors. I volunteer with Junior Achievement, a program to help K-12 students develop entrepreneurial

skills and become financially literate and work-ready. It gives me the opportunity to see how much fun kids have while they learn valuable life skills. As an added bonus, my sons think I'm pretty cool for doing it!

Pat Kelly is a member of my Toastmasters club – the Barnum Square Toastmasters. She has inspired me and many others as a teacher and Toastmasters mentor for an amazing 50 years. A longtime



elementary school teacher in Connecticut, Pat uses her communication skills – sharpened over years of Toastmasters training – to help students, and she happily gives countless hours beyond her normal classroom time. One experience in particular stands out for Pat where she made a difference in a young man's life as well as her own. The high school student wasn't allowed back into his school due to behavior issues, so Pat tutored him two hours a day for six months.

"He worked hard, one-on-one, without the distractions of a regular school day," she says. "He went on to graduate with his class and that was a proud moment for him and for me." The extra time she spent working with this student made all the difference.

Another longtime Toastmaster, Bryson Dean, is helping young people as well. The 70-year-old retiree from Iowa City, Iowa, volunteers her time and efforts to *Speak Up!*, an eight-week non-Toastmasters program that teaches the basics of public speaking to fifth graders. "We explain what a lectern is, we talk about how to organize a speech, brainstorm ideas with the kids, have them write down their ideas, and then after about three or four sessions they start giving their speeches," says Dean, a member of the Old Capitol Toastmasters in Iowa City.

Noting that she was a very shy youngster in school, Dean says the most important Toastmasters principle she draws on is the value of giving encouragement and support. "Some of the previous volunteers in the *Speak Up!* program had apparently

been overly critical," she says. "When I evaluate the kids' speeches, I always congratulate them just on the fact that they did it! They got up there and spoke. Some of the students are more confident than others, so you really want to encourage the others."

Dean volunteers through Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), which presents *Speak Up!* It is a large volunteer network in the United States for people 55 and over. (For more information, visit http://www.seniorcorps.gov/home/site_map/index.asp.)

Toastmasters like Pat Kelly and Bryson Dean have used their talents and time to positively impact young

"Toastmasters are often in the enviable position of truly making a difference in the world."

people. Whether you mentor someone as a volunteer or simply focus on benevolence in your paid engagements, your attention to the individual can make a difference.

Stay Positive During Tough Times

Author and former Toastmaster, Mary Marcdante, explores many universal and positive subjects through her books, blogs and presentations. During these often-difficult days, she notes, "It's so important to keep yourself and the people around you in a mindset that ignites *inspiration, appreciation and enthusiasm* – the three key qualities that help you generate inspired action during challenging times."

For a practical tip on staying motivated and passionate about life, Marcdante suggests asking yourself these three questions each day:

- **Who do you appreciate?**
Tell them.

- **What are you grateful for?**
Tell yourself.
- **Who and what inspires you?**
Tell the world.

Nourish the Individual

I am always reading. I believe that if I can learn even one bit of information that can help me, my family or an audience I'll be speaking to, then the effort is worthwhile. We can think that way about our presentations too: If we can help just one individual, then we have provided a valuable service. What might your audience need from you? Perhaps a chance to think about how they can overcome personal challenges. Or

some ideas on ways they can improve themselves. Or inspiration to create change.

Find your passion – your *superpowers*, if you will. Speaking from the heart will make for more persuasive, commanding presentations. And remember this: Whether you're giving a speech, doing volunteer work or fighting for a particular cause, your influence can improve one person's life or rally an entire community to take action. Toastmasters are often in the enviable position of truly making a difference in the world. And they don't even have to wear tights. Now, *that's* super! 📺

Heather O'Neill, CC, is a member of the Barnum Square Toastmasters in Bethel, Connecticut. She is a writer, speaker and environmental advocate. Reach her at heather@takingcaregreen.com.



Delivering Bad Business News

By Kathy S. Berger



have some good news and some bad news...

You know the joke. Someone offers upbeat information.

"The good news is that a customer asked if your work will appreciate after your death. When I told him it would, he bought all your paintings."

The punch line follows, often involving health, law or religion.

"The bad news is that he was your doctor."

How to be clear yet comforting.

The good news/bad news pair has been a staple of comedy for years, but it's not a lesson in communication.

Delivering bad news to employees, customers or clients is far from funny. It is usually a difficult task, making even the best communicators uncomfortable. Unfortunately, it is also becoming more frequent in today's trying economic times. Leaders and



managers are announcing layoffs, acquisitions, reorganizations, changes in benefits, budget overruns, schedule delays and low returns. The messages are delivered to

The Neutral Beginning

Start with a simple statement of relevant information that everyone in the audience can agree to. This neutral sentence helps draw in the audience and set the stage with facts about the environment that led to the circumstances at hand.

“Our business has been affected by the closure of the factories on Second Street,” is an example. The statement

“Delivering the bad news in the first sentence is usually too abrupt and doesn’t give the audience enough time to anticipate and prepare for the message.”

large groups, to small groups and in one-on-one conversations.

Is there an easy way? No. But there are techniques to make the delivery of bad news more effective, and knowing the techniques makes the delivery easier.

As with any communication, start by analyzing your audience and identifying information the audience will understand and accept. One easy way to pull the entire message together is to follow a standard outline. It isn’t the one-two punch of the good news/bad news joke: Few people appreciate humor in serious situations that involve undesirable outcomes. Instead, effective delivery often contains these four elements:

- A neutral statement both the speaker and audience can agree on
- The bad news in one sentence
- The impact of the news on the audience
- Supporting details and facts

Each element is important; together they can help you deliver bad news to an audience of any size.

should be a fact that everyone recognizes. Depending on the situation, you may state the importance of some element, such as customer satisfaction, or point out a challenge that everyone can recognize as being difficult.

The neutrality encourages listening; if the first sentence is not something most people will readily agree with, they will form arguments in their head or stop listening. Delivering the bad news in the first sentence is usually too abrupt and doesn’t give the audience enough time to anticipate and prepare for the message. Those listening may reject the message or start distancing themselves from it and fail to absorb it.

Briefly stating a significant, evident fact also sends a signal that the message is serious and has been well-considered. This sets the right tone and gives the audience time to prepare for a serious message. One sentence is all that is needed – don’t drag it out.

Phyllis Davis Hemphill, co-author of *Business Communication*, calls this neutral beginning a “buffer,” because it helps cushion the blow.

Boiled-Down Bad News

Once you’ve set the stage, immediately deliver the bad news in a simple, clear statement. Avoid building suspense, and leave no doubt about your message. Choose words that are not likely to stir emotions.

“The negative should be given once, clearly and not repeated,” advises Nancy Schullery, professor of business



information systems at Western Michigan University. Schullery, a member of the board of directors of the Association for Business Communication, suggests avoiding negative terms such as “unfortunately,” “dismal,” “mistake” and “misunderstanding.”

“We will be closing this store in four months,” is an example of a simple, clear statement of bad news.

The Connection to the Audience

Your next job is to answer the question that has popped into the audience’s head: “What does this mean to me?” Many times this portion of the message literally contains the word “you.” This may not be possible when you are speaking to a large group, but it’s important to be specific. Use numbers to quantify the situation and provide dates to answer, “When?”

For example: “About 60 percent of you will be relocated to other stores. The other 40 percent will receive layoff notices at the end of next month.”

Supporting Facts

Follow up with details, reasons and projections about the future. This supporting information often becomes the substance of your delivery, showing that the message is realistic and grounded in fact. You can provide implementation details. If appropriate, explain other options that were considered and the reasons why they were rejected.

Here is an example: “We are assessing skills and evaluating the needs at the West Tanner, Centerville and Scottsdale stores to determine which employees will be able to move into positions there. The results of the

assessment will help us understand within four weeks which jobs are in jeopardy.”

Still having the audience’s attention when you give such important information depends on the effectiveness of the earlier pieces. If they were not delivered clearly or seemed overwhelming, the audience may have shut down.

A few more examples illustrate the simple outline:

“Our schedule to manufacture and assemble the system has been disrupted by the flooding at our supplier’s location. The original delivery date has slipped, and you will have the system on March 10. We have confidence in this date because . . .”

“The rising cost of health insurance threatens our ability to keep prices competitive. In order to stay in business, the employee contribution to medical benefits will increase in January. Depending on the coverage you elect, your costs will range from . . .”

“The LX-C program was an important part of our long-term business plan. Losing that proposal means leaner years ahead and the possibility of layoffs in 10 months. The most vulnerable jobs are in . . .”

“The shortfall in county funds is causing cut-backs in many areas. Each library in the county system will have fewer operating hours starting next month. Beginning May 1, this branch will be closed . . .”

Some circumstances – such as issuing reprimands within an employee discipline system or handing an individual employee a layoff notice – may require following a prescribed procedure or script. In such cases, be sure to consult with Human Resources or Legal advisors. If no guidelines are available, analyze your audience, then use the elements outlined here:

Tips for Delivering Bad News

- **Be honest.** Give accurate information. If you don’t know the answer to a question, say you don’t know. If you don’t know it off-hand, explain when you can provide the information accurately and then follow through.

- **Be open.** Avoid “sins of omission” by providing as much information as you can. The audience will sense when important information is being withheld, even if everything said is true. Being open is an important part

of earning trust. If you know but can't share, explain why you cannot and reveal when you will be able to provide the information.

- **Keep your message – and language – clear.** It is easy to get tripped up in your own words trying to soften the blow, but masking reality is misleading and makes sorting out the truth later even more painful. Avoid distorting the truth and notice if you are relying on big words – they are often a signal that you are not being direct.

- **Acknowledge the emotions and reactions of the audience.** Once you state that you understand the anxiety of audience members, for example, you remove their impulse to interrupt and express their emotions. Remember that even those indirectly affected by the news may need to adapt in some way, and change is usually stressful. Acknowledging such feelings will also put you in the right frame of mind to address the subject appropriately and will help you choose language that is most sensitive to the feelings of others.

- **Keep your own emotions in check.** Even if you are upset by the news, try to present it without showing your own distress. To others who are more negatively affected than you, a display of emotions may seem insincere or offensive.

- **Don't make the message about you.** Don't say how difficult it is for you to deliver the news or try to play on the audience's sympathy. One manager, caught up in expressing how tough the conversation was for him, dragged out the delivery of a layoff notice from 10 minutes to 45, confusing the employee and unnecessarily extending the agony for both of them. More messages should contain "you" than "I." You can speak from the heart, but be aware that the audience may resent any sentiments that do not seem sincere.

- **"Don't apologize,"** cautions Schullery. "It implies fault," she explains, and as such should be avoided in situations where litigation could become a possibility. Apologies also invite skepticism and resentment if the audience disagrees with the action taken.

- **Start early.** When provided with even the earliest indications that change may be necessary, employees start to figure things out for themselves. They begin to prepare for and accept ensuing bad news as more details emerge. Starting early, when sales are first lower than expected for instance, fosters trust and minimizes surprises.

- **Be specific.** Saying that customer orders have dropped from 15,000 to 4,200 in one month clarifies the magnitude of the problem. Details like this also make it evident that the facts have been analyzed and that actions are based on a clear understanding of the situation. Such information fosters trust that others are taking the best actions to remedy or at least adjust to the situation. Avoid words like "very", "dramatically", "apparently", "obviously" and even "of course". Anticipate questions and be prepared with backup information.

- **If there is an upside, share it – but do not dwell on it.** Overall, keep the tone of the message positive. Avoid words such as "bleak" or language that is similarly pessimistic or hopeless. Don't overdo it or stretch to find a silver lining. It is difficult for employees, for example, to take comfort in the positive effect their layoff will have on the company.

- **Deliver the news face to face.** In-person communication is more difficult, but more credible. It allows eye contact with all audience members in a small group and with some even in a large group setting. The personal delivery of bad news signals its importance, suggests leadership competence, and usually signifies a level of concern or care.

As employees become more dispersed globally, the opportunity to deliver bad news face to face may decrease. Webcasts may help reach geographically dispersed employees at the same time with bad news, in a forum that at least tries to simulate face-to-face delivery.

Also, the widespread use of computers to communicate company news may eventually make sending bad news in an e-mail more acceptable. If you are delivering

“Don't say how difficult it is for you to deliver the news or try to play on the audience's sympathy.”

the bad news in writing, craft your message using the same four-part sequence:

- 1) Get attention with a neutral statement that implicitly gains the audience's agreement.
- 2) Deliver the bad news clearly and briefly.
- 3) Do what you can to answer, "How does that affect me?"
- 4) Provide the details and supporting facts. And leave the joke book at home. **T**

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"The eyes have one language everywhere."

GEORGE HERBERT (1593–1633)

Speaking Eye to Eye

It's rush hour on the subways of New York City. People are jammed together, forced to physically invade each other's personal space for an entire journey. New Yorkers know the only way to cope is to avoid looking at anyone's eyes. Thus,

we create a psychological barrier to communication, a protective shield of intentional indifference. It's a powerful demonstration in reverse of a vital element of human communication: eye contact.

That's why one of the primary rules in Toastmasters is to "speak to people's eyes." The importance of speaking eye to eye with your listener goes without question: It's hard to trust someone who won't look you in the eye. But the actual nature of that exchange of glances is not always

well understood. Indeed, many speakers who practice what they consider "eye contact" fall short of the true purpose and meaning of the act.

Of course, speakers also need to respect cultural differences in this area. While direct eye contact is valued in the United States, it can be considered an invasion of privacy in some places – Asian countries, for example. When speaking to such audiences, don't focus on one individual for too long – it could embarrass them.

A meeting of the eyes denotes a meeting of the minds.

By Mike Landrum

But where eye contact is valued, *make eye contact*. Too many speakers believe that a constant scan of the audience with their eyes, back and forth like a lawn sprinkler, will do the job. I recently visited a church where the minister read her sermon from the pulpit, glancing up every now and then at the back wall of the room, high above her congregation's heads. This technique is taught in some books as a way to reduce stage fright, but in my experience it seldom diminishes fear and cannot increase understanding of your message.

Those who just give the audience a quick glimpse of their baby blues

are not making eye contact. Trying to talk to *everybody* is actually talking to nobody. When we sit in an audience listening to a speaker, we want to feel spoken to, directly and personally. Therefore, the proper mindset for the speaker shouldn't be, "Let them see my eyes" – but rather, "Use my eyes to see *theirs*."

Who is the better judge of effective communication: the transmitter or the receiver? The receiver is the only one of the pair to know whether the ideas being expressed have landed and are well understood. You, the speaker, are the transmitter, so you don't know how well you are doing... unless you also become a receiver. The purpose of eye contact is to create a give-and-take relationship with your audience.

"Every audience is a treasure trove of experience and wisdom that no speaker can match," writes Lee Glickstein in his book *Be Heard Now*. "The way to tap this treasure is to put a priority on the *relationship* with the audience."

See if They Understand

Here is how I believe good eye contact should work: As you transmit your message – with your words, your facial expression, posture, tone of voice, gestures – you watch your listeners' eyes to determine whether or not they understand. Just as any telephone has two elements – one for sending and the other for receiving – so do public speakers. In our case, our voices and bodies are sending and our eyes are receiving. No one would fail to put a phone to their ear and only use the transmitter, so we must not ignore our reception devices – our eyes!

The human eye is extremely expressive. There's a lot to be learned by looking into the eyes of your audience. Smiles, frowns, boredom, excitement, understanding,

empathy – all these and countless other messages are being sent your way as you speak. The process of receiving these messages is called "reading your audience," and it's a crucial skill if

you want to persuade or inspire them. Read the effectiveness of your communi-

cation with the audience as you speak, and if need be, change your tactics to engage them more.

In her book *It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It*, master speechwriter Joan Detz writes, "Good eye contact builds rapport, fosters trust and creates a more likeable persona.... We rely on eye contact [from a speaker] to judge truthfulness."

When you think of your eyes as receivers rather than transmitters, it changes your style as a speaker. Now you can become interested in your audience as a group of individuals and speak to them one at a time. How? Deliver a full thought to each person you look at. Lock eyes with that listener and see the response in her eyes. Then pause, find another person and deliver the next thought. Read his eyes as you speak. If you feel that method slows you down, all the better – most speakers tend to rush.

One description of a successful speech is "a conversation, amplified." It's useful to remember when considering eye contact that a good, steady meeting of the eyes in conversation denotes a meeting of the minds.

Eyeing a More Relaxed Style

An added bonus to good eye contact is that it throws your attention off yourself and onto your listener. Self-consciousness hinders a speaking performance. Focusing on others can help you relax and perform naturally.

"Trying to talk to everybody is actually talking to nobody."

Years ago, I experienced a vivid demonstration of the value of eye contact. My friend invited me to a party – a gathering of deaf people held in a school gymnasium. When

we entered, I saw about 50 people lining the walls around the perimeter. I wandered out into the middle of the floor, but my friend pulled me back to the side. "You're interrupting conversations," he said.

Indeed, I began to realize that the room was filled with animated dialogues between people up to 50 feet apart. They told stories with their hands, their face and their emotions. Though I didn't know American Sign Language well, I could easily catch the drift of most of the stories and enjoy the laughter along with everyone else.

It was a powerful reminder about what makes successful communication. Toastmasters must establish both sides of our two-way signals: Too many speakers think their only job is to talk and the audience's job is to listen. Wrong! If you want to be a successful speaker, you must learn to read the crowd with your eyes as you speak. In doing so, you take responsibility for the reception as well as the transmission of your speech.

The speaker's eye is a subtle and powerful tool. Bear in mind the words of the famed English writer G.K. Chesterton: "There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect." **T**

Mike Landrum is an executive speaker's coach and speechwriter in New York. He has recently published a volume of essays titled *The Best of the Passionate Speaker*. Reach him at www.CoachMike.com.



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