

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MAY 2017

TOASTMASTER®



Meet 2017
Golden Gavel Recipient

ERIN GRUWELL

Renowned educator
brings Freedom Writers'
message to the stage

**Harley-Davidson:
Tuned Up for a Great Ride
with Corporate Clubs**

Forward Thinking

How many times do we hear the comment that Toastmasters is the best-kept secret? It doesn't need to be. How can we, as members, spread the word about its value to people around the world? What part can we play in showcasing our organization and what it offers?

The answer can be found in the eighth commitment in the Toastmaster's Promise, which clearly sets out club members' responsibilities: "To bring guests to club meetings so they can see the benefits Toastmasters membership offers."

Of all the commitments in the Toastmaster's Promise, this is probably the one I tend to overlook the most. How about you? When was the last time you brought a guest to your club? When was the last time you even *invited* someone to your club? Marketing analysts will tell you the best method for creating interest in a product or service is through personal referrals. Yet most of us fail to refer others to Toastmasters.

To invite others to participate in what could be a life-changing experience is an opportunity not to be missed.

For those who bring guests regularly, I can almost hear you saying, "This does not apply to me." But to the majority of us who, for one reason or another, fail to live up to the promise, I ask, Why? Is it because you feel uncomfortable with the possibility of rejection? Or perhaps it's the dwindling number of members attending your meetings, which tends to lead to uninspiring meetings. Perhaps you are too busy and leave it up to those who have more time. Excuses are countless but few, in fact, are viable or acceptable.

As I write this article, I realize that if I am to be true to my mantra of "Remember the Member," then I should also consider all *potential* members. As Toastmasters we have a responsibility to share with others the benefits we derive from our membership. To extend the hand of friendship and invite others to participate in what could be a life-changing experience is an opportunity not to be missed.

I challenge every member to bring one guest a year to a meeting. Consider the possibilities: This would mean more than 350,000 guests worldwide. If we converted only one in five guests, that would mean more than 70,000 new members a year. Breaking it down to the club level, if your club currently has 15 members and each member brought one guest a year, then of the 15 guests you could potentially gain three new members. Imagine what could happen if you brought two guests a year! Are you prepared to take up the challenge and *Remember the (future) Member*?

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“I have never in my entire life seen a magazine so filled with pictures and words about strong professional women who kick butt.”

— **Aazir Munir**
Kitchener-Waterloo Toastmasters,
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Table Topics Tips

In regard to “8 Tips for Table Topics” (March), we structure our questions differently than the authors. They recommend selecting the participant first, then having her pick a question. In order to keep everyone on their toes, we have the Table Topicsmaster ask the question first, pause, and then call on a member by name. This gets everyone thinking about their possible answer during that moment, engaging the whole audience.

Jack Wharton, ACB, ALB
Orlando Toastmasters club
Orlando, Florida

Meaning of Words Matter

In reading Gordon Thompson’s letter, “What’s in a Word?” (January)—about how one word can mean different things to different people—I was reminded of a similar situation I encountered in setting up a 401k plan for a United States subsidiary of a United Kingdom company. The person in the company’s human resources department told me how people in the UK refer to the plan as a “retirement scheme.” While we, in the U.S. and in the UK, speak a common language, sometimes the usage and meaning of certain words are quite different. If I referred to the plan

as a retirement scheme, my U.S. customers would think I was doing something illegal.

Bob Burns, ATMG
High Noon Club
Sherman, Texas

My Father’s Eulogy

As my father’s eight-year battle with kidney disease was bringing him closer to death, I worried how I would handle the deep emotions and self-imposed pressure of giving the eulogy at his funeral. As the eldest of five siblings, I felt it was my duty to deliver it. I was relieved when I read the article “Specialty Speeches” in the December issue that suggested eulogies be read because our emotions can knock us sideways.

When my father, Dennis, passed away in January, I wrote a tribute to him and asked each of my siblings to provide me with their own. On the morning before his funeral, I read the tributes aloud to myself three times, edited difficult words, and underlined places to pause and emphasize—preparation learned at my Toastmasters club.

While I was extremely sad at my father’s funeral, giving his eulogy was one of the most affirming moments of my life. I delivered our poignant tributes with clarity, passion and power.

As my father, a lifelong baseball fan, would say, I knocked it out of the park. It helped me fulfill one of my greatest desires: To ceremonially honor and bless my father upon his death. I did it for him, for my family and for me.

Thanks to Toastmasters for the great work that you do and for the support you gave me in honoring my father.

Tim O’Connor
Town and Gown Toastmasters
Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Growth in Toastmasters

I joined Toastmasters almost four months back and must admit there has been a phenomenal change in me and my communication skills.

We started off with one club in a small place—Siliguri, India—and now in a few months we can boast of having three clubs, and Toastmasters is still growing.

With loads of publicity on social media and hoardings (also known as billboards) on main streets, more and more prospective members and guests are attending our sessions. We are awestruck by the flow and discipline of our newly formed clubs.

Glad to see people from all walks of life benefiting from clubs. The concept of the learning process is fabulous. Cheers to Toastmasters!

Dhiraj Golyan
Silguri Toastmasters club
Silguri, India

First Impressions

I am a new Toastmaster and January’s issue was my first magazine. I have to say I am very impressed. I have never in my entire life seen a magazine so filled with pictures and words about strong professional women who kick butt. I just want to give kudos to Toastmasters for this; it is a refreshing change! Toastmasters rocks!

Aazir Munir
Kitchener-Waterloo Toastmasters
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

A Heartwarming Story

Caren Neile: What a lovely story to read in the December issue of *Toastmaster* magazine (“The Vows of Marriage”). For days it has been “Siberia South” here in Paris and I am finding many excuses not to have to go outside. Tucked in my cozy apartment with a Vin Rouge, I get ready to cross this off of my to-do list: Read the December *Toastmaster* magazine. The Siberian temperatures were good for something after all. “The Vows of Marriage” warmed my heart. Thank you so much for sharing your experience—it makes Toastmasters ever so real life. Wishing you a bountiful year filled with many “I do” moments.

Nancy Norton, ACG, CL
Busy Professionals
Paris, France

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

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COVER PHOTO: *Discovery Education Inc., Caroline Heming, photographer*



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▶ MEMBER MOMENT



From the Tech World to the Writers' Circle

BY MARIAM JEHANGIR

The first time Ayan Pal, DTM, realized creative writing was more than just his hobby was while pursuing a bachelor's degree in electronics and communication engineering from Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Technology in Karnataka, India. He had always enjoyed writing short stories and poems, but during a school break in 2002, he set a goal to become a published author. During his final year of engineering school, he started writing a novel but didn't complete it. It wasn't until he joined Toastmasters in 2010 that he once again was drawn to the world of storytelling. Three years later, after he became a Distinguished Toastmaster, he was determined to be published even though he had a full-time job at IBM in Kolkata. A year later, Pal's writing was featured in an anthology of creative short stories. Since then he has contributed to eight additional anthologies and has published two novels to high acclaim in India. Pal, who is a member of his employer's club, IBM Blue Voice Toastmasters, in Kolkata, talks about his creative journey below.

What are some highlights of your writing career?

In 2014, I was one of 21 winners in a nationwide short story contest organized by the self-publishing company Notion Press. More than 400,000 readers voted in the online contest and winning entries were published in the anthology *21 Tales to Tell*. In 2015, I co-authored India's first composite novel (a series of short stories that are all inter-related in a coherent whole), *Crossed and Knotted*, which made it to the *Limca Book of Records*, often regarded as India's version of the *Guinness Book of World Records*. In 2016, I was one of the top five finalists in the creative writing and humor categories for the Orange Flower Awards, which recognize creativity in the digital landscape. The same year, I released my solo debut novel, *Confessions on an Island*, which is highly rated on both Amazon and Goodreads.com. It was also chosen as the best Indian book for 2016 by *Prabhat Khabar*, a Hindi language newspaper in India.

You accomplished your goal while working full time. How did you manage this?

I give a lot of credit to Toastmasters. Being part of an executive committee—sometimes while in multiple clubs—and playing different roles in meetings taught me how to multitask. In the process of becoming a Distinguished Toastmaster, I learned how to set and achieve goals and balance my time between work, family, Toastmasters and creative writing. Over time, I learned how to manage my growing list of responsibilities by focusing on one thing at a time. When I was in a meeting, I would turn off my phone and concentrate only on the meeting. Likewise, while writing or working, I wouldn't give in to distractions.



Ayan Pal speaks about Chronicles of Urban Nomads, one of the anthologies to which he contributed, at Oxford Bookstore in Kolkata, India.

To those who want to pursue their passions while working full time, I suggest setting aside time on a regular basis to focus solely on specific tasks, and to avoid distractions as much as possible during that time.

Can you share more about your Toastmasters experience?

Toastmasters taught me innumerable things that have helped me personally as well as professionally. Having been a club officer over 30 times, and serving both as area and division governor, has helped me to establish myself as a thinker, influencer and motivator—even beyond Toastmasters. Regular participation in speech contests and mentoring others have helped me express myself in the best possible manner and communicate with maximum impact. Toastmasters also helped me with storytelling. In fact, my first published short story was based on my Project 4 speech from the *Competent Communication* manual.

What genres do you write in and what is your inspiration?

Having started with short stories, I've experimented with multiple genres, including contemporary, thriller, drama, fantasy, romance and magic realism. But a common theme that runs through all my stories is the transformation of complex characters facing big decisions. I want my readers to relate to my stories on some level and empathize with the characters. As far as inspiration is concerned, my late mother will always be at the top of the list, followed by talented storytellers including Agatha Christie, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, M. Night Shyamalan and Satyajit Ray, who inspired me with their passion, perseverance, hard work and determination.

Mariam Jehangir is the editorial assistant for Toastmaster magazine.



BLUE NEW YEAR

Members of Tainan Toastmasters club promoted District 67 at the Lunar New Year Festival in Tainan, Taiwan. The group, dressed as characters from the 2009 film *Avatar*, carried copies of the *Toastmaster* magazine, as well as the QR-code for their district's Facebook page.

▶ GRADUATION

Let the Speeches Commence!

May and June are traditional months for high school and college graduations, and schools typically mark the milestone with commencement speakers. To fill this prized slot, many universities turn to high-profile figures such as politicians, entertainers, activists, religious leaders and business stars.

Apple CEO Tim Cook and the Dalai Lama are among the heavyweights scheduled to speak at universities this year.

But nabbing a big name doesn't guarantee an entertaining or enlightening presentation. What, then, makes a compelling graduation speech?

Offering insights gleaned from years of hard-earned experience is always good. *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling encouraged the Harvard University class of 2008 to take risks: "It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live

so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default," she said.

Humor is a great asset in a commencement address, especially considering how restless audiences are at such lengthy, serious events. In his 2013 speech at the University of Virginia, U.S. comedian and talk-show host Stephen Colbert poked fun at the graduating millennials: "So self-obsessed—tweeting your Vines, hashtagging your Spotifys and Snapchatting your YO-LOs—your generation needs everything to be about you. And that's very upsetting to us baby boomers, because self-absorption is kind of our thing."

Eager to hear some sparkling graduation speeches? America's National Public Radio (NPR) has compiled 350 of them. Check out apps.npr.org/commencement.



Rebecca George, ACB, ALB, delivered a graduation speech to 5,000 people at a basketball arena in Phoenix, Arizona. In a 2010 article in *Toastmaster* magazine, she wrote about how gratifying it was speaking to her fellow 2006 graduates of the University of Phoenix Online.

"Graduates approached to tell me how much they loved it; they felt I was talking about their own personal journeys and the challenges they overcame to be at this ceremony. ... All the practice and anxiety generated by having to give this five-minute speech was worth it!"

Paul Sterman is senior editor of *Toastmaster* magazine.

QUICK TAKES

▶ MEET MY MENTOR



Mia Cao, DTM

BY MARY NESFIELD

Mia Cao, a member of two clubs in Shanghai, China, was unsure of her qualifications for mentoring although she had been in Toastmasters for 18 months. But, in 2014, thanks to Rocky Shen's perseverance, Mia agreed to take on that role. Rocky, ACB, ALB, now area director, is currently a member of three clubs, and is not the only one who has benefited from Mia's mentoring. Mia has learned much as well—she not only polished her own skills, but also drew inspiration from Rocky. Today Mia is confident about mentoring—it's a lifelong journey for her, and for her mentees.

What was your first impression of Mia?

I met Mia before I joined Toastmasters and was inspired by her clear thoughts and ideas as she delivered an evaluation to a speaker at a different English-speaking organization I had visited. We chatted, and as I learned more about Toastmasters and its mentoring program, I asked her to mentor me.

How has Mia helped you?

When I joined Toastmasters, Mia belonged to an advanced club, yet she reviewed each one of my speeches at least twice, and guided me in my leadership roles.

What has her mentoring helped you to accomplish?

Mia has accompanied me throughout my entire journey in Toastmasters, even as I co-founded the iRead + Bilingual Toastmasters club. That was not easy, but I jumped out of my comfort zone and stretched my communication and leadership skills.



Mia Cao (right), and Rocky Shen

What makes her a good mentor?

Besides reviewing my speeches and videos, Mia encouraged me when I was depressed, and even endured my insolence when I was in a bad mood. She is my most trusted friend; I can confide in her personally. And, because of my improved communication skills, I am never afraid to speak with colleagues or customers at work. I try to repay her by working hard to develop myself beyond her imagination.

Mary Nesfield is the associate editor for *Toastmaster magazine*.

NOMINATE YOUR MARVELOUS MENTOR!

Do you know an exceptional mentor who has positively influenced you? Send a 200-word description and photo (1 MB or larger) of you and your mentor to MentorMoment@toastmasters.org.

▶ THE CLUB EXPERIENCE



Millennials in Manila

Club officers of the Maharlika Toastmasters club in Manila, Philippines, take a photo “millennial style” during the club's Gatsby-themed 36th anniversary celebration and turnover ceremony in July at Bayview Park Hotel, Manila.



► ADVICE FROM MEMBERS

Balancing Club Demographics

BY STEVE PIET, DTM

To prepare a meal, you need the right mix of ingredients. What is the right mix of people in a club to maximize member benefits and long-term success?

Novice members focus on learning the club culture and completing the *Competent Communication (CC)* and *Competent Leadership (CL)* manuals. New members have the fastest improvement, which increases energy—theirs and the club's. They are typically the best source for recruiting potential members because they haven't been pestering friends and co-workers about Toastmasters for years. If a club doesn't have enough novices, it isn't meeting Distinguished Club Program goals 7 and 8 and likely lacks energy, enthusiasm and recruitment of new members.

Current club officers own the current success of the club. They must “walk the talk” by earning education awards. They improve their communication skills by giving speeches inside and outside of Toastmasters that matter (something's at stake). They improve their leadership

skills by serving as club officers, using tools such as the Toastmasters Successful Club Series. They typically mentor novice members.

By the way, when I analyzed my district's member retention numbers I found that those who earned a Competent Leader award were more likely to stay in Toastmasters. Retention of those with a CL was 10 percentage points higher than those without. These are the people who have found that Toastmasters is about more than just talking.

Seasoned members own the long-term success of the club. They hold institutional memory and can fill club offices in emergencies. They typically mentor current club officers. It is often hard for them to recruit friends and co-workers because they've already pursued them as potential members. Seasoned members need new challenges such as finishing DTM awards and joining advanced or specialty clubs. Their mentors may be people outside their



clubs, unless the mentor is some young novice teaching them about internet marketing or video communication. If a club doesn't have sufficient seasoned members, there is inadequate

long-term vision and support, although mentors for new clubs and club coaches for existing clubs can temporarily substitute for seasoned members.

For a stable club, each of the demographic groups mentioned above must have at least three people, preferably seven. Indeed, three groups of three people match the minimum club size of eight. Three groups of seven people match the target club size of 20. What kind of demographics does your club have?

Steve Piet, DTM, PDD, ScD, is a member of four clubs in Idaho and one club in Utah.

► NEWS FROM TI

Check Out the Online Magazine

Have you read the *Toastmaster* magazine online? The web-based edition, which launched in October, can be read on any device, at any time. To view the current month, log in to www.toastmasters.org and click on the Magazine tab. Take advantage of extra interactive content you won't find in print, such as video, additional photos and hyperlinks! All previous issues are open to the public, with the ability to instantly share on social media, email to a friend or print out a copy.

To opt out of your print version, you can now go to www.toastmasters.org/My-Toastmasters/Profile/Magazine-Subscriptions, or email membership@toastmasters.org.



TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



- 1 | **PRAVEEN WADALKAR, CC**, from Mumbai, India, stands on the Rathong Glacier in Sikkim, India.
- 2 | **MARK BROWN**, from Salt Lake City, Utah, visits the Angkor Wat temple complex near Siem Reap, Cambodia.
- 3 | **CHAVA LILOVE**, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, stands at Shureimon gate in Okinawa, Japan.
- 4 | **LIV THEUNISSEN**, from Hamilton, New Zealand, explores Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa.



View more photos on Toastmasters International Official Fan Page on Facebook.



PICTURE YOURSELF HERE! Pose with the *Toastmaster* magazine during your travels and submit your photos for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue. Visit www.toastmasters.org/Submissions. Bon voyage!

Acing the Interviews

How my club experience is helping me become a police officer.

BY ANTHONY BAILEY, CC

In 2015 I began to seriously pursue my dream of being a police officer. I knew I had to overcome my tremendous fear of public speaking to be successful in law enforcement. I also knew it might hinder my performance at required interviews.

That summer, I asked a presenter at a workshop I attended how he became such a smooth and confident speaker. He suggested I look into joining a local Toastmasters club. On a Friday morning in August, I went to a meeting of the Shop Talk Toastmasters in Lancaster, California. The club regularly hosts 20 to 25 members at their meetings, and I was pleasantly surprised to be introduced to men and women brimming with wisdom.

But fear set in immediately. How would they receive me? For an instant, I considered bolting out of the room. But I stayed for the meeting, and my fears could not have been more unfounded. Shop Talk members are friendly and welcome everyone with open arms. At one point, I was invited to participate in what I thought would be a dreadful experience: Table Topics. I remember barely squeaking out my response: "I'll pass." I felt so ashamed of myself. Yet during the meeting, I began to receive the club's famous "love notes" written on ballot forms. The notes were filled with comments about how brave I was just for attending—and expressions of thanks for doing so. That's when I knew this was the place for me!

Meanwhile, I began the arduous process of testing with various law enforcement agencies. Soon I was scheduled to complete the oral board interview with the Los Angeles Police Department. Shop Talk President Ellie Kay, an Accredited Speaker, told me the club could conduct a mock interview to prepare me for the board interview. My hopes soared at the idea of doing a "dry run" to help me face potential hiccups in my interview responses.

Ellie and Vice President Education Ann Vanino, CC, went above and beyond



Anthony Bailey fields questions from fellow club members during a mock interview. It was conducted to help him prepare for real interviews.

to prepare both me and the club for this mock interview. They wrote detailed notes with specific guidelines on how the interview should be conducted, plus agendas for four mock interviewers and a list of possible questions I might be asked. They also printed feedback sheets with an LAPD logo that would be given to each club member in attendance so I could get additional feedback.

I was extremely nervous, but I answered every question they threw at me without a hitch.

Before the mock interview started, a member escorted me out of the room while the Toastmaster briefed the interviewers and other members. When I was escorted back in, I treated the event like it was the real thing, greeting and shaking hands with everyone on the panel before I sat down. I was extremely nervous, but I answered every question they threw at me without a hitch. At one point Ellie even whispered to the others in an effort to rattle me. The entire mock interview, from

start to finish, lasted about 15 minutes. I thanked the panel and exited the room.

Afterward, I received a highly favorable evaluation in addition to 15 feedback forms from members who watched, each filled with compliments or little tidbits of advice that were extremely helpful.

The mock interview made the real one a breeze. I successfully passed on every count, making me eligible for the next step in the process of becoming a police officer.

I also know that my improved leadership and communication skills will help me be a successful officer. I'll draw on these skills when speaking to large groups, handling crowd control, de-escalating heated situations and interviewing witnesses when performing crime scene investigations.

My club's help in preparing for job interviews is just the kind of out-of-the-box experience Shop Talk Toastmasters gives its members. I find it truly heartwarming when I think of what they did for me. And now I know: This is what Toastmasters is all about. **T**

ANTHONY BAILEY, CC, is a member of the Shop Talk Toastmasters club in Lancaster, California.

A Product of Her Community

Natalie Torres-Haddad draws from personal experience to help others reach financial and educational goals.

BY MISSY SHEEHAN

Students have a special place in the heart of Natalie Torres-Haddad—especially those in need. That’s why, in 2007, she founded LA’s Prom Closet, which provides free formal gowns to teenage girls in Southern California.

“At our very first event, we helped 45 girls, and every year it grew until we were helping more than 300 girls,” she says. “It was really rewarding to see them enjoy their prom night and not have to worry about any expenses.”

Countless other students have benefited from Torres-Haddad’s compassion and counsel. She is on a mission to help others through financial literacy and higher education. As a partner and contributor for Educated Latina, an online community for Latina women in pursuit of higher education, Torres-Haddad speaks at student conferences and gives presentations on financial literacy. She facilitates workshops for college students and nonprofit organizations several times a year and teaches business administration courses at the United Education Institute College in Huntington Park, California.

Toastmasters, she says, gives her the speaking skills and confidence to effectively share her message of empowerment.

Born in El Salvador, the 35-year-old has experienced firsthand the struggles of poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Her family escaped the dangers of El Salvador’s civil war, which lasted from 1980 to 1992, by immigrating to the United States when she was a baby. Though the family escaped a war, they experienced a different set of challenges in their new home.

“I grew up in Inglewood, California—in a very poor area—during the time right

before the Los Angeles riots [in 1992],” she says. “We saw grocery stores and mom-and-pop restaurants nearby burned to the ground. People were just so frustrated. As a kid, I didn’t understand why, but it had a real impact on the way I grew up.”

Opportunity Knocks

Her parents stressed the value of education at a young age. Because their neighborhood was plagued by gang activity and poor schools, her father drove her and her younger brother to a private high school 45 minutes away. That school opened many doors for Torres-Haddad and gave her access to “guidance that a lot of public high schools weren’t providing—like how to apply for financial aid,” she says. And her parents considered college a *must*.

“A lot of people are nervous about their accent, but the thing is, my accent makes me who I am.”

—NATALIE TORRES-HADDAD

She went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in 2003 in finance and international business from California State University, Long Beach. She also earned a master’s in public administration from California State University, Northridge, in 2011. And while her fellow graduates were struggling with student loan payments and credit card debt, Torres-Haddad maintained a balanced budget that allowed her to pay off her student loans and purchase her

first property by age 24. She was determined not only to earn financial freedom, but also to help others do the same.

She heard about Toastmasters when working as a project manager for the South Bay Latino Chamber of Commerce in Hawthorne, California. “I was always the one representing our chamber at city council meetings and doing grand openings and events, so being able to present to a large group was something I wanted more experience and practice with,” she says.

So in 2005 Torres-Haddad joined the Xerox Xeroids Toastmasters in El Segundo, California. It helped her learn to embrace her Spanish accent when speaking in English. “A lot of people are nervous about their accent, but the thing is, my accent makes me who I am,” she says.

In 2016, she joined the Compton Elite Communicators, where she’s working on a whole new set of goals, one of which is to become an Accredited Speaker. “Natalie is an excellent storyteller and uses stories from her own life to drive home a point,” says the club’s vice president education, Margaret L. Mitchell, DTM. “She has a certain amount of warmth about her personality. She’s able to bring that into her speeches, so they’re inspirational.”

Achieving Her Goals

Torres-Haddad credits Toastmasters with helping her reach her personal goals and build her career. These achievements include earning a master’s degree, getting paid to speak in public and publishing a book, *Financially Savvy in 20 Minutes*. She’s also determined to visit 80 countries by the time she’s 80 years old (she’s been to 31 so far).



Natalie Torres-Haddad

“All the little things I learned through Toastmasters helped me be a lot more comfortable when speaking to the media.”

—NATALIE TORRES-HADDAD

College, says her teacher made a lasting impression.

“I’m not used to teachers being as committed to their students as she was,” says Alvarez, who also attended one of Torres-Haddad’s financial literacy workshops. “She made all of our goals seem more believable and achievable. I still go back to Natalie and ask for her advice any time I feel like I’m stuck in a place where I have to make choices about work. ... I feel like she took me under her wing and guided me through life.”

Sharing her own experiences, Torres-Haddad strives to inspire others, particularly students and fellow Latinos, to look for opportunities they can use to achieve their goals. She continues to focus on empowerment through financial literacy and higher education. As a financial literacy expert for LatinaVIDA, a nonprofit organization that hosts leadership programs for up-and-coming Latina executives, she has given presentations on how to manage money, prepare a budget and eliminate debt.

“She really cares about the community,” says Cecilia Mota, executive director of LatinaVIDA. “That’s what I really sense about her, that she loves what she does and that she cares about the betterment of her community.”

“I am a product of my community,” Torres-Haddad says, “and if I don’t give back to it, then I don’t expect someone else to have those same opportunities.” ■

Missy Sheehan is a freelance writer, copy editor and proofreader. For more information, visit her website at www.sheehanwriting.com.

Following the success of LA’s Prom Closet, Torres-Haddad was in the spotlight, with news outlets including the *Los Angeles Times*, ABC News and Telemundo (a Spanish-language television channel) wanting to interview her about the organization. “I was never a shy person, but when it came to talking about my dreams, I got very nervous,” she says. “All the little things I learned through Toastmasters helped me be a lot more comfortable when speaking to the media.”

Her Toastmasters skills continue to help her, especially when she teaches classes and workshops. “One of the things I’ve learned is how to engage my audience—sometimes I’ll ask for a quick response, for students to raise their hands

“I am a product of my community, and if I don’t give back to it, then I don’t expect someone else to have those same opportunities that I had.”

—NATALIE TORRES-HADDAD

or to shout out the answer. People sometimes can get lost when they’re listening to someone speak. Their minds wander, and you have to bring them back to the topic.”

Cindy Alvarez, a former student of Torres-Haddad’s business administration class at United Education Institute

First Pathways Translations Are On The Way

Educational materials will be available in 8 languages, starting with Simplified Chinese.

BY PAUL STERMAN

The most expansive and exhaustive translation work in Toastmasters' history is being done on the Pathways learning experience. All materials in the new education program are translated into the eight non-English languages supported by Toastmasters: Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Spanish and Traditional Chinese.

Member volunteers around the world play a major role in this massive undertaking. They are part of translations-review teams in countries where these languages are spoken. The teams help develop glossaries and review the professional translations. They ensure that the translated materials are true to both the Toastmasters experience and the local culture.

Pathways launched in February with a three-district program pilot. The districts chosen to participate were, in chronological order, 57, 27 and 51. District 51 is in Peninsular Malaysia, so to meet the needs of members there, Pathways materials in Simplified Chinese will be the first translated materials made available.

Eleven members serve on the Simplified Chinese translations-review team. Hailing from countries ranging from China to Indonesia to Canada, the team's reviewers say it's been gratifying to know their work will help improve the Toastmasters experience for fellow members.

"I enjoy working on a huge project that will shape the future of this worldwide organization and a place we think of as *home*," says Jack Luo, ACB, ALB, a member of the Chengdu Yinying Trainers' club

in Sichuan, China. "It has been a meaningful and rewarding journey."

Meeting Global Needs

With nearly 16,000 clubs located in 142 countries, Toastmasters' membership has never been more diverse. That's why the global translation effort is so important: It enables members to work in Pathways in their preferred language.

"I think the greatest benefit for members will be the opportunity to appreciate their own language through the Toastmasters program," says Gerrie Ying, CC, ALB, a member of the Simplified Chinese review team who belongs to the Burrard Toastmasters club in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

"I enjoyed working on a huge project that will shape the future of this worldwide organization."

— JACK LUO, ACB, ALB,
SIMPLIFIED CHINESE REVIEWER

As Pathways begins a phased rollout to Toastmasters regions, the translated materials of the other seven languages will also become available in phases. The timing will be connected to the rollout order of the regions where those languages are commonly spoken.

For example, content translated into French will be ready in the third roll-

out, when Pathways launches in Region 6, which includes parts of Canada, and Region 7. German, Arabic and Portuguese materials will be ready in the fifth rollout phase, when regions 1 and 11 launch. Region 11 includes countries such as Germany, Austria, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Portugal.

(To view the full rollout schedule, go to the Pathways learning experience webpage at www.toastmasters.org/Pathways.)

Base Camp is the online learning management system for Pathways. The system's user interface is in English only; however, it will include reference guides and FAQs in all eight languages explaining how to navigate Base Camp. All the projects in Base Camp will be available in the eight languages.

Taking It to Another Level

Toastmasters began expanding its translations efforts in 2014, when it launched the Translation Review Program. It was established to improve the accuracy and quality of the organization's translated materials and the consistency of translations across all languages. Review teams composed of members from around the world were formed, and they began reviewing translated manuals and other educational materials. Eventually they started work on the Pathways project.

The translations process involves the work of professional translators and editors, project coordinators, linguists, and editorial, design and technical personnel at World Headquarters and around the



Pathways' greatest benefit to members is "they will be able to learn and practice different types of must-learn skills in Toastmasters, which will contribute to their professional and personal development."

— YINGDAN LIU, DTM
SIMPLIFIED CHINESE
CHIEF REVIEWER

Sumatra, Indonesia. "There is always a value that comes from the need to research and understand the source and its meaning in order to translate it in the proper manner."

Fellow team member Gerrie Ying says, "I enjoy working and connecting with Chinese translators and proofreaders around the world, discussing linguistic points and polishing the materials."

In addition to Pathways materials, other Toastmasters materials have been translated into the eight languages, and more are still to come, including the guidebooks *How to Build a Club* and *A Toastmaster Wears Many Hats*.

The contributions of members are vital to the translations process. And when it comes to Pathways, reviewers say they are excited for members to experience the new education program.

Yingdan Liu, DTM, Chief Reviewer for the Simplified Chinese team, says she believes Pathways' greatest benefit to members is "they will be able to learn and practice different types of must-learn skills in Toastmasters, which will contribute to their professional and personal development." **■**

Paul Sterman is senior editor for *Toastmaster magazine*.

world. Hundreds of items online and in print are being translated, including learning projects, interactive materials, quizzes, tutorials and even videos.

Each of the eight review teams has a dozen or so members, all of them experienced Toastmasters proficient in English and their native language. All volunteer their time. A Chief Reviewer leads each group, and because there is so much content to handle—including hundreds of Pathways-specific terms—the teams have now added one or more Lead Reviewers to assist the Chief Reviewer.

The Pathways materials are all professionally translated before they go to the review teams. The reviewers make sure the content and terminology sounds natural in the native language and authentically reflects the Toastmasters culture. For example, they have to constantly ask themselves, Does this sound like something a member would genuinely say at a club meeting?

Such rigorous examination of language issues leads to lengthy debates and discussions among the reviewers. They say the process is intellectually stimulating.

"I believe in the value of learning something new," says Liana Kwan, DTM, a Simplified Chinese reviewer who belongs to the Medan Advanced club in North

LEARN MORE

The members of the Simplified Chinese translations-review team are: Chief Reviewer Yingdan Liu, Lead Reviewer Vicky Wu and reviewers Liana Kwan, Gerrie Ying, Karen Teh Hui Pheng, Kwock Wing Ching, Eveleen Weng, Nansen Zhai, Jack Luo, Rolf Chew and Monica Kwan.

Go to **www.toastmasters.org/Translations** to see photos of the team members and read what they say about their experience as volunteer reviewers.

You can also read about the other translations-review teams on this webpage.

For more information, please email the Translations Team at World Headquarters at **translations@toastmasters.org**.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON: *Tuned Up*

Famed motorcycle company revs up its culture with corporate clubs.

By the time Ralph Smedley hosted the first meeting of the Number One Toastmasters club in Santa Ana, California, in 1924, Harley-Davidson was just 20 years old, and had become the largest motorcycle company in the world. Fast forward to the 21st century, when the two successful organizations crossed paths, and you're in for a great ride. And, as the Harley-Davidson website states, "Every great ride has a great story." This is the story.



for a Great Ride

BY MAUREEN ZAPPALA, DTM

Cindy Laatsch, a 17-year Harley employee, joined Toastmasters in 2009. Four years later, when Laatsch, Harley's IT program manager, was in a casual conversation with Dave Cotteleer, vice president and chief information officer for the company, she suggested they start a Toastmasters corporate club. His response was immediate: "Yes!"

A Good *Kick-start*

Not only is Cotteleer passionate about communication and leadership, he also has had a rewarding personal experience with Toastmasters. "More than 20 years ago," he says, "while I was in graduate school at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, a friend invited me to Toastmasters—and I was intrigued. I went, and I immediately saw the value. Plus, it was fun. It was also serious, helping people communicate with confidence. I wasn't comfortable speaking in public, but I wanted to be." He says Toastmasters helped.

Laatsch, DTM, and District 35 director, recalls why she had mentioned Toastmasters to Cotteleer, a top executive at the company. When Laatsch was a new member, she attended everything from club meetings to conferences. "I met corporate club

members from other companies and saw the impact a Toastmasters corporate club could have," she says. "I work in IT, but my background is in training, communication and change management. I knew Toastmasters could make a big difference in an IT department. When Dave gave his support, I got busy starting a club." In February 2014, the first Harley-Davidson corporate club, Rumble Don't Mumble, was chartered, with Laatsch and other members of the Harley-Davidson IT groups as members.

Cindy Laatsch, IT Program Manager at Harley-Davidson, sees the Harley Toastmasters clubs as "breeding grounds" for leaders.

Enthusiasm spread quickly. In November 2014, a second corporate club chartered, Screamin' Eagle Speakers, comprised mostly of engineers. In May 2016, a third club, Cruisers Toastmasters, chartered at the Harley-Davidson Financial Services division in Plano, Texas. Most recently, in June 2016, a fourth club,



THE CLUB EXPERIENCE

Chrome Conversations, chartered at the Milwaukee headquarters. That one is open to all Harley-Davidson employees, making Toastmasters now part of the Harley culture.

An Iconic *Brand*

Harley-Davidson's iconic brand evokes a feeling of acceptable rebellion, personal expression and the thrill of exploring the open road on a rumbling and shiny motorcycle. Driven by its commitment to "help people fulfill dreams of personal freedom," the company knows the significance of effective communication in corporate strategy. When the company incorporated Toastmasters into its culture, the result was extraordinary.

"We're excited to develop leaders, especially those in management positions," Cotteleer says. "I knew Toastmasters would help. But what was unexpected was the rapid growth and improvement in the employees who joined, and the impact they had on the company. The results were so obvious—like night and day. People were clearer in their communications. They were well-prepared, more engaging, calm and able to handle quick questions and complicated situations. When you have more employees like that, they become better-quality leaders who achieve goals faster. That can only be good for the company."

When the company incorporated Toastmasters into its culture, the result was extraordinary.

It's true. The way a company communicates can make the difference between success and failure. Research shows that businesses with effective communications are 50 percent more likely to have lower employee turnover. Strong communication builds stronger relationships with customers, vendors and stakeholders, as well as improves internal *esprit de corps*. Happy employees are productive employees.

Jaki Van Valin, CC, CL, is the director of information management in the Global Information Services department at the company. She sees firsthand how good communication skills benefit employee engagement. "Recently," she says, "we realigned all Information Management teams across the country into one team. To better integrate everyone, I used an exercise that mirrored the Ice Breaker." She set up an online team meeting where each person introduced themselves in four minutes using only three slides. "They could be as creative as they wanted, as long as we learned more about them." To make things fun, they followed up with a survey and feedback mechanism, awarding prizes for the best presentation. "Not only did the team enhance their presentation skills," Van Valin says, "team engagement soared. We measure employee engagement through the Gallup Survey, and our scores have continuously increased each year. I credit my Toastmasters experience for that."



Dave Cotteleer and Shae Schoenherr review Toastmasters manuals to prepare for a club meeting.

The Customer *Connection*

Cotteleer says helping customers fulfill their dreams of personal freedom is the company's core goal. "We want to be *the most* customer-led company, *period*," he says. "To do that, we *must* connect with customers, and you can't do that with just a small team. All employees must engage well, and be comfortable with conversation. All employees must communicate clearly and passionately. ... When I see some of our Toastmasters employees address a large group I'm so impressed with them."

One success story is from Shae Schoenherr, CC, ALB, lead resource manager with the Global Information Services (GIS) department. She joined Toastmasters to develop her communication skills. "Three years ago," she says, "I was asked to present at a conference and my reaction was 'Absolutely not!' But a year after joining Toastmasters I was asked again, and this time I felt comfortable enough to agree. My Toastmasters experience helped me organize an effective presentation, but even more so, Table Topics helped me prepare for the Q&A portion of the session. I could think on my feet and speak in an organized manner." Laatsch adds, "Toastmasters has gotten quite a reputation here. When someone gives an awesome presentation, the talk around the company is 'I bet they're in Toastmasters!'"

Haley Loprieno, an associate analyst, also in the GIS department, knows this well. She was up against some tough *Shark Tank*-style competition when employees were challenged to propose innovative ideas in a contest for new products or services that Harley-Davidson could offer to customers. "In the weeks prior to the contest," she says, "as I looked at my very talented

co-workers, I thought their concepts were better than mine. I knew I would have to wow the judges with a great presentation. I did! I took second place, largely because of my presentation skills. For weeks, my co-workers congratulated me, saying my speech had a big impact on them. Toastmasters gave me confidence and helped me incorporate different speaking styles and surprise elements that gave my talk that extra kick.”

Going Full *Throttle*

The appeal of Toastmasters is not just because people are improving their skills. Harley club members are also having fun. With a focus on building relationships, the corporate culture at Harley-Davidson attracts naturally fun and gregarious people. Add in Toastmasters with the applause, recognition, freedom to speak about fun topics and a focus on personal development and you have the recipe for a lively and contagious atmosphere. And while the clubs have open houses and membership drives, membership growth results more from organic word-of-mouth methods, and fun is a strong catalyst for growth.

Laatsch says, “At Harley-Davidson, we are proud to be employees and proud to be Toastmasters. Employees wear HD clothing and boots almost everywhere, so when we ‘arrive’ at a district event, people know. Fellow Toastmasters even make motorcycle noises and yell things like ‘RRRRRRUUUMMMMMBLE!!!!’ It’s fun to be connected to such a cool product, and to know the depth of Harley-Davidson in the fabric here in Milwaukee.”

The word-of-mouth club-building strategy mimics the corporate approach to growing the company’s loyal customer community: To develop a great product, provide outstanding customer service and cultivate camaraderie between people who share the owner experience.

“When I see one of our corporate leaders or technical experts speaking to the media or at a conference—and they are engaging, poised and polished—that reflects well on our company.”

— MARIPAT BLANKENHEIM

Cotteleer emphasizes, “Nobody *needs* a motorcycle. It’s a voluntary participation in a lively community. Freedom is the brand, and the sense of community runs through the brand. For the dealer to deliver a great experience, the dealer has to have great experiences with the company. And for the company to deliver that great experience to the dealer, we, as employees, have to deliver a great experience to one another. Communication and collaboration are foundational to that. It’s a prerequisite because everything cascades to the customer. That’s where Toastmasters comes in. My team ... the global IT leaders of the company, is excited about Toastmasters. Just like me, they support Toastmasters




FROM LEFT: Shannon Weis displays the club’s “monkey award” for Best Evaluator; Jackie Breezer holds the “chicken award” for Best Speaker and Tony Colgrove shows off the Best Table Topics award. These awards prompt discussions of club-membership benefits when other employees see them displayed on award-winners’ desks at work.

here because we all see the benefit. I even have the club banner on display here in my office.”

Maripat Blankenheim, director of corporate communication at Harley, echoes Cotteleer’s support of Toastmasters. “It’s hard for employees speaking on behalf of the company if they’re not polished, clear or comfortable,” she says. “If we can improve their comfort and effectiveness, that’s a good thing. When I see one of our corporate leaders or technical experts speaking to the media or at a conference—and they are engaging, poised and polished—that reflects well on our company and our brand is preserved.”

Laatsch sees the Harley Toastmasters clubs as “breeding grounds” for leaders. “I’ve seen many members develop within the club and step into leadership roles both within Toastmasters and here at Harley. In addition, since our corporate culture is relational and casual, we interact a lot with senior managers who are very open and approachable. Conversational skills are important.”

Cotteleer agrees. He says, “The impression you make on the people above you (in the leadership chain) are made in those five-minute chunks. If you can speak clearly and concisely, if you can settle yourself, present yourself well, the impact is huge. Things happen, like promotions, moving ideas forward, resolving conflicts and solving problems.”

Indeed, every great ride has a great story. The story of Toastmasters and Harley-Davidson is one worth telling. 

Maureen Zappala, DTM, is a former NASA propulsion engineer. Today she’s a professional speaker, author and presentation skills coach, as well as founder of High Altitude Strategies, a coaching and speaking service. She belongs to the Aerospace Toastmasters club in Cleveland, Ohio. Visit her website at www.MaureenZ.com.

“Now that we are proud Toastmasters members, we understand more than ever the power of the voice and the importance of speaking out authentically and passionately about what you believe in.”

—ERIN GRUWELL

A NEW CHAPTER FOR Freedom Writers

Erin Gruwell and her former struggling students take their stories to the stage.

BY DAVE ZIELINSKI

When Erin Gruwell and the former high school students who gained fame in the 2007 movie *Freedom Writers* decided to transform the power of the pen into the power of the voice, they turned to Toastmasters for help in spreading their message of hope, perseverance and self-empowerment around the world.

The speaking skills the Freedom Writers developed allowed them to bring—many for the first time—the powerful lessons of their well-known personal diaries to the podium, inspiring new generations of at-risk youth and vulnerable populations to transcend life’s most trying circumstances in the same manner they did.

Many years earlier, in the 1990s, Gruwell, a young English teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California, had found herself struggling to reach these same students in her classes. Gang and racial violence were running rampant in the city, and students were more concerned about surviving to the next day than making it to graduation. Desperate to capture the students’ interest, Gruwell brought in literature written by teenagers to whom they could relate and who faced similar life challenges.

“We read the harrowing and heartbreaking tales of other people who refused to let their circumstances identify them as victims,” Gruwell says. “Whether it was the diary of Anne Frank or survivors of gang violence, I decided early on I wanted my students to read those stories and look for parallels in their own lives.”

Soon Gruwell was encouraging her students to write about their own life circumstances. Students recorded their thoughts and feelings in raw and often-jarring diaries about domestic violence, the killing of family members and friends, broken homes, drug use, finding love, and other teenage concerns. They called themselves the Freedom Writers after the 1960s American civil rights activists the Freedom Riders.

“The diaries spoke about refusing to be victims and what it takes to survive in their worlds,” Gruwell says, who was recently named Toastmasters’ 2017 Golden Gavel recipient.



Erin Gruwell, above, delivers a keynote in October to educators at a Discovery Education Powerful Practices event in Atlanta, USA.

PHOTO CREDIT: Discovery Education Inc., Caroline Heming, photographer

FROM LEFT: Freedom Writers Shanate Jones-McConnell, Erica Alcaraz (top), Alicia Mitchell (bottom) and Tiffany Jacobs.



Few of the Freedom Writers had told the tales from their famous diaries in public settings, and Toastmasters prepared them for that leap.

The powerful essays gained notice and became a best-selling book, *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them*. The critically acclaimed movie *Freedom Writers* followed, starring the American actress Hilary Swank as Gruwell.

The Toastmasters Connection

Following the release of the book and movie, Gruwell began receiving requests for the Freedom Writers to speak around the world. Although the students had bared their souls in the diaries, the prospect of standing before audiences and telling their very personal and often-wrenching stories was daunting. The Freedom Writers' diaries had been kept anonymous by design, with numbers rather than names assigned to journal entries in the book to protect privacy and to emphasize the universality of the students' experiences.

"The idea of public speaking was terrifying to those not used to being exposed," Gruwell says. "But I began thinking that we had brought all these great stories of perseverance into the classroom and now it was time to bring them into the larger world. That's where Toastmasters came into the picture."

Gruwell knew a colleague in Toastmasters and wondered if there was something the organization could do to prepare her former students for speaking engagements. Soon the Professional Women Toastmasters club in Playa Vista, California, comprised of past presidents from other clubs, agreed to deliver an eight-week Speechcraft session for the Freedom Writers. In this club outreach program, experienced Toastmasters present the fundamentals of public speaking to non-members in an atmosphere that resembles a club setting.

"This very dynamic and giving group of women decided to take us under their wing and create a program for us," Gruwell says. The group transformed one room of the historic home in

Long Beach where the Freedom Writers Foundation is based—an organization Gruwell founded and leads as executive director, to continue the mission and teachings of the Freedom Writers—into a classroom for the Speechcraft sessions.

"These Toastmasters leaders made it their mission to model what great speaking is for us, to help ease the Freedom Writers' anxiety about presenting and to encourage us all to take risks as speakers," Gruwell says. "Toastmasters became a game-changer for us."

Inspired by the program, the Freedom Writers decided to charter their own Toastmasters club, Freedom Writers Toastmasters, in September 2014.

Silent No More

Brimming with confidence and newly polished speaking skills from their Toastmasters experience, the Freedom Writers began presenting frequently to diverse audiences around the globe. Now in their 30s with good jobs, advanced degrees, families and successful lives, Gruwell's former students—all of whom graduated from high school and attended college—found it rewarding, sometimes liberating and often emotional to revisit the experiences from their turbulent teenage years.

The group has remained close over the years, and participating in the Toastmasters club is one way they maintain that bond; the team-oriented and camaraderie-building nature of the meetings often feels like a natural extension of their high school classroom. But few of the Freedom Writers had told the tales from their famous diaries in public settings, and Toastmasters prepared them for that leap.

Collectively, the Freedom Writers have now presented in more than a dozen countries and in all 50 American states, including at venues like the Congressional Theater in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., to audiences in Israel and Palestine as part of

Continued on page 24.

TAKING THEIR STORIES ON THE ROAD

The students who became known as the Freedom Writers through the publication of their high school diaries credit Toastmasters with helping them evolve and blossom as public speakers. They now inspire audiences around the world with their harrowing, yet ultimately uplifting memories of transcending tragedy and hardship. Along the way, their Freedom Writers Toastmasters club in Long Beach, California, became an instrument for maintaining the powerful bond they formed with their former schoolmates two decades ago.

Freedom Writers Sue Ellen Alpizar, CL, Narada Comans and Shanita Jones spoke recently about how gaining presentation skills and confidence helped them connect with international audiences. “When you stand up in front of an audience and share painful stories, you have to travel to a place where feelings are still raw,” says Alpizar, who since graduating from high school in 1998 earned a bachelor’s degree in Chicano and Latino studies at California State University, Long Beach, and now works as the fiscal and human resources director at the Freedom Writers Foundation. “But it enables you to connect with people in a deeper way, and over time I’ve also found it to be cathartic. With many of the audiences we speak to, you often have to expose yourself emotionally to gain their trust.”

Comans, who has worked for the foundation as an outreach speaker since 2006 and who married a fellow Freedom Writer, adds, “Recounting a painful experience can be like peeling open a scab you thought had healed long

ago.” By sharing his story of being homeless and experiencing domestic violence and drug use, he now helps others who are in similar situations.

“With many of the audiences we speak to, you have to expose yourself emotionally to gain their trust.”

— SUE ELLEN ALPIZAR

“I didn’t see a light at the end of the tunnel in those years,” says Comans. “My mission has become to help other at-risk individuals see it’s possible to overcome huge obstacles through hard work and perseverance.”

Speaking in the Middle East

Alpizar, Comans and Jones accompanied their former English teacher Erin Gruwell on a recent U.S. government-sponsored visit to the Middle East.

Alpizar initially feared her story wouldn’t resonate with Palestinian or Israeli audiences but quickly found acceptance and understanding. “We grew up in a battle zone of sorts and they face a battle zone in their backyards every day,” she says. “I was amazed at how many I spoke to had experienced some of the same struggles I had growing up—and didn’t judge.”

Adds Jones, who helped lead a foundation workshop for educators in Israel: “The Freedom Writers’ diaries are not just our stories but the stories of many people around the world who struggle with the same challenges we had in our childhoods.”

Family Ties

The Freedom Writers enjoy the same camaraderie that characterized their famous high school classroom in Southern California in the 1990s. They often bring their children to club meetings—with a baby sitter attending to their needs—as well as family dogs, who’ve provided an unforeseen benefit to the sessions. “When they bark it helps us practice how to deal with unexpected interruptions to our speeches,” jokes Alpizar.

Their Toastmasters’ experience has revealed a side to the Freedom Writers that many of their peers hadn’t previously seen.

“We’ve known each other for more than 20 years but I’ve gotten to know a whole other part of my fellow Freedom Writers through their speeches and Table Topics sessions,” says Alpizar. “We still come together to laugh, to cry and experience life’s emotions, pulling each other up when we’re feeling down or celebrating as a family when good things happen.”

The group is grateful for the continued opportunity to spread their message of hope, acceptance and unity to audiences around the world.

“We have been given such a wonderful gift in being able to help those we speak to see that even in the darkest corners of life, there can be light,” says Alpizar.

Dave Zielinski is a freelance journalist based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and a long-time contributor to the *Toastmaster magazine*.



Gruwell speaks to local undergraduate students and faculty at the U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv last December.

PHOTO CREDIT: Matty Stern/U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv

Continued from page 22.

a peace-making trip, at the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam and on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. The Freedom Writers also speak regularly to smaller groups in homeless shelters, juvenile halls, in safe havens for young girls victimized by human trafficking, in Boys and Girls Clubs of America and in schools around the world where students face some of the same life-threatening challenges as they did growing up in dangerous sections of Long Beach.

While diary-writing was a cathartic and often transformative experience for the Freedom Writers, Gruwell says the anonymity of the essays created a “veil” for them. Toastmasters helped lift the veil and embolden them to share their stories in public, facilitating their evolution as storytellers along the way.

“There is a different power in speaking than you have in writing, but it also makes you more vulnerable,” says Gruwell, who was recently named one of 50 finalists from around the world for the Varkey Foundation’s prestigious 2017 Global Teacher Prize for her body of work as an educator. Gruwell continues to teach as a professor at Bay Path University in Massachusetts.

“Toastmasters gave the Freedom Writers a safe space to practice telling their stories without fear and helped ease the transition from diary writing to presenting,” Gruwell says.

Practice in the Toastmasters club meetings helped to polish and elevate the natural storytelling and soul-baring skills many of the Freedom Writers already possessed. “I marvel at the Freedom Writers’ ability to be emotional storytellers, to unabashedly stand

in front of an audience and shed tears about their own stories but also be able to sprinkle in humor,” she says. “Just when you think you can’t cry enough, they make you laugh. As a teacher I find myself continually becoming their student.”

Gruwell has invited teachers who come to the foundation for training to attend the Freedom Writers club meetings. “I want them to see the students run the meeting and experience firsthand their transformation as storytellers and leaders,” Gruwell says. Impressed by what they witness, many of the teachers go on to start Toastmasters clubs in their own school districts and classrooms.

Boost From Table Topics

Table Topics has proved particularly valuable to the Freedom Writers, Gruwell says, given the diversity of audiences, questions and social situations they encounter in their travels. “On one day they can be speaking to CEOs or billionaires and the next day to disenfranchised youth,” Gruwell says. “They need to be social chameleons and have a comfort level with a variety of audiences. Table Topics practice has really helped them become fast on their feet and adapt to different kinds of conversations and topics in these settings.”

That impromptu-speaking skill also has paid dividends during the “video chats” Freedom Writers now conduct with students and teachers in schools around the world—sessions delivered via Skype where they tell their stories and field wide-ranging questions from viewers.

Julie Broady, DTM, one of the Toastmasters who led the original Speechcraft program and who now chairs the board of direc-

tors of the Freedom Writers Foundation, has seen the Freedom Writers make major strides in their off-the-cuff speaking and Q&A skills. “Expressing themselves through writing was a huge step in helping them feel validated and understood, but I think expressing themselves through speaking has been an even bigger step because of the impact it has on others, which they often get to see directly,” says Broady, now a program quality director for District One Toastmasters.

Inspiring the Vulnerable and Voiceless

Gruwell believes the Freedom Writers’ biggest influence is demonstrating to vulnerable or at-risk audiences that they, too, can overcome enormous odds to find success in life.

“What I love is watching audiences listen to them tell a personal story that may be very painful about mental or physical abuse, or even about contemplating suicide, and have them understand they are not alone,” Gruwell says. “They see how someone has received help and support and has been able to transcend their circumstances.”

Yet even with the passing of two decades it can be difficult for the Freedom Writers to revisit their experiences of broken homes, street violence and other tragic situations; telling those stories can reopen old wounds. To help her former students better cope with that challenge, Gruwell uses the example of Holocaust survivor Renee Firestone, now 93, whom she once invited to speak to the group about her time in the Auschwitz death camp, where her mother and sister were killed.

“Renee has been telling her powerful story for almost 70 years, and each time she tells it she is forced to go to that difficult emotional place again; there are often tears,” Gruwell says. “That’s helped the Freedom Writers understand it’s very natural to experience and show those same emotions again when recounting their own stories.”

The Mission Continues

Gruwell continues to “pay it forward” through her work at the foundation, an organization that provides teacher training, develops curriculum, awards scholarships to first-generation high school seniors and college students, and conducts outreach through initiatives like the Freedom Writers’ presentations.

A new documentary titled *Freedom Writers: Stories from an Undeclared War* is set to be released in the spring of 2018; the foundation is in discussions with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the U.S. to air the documentary. The film follows the Freedom Writers’ story from their freshman year in high school to the present day.

Last year, Gruwell and four of her former students traveled to the Middle East on the invitation of the U.S. State Department. “They believed if we could bring together and unify rival gangs in a classroom in California, we might have some lessons to share in that divided part of the world,” Gruwell says.

Gruwell and the Freedom Writers conducted more than 20 events in Israel and seven for the Palestinian Authority in the

Erin Gruwell TOASTMASTERS’ 2017 GOLDEN GAVEL AWARD RECIPIENT

Toastmasters International will honor Erin Gruwell with the prestigious Golden Gavel award for her influence as a high school teacher



and subsequent success with the Freedom Writers Foundation. The award is given annually to an individual who is distinguished in the field of communication or leadership. The award will be presented this August during the 86th Annual Toastmasters International Convention in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. You can hear Erin Gruwell speak by registering for the convention at www.toastmasters.org/Convention.

West Bank, using some of the same methods Gruwell employed in her high school classroom to open dialogue and examine long-held belief systems.

In the trip, Gruwell found similarities with her first journey into Long Beach after the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles in 1992. “Both communities had been plagued with misunderstandings and gross stereotypes,” she wrote in a blog post after the Middle East trip. “In both scenarios people were anxious for the world to take notice of their plight and humanize their existence. Like many of the educators I interacted with in Israel, the [Palestinian college professors and educators wanted to be] seen for who they are, not who they pray to.”

Gruwell believes the current political and social climate in much of the world makes it more important than ever that the Freedom Writers continue to share their message.

“The roots of our foundation are based in standing up for and protecting the most vulnerable, marginalized and invisible people,” Gruwell says. “That’s also the student clientele of many of the teachers who come to our institute for training. We want to continue to give a voice to the voiceless. Now that we are proud Toastmasters members we understand more than ever the power of the voice and the importance of speaking out authentically and passionately about what you believe in.” ■

Dave Zielinski is a freelance journalist based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and a longtime contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



Coping with a Disliked Member

Well-communicated feedback can be a powerful tool.

BY LUANN LEE BROWN, CTM

Our club was doing great. The Toastmasters goal of providing a supportive environment was fully actualized. Our weekly program nurtured everyone and speaking skills mushroomed.

It was all so perfect. Until He joined. Have you ever had a member who, frankly, you wished would join another club?

Our club includes a cornucopia of people, creating diverse and enlightening listening and learning experiences. Guests are always cherished and treated accordingly, resulting in a continual flow of new members. While I adored some members more than others, in three years as a Toastmaster, I'd never encountered

anyone quite like Him. As a result of this one member's offensive behavior, my once enjoyable meetings became only tolerable.

I didn't want to leave my "family" of Toastmasters, but neither did I want to chew the insides of my cheeks raw every time he spoke. Thus, I was forced to problem solve. Unfortunately, I did not have the good sense to begin with such a tactic. During and between meetings, I split my energy between blaming, berating and bemoaning my fellow Toastmaster.

Fortunately, I discovered that such a situation can be resolved without losing one's sanity or the joy and growth that Toastmasters offers. Here's how:

Identify specific behaviors that trigger your emotions.

Remember, each of us responds to the world uniquely. Every time we react to another person strongly—positively or negatively—it says as much about us as it does about the person. Accept responsibility for your feelings and thoughts. What drives you to distraction may actually be enjoyed by another member.

Talk privately to the individual.

Use the "sandwich technique." Rather than venting to other Toastmasters and risk splitting club affections or possibly causing more conflict, consider the situation as

yet another Toastmasters learning experience. Once you have identified specific behaviors that you find annoying, share them as you would a helpful evaluation, sandwiched between positives. Everyone has at least a few positive attributes! Use assertive rather than passive, passive-aggressive or aggressive communication, using a lot of “I statements” as opposed to “You statements.” For example, say, “I felt uncomfortable when you told that off-color joke” rather than, “You were so obnoxious.”

During and between meetings, I split my energy between blaming, berating and bemoaning my fellow Toastmaster.

Timing is critical, even when there are no lights to guide you!

Choose a time when you are not upset and stick to the issue—the issue being your response to specific behaviors. Plan to meet for coffee, away from the club, in a relaxed setting. Give yourselves enough time to talk and be prepared not only to express yourself directly and kindly, but also be ready to listen.

Remember the Toastmasters mission statement.

We gave an oath when we joined this extraordinary organization to provide a “mutually supportive” environment for our fellow members. There aren’t any exceptions or addendums stipulating that we only need to support those we like. It’s a huge challenge to make the Toastmasters mission statement come alive when faced with a member who presents obtuse evaluations that seem to strip the recipients of any confidence, or a member who chronically uses the club as a platform for political or religious reform, or a member who never shows up when scheduled as a

functionary. Well-communicated feedback can be a powerful tool. Use that tool for your sake as well as your club’s sake, and even for the possible benefit of the member you’re reacting to with alarm, irritation or anger.

Don’t quit Toastmasters!

A brief “time out” may be helpful, however, to gain perspective. This isn’t always necessary, of course. But there are times when we are too close to a situation, thus blurring our vision. Stand back; take a deep breath, refocus and return.

If the above approach doesn’t work, find a mediator.

It’s important that the mediator be objective. This person might be the club president or someone else in the club. Their expertise can be extremely valuable in sticky, uncomfortable situations. It stretches his or her communication skills, too! If the issue is violating Toastmasters ethics or threatening club morale, an objective mediator is especially important. If you are considering leaving, perhaps there are others who feel the same way.

In our club’s situation, a mediator was found and the problem was re-

solved. In the process, I discovered that my nemesis was, in fact, my teacher. He taught me a lot, indirectly and experientially, about myself and communication.

Serendipity happens through other members who touch our lives and teach us what we most need to know.

In an effort to change him, I changed myself. I grew out of the struggle. Did I do it all graciously, ideally and with a perfect outcome? Only about as well as I did my Ice Breaker and with about as much comfort. Sometimes our most important personal and communication growth in Toastmasters occurs even when we are far removed from the lectern. Serendipity happens through other members who touch our lives and teach us what we most need to know. ■

Luann Lee Brown, CTM, is a former member of the Gilbert Toastmasters club in Chandler, Arizona.

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How to Muzzle the Yakker

Strategies for stopping the serial interrupter.

BY PATRICK MOTT

If you don't already know this one, ask your kids—or any kid, because no kid can resist pulling a fast one on an adult—to tell you the “interrupting cow” knock-knock joke:

*Knock, knock.
Who's there?
Interrupting cow.
Interrupting cow wh . . . ?
Moo.*

Cute, right? Gives you a little chuckle? Then what happens? You think about it a little more and before you know it you are giving some serious thought to grinding your teeth.

Why? Because we all hate to be interrupted. Or drowned out. Or conversationally dominated. We despise, secretly or otherwise, the verbal interloper. This scourge can appear in the guise of the loud talker, the close talker, the conversation hog, the story topper, the quick interjector, the extra-long joke teller or the questioner who never waits for an answer. They all share one basic infuriating aim: They want you to shut up and yield the floor, and they want you to do it right *now*.

Your first impulse might be to slip a few dozen tablespoons of hot sauce into the yakker's double decaf latte, but, being the inventive Toastmaster you are, you ponder less explosive solutions (even as you eye the Tabasco longingly).

Check out these ideas to get the more civilized wheels turning:

Learn to Listen

If we take our cues in everyday conversation from much of modern political

discourse, we may come to believe that bombast equals victory and good listening equals defeat. *I shout 'em down and shut 'em up, I win; I keep my mouth shut, I lose.* But that's not conversation, that's verbal bullying.

So why do so many people do it? The late American philosopher and educator Mortimer Adler, in his book *How to Speak, How to Listen* (1983), wrote that schools do not teach listening as a skill at any academic level. This leaves many adults unprepared to engage in truly intelligent conversations.

“Is anyone anywhere taught how to listen?” Adler asked. “How utterly amazing is the general assumption that the ability to listen well is a natural gift for which no training is required.”

Fortunately, listening is one of the skills that Toastmasters International values most. It is a quality that members focus on and improve at club meetings. Toastmasters recognizes what Adler believed: Listening is a quality that needs to be honed. “While listening may seem like it should be easy to do, it can be very difficult, often requiring more mental effort than speaking,” says the Toastmasters *Competent Leader* manual.

Don't be Dominated by Interrupters

Parlor conversation is one thing. But what if you're in the bare-knuckle netherworld of the business meeting, sitting around a table waiting for a serial interrupter—the person who loves to score points through the domination of others—to strike again? How do you deal with the occasionally malicious verbal counterpuncher?

No less an authority than celebrated funnyman John Cleese, of Monty Python fame, lays out a handful of semi-guerrilla tactics in a video called *Meeting Menaces* (one in a series of popular business-training videos from Cleese). First, however, he points out that not all interruptions in meetings are bad. Interjections to “save time or to correct mistakes” are fine as long as they're quick and useful. He calls such breaks “running repairs to the discussion.”

It's the egregious interrupting windbag who's the true culprit. The initial speaker can lose control of the situation and “completely swallow the interrupter's change of agenda.”

“Letting the interrupter take over isn't the answer,” says Cleese. Neither is simply telling the verbal interloper to shut up an option. Assuming the meeting is chaired, the best defense, says Cleese, is to “keep your cool, ignore the interrupter and appeal to the chair.” And if that fails? The “ultimate deterrent,” says Cleese, is to pack up and start to walk out. Severe? Yes, but “it's very unlikely that it will ever come to that,” says Cleese, “and if it did, it would be very surprising if the chair didn't call you back.” Timing, of course, is everything.

One strategy that may disarm the serial interrupter before he or she can pounce, says Cleese, is to begin your floor time by stating how many points you're going to make. This helps to close the yakker's windows of opportunity from the start.

Quieting the Questioner Who ... Won't ... Stop ... Talking

Another awkward and frustrating situation can occur when you give a speech—



typically outside of the courteous environment of Toastmasters—and during a question-and-answer session, when you're confronted with a questioner who *goes on and on and on*. They hog the Q&A time, to the extreme irritation of other audience members. In a June 2008 article for the *Toastmaster* magazine, author R.J. Stove described this kind of person as the "Never-Ending Questioner"—"or, rather, the interminable speechmaker who offers up his unsolicited biography and hopes it'll be accepted as a question."

Stove's solution for handling such a boor? Say something like, "I'm sorry, I'm not quite sure what your specific concern is. Could you perhaps approach me about it afterward?" "In nine cases out of 10," notes Stove, "the Never-Ending Questioner won't accept this implied invitation."

Be Decisive and Confident

Interrupting can be a form of domination and, depending on the degree, sometimes needs to be dealt with instantly and decisively. "Sometimes you must return the dirty deed with a polite retort—something like, 'Excuse me, Debbie, but I didn't get to

finish. I'd like to add that ...'" writes business-communications consultant Connie Dieken in her *Influence* blog.

Today's interrupters, writes Dieken, are a new breed. Often they aren't merely rude, but rude *and* in a hurry. She calls them "The Chronically Impatient."

Today's interrupters, writes Connie Dieken, are a new breed. Often they aren't merely rude, but rude and in a hurry. She calls them "The Chronically Impatient."

"Buoyed by instant technology and addicted to speed, these pragmatic people are having a tough time tolerating long-winded rambles," she writes. "The Chronically Impatient value time, clarity and action, and they want you to get to the point, pronto. If you dilly dally, they'll either nudge you with a brief

interjectory question or they'll outright overpower you and butt in as if your words don't matter."

How to keep them at bay? When you're speaking, be confident, don't be long-winded or hog the floor, and stop "speed talking." "If you've ever received feedback that you're a fast-talker," writes Dieken, "chances are you're often interrupted. Why? After all, you're talking as fast as you can. Bingo! Some people can't digest what you're saying at a high rate of speed, so they cut in to catch up."

Dieken offers her own fail-safe weapon to use in the war of words: Keep right on talking. If you're dealing with a relentless interrupter who just won't quit, she says, then the last-ditch—and unconventional—approach is to push ahead with your own words and add more volume to them. That, she says, "delivers a jarring and unmistakable message. It conveys that you're sick of being rudely interrupted and you're just not taking it anymore." ■

Patrick Mott is a Southern California-based writer and a contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



Let's Talk Grammar

Is your present tense? Is your voice active? Is your mood subjunctive?

BY JOHN CADLEY

If you want to appear smart—and I mean *really* smart—don't trot out your knowledge of arcane facts, quotable quotes, and obscure books. Just wait for someone to speak and then say, "Well said. You managed to use the pluperfect tense in the same sentence with a split infinitive *and* a dangling participle. One doesn't hear that very often these days."

They'll think you're Einstein.

I say that because grammar is a lost art and those conversant in it are considered shamans. I would be surprised if they still teach it in school. In the years of my education we were taught to view grammar as "that department of the study of language which deals with its inflectional forms or other means of indicating the relations of words in the sentence, and with the rules for employing them in accordance with established usage" (*Encyclopedia of English*, 1947). I would imagine at this point modern curricula have boiled that definition down to *Talking 101*.

But we are Toastmasters. We don't just talk, we *communicate*—with precision, clarity, and brevity. And for that, we need to know the rules of grammar, however superfluous they may seem to lesser minds. Hence, for those of you who may be a little rusty on your verb conjugations and noun declensions, I offer you a brief refresher course.

The basic building block of written and spoken language is, of course, the sentence. The shortest sentence is any imperative (*Go! Stop!*) where the *You* is

understood. The longest is indeterminate. Several vast sentences have been put forth—one well over 1,000 words—but nobody knows for sure which is the longest because nobody has had the patience to finish them.

Sentences can be declarative (making an affirmation), interrogative (asking a question), imperative (giving a command) or exclamatory (any of the above emphasized in *italics*, or spoken REALLY, REALLY LOUD). My favorite book on grammar is the aforementioned *Encyclopedia of English*, edited by Arthur Zeiger. I like him because his examples have a penchant for the morbid. Discussing the classifications above, Mr. Zeiger illustrates them thusly: Affirmative: **Men must die**. Interrogative: **Must men die?** Imperative: **Let the men die**. Exclamatory: **The men must die!** Warming to his subject, old Arthur goes on to explain that one could also say, **The men asked, "Must we die?" He ordered, "The men must die!"**—and *both* sentences could be declarative since they are essentially statements. I doubt if the men involved got quite as much pleasure from this as Mr. Zeiger did, but at least they had the consolation of knowing their deaths were grammatically correct.

Complete sentences usually have a subject (who or what), a predicate (what who or what did or is doing), and an object (what who or what did or is doing it to). Example: *The man kicked the dog*. The *man* is the subject, *kicked* is the predicate and the *dog* isn't very happy. Of the three,

the predicate, or verb, is the most important because it carries the action. Or not. Verbs have an active voice—"Honey, *I forgot to take out the garbage*"—and a passive voice—"Honey, *taking out the garbage was forgotten*." The latter is also known as the passive-aggressive voice because it lets you be bad without taking responsibility.

Verbs have tenses, too, and if you think it's as simple as past, present and future, think again. You've got present perfect, past perfect and future perfect, any of which can be in the active or passive voice and in the indicative or subjunctive mood. Hence, we get "I love," "I have loved," "I had loved," "I have been loved," "I shall have been loved," "I had been loved," "I shall have loved," "I was loved" and many more ways to express the vagaries of our hapless love lives.

But wait, there's more! Namely, the fabled pluperfect tense, derived from the Latin *plus quam perfectum* (more than perfect). This is obviously a tense that thinks a lot of itself. And perhaps it should, since it allows us to refer to something that occurred earlier than the time being considered, when the time being considered is already in the past.

I can't give you an example for that. Or better yet, an example for that cannot be given. ■

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

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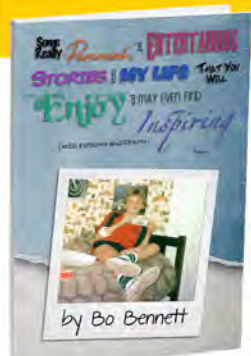
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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM



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

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes 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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