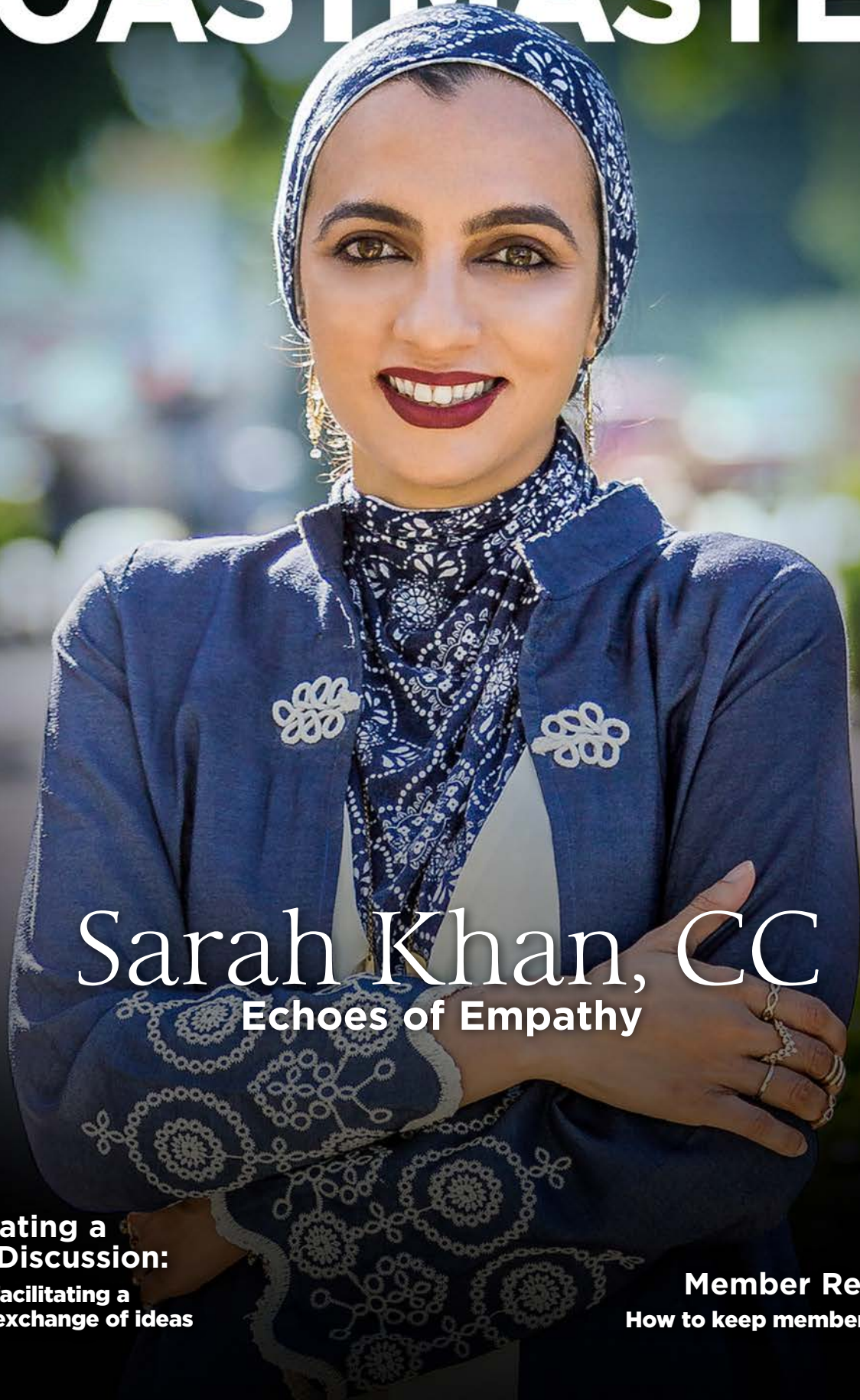


THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | MARCH 2018

# TOASTMASTER®



Sarah Khan, CC  
Echoes of Empathy

**Moderating a  
Panel Discussion:**

Tips for facilitating a  
riveting exchange of ideas

**Member Retention:**

How to keep members engaged

# Embrace Pathways

What's one of the scariest words in the English language? *Change!*

Such a small word. Why does it often cause consternation? Change is all around us—it occurs every day. Our children grow up, our friends retire, the weather is ever-changing and our obligations, routines and outlook all change over time. As the poet Alfred Tennyson wrote, “The old order changeth, yielding place to new.”

But when change is immediate and massive, our anxiety level goes through the roof. A Toastmasters friend recently conducted an unscientific poll among members in his region and found that the mention of the Pathways learning experience—Toastmasters' new education program—elicits this type of reaction, especially from seasoned members. A few of the responses: “Great—they're changing things again;” “What's wrong with the program we have?” and “It sounds way too complicated to me.”

But other veteran members were more positive, writing such comments as, “The old system has run its course and I'm looking forward to a new challenge” and “I'm excited to get into Pathways deeper and see where it leads me.”

Pathways will benefit members in many ways. It is tailored to the individual's needs and goals and enables you to develop 300 different skills you can apply to the world outside Toastmasters. The criteria for speech evaluations are more rigorous and expansive, allowing speakers to benefit from more specific, useful feedback.

**“Change, although scary, is important if we are to progress in life.”**

I heard of one member who shared his Pathways goals with his work supervisor. The supervisor agreed to incorporate those goals into the employee's performance assessment and tie future pay and promotions to the member's Pathways success. What a great idea. Many of us would be wise to share our Pathways goals with our supervisors.

Walt Disney once said, “We keep moving forward, opening new doors and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” To stay relevant in these times, Toastmasters International has chosen to lead us all down new paths. Change, although scary, is important if we are to progress in life. Although the survey mentioned earlier was unscientific, a majority of members expressed curiosity and excitement about Pathways. Embrace the change and approach the program with an open mind. Think of it as an opportunity to learn, grow and experience new challenges.

Change is inevitable, and it's here. I joined Toastmasters 28 years ago and have benefitted greatly from the organization's traditional education program. But Pathways will become available in my region in the next few months, and I could not be more thrilled. I am excited about the opportunity to grow—about the possibilities Pathways represents for all of us. As International President, I invite you to join me in the exciting journey ahead!

**Balraj Arunasalam, DTM**

International President



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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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The *Toastmaster* magazine (ISSN 00408263) is published monthly by Toastmasters International, Inc., 23182 Arroyo Vista, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688, U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Mission Viejo, CA and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: Send address change to the *Toastmaster* magazine, P.O. Box 9052, Mission Viejo, CA 92690, U.S.A.

Published to promote the ideas and goals of Toastmasters International, a nonprofit educational organization of clubs throughout the world dedicated to teaching skills in public speaking and leadership. Members' subscriptions are included in the \$45 semi-annual dues.

The official publication of Toastmasters International carries authorized notices and articles regarding the activities and interests of the organization, but responsibility is not assumed for the opinions of the authors of other articles. The *Toastmaster* magazine does not endorse or guarantee the products it advertises.

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“I commend the organization for its openness to discuss sensitive or controversial topics, provided the discussions are executed with tact, empathy and humanity.”

—KATIE HACKETT  
Twin City Toastmasters  
Stevensville, Michigan

### An Inspiring Article

I was reading some past *Toastmaster* magazines and came across an exceptional article by Dave Zielinski in the June 2017 issue: “A Toastmasters Guide to Civil Social Communication.” Wow! I read it, promptly re-read it, printed it and shared it on my social media page. This article could not have come at a better time in today’s political and social environments!

This issue continued to blow me away with articles about social network etiquette and presenting controversial topics. I want to applaud the editors and Toastmasters International for tackling sensitive issues in such an eloquent, open and professional manner. I also commend the organization for its openness to discuss sensitive or controversial topics, provided the discussions are executed with tact, empathy and humanity. I appreciated that the discussion of controversial topics was presented as a learning opportunity. All of us, at some point, will have to discuss things that bring us discomfort or that unintentionally incite disagree-

ment. Toastmasters is a wonderfully supportive environment to practice skillful navigation.

Thank you for such an extraordinary issue. I look forward to continuing my Toastmasters journey down a path filled with more openness, increased empathy and professionalism.

**Katie Hackett**  
Twin City Toastmasters  
Stevensville, Michigan

### Planning a Visit

I was delighted to read “A Traveling Toastmaster” by Sara Safari in the October 2017 issue. It is very interesting how Safari gave a TEDx Talk and gained the support of Toastmasters in Paris. I am impressed by how the members treated her like family, offering her meals and giving her a tour of their city. I am also amazed by how she survived a 7.8 magnitude earthquake while climbing Mount Everest.

My mom is a member of the Cream City Communicators club in Milwaukee, and she speaks about the friendship, support and warmth of her Toastmasters friends. From the article, I can tell that Toastmasters is a wonderful organization and I hope to attend a meeting soon.

**Ardeshir Irani**  
University School of Milwaukee

### Staying in Focus

Your article [“Like, Um, How Do I Stop, Ya Know, Using Um and Ah?” By Lisa Marshall, September] on avoiding common filler words really resounded with me. Before I joined Toastmasters, my girlfriend said that if I were to be interviewed or quoted using filler words, it would make me seem unprepared and take the focus away from my message.

I have heard many high-caliber speakers during my time at Auckland Toastmasters and it seems the key to avoiding unwanted fillers is the pause and silence. Rather than using filler words to gather thoughts to progress in the speech, simply pausing or using short silences will almost always allow the brain and mouth to sync

and synergize. Thanks for helping me to remove those easy-to-use but needless filler words!

**Ray Calver**  
Auckland Toastmasters Club  
New Zealand

### Rhetorical Devices

In the November article “Say It With Flair” by Bill Brown, DTM, I was amazed by the skillful tips he offers. He clearly outlined the various rhetorical devices and related them to well-known speakers.

I also liked the websites he included as resources. Brown’s writing also had the unique flair of challenging readers to find the triads that he used in the article itself. I implemented them in my upcoming speech. I learned. I implemented. I excelled, thanks to his advice.

**Phyllis G. Williams, ACG, ALB**  
Bronco Toastmasters  
Fayetteville, North Carolina

### Movie Worthy

“John Mabry: Turning Trauma into Triumph” (November) by Dave Zielinski is a touching and inspiring story. It occurred to me that in this story, Toastmasters helped Mabry share his message to combat substance abuse (recently declared a national emergency in the United States) with confidence before a large audience and to be a better husband/father. As Mabry mentioned, “We’re going to make mistakes, but the only way to succeed is to keep at it and not be afraid to reach out for help when you need it.”

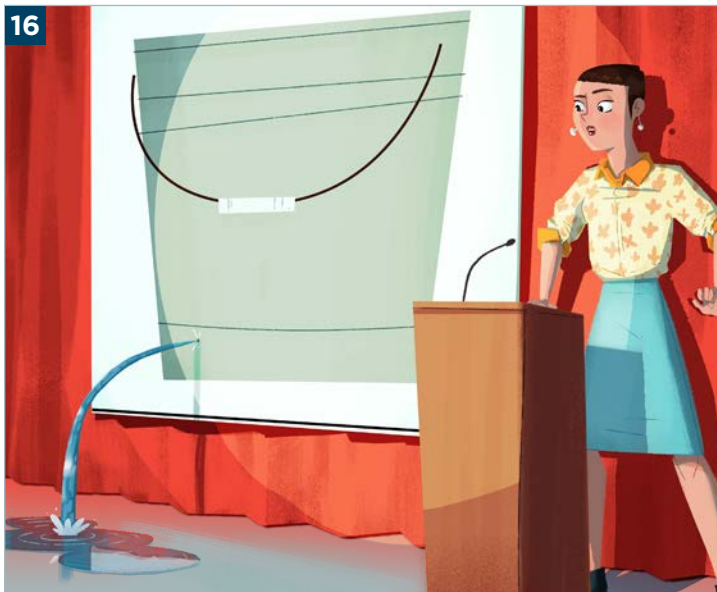
**Editor’s note:** View John Mabry’s testimonial video at [bit.ly/TI\\_JohnMabry](http://bit.ly/TI_JohnMabry).

**Bruce Yang, DTM**  
Taichung Toastmasters  
Taichung, Taiwan

### DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

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Cover photo by Chelsea Vincent, Bleu House Photography

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*By Joel Schwartzberg, CC, CL*



# Toastmaster Magazine Online

See more photos, videos and links online at [www.toastmasters.org/Magazine](http://www.toastmasters.org/Magazine).

## March Online Extras:

- **Coaching, Communication and Comedy**—Hear what Meera Manek has to say about Toastmasters keeping her skills sharp by watching her member testimonial video. ▶
- **Sarah Khan: Echoes of Empathy**—Learn more about Sarah Khan's journey and message of empathy in this exclusive Toastmasters video. ▶
- **Top Technology Products for Toastmasters**—Discover promising new presentation apps, tools and technologies through hyperlinks.



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▶ MEMBER MOMENT 

## Former Pastor Empowers Others to ‘Rock Your Story’

BY SHANNON DEWEY

Åsa Rydhard knows how to entertain a crowd—just ask anyone from her former church congregation. During her time as a pastor in the early 2000s, the Swedish native would pack the church to capacity with her engaging sermons, lively stage presence and passion for storytelling.

But after an internal quarrel, the entire church staff was fired, and that’s when Rydhard, ACG, ALB, says she lost her voice, her stage and her social network.

In 2010, she joined the Borås Toastmasters club in Sweden to find her voice again. Then, in 2014, Rydhard won first place in the Division G Toastmasters International Speech Contest. Now an entrepreneur in the communications field, her mission is to help small-business owners find *their* voices and use storytelling as a tool for social impact.

### Tell us about your background.

When I was in school, I had a vague idea about what I wanted to do with my life. I attended three higher education institutes, and each time I was convinced that I had found my ultimate path. I first studied information technology because it was new and exciting at the time, but then it started to bore me, and I knew I needed more.

Since I felt a calling, I studied theology and trained to be a pastor—and I loved that. Working as a pastor is more than a normal job ... it’s a way of life! I loved leading others, inspiring them as a speaker and building a platform where I could empower people to grow. But after I was fired, I went on to earn a master’s degree in applied cultural analysis at Lund University. I continued to dive deep into my passion for strategic communication. This gave me the tools for understanding other people’s worlds, thoughts, beliefs and values. That is the foundation of what I do. I help people communicate with impact in a strategical way, through the power of story.

### What’s your career today?

As a speaker and consultant, my most appreciated workshop is “Find your 7-Second Pitch.” My keynote is “Rock Your Story,” which focuses on strategic storytelling. My audiences can learn how to be seen and heard by engaging quickly and authentically with anybody, anywhere, anytime through the power of their stories.

In addition, I teach social impact and strategic storytelling through social networks and online, and give presentations as a teacher at the university level for two-week courses. I also give workshops for half a day or more. My keynotes are mostly for



Åsa Rydhard, ACG, ALB

company meetings, and the audience size can differ from 10 people to hundreds.

### How do you prepare for audiences of different cultures?

In 2017 I traveled to Germany, India, Amsterdam and Croatia for work. Presenting to people from different cultures is something we train for at Toastmasters in Sweden. The majority of members are from all over the world! Since I’m not a native English speaker, I prepare by writing or reading a manuscript before presenting, which allows me to speak onstage without notes. Being a non-native English-speaking person can actually be a huge plus when presenting to others who are the same. There is no risk that I talk too quickly or use fancy words, which is a common mistake of a native English speaker presenting to people from other countries.

### What keeps you coming back to Toastmasters?

When I joined Toastmasters I had just lost my job and felt my life was ruined. But through my years in Toastmasters I found another, stronger voice. I also found my “7-Second Pitch” workshop, which made the core of my business and I now have an amazing new career.

I stay because I have many friends in the organization. As a lonely entrepreneur I find valuable business contacts through the network. Having the honor to present at conferences is also a way for me to give something back to the organization. After all, I have a lot to thank Toastmasters for.

Some people believe that they don’t need Toastmasters once they go professional. But, as I said, it is a great network to find friends. And only true friends will tell you when you overuse those dreaded “ahs” and “ums.” To work as a professional public speaker is a never-ending journey of learning, and Toastmasters is a great place to be if you want to continue growing!

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

## 5 Words to Make You More Persuasive

BY DEAN BRENNER

I believe that the ability to persuade, influence and build consensus is the most important skill that you can have in the workplace. If you attempt to add one skill to your toolbox in the coming year, verbal persuasion should be at the top of your list.

This begs the obvious follow-up question ... How do you make yourself more persuasive?

It's not easy, and it requires constant attention and preparation. But at the most fundamental level, persuasive communication has a few consistent characteristics: Clarity. Brevity. Context. Impact. Value. These are the five characteristics that we see most consistently.

1. If it is not clear, the audience will not be persuaded.
2. If your audience is waiting for you to get to the point, the audience will not be persuaded.
3. If the relevance to the audience is not obvious, the audience will not be persuaded.
4. If there is no impact, and the audience cannot remember what you said, they will not be persuaded.
5. And if there is no value, and the speaker only communicates from his/her own perspective, the audience will not be persuaded.

If you are starting to think about professional self-improvement for 2018, add these five words to the list: **clarity, brevity, context, impact and value.** If you can achieve these things, you'll be more effective and more persuasive. You'll have a better year.

*The Latimer Group, based in Wallingford, Connecticut, provides individual coaching and training services to clients around the world. To learn more, please visit [www.TheLatimerGroup.com](http://www.TheLatimerGroup.com).*



Enthusiastic members of the Speakers Bureau of the Blue Ridge club in Salem, Virginia, took a “fifth Tuesday in August” road trip to nearby Roanoke for a team-building event. They stopped to take a club photo at the base of Mill Mountain Star, the world’s largest freestanding illuminated man-made star at almost 90 feet (27 meters) in height. In its place atop Mill Mountain since 1949, it makes scenic Roanoke the “Star City of the South.”

## QUICK TAKES

### ▶ MEET MY MENTOR



## Sheila Umbaji Futch

BY MARY NESFIELD

Sheila Umbaji Futch, ACG, ALB, is a former substitute teacher and a U.S. Air Force veteran who now is retired from her job with the State of California and coordinates Toastmasters Youth Leadership programs. Lea Michelle Cash, CC, CL, is a reporter, author and founder and CEO of The Brightest Star Inc., an award-winning volunteer organization that serves the needs of children and teens in foster care. Cash and Futch are members of the Vernon Bragg Jr. Rialto Toastmasters club in Rialto, California.

### Lea, when did you meet your mentor?

I met Sheila when I first joined Toastmasters in the '90s. We both loved the experience, but did not stay. Sheila and I remained friends, and years later she rejoined the club and encouraged me to return.

### What is it like to be mentored?

Sheila has a mentoring spirit and is passionate about Toastmasters. She inspires me. She served two terms as club president and took on area and district leadership roles. She grew to become a role model for me, and for others.

### What benefits do you see in Toastmasters?

It's how a Toastmaster communicates, as compared to non-Toastmasters. I did not like speaking before a group, and I still do not like it, but I thoroughly enjoy the benefits when I do. Actor John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death—and



FROM LEFT: Sheila Umbaji Futch and Lea Michelle Cash

saddling up anyways." That is kind of what I do in my club. I speak before students and groups regularly, and my fear has subsided remarkably.

### What is the best advice Sheila has given you?

To *enjoy the journey* of learning to communicate, speak with confidence and meet goals and objectives. I sometimes listen and watch her as she mentors others—she expresses the joy of a Toastmaster in her every word as she helps others. I am grateful for everything she has done for me.

Mary Nesfield is associate editor of *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](mailto:MentorMoment@toastmasters.org).

### ▶ MEMBER CONNECTIONS



## An Irish Blessing

For as long as I have belonged to the Killarney Club in County Kerry, Ireland, we have hosted an annual dinner, inviting neighboring clubs to attend. In 2017 we were honored to host members from Kilrush & District Toastmasters, Speakeasy Toastmasters (Mallow), Thomond Toastmasters (Limerick), Shannon Toastmasters, West Limerick Toastmasters and Tralee Club. There is a lot of friendship, history and fellowship in this photo, and I love sharing it with the world!

*Contributed by Area Director of District 71 Debby Looney, ACB, ALB, a member of the Killarney Club in County Kerry, Ireland (pictured in front row in the black dress).*





## ▶ PATHWAYS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

# Pathways Translations

Pathways educational materials will be available in German, Arabic and Portuguese when regions 1 and 11 roll out the Pathways learning experience this month. Region 1 is in the Western United States, and Region 11 is located in Africa and the Middle East.

All materials in Toastmasters' new education program have been translated into Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Spanish and Traditional Chinese. Materials in Simplified Chinese, French and Spanish have previously been released in the Pathways rollout, and they have been well-received by members.

Members around the world volunteer their time and effort to ensure that all Pathways translations are accurate and authentic to the local culture. Thank you to members of:

### **The German Translation Review Team:**

Chief Reviewer Ellen Hermens, Lead Reviewer Andrea Sauerzweig, reviewers Brigitte Grabowski, Max Ridder-Patrick, Otto Schwerer, David Gökçedağ, Barbara Stauch, Jens Geyer, Irene Hermann, Peter Blaskoda, Goetz Mueller, Michaela Zuber, Bernhard Fraling, and past reviewers Dirk Brueckner, Sabine Olschner, Toni Laemmel, Claudia Gaida and Mirja Iannuccelli.

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Visit [www.toastmasters.org/](http://www.toastmasters.org/) **Translations** to learn more about the team members.

## MORE TRANSLATION NEWS

The guidebook *How to Build a Toastmasters Club* has been given a multi-language update. In addition to English, it is now available in Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Spanish and Traditional Chinese.

Toastmasters International's volunteer translation-review teams provided support on this extensive project. *How to Build a Toastmasters Club* includes step-by-step instructions on how to start a community or corporate club.

You can download *How to Build a Toastmasters Club* from the Toastmasters website's Resource Library.

## ▶ LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

# The Winning Word

The 2017 word of the year is ... "youthquake."

That's according to the editors at Oxford Dictionaries. The noun is defined as "a significant cultural, political or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people." The Oxford editors say the word was used five times more in 2017 than in 2016. The catalyst for that surge, they report, was the June election in the United Kingdom called by Prime Minister Theresa May. A large number of young voters turned out for the election, prompting many media references to a "youthquake."

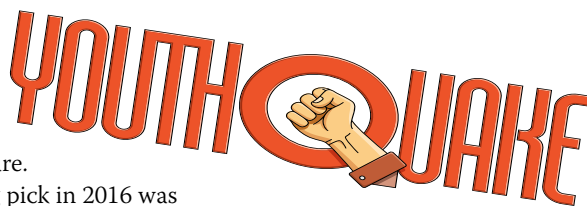
The Oxford Dictionaries' word of the year is meant to reflect the mood of the past year but also have the potential to endure

in the culture.

Its winning pick in 2016 was "post-truth," and in 2015, "emoji." Oxford Dictionaries President Casper Grathwohl said youthquake is an interesting word from a linguistic standpoint.

"But most importantly for me, at a time when our language is reflecting a deepening unrest and exhausted nerves, it is a rare political word that sounds a hopeful note," he wrote in a blog post on the Oxford Dictionaries website.

Two other dictionary companies tapped their top word for 2017: Merriam-Webster chose "feminism," while Dictionary.com selected "complicit."



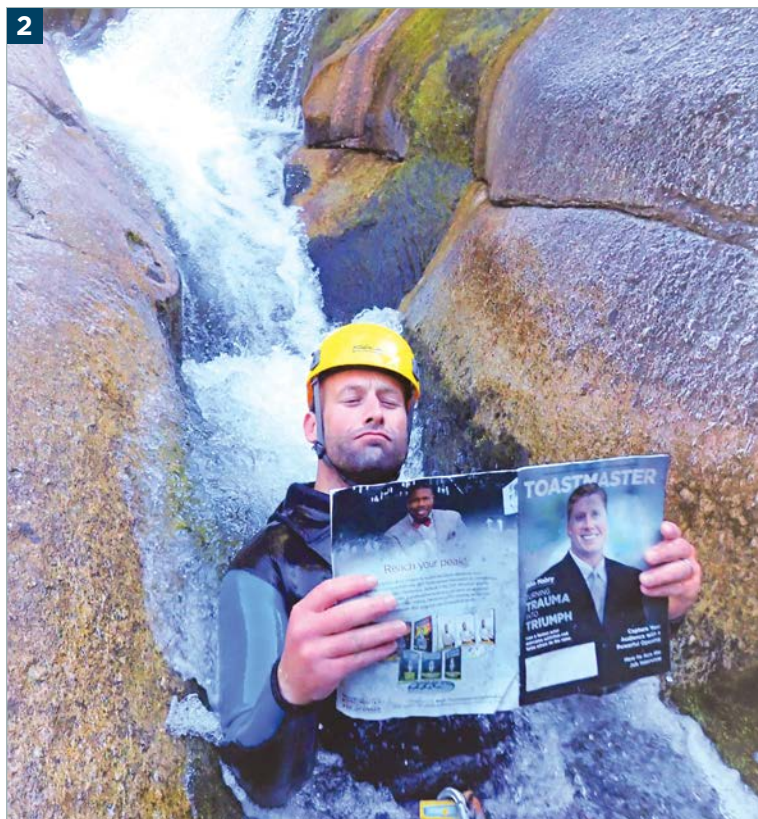



**1 | JOHN BEILER, CC,** flies a powered paraglider above his hometown of Sarasota, Florida.

**2 | STEVE THOMAS,** from Motueka, New Zealand, goes canyoning in the Torrent River, located in the Abel Tasman National Park in New Zealand.

**3 | ELINE DEVOS, CC,** living in Tokyo, Japan, visits the Htilominlo Temple in Bagan, Myanmar.

**4 | TERESA BRAKE, ACG, ALB,** from Broadbeach Waters, Queensland, Australia, poses in front of famous artwork in Melbourne, Australia.



 **View additional photos** in this month's *Traveling Toastmaster* photo gallery at [www.toastmasters.org/Magazine](http://www.toastmasters.org/Magazine).

 **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](http://www.toastmasters.org/Submissions). Bon voyage!

# At Last, a Standing Ovation!

How I brought my Toastmasters skills to the theater and my audience to their feet.

BY MARIAN SISNEROS, CC

Of all the ways I have benefited from Toastmasters, my success in a recent community theater production is not only easily identifiable, but also unanticipated. Developing skills as a Toastmaster has been a gradual, almost subconscious process that has become a part of my everyday life. Thankfully, those skills came through when I made an impetuous decision to try acting again.

Before October 2017, *Don Quixote* was the one and only play I had been in. That was several decades ago—I think I played a tree. But when I saw the audition notice for *Steel Magnolias* in one of our small community theaters, I knew I had to try out. The show is about a group of women in the American South who form a strong bond. Playing an old Southern woman? That's what I've been rehearsing for my whole life!

After the first of eight performances ended, the director rushed into the dressing room and told the cast we had received “a standing O.” I had given others a “standing O”—a standing ovation—many times over the years, and now I had one of my own!

Performing in a production was a fun opportunity for growth, and I drew on many of my Toastmasters skills during the process. Here are some examples.

Our talented director encouraged us to make whatever role we were playing our own. Because I had given many Toastmasters speeches—particularly “Your Body Speaks,” Project 5 in the *Competent Communication* manual—I was able to respond to that directive with vigorous, well-timed movements. I had the confidence to fling my arms out, point fingers, sashay across the stage and even do a shoulder shimmy with spontaneity!

I was at ease with my stage surroundings, even in such a close and intimate setting, where patrons sometimes sat within



Marian Sisneros, CC

“I had the confidence to fling my arms out, point fingers, sashay across the stage and even do a shoulder shimmy with spontaneity!”

three feet of the actors. It was even closer when that 6-foot cowboy in the first row decided to stretch his legs out! I already overcame that “you’re in my space” fear when I gave speeches with no more than the space of a lectern between me and my fellow Toastmasters.

Rising above distractions like that cowboy’s boots was easy. Our club has at times met in crowded, noisy restaurants with the potential for doors closing, background music and cell phone ringtones going off. Even speech-contest venues aren’t always completely controlled environments. Toastmasters adapt!


Those “Vocal Variety” speeches (Project 6 in the CC manual) I had given came straight back to me as I focused on being expressive and keeping my pitch as varied as the dialogue required, while still projecting clearly and using appropriate pauses.

I looked at the play’s 70-page script as just an extension of a seven-minute Toastmasters speech: Prepare, prepare, prepare.

And then practice, practice, practice. Thank goodness for my patient husband, Joe, running lines with me. By the time the curtain went up, I think he could have been an understudy for any part.

I realize now that whether I was giving a speech or evaluation in front of my club or standing onstage in a district speech contest, Toastmasters was an incredibly effective lab for increasing my comfort level while expanding my speaking capabilities. It’s an all-pass, no-fail environment where the degree of success is limited only by the degree of interest.

To anyone who says, “I could never speak in front of a group, or get on a stage,” I say, yes you can! The confidence and skills you build in Toastmasters will benefit you greatly in your everyday life.

So here’s to Toastmasters—a standing O! 

**MARIAN SISNEROS, CC**, is a member of the Morning Tour Toastmasters club in Casper, Wyoming.

# Coaching, Communication and Comedy

Kenyan-born speechwriter helps others discover their inner storyteller.

BY SHANNON DEWEY

**A**t age 7, Meera Manek's family moved from her birthplace of Nairobi, Kenya, to the United States. Manek's father was inspired to pursue the proverbial American Dream in order for her and her sister to follow educational, career and life opportunities. Like many immigrants, she says she struggled to fit in as an Indian with East African roots growing up in Southern California. But she understood the opportunity her parents were trying to present, so she instead focused on being a well-rounded individual by joining the Girl Scouts, school sports teams, theater and eventually, Toastmasters.

"I developed a sense of leadership in these activities and an understanding of my own capabilities as a leader, which now extends into my personal and professional endeavors," Manek says.

Her interest in public speaking began when she won a speech contest in high school. The judges were from a local Toastmasters club, and, at their encouragement, Manek joined a local club when she turned 18.

Today, Manek, 36, is a speechwriting and public speaking coach in the Los Angeles area. When she's not busy consulting, she finds her way to the stage as a stand-up comedian. A member of the Warner Bros. Toastmasters club in Burbank, Manek, ACS, CL, continues to nurture her speaking and leadership skills as well as help others feel empowered.

## How did you adjust to a new country as a child?

When my family arrived in the U.S., it was a challenging, strange and rewarding experience adapting to a new life, systems and culture. I can't imagine how

difficult it must have been for my parents to navigate such an experience. My sister and I adapted quickly. We watched a lot of television to understand what it meant to be an American. We also participated in "American" activities and experiences like school plays, after school sports, Fourth of July at Angel Stadium and Disneyland visits. My family and I lived in Fullerton, where I grew up before moving to Irvine to pursue my undergraduate studies at the University of California, Irvine.

**"It's the joy of my life to make people laugh, so when I first tried stand-up comedy, I just knew that it was for me."**

—MEERA MANEK

## How did you get started in speechwriting?

I began my career as a political organizer and always gravitated toward developing skills in speechwriting, public speaking, leadership and service. While studying for my master's in business administration at the Kogod School of Business at American University in Washington, D.C., I also studied political speechwriting with speechwriters who, most notably, had worked in the Clinton-Gore Administration. I studied all elements of speechwriting and public speaking, including understanding the audience, use of language (anecdotes, evidence, wit, humor, sound bites and using memorable language), and delivery. Upon completion of the class, students were so well prepared that they'd

often be hired to join the communication team for a member of Congress. One student eventually became the British Ambassador's speechwriter. I was selected as the graduation speaker for my MBA class and incorporated what I had learned to make it a memorable speech.

## What do you do for a living?

As a speechwriter, I have coached, collaborated and worked with CEOs, nonprofit executives, entrepreneurs, real estate agents, politicians, engineers, city planners, fitness instructors, clergy, actors, students, and entertainment, business and sales professionals. I have also spoken to numerous audiences, large and small, either as a speaker, facilitator, master of ceremonies or stand-up comedian. Notably, I have written speeches for the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California and the two-time Oscar-nominated costume designer for the movies *Malcolm X* and *Selma*.

When I meet with a client, I work like a doctor diagnosing a plan of action in regard to speech development and delivery. I want to bring out the best in people by leveraging what they do well and help them improve messaging, stage presence and delivery. I enjoy helping people of all ages discover the storyteller within and the message they are meant to share, and help them craft and share it in a way that leaves the audience moved with emotion and inspired to take action. When I coach workshops and young women approach me after the session to say "thank you," and "I didn't know I could have a voice," I am reassured that I am doing exactly what I am meant to be doing.



Meera Manek, ACS, CL


before. It wasn't enough time to learn the correct pronunciation of names containing 16 letters. When I started fumbling, I was booed and that caused me to get nervous and fumble even more. It was an awful feeling; I wouldn't wish it on anyone and always encourage preparedness. The experience made me a better, more empathetic audience member. The booing wasn't well received by other audience members and the person who made the disruption did eventually come backstage and apologize. The experience also made me a much stronger comedian and public speaker by helping me to let go of the fear of ever "bombing."

### How can someone begin performing comedy?

Go to open mics or take a class. Stand-up comedy is about getting back up again, so don't be afraid. Work on preparation. Preparation in writing and rehearsing your own jokes, studying comedy, and preparing your mind are all key to getting over the fear and being confident onstage.

### What advice do you give your clients?

The most important advice I give to clients is to be their authentic self. A speaker who is personable and vulnerable is empowered and you can only be that way by telling your own story and not someone else's. Audiences can tell right away when someone is not being authentic, and it diminishes the speaker's credibility. I also emphasize not to underestimate the preparation time needed to deliver an incredible presentation. Give yourself at least three weeks to allow for inspiration, writing and rehearsing.

Learn more about Meera Manek at [www.manekmonday.com](http://www.manekmonday.com). 

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



**ONLINE EXTRAS:** Hear what Meera Manek has to say about Toastmasters keeping her skills sharp by watching her member testimonial video.

### You also work as a stand-up comedian?

It's the joy of my life to make people laugh, so when I first tried stand-up comedy six years ago, I just knew it was for me. I've had incredible moments performing onstage and I continue to grow, nurture my point of view and develop as a comedian. It's helped me become a better performer, speechwriter and observer of the world. Stand-up comedy has helped me better understand the audience's needs and wants and learn how to deliver that for both my client and my audience.

### What do you talk about in your comedy routines?

Stand-up comedy is usually about what's going on in the comedian's life. In my routine, I talk about my life: people being confused looking at me and trying to figure where I am from, growing up as an Indian/Kenyan immigrant in the U.S.,

“When I meet with a client, I work like a doctor diagnosing a plan of action in regard to speech development and delivery.”

—MEERA MANEK

my extended family, being a woman, my super-competitive yoga class and cultural, political and topical material.

### Have you ever “bombed” onstage?

Like with public speaking or in Toastmasters, if you don't prepare you could very well bomb. I had such an experience, but not in comedy. I hosted a cultural event and was given the information about participants and the event a day



## An Empty Tradition?

Opinions differ on how an Ah-Counter should operate.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

I was asked to write an article about the various methods clubs use to help members eliminate filler words when speaking. I thought the article would be easy to write. Instead, I found it painful.

The topic actually involves two questions: What methods are clubs using? And how effective are those methods?

Clubs have two basic options when it comes to monitoring filler words (such as “ah” “like” or “um”). The Ah-Counter can (1) provide immediate feedback during a speech (for example, by ringing a bell or pressing a clicker when a filler word is uttered) followed by a verbal report at the end of the meeting detailing each member’s use of fillers or (2) eliminate the use of immediate feedback and verbally relay the observations in the summary report in the meeting wrap-up. When I first became a Toastmaster, I joined three clubs. Two rang a bell whenever a member used a verbal crutch; the third did not. That was 12 years ago. The year 2018 tells a different story.

I asked several Toastmasters leaders in Las Vegas how many of the 80-plus clubs in the area use immediate feedback and I was told that none of them do. Elaine Lung, DTM, in the Silicon Valley in Northern California, is unaware of any clubs nearby that use that method. John Barry, ATM, a 35-year Toastmaster who has started more than 20 clubs, is aware of only three in Founder’s District, Southern California, that employ immediate feedback methods during speeches.

Once in a while, Roxann Andersen, ACG, CL, of Riverside, California, clicks a spoon on a glass when she hears filler words in Table Topics, but her club primarily waits until the final report to share

the results. A trophy, however, is presented tongue-in-cheek to the speaker with the most filler words.

Practices might be different where you live, but the “final report only” method seems to be winning the day. Now to that second question: How effective is that method? My “filler word radar” was switched on at my most recent club meeting. I attend an advanced club that includes high-level speakers—Accredited Speakers, DTMs and others. As grammarian, I picked the word of the day. Only three used it. Had I chosen “um,” I would have had near-unanimous usage. Perhaps that final report isn’t working as well as we think.

**“I picked the word of the day. Had I chosen ‘um,’ I would have had near-unanimous usage.”**

Since that time, I have paid close attention to my own words and I’m appalled by how many times during the day I say um. Did I mention that this article was painful to write? When I asked Elaine, the Silicon Valley member, about how she would feel if she heard a bell ring during her speech, her immediate reaction was, “It would rattle me.” Reg Boaler, CTM, CL, from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, views the bell as a distraction to both the speaker and the audience. It can have that effect, but in clubs that use the method I have seen speakers eliminate filler words in less than two months.

John, the member in Southern California, is a longtime member of Saddleback Sunrise Speakers, one of my first clubs. He

says “The Triple S,” as the group is called, dings all filler words used in club speeches, and even during the opening invocation. “In my humble experience,” he says, “clubs that actively enforce the use of the bell will find that their members eliminate that pattern of speech.” Does that scare people away? Well, with 36 members, they are one of the largest clubs in Founder’s District.

While my Toastmasters friends may disagree on the best method to use, we all agree on one point: You have to care enough to want to change. John said it takes “a concentrated effort, not only in the meeting, but even when you are talking to your mother.” Reg adds, “You can’t change it if you don’t want to change it.” Roxann, in Riverside, made a sobering point: “When someone doesn’t care, I start to wonder what else they don’t care about, and I start discrediting what they are saying.”

Are we truly committed to eliminating filler words, or has our Ah-Counter report become nothing more than an empty tradition? That is a question each club needs to seriously evaluate. Listen closely for ums and ahs at your next club meeting. I mean, really listen—closely. If you don’t like what you hear, you might want to try the bell for one meeting. Painful? Perhaps.

My pain certainly got my attention. As a result, I do hereby pledge to once again eliminate the ums and ahs from my vocabulary. Will you join me in that pledge? **T**

**Bill Brown, DTM**, is a speech delivery coach from Las Vegas and a member of two clubs—Pro Toastmasters and Powerhouse Pros. Learn more at [www.billbrownspeechcoach.com](http://www.billbrownspeechcoach.com).

# Is Your Voice Being Counted?

Tips for learning how to express your thoughts.

BY KAREN FRIEDMAN

*“If you’re going to interrupt, you have to know what you’re talking about. And you have to do it in a strong voice.”*

—MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

I was excited to hear former United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright speak at a conference I attended a few years ago. She’s brash, smart and outspoken, the type of woman who will not be silenced. As the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, she recalled, she went to a United Nations meeting attended by 15 members of the intergovernmental organization’s Security Council back in 1993. She was the only woman. At first, she thought: *I’ll just see who’s who, what the mood of the room is and if they seem to like me.*

That’s when she saw a sign in front of her that read “United States.” She remembered thinking to herself, *If I don’t speak today, then the voice of the United States will not be heard.* So she interrupted, making sure her voice was counted. That’s when she said she learned to interrupt—it became her favorite word.

## Learn to Interrupt

Perhaps you want to speak up but think *OK, I won’t say that, because it sounds stupid.* Then, someone else says what you were thinking and everybody is impressed. You’re angry at yourself for not speaking up. Albright says she experienced that most of her life.

That’s when she started to interrupt. Colleagues often criticized her for being so blunt, while others applauded her for expressing her views and not allowing others to silence her.

Male or female, there is a lot to learn from Albright’s tenacity. It’s essential to overcome personal uncertainties. The key is to know what you’re talking about, so you don’t interrupt just to interrupt.

Rather, you want to speak in a strong confident voice. There are ways to interrupt politely. I call them “the in steads.”

- ▶ **Instead** of cutting someone off, say: *Please excuse me* or *Let me interrupt for just a moment.*
- ▶ **Instead** of correcting someone, try saying: *I understand your concern or viewpoint, but perhaps we can look at it differently.*
- ▶ **Instead** of totally ignoring what someone is saying, acknowledge or expand on it: *As Brian just said, we can do this...* or *What do you think if we also did such and such?*
- ▶ **Instead** of not responding or not speaking up because you aren’t sure what to say, look for opportunities to ask a question or to clarify, which will help you be heard.
- ▶ **Instead** of burying your head in your notes or your phone, make eye contact with the person leading the meeting or gently hold up a hand to signal you’d like to say something.

“The in steads” are not just for interruptions. They also apply to holding your ground. When I was a television news anchor at a station in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I had a boss who wouldn’t permit me to read the stock report because he claimed male readers were more credible when it came to delivering business news. I was fuming. Instead of yelling or walking away, I stood tall, purposely moved into his space, looked him directly in the eye and raised my voice just a tad to sound more authoritative when I objected. I didn’t win the argument, but instead of seeing me as someone whom he could silence, he saw me as an assertive, confident employee who wasn’t afraid to speak up.

Here are more tips:

**Provide Value.** Every time you speak up at a meeting, talk to your boss or address an audience, you make an impression.

When you strive to be a regular contributor without talking too much or interrupting too often, you provide value. Be prepared—jot down two or three points in advance and look for opportunities to interject them.

**Solution-oriented Examples.** Instead of apologizing or making excuses for your opinions, point to facts and solution-oriented examples that support what you’re saying to help naysayers and others see your point of view.

**Use Strong Words.** Hesitant and self-deprecating language can make you appear unsure of yourself. Replace disclaimers and tentative phrases such as “It seems I get results” or “I hope to have the plan next week,” “I think,” and “I guess,” with more definite language such as “I firmly believe,” “the facts are as follows,” “I’m committed,” and “I would like the plans on my desk Monday.”

**Pace and Pause.** It’s not necessary to fill the silence. By pausing and giving listeners a moment to digest what you’ve said, you will position yourself as thoughtful, comfortable and more confident in your delivery.

**Don’t Bury the Lead.** If you want something, state what you want upfront and then back up your main point with facts.

And, here’s a final “instead.” Instead of scowling or looking annoyed because someone is dominating the conversation and you’re struggling to be heard, when you interrupt do so with a smile. ■

**Karen Friedman** is a business communication expert, executive coach, speaker and author of *Shut Up and Say Something* and *Ordinary People: Extraordinary Lessons*. She heads *Karen Friedman Enterprises* ([www.karenfriedman.com](http://www.karenfriedman.com)) in the Philadelphia area. @karenfriedmane

# Membership Retention: Is Your Bucket Leaking?

It's easier to retain an existing member than to gain a new one.

BY MAUREEN ZAPPALA, DTM

In the commerce world, the “leaky bucket” is a metaphor depicting a business as a bucket and the customers as water in the bucket. A leaky bucket is a business that is losing customers. For the business to survive, it must either stop the leak (keep existing customers) or add more water (new customers) at a rate that is equal to or greater than the rate of the leak.

The metaphor applies to Toastmasters clubs as well. Member attrition due to changes in life circumstances is normal. Flourishing clubs focus on both recruiting new members *and* retaining the existing ones. Membership drives and open house meetings can help add water to the bucket. But no matter how many members you recruit, they won't stay if your club doesn't deliver on their expectations. So what is your club doing to plug the leak?

Can your club completely stop a leak? No. But it can be slowed down to a trickle. In fact, it's easier to retain an existing member than it is to gain a new one. Think of your members as having individual “satisfaction accounts” that control their involvement with your club. If you make sufficient “deposits” that increase their level of satisfaction, they won't have a problem making a “withdrawal” from their real bank account when it comes time to renew dues.

What are those deposits? They are seven simple strategies that can help keep members engaged, satisfied and excited about their Toastmasters journey.

## Define Their Needs

Every member's needs are different and they change over time. Many joined Toastmasters to become better speakers but found terrific leadership training. Some joined expecting fast improvement but experienced slower progress than they anticipated. Cindy Laatsch, DTM, of Rumble Don't Mumble Toastmasters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, says, “Toastmasters is so multifaceted. It's the club's job to find out what members need and help them see that the Toastmasters experience offers that. Speaking, networking, learning, horizon-broadening, safe place to fail? Yes—Toastmasters has that!”

Matt Goldberg, DTM, of Voorhees Toastmasters club in Voorhees, New Jersey, says, “In my nearly 10 years of membership, I've thought about ‘retiring’ a few times. My meeting attendance sometimes felt obligatory or futile, even as an officer for nine years. It's important to keep one's goals fluid, and mine have changed over time. Now I do more professional speaking and training than I did when I joined. I value my own growth, but I also value mentoring others to help them find their own voices.”

Along with defining members' needs, it's important to define what they *don't* want. Some don't want to pursue a DTM or complete a *Competent Communication* manual at lightning speed. Some don't want to compete in a contest or be the club treasurer. Honor their “don't-wants” as well as their “wants.”







### Elevate the Fun Factor

Psychology confirms that when people have fun, the brain releases feel-good chemicals such as oxytocin and dopamine, leading to feelings of bonding and safety with other people. An overwhelming number of employees who work for one of *Fortune* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" say their work environment is "fun," which can lead to reduced conflict and increased employee engagement. While Toastmasters is not a for-profit workplace, there's every reason to assume that increasing fun at meetings can have the same effects. Members who have fun will be more productive, more creative, more accepting of others, more likely to stay in Toastmasters and more committed to reaching their own personal goals. Think about the times you've had fun with others. Most likely, you felt a warmer connection to them, and those positive emotions helped cultivate a stronger community.

Try themed meetings, club parties, or special events outside the regular club environment. Insert levity and humor into your meetings. Institute some wacky traditions, or do something unexpected or unusual. Entertained members become retained members.

### Provide a Safe and Supportive Environment

Joining and belonging differ. Joining is an event. Belonging is a journey. Brené Brown writes in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*: "True belonging is not the belonging that comes with just joining a group. It's not fitting in or pretending or



“The biggest reason I stay is the prospect of challenges in different roles outside the club and seeing whether I can make a difference or help others.”

—ROB WOOLLEY, ACS, ALB

selling out because it’s safer. It’s a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable and learn how to be present with people—without sacrificing who we are.” Members want to feel accepted, safe and free to express their authentic selves. Toastmasters is an incredibly supportive and celebratory environment, but many members still fear new challenges. A harsh evaluation can crush their confidence. A rude comment can sting for weeks. A tight group of friends can feel like a clique to someone on the outside.

Paul Arnhold, DTM, of two clubs in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, says, “I’ve been in Toastmasters since 2008, and I’m close to completing my third DTM. But I almost quit after getting an extremely critical evaluation on my third speech. Another time I almost quit because of district leadership issues. Thankfully, other leaders who understood how to value others helped changed my mind.”

Mark Snow, DTM, of Australia, almost left Toastmasters after an unpleasant and very public experience in his club. He says, “Although the actions of a small group of members nearly made me walk away from the organization I love, the care and support

I received from other members renewed my faith in Toastmasters and they convinced me to stay.”

Does your club feel safe? Are there conflicts and unrest that cause divisions or disillusionment? Are members free to express themselves without fear of criticism? Be aware of how unmet expectations can make a member feel uncomfortable.

### Offer Massive Value

Community Brands, a technology company that serves nonprofit groups and associations, conducted a member loyalty study that describes three levels of member commitment ranging from ultra committed to least committed. Members of this least committed group are the most at-risk for leaving because they are looking for value in the organization but may not see it.

Toastmasters offers great value, but some clubs may struggle to identify exactly what it is. The document “Features, Benefits and Value” (downloadable from the Toastmasters website) defines the tangible impact Toastmasters can have on individuals and organizations. This document can help one of these “at-risk” members find the value they are seeking. For example, Table Topics is a feature of Toastmasters that has the benefit of helping members to think quickly. The value of this is greater confidence in impromptu situations, such as in communications with customers. And the new Pathways education program offers a learning experience that includes more competencies than ever before.

Poll your members to find specific examples of the value they receive. Consider these comments from members:

- ▶ “I’ve been a member for almost 22 years. Every six months I renew because I’m still getting benefits from investing my time and money.” —Bob Logan, ATMG, CL, a member of two clubs in Maryland.
- ▶ “I love that there are opportunities outside the club level. Toastmasters is an amazing learning experience. I’m not leaving because I still have a long way to go.” —Brenda Salazar-Elenes, vice president public relations in the Chula Vista club in California.
- ▶ “The biggest reason I stay is the prospect of challenges in different roles outside the club and seeing whether I can make a difference or help others.” —Rob Woolley, ACS, ALB, of the Avon Club in Christchurch, New Zealand.

### Show the Big Picture

The world beyond the Toastmasters club is filled with opportunities. Attend or serve as an official at an area, division or district contest. Attend a Toastmasters Leadership Institute, the twice-yearly club officer training, to see the values, mission and vision of Toastmasters. For a truly magnificent experience, attend the annual Toastmasters International Convention in August. Nothing comes close to showcasing the global impact of this extraordinary organization. People from all over the world share stories and develop friendships, and they all started with the same thing: Project No. 1—The Ice Breaker. The brand of Toastmasters

transcends culture, gender and generations. One can't help but be inspired by the global impact of the simple concept of helping people develop communication and leadership skills.

### Increase Recognition

Toastmasters is generous with applause and recognition, but that next milestone can seem far away. It's easy to lose focus, get bored and quit. To help wandering members regain enthusiasm, some clubs have recognition for other activities beyond the education program or speech contests. Kristie Stocker, DTM, of Skillmasters Club in Detroit, Michigan, says, "We recognize members who volunteered for roles the most, attended the most meetings, did the most speeches, etc., from July 1 to December 15. Our club secretary and sergeant at arms keep track of the statistics, and we recognize the winners at our December holiday party. It's not only fun, it's a great jump-start for members to plan their next six months of goals."

Akash D. K. of KIT Toastmasters club in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, says, "We tried to reward perfect attendance, but that was hard. Now in every meeting we recognize every first-time role-taker, which encourages others to attend meetings."

Jimmy Dent, DTM, of Colorado Springs, a member of three clubs, says, "We've awarded 'Most Improved' for speaker, evaluator or Table Topics speaker, rather than 'Best [speaker, evaluator or Table Topics speaker]'. This allows the less experienced speaker to win over an experienced member who is not showing improvement. It also makes more experienced members step up their game." Dent's clubs also award points to members who compete or serve in contests, sign up for a role in advance, attend officer training if they are not an officer, and more. "These points add up toward our 'Toastmaster of the Year' award," Dent says.

### Treasure the Relationships

If you ask a thousand Toastmasters why they stay in their clubs, you'll hear a consistent answer: relationships. If you're like most members, you probably joined Toastmasters for one reason, but stayed for another—the people. Consider these comments from members:

- ▶ "Every time I've pulled away from Toastmasters, I return because of my Toastmasters friends. When someone asks for my help, I'll say yes. So many people have helped me through my journey that when I can give back, I will." —Karen Colby Aurbrecht Donovan, DTM, a member of two clubs in New York.
- ▶ "Warmth and friendship keep me here. Our club is incredibly connected and we enjoy activities together outside of meetings." —Leigh Kottwitz, Missouri.
- ▶ "I found lifelong friends who believe in me and appreciate my hard work for the organization that changed my life." —Daniel Morris, CC, of Great Land club, Alaska.
- ▶ "I stay because of the camaraderie, the education, the chance to enjoy hearing someone progress from a 'scared timid rabbit' to a confident speaker and evaluator. I've met people that I would never have had a chance to anywhere else." —Leah Cox, DTM, of Crosswinds Toastmasters club in Iowa.
- ▶ "I almost quit a few months ago. Why did I stay? The people in my club want me to. They want my help." —Michael L. Trotter,



"True belonging is not the belonging that comes with just joining a group. ... It's a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable and learn how to be present with people—without sacrificing who we are."

—BRENÉ BROWN

ACB, ALB, of the High Definition Speakers Toastmasters club in Santa Clara, California.

In theory, slowing the leak in your club bucket is not complicated. In practice, it requires being intentional and consistent to make these deposits in the members' satisfaction accounts. Satisfied members are longtime members, and when it's time to renew, they'll be happy to make the withdrawal to pay their dues.

To learn more about planning and maintaining membership growth in your club, see the *Toastmasters Membership Growth manual (Item 1159)* and the *Moments of Truth (Item 290)* available from the *Toastmasters Online Store*. **T**

**Maureen Zappala, DTM**, is a keynote speaker, author, presentation skills coach, founder of *High Altitude Strategies* and the 2017–18 president of the *National Speakers Association, Ohio Chapter*.

## Good Notes: A Public Speaker's Best Ally

Use smart and sparse speaking notes—not a script—to maintain a solid connection with your audience.

BY JOEL SCHWARTZBERG, CC, CL

Many people think creating and delivering a speech automatically entails writing a word-for-word script. They often take this route because they think precise wording is critical, or because they think it will calm their nerves to simply read word one through word 632. But while reading from a pre-written script is standard for prominent events such as conference keynotes, political convention speeches and commencement addresses, in most day-to-day cases it's a bad idea. Why? For starters it forces you to look at your words instead of your audience. This makes losing your place more likely and certainly more catastrophic. It also instantly dates your presentation and makes you seem less spontaneous—who knows how long ago you wrote it? It diminishes your power to persuade and inspire, because it is harder to read and emote at the same time. And doesn't it inevitably seem unauthentic—when's the last time a friend read to you his restaurant recommendation or what she did over the weekend?

You could *memorize* your speech, but that's extremely time-intensive and very dangerous. If you forget one line, you're done. You will also end up twice as nervous and truthfully, you should be. You're speaking without a safety net.

Given these realities, the best (and easiest) way to stay on point and connect with your audience is putting

together and using good notes. Good notes are basically a short-hand cheat sheet of the points you'll be hitting in your speech, as well as anything you might forget, like a date, a name or a statistic. It should contain only those things you need to remember, not things you already know. And when I say "short-hand," I mean it. When I review the notes my students prepare for their speeches, the first thing I look for is that they make little sense to me. If I can make a similar speech with their notes, then there's too much information and likely too many complete sentences.

As with all good cheat sheets, you should rarely need more than a small piece of paper to contain your notes (but please use paper, not your hand, as Sarah Palin once famously did). The days of using stacks of numbered index cards are long gone. Think of your notes like they're a rock band's setlist. The setlist isn't what the band is presenting to the audience; it simply *reminds* them to deliver the goods and in what order.

Here is a case study. A few years back, the CEO of a furniture-building company—let's call him Connor—asked me to help him with a 5- to 7-minute "thank you" speech for a humanitarian award. He only knew he needed to say the aforementioned two words but beyond that was a mystery. The first thing I did was disabuse him of the notion that he needed to write

a manuscript. Then we had a discussion in which I asked him to write down a few words answering the following questions: Who are the people and organizations you want or are obligated to thank? How does the award connect to your personal mission or passion? Is there a memorable moment that illustrates the work for which you are being honored? Who or what inspires you to create beautiful furniture? What kind of impact do you hope you made?

After Connor wrote his answers down, I looked at him and asked, "Do you think you could speak for roughly 60 to 90 seconds about each of these things?" He said yes, and then—using those very notes—did just that.

His notes looked something like this:

- ▶ *Thanks Jim, Kathy, Roger, City Housing. Tremendous work.*
- ▶ *Connection to passion—helping less fortunate. (story: meeting Janice)*
- ▶ *Favorite moment—being there when Chelsea saw her new home and furnishings.*
- ▶ *Inspired by Dad. (story: woodshop class)*
- ▶ *My hope: People feel they have real homes. Home is everything.*

Connor looked down at his note card quite a bit during that very first speech, but over time and with practice, his notes





got smaller and smaller, and his reliance on them diminished to the point where he rarely needed to look down at all. This was only possible because Connor was focusing on points, not words. Not only did that make his notes shorter, but points—not words—are typically what audiences remember about speeches. And points are what you *want* your audience to take away. After all, what would you rather hear about your speech: “You made a great point” or “You had great words”?

“Think of your notes like they’re a rock band’s setlist. The setlist isn’t what the band is presenting to the audience; it simply *reminds* them to deliver the goods and in what order.”

Some of my clients insist on writing a word-for-word speech at the start, just as a way of getting all of their ideas on paper. I let them but then I have them rewrite the script as notes. Once they can deliver their speeches from the notes, I have them throw away the written-out speech. Just like with Connor, practicing with notes

makes the notes smaller and smaller, while the speech gets better and better.

### **It’s OK to Look at Your Notes, as Long as You’re Just Looking**

There’s nothing wrong with looking down at your notes to remind yourself what to say next, but don’t speak while looking at them. Speaking “into your notes” breaks a valuable connection with your audience and throws distracting attention at the notes instead of at you. But if you look up again before you speak, the audience will likely not even remember you looked down in the first place.

Taking time to transition cleanly to and from your notes may feel awkward, but remember that the audience doesn’t mind silence. In fact, because they need more time to digest your points than you need to express them, those pauses may even be helpful. The key idea is this: Give your speech to your audience, not to the notes because, really, your notes couldn’t care less.

### **Handling the Notes**

Almost as important as the content of your notes is how you handle them. Your notes should be on one sheet of paper—preferably half or a quarter of it—and held in one hand at your side. Don’t ball it up, play with it or wave it around, because all those things say, “Look, everyone! I have notes!”

The absolute best place for your notes is not in your hands at all, but on a flat surface, like a table, one step in front of you (never behind you). That way you can refer to them as you need and leave both arms free for gesturing.

### **Maintaining Engagement is Key**

Connor’s speech received plenty of praise from the nonprofit organization honoring him, as well as from a number of audience members. No one thought, “Here’s a guy reading to us from a piece of paper.” They all thought, “Here’s a guy speaking to us from his heart.” The difference between those two approaches is profound in terms of audience engagement and retention.

Whether inside or outside the warm Toastmasters environment, our hope is almost always the same: We want to engage with our audiences, not read to them. We want to spend less time preparing and more time practicing. And we want to increase the odds that the experience will end in triumph, not embarrassment. Writing and using good notes is key to accomplishing every one of those goals. **T**

**Joel Schwartzberg, CC, CL**, is senior director of strategic and executive communications for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and vice president education for ASPCA Toastmasters in New York City.



**SARAH KHAN:**

# Echoes of Empathy

How an American Muslim emerged from the shadows of anxiety to teach compassion.

**BY SUZANNE FREY**

Sarah Khan, CC, spent the last few weeks of 2017 on a whirlwind speaking tour in the Middle East. A Toastmaster and professional speaker from Southern California, she gave keynotes and workshops in Bahrain and Dubai to Toastmasters and non-members alike on the topics of communication skills and her own journey overcoming social anxiety. One of her presentations was a two-hour talk titled “The Making of a Peace Monger.”

As part of her preparations, she learned about the interests of the local community and any particularly sensitive subjects to avoid. She was advised to avoid the topic of mental illness, told that even though discussion of it is much needed there, it’s a taboo subject. Instead of avoiding it, she says she did the opposite. “As I always do, I chose that very subject [indicated as taboo] to create all my talks around.” Her “Peace Monger” speech, too, focused on just that taboo topic, but in Khan’s signature way of sharing “stories of mutual pain and suffering to try to create an atmosphere of empathy.”

In sharing her own personal experiences with overcoming severe social anxiety and agoraphobia, and stressing that mental illness is stigmatized in almost every society, Khan was able to connect with her all-female audience and offer meaningful connections to audience members who approached her afterward to learn more about therapeutic coping skills and how Khan had personally gained victory over deeply rooted fears. This is her story.

After the terrorist attacks on New York’s Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, Khan became the victim of racial slurs and personal attacks. A devout Muslim immigrant to the United States from Bombay, India, she says, “On 9/11, my faith became weaponized by the terrorists who had hijacked my religion, and by a media that fed on the storm of fear and revenge.”

As a recognizable Muslim due to her appearance, she felt labeled and ostracized by her American community. After experi-



Sarah Khan gives keynote “Be Courageously Contagious” at Crossroads event in Dubai, December 22, 2017.

encing violent threats against her and her two sons, she began to withdraw both physically and psychologically from the world. She developed social anxiety disorder and eventually confined herself to the four walls of her house.

She says, “Once you are labeled the ‘other,’ aspects of your identity are no longer welcome to others, so you become closed in. As an isolated mother of an infant and a toddler ... I had to do something.”

“ If we take a chance to get to know those we perceive as different from us, then the fear will leave the heart and make space for a personal relationship. ”

—SARAH KHAN, CC

Medications alone didn’t help, and she encountered hurtful comments, even from those assigned to treat her. Finally, in the summer of 2011, she was admitted to a one-month intensive anxiety treatment program at Linden Oaks Behavioral Health in



*Sarah Khan speaks at TEDx Camarillo in 2017 on the topic "I Dare You."*

Chicago. At the end of one session, her therapist offered to hug her. Khan says that simple act helped her realize the power of empathy. "What if I could find the aspects that make us who we are—our need for love, connection and support—in other people who were not like me?"

When she returned to her home in Los Angeles, she joined Toastmasters on the recommendation of a therapist friend who said it was a safe place to practice exposure exercises. She worried about being labeled and judged in a negative light. But to her delight, "my club gave me nothing but unconditional love and support." She soon was comfortable speaking to a room full of people—a far cry from her early days in therapy when she would get so anxious that she couldn't even remember her own name to introduce herself.

### **Toastmasters as Therapy**

Less than six years later, Khan has left her fears behind and embraced her calling. A member of Madera Toastmasters club in Simi Valley, California, she now mentors others who have stage fright. She tells them she was once more terrified than they

could imagine. "You see, in Toastmasters meetings we share our stories—unique, authentic and deeply vulnerable stories—and discover that our hopes, dreams and fears are not so different from each other's."

Khan now projects a confident and stylish presence in her role as a professional diversity and interfaith speaker. She also wants to help others, such as the women in the audiences of her recent Middle East speaking tour, who wanted to know about overcoming anxiety.

“What’s unique about Sarah is that first and foremost, she speaks from her heart. That’s where her authenticity comes through.”

—MITCH KRAYTON, DTM

"Empathy is courageous," she tells her listeners with a wide smile and much conviction. "Taking a step to stand in someone else's shoes, or seeing through someone else's eyes, enables us to feel with the heart of another. This in turn helps broaden perspectives, so there is tolerance and respect towards the otherness of others."

She mentions her first Toastmasters mentor, who is Jewish, and became a close friend. "We had a great mentor and mentee relationship, and we started sharing stories about our struggles and about our very real and present differences. I wept for Palestine; she, for Israel. ... Eventually we realized, all this time we had been feeling the same hopes, fears and dreams."

It is that shared humanity, the mutual respect and understanding, that Khan sees as the solution for peace and cross-cultural communication. She wants to get people to appreciate that inside we are all the same. "If we take a chance to get to know those we perceive as different from us, then the fear will leave the heart and make space for a personal relationship."

### **A Supportive Community**

In 2012, only a year after joining Toastmasters, Khan became California's District 52 International Speech Contest champion. And thanks to her tribe of supportive mentors, she was able to take on her biggest exposure exercise—speaking before 500 people at the 2012 International Semifinals in Florida, where she placed third in her semifinal group.

She calls her Toastmasters club her "home away from home," and appreciates all the learning opportunities. She credits Toastmasters "for the love, support and encouragement I received from such a diverse group of people. Without them, I wouldn't be able to share my message."

Her friends and mentors comment on Khan's authenticity and drive to perfect her presentations. Her longtime friend, Mitch



# CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION TIPS

BY SARAH KHAN, CC

**1 Engage to broaden perspectives.** Every communication, whether it be public or interpersonal, is an opportunity for everyone to expand their views.

**2 Consider that your reality comprises all your perspectives, emotions and motivations.** Your reality forms your truth, and your truth is yours, and yours alone.

**3 Let go of the belief: For me to be right, I must prove you wrong.** Anyone's truth is as self-evident to them as yours is to you.

**4 Win hearts, not arguments.** Don't get into arguments about who is more right. When you play the "right vs. right" game, you lose the opportunity to bridge differences.

**5 Use the "yes, and" approach to address disagreements by acknowledging a person's**

**opinion first, then stating your own.** The more respect you show to others, the more likely they will be receptive to your views.

**6 Share your struggles to sell your successes.** The only difference between a success story and a crisis story is the ending.

**7 Walk your message.** It's not about what you say, but about who you are. Inspiration and influence begins with what you believe.

**8 Remember, it's not about you.** The most influential and impactful people are those who focus on serving others.

**9 Soften the sharp edge of truth with self-deprecating humor.** Laughter makes us listen.

Krayton, DTM, of Denver, Colorado, met her in 2011 when Khan was a new Toastmaster. He says, "Most people who say they want to speak professionally, they speak from the head. What's unique about Sarah is that first and foremost, she speaks from her heart. That's where her authenticity comes through."

In fact, Krayton, who is Jewish, was invited by Khan to a community event in a mosque where he conducted a workshop on public speaking, calling it "one of the best experiences in my Toastmasters life."

“Curiosity toward other people is the first step toward developing empathy.”

—SARAH KHAN, CC


Andrew Chiu, DTM, of Redondo Beach, California, is another mentor whom Khan sought out for advice on sustaining eye contact and connecting with an audience through humor. "She has an insatiable appetite to become better, in seeking influences. Sarah is very funny, very quick-witted," he says. "She wants to educate the heart of her audience through humor and personal stories. She is proud of her heritage, but she is not a label. She proudly wears her hijab, but she is not her hijab."

Khan shares her story, such as in her 2017 TEDx Talk in Camarillo, California, by inserting humor to offset any questions audiences may have about her appearance. In that talk, she wore an abaya, a traditional Muslim overgarment, joking that, "No, I'm

not a Ninja; I just dress like one." She also made a joke about how she used to love wearing a dark cloak because she could get away with wearing "hot pink pajamas and bunny slippers underneath and no one would ever know."

Khan eventually switched from abayas to more colorful and intricate gowns but still covers her hair with the traditional hijab. "People always ask me, 'You look so pretty in your hijab. What does it mean, what does it represent to you?'" she says. "Believe it or not, I'm a feminist. And I choose modesty not only in deference to my religion, but because I believe that modesty doesn't veil your beauty, it reveals personal liberty."

Khan's story of overcoming fear and severe anxiety to become a globe-trotting professional speaker would not be possible without therapy and the community of support she has in Toastmasters. Once a victim of prejudice and fearful of venturing outside her own house, she now confidently travels the globe with her message of empathy, making points with humor and charisma and paying it forward by mentoring others.

What's her best advice for those wanting to be better understood, and to better understand others who have different ideologies, perspectives and opinions? Khan doesn't hesitate: "Watch and wonder. Because curiosity toward other people is the first step toward developing empathy." 

Suzanne Frey is the managing editor of the *Toastmaster magazine*.



**ONLINE EXTRAS:** Learn more about Sarah Khan's journey in an exclusive Toastmasters video.

# How to Moderate a Panel Discussion

Tips for facilitating a riveting exchange of ideas.

BY KRISTIN ARNOLD

Your friend Sally knows about your speaking skills and asked you to moderate a panel at a forthcoming conference. Thrilled to be considered, you quickly answer, “Sure I will!” After all, how hard can it be to lead a discussion and conduct a question-and-answer session?

A few days later, after the initial excitement has passed, you find yourself wondering, *What was I thinking? I know how to give a speech, but I don't know how to moderate a panel discussion.*

Here's the good news: The speaking skills we learn in Toastmasters serve us well when moderating a panel. Just like in a speech, it's good to start strong and show the audience they are in good hands. As moderator, you'll introduce the topic within the first few minutes. Start with a short, interesting hook to grab everyone's attention, then share something about yourself and explain how you will introduce the panelists and facilitate the session.

But first you'll need to prepare for the session. Research the topic, the panelists and the audience beforehand, and consult the meeting chair and planner to learn more about the event format, what assumptions have been made for you, and how much latitude you have to be creative.

The preparation work a moderator does is similar to the preparation done by a speaker, although being a good speaker does not necessarily mean you will be a good moderator. Rory Vaden, second-place winner of the 2007 Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking, compares the two roles: “When you are the speaker, the spotlight is on you. When you are the moderator, you become the spotlight operator. It's your job to make the

panelists look good and you should fade away into the background.”

Some speakers find it difficult to shine the light elsewhere. They like being the “sage on the stage” and controlling a time slot. However, as moderator, once you get the conversation rolling you become more of a “guide on the side”—ready to interject a question to keep speakers' energy levels high and get the audience involved, or to intervene to get the conversation back on track.

“As a panel moderator, once you get the conversation rolling, you become more of a ‘guide on the side.’”

For some, moderating a panel is terrifying. “You have no control over what people are going to say,” Vaden says. “You have to spontaneously navigate an infinite number of dynamics that are perpetually changing at any given moment. It's difficult to weave together points, create value for the audience and shine an uplifting spotlight on panelists, all while keeping it entertaining!”

For others, the challenge of moderating in the moment is electrifying. As a professional meeting facilitator and panel moderator, I thoroughly enjoy enhancing the spontaneity of the conversation while making sure it provides meaningful takeaways for the audience.

Darren LaCroix, the 2001 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking, says, “A great panel moderator needs to be able

to listen, know when to cut people off and ask deeper questions. This is exactly why we do Table Topics in Toastmasters, where you have to think and be in the moment. You have to get comfortable with the impromptu style.”

Follow these tips to moderate a lively and informative panel discussion:

**Select, invite and confirm interesting panelists.** If panelists have not yet been selected, round up “DEEP” people who can sufficiently address the topic:

**Diverse.** Make sure the panel represents the demographic of the audience while ensuring a diversity of opinion and thoughts. A group that is in complete agreement can make a discussion boring.

**Expertise.** Invite a recognized authority or thought leader in the industry who possesses strong credentials. That person must establish credibility with the audience quickly via a biography or a 30-second introduction.

**Eloquent.** Panelists should be good conversationalists. Do they speak well on the phone? Did your interview with them produce a monologue or a discussion? Review video footage of your potential panelists to make sure they can keep the audience engaged and interested.

**Prepared.** Panelists must be willing to make a few key points and tell stories that illustrate those points.

Preparation makes the difference between a mediocre panel and an amazing one. Remember these important tips:



**Research.** It is your job to facilitate the conversation so the audience draws value from the panel's expertise and perspectives. To do this effectively, you must be familiar with the panelists, the topic and the expectations of the audience.

**Create a panel format.** You don't have to settle for the typical long, draped table. Why not spice it up using a popular television-talk-show format? At a sales meeting, we did a spoof on the American TV talk show *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, and had the moderator come out in a tie, vest and sneakers, as host Ellen DeGeneres does herself.

**Write the welcome and introductions.** Make them short and snappy—after all,

panelist biographies are printed in the program, so you don't have to repeat them. Try projecting one slide showing each panelist's photo (in the same seating order as in the event) along with a headline and Twitter username for each person. Then say something interesting about each one.

**Compile great questions.** Get the conversation started quickly with well-prepared questions. Start with broad questions to raise a conversation about current events. Next, move to stating the reasons the audience should care, and then ask specific questions to spur the panelists to share anecdotes, concrete examples and implementation ideas. Be willing to let go of your planned questions when an interesting discussion emerges.

**Select the Q&A format.** You don't need to save your question-and-answer session for the end. You can take audience questions as you go, or dedicate specific times to take them.

Determine how you will entertain those questions: You can have audience members line up at the microphone and take "live" questions, or you can assign microphone "runners" to go to inquirers who have their hands raised. As moderator, you can also roam the audience to take questions. Another option is to "screen" queries and prioritize them in the moment using question cards or texting or tweeting (I love using [sli.do](#) for this). Another approach is to form small groups from the audience and ask each one to discuss ideas, and have a group representative present the best question.

## PRESENTATION SKILLS

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*As moderator, take the time to consider the physical setup of the panelists' space and microphone placement to ensure the audience can hear the conversation.*

**Determine room logistics.** As a public speaker, you know how crucial the setup of the room is to the success of your speech. The same thing holds true for a panel discussion. As a general rule for panels, a snug space helps everyone hear the conversation. You'll need to think through the furniture type and placement, screen, seating arrangement and microphones. Ideally, each moderator and panelist should have his or her own lavalier microphone, and a cordless handheld microphone should be reserved for audience interaction.

**Arrive early.** Meet briefly with each panelist and review the agenda and ground rules. Do a walk-through of the

room. Check the microphones and your slideshow.

**Keep the conversation moving.** If you have prepared the panelists appropriately, and you kick off the discussion with a few good questions, the conversation will start to flow on its own. Encourage each panelist to comment on particular parts of other panelists' statements. Be flexible about following the natural conversation path, as long as it is interesting and the audience is engaged. You may, however, need to interject a follow-up question here and there to keep the conversation moving at a brisk pace. Probe deeper, make bridges between ideas, present opposing views, catch

contradictions, test the unsaid, shift gears, create transitions and intervene firmly and respectfully to keep everyone on track.

**Be playful. Smile.** Always be uplifting. Bring positive energy to the stage. Compliment the audience and the panelists. Never criticize, even if it's to get a laugh.

**Use callbacks.** Your biggest opportunity for humor is to use "callbacks" by mentioning something that has previously been said. Listen to anything that happens spontaneously in the room that causes a laugh and seek clever ways to reference it again. Callbacks make it fun for the audience, and they make you look witty.

**Put a bow on it.** Let the audience know the program is coming to an end by saying "We're almost out of time. There are a few key things to wrap up." Then, summarize the discussion (or have your panelists do it), and offer opportunities to extend the discussion beyond the session. Share each panelist's contact information and promote their agenda (now is the time for each one to make one short plug for their company, product or service). Make final announcements and conclude with heartfelt words of thanks and a round of applause.

Never lose sight of the fact that you are the champion for the audience. Always keep listeners in mind and make sure their needs are being met throughout the entire session. If you can do that, you'll be glad you said, "Sure I will!" to Sally's invitation. **T**

*A version of this article appeared in the April 2015 issue of the Toastmaster magazine.*

**KRISTIN ARNOLD**, a meeting facilitator, panel moderator, and keynote speaker, is the author of *Powerful Panels: A Step-By-Step Guide to Moderating Lively & Informative Panel Discussions at Meetings, Conferences & Conventions*. For more information about how to moderate a panel discussion, see Kristin's free seven-part video course at **PowerfulPanels.com**.

# Top Technology Products for Toastmasters

Make your next presentation stand out with these tools.

BY DAVE ZIELINSKI

**A** number of promising new apps, tools and technologies designed for speakers were featured at the recent Presentation Summit conference in Florida. Here is a selection of the top products and services for Toastmasters.

## Presentation timer

A new PowerPoint add-in called **TalkTime** calculates the total time PowerPoint slides will take to present—even as speakers add or delete slides. It calculates the length of a presentation based on times assigned to individual slides. Speakers can either copy PowerPoint rehearsal times into TalkTime, enter them manually for each slide, or record timings from a typical slideshow.

## Remote for slide shows

Logitech's **Spotlight Remote** combines a sleek design with impressive functionality. An advanced pointer system allows speakers to precisely highlight areas of focus or magnify for high detail. The on-screen cursor can open links and pause or play videos with no need to break the presentation flow by moving to a mouse or laptop. The remote also enables speakers to manage their presentation time, setting milestones within the app and sending vibration alerts directly to the hand. The remote connects via USB receiver or Bluetooth, is fully rechargeable and has a 100-foot operating range.

## Audience interaction technologies

**Sendsteps** allows speakers to ask audiences questions using PowerPoint, with audiences responding via text on mobile devices or through a website. Speakers can create trigger questions or challenge participants to take a quiz. Groups can vote with their tablets or smartphones, with results appearing instantly on-screen.

**Poll Everywhere** transforms one-sided presentations into two-way conversations. The audience response system enables

speakers to embed interactive activities directly into a presentation, with audiences responding via SMS text on phones or tablets. Results are summarized instantly on-screen. It offers a large variety of polling activities, including multiple choice, open response, live word clouds, clickable images, rank order and more. Questions can be written in 30 languages.

## Presentation slide management

Tired of hunting for missing slides, images or charts? **Empower** is a content management system that stores all PowerPoint slides in one place for easy search and centralized updating. This scalable slide library, which will automatically increase its capacity to accommodate new slides as they're added, also helps ensure a sanctioned corporate design is part of all presentations.

**“VirtualSpeech has a tool that can help prepare you for Toastmasters meetings and improve your career skills.”**

**Ecos** allows users to create, edit, deploy and track presentations from a centrally located dashboard in a cloud-based environment. Administrators can monitor brand standards and update content such as data, video or photos to ensure presentations always convey the right message throughout an entire organization or company.

**Shufflrr** keeps presentation messaging consistent across a company, allowing users to share presentation files easily and create slide decks quickly. The platform tracks usage by slide, file, user, activity, shares, likes and comments. Slides once lost on a network after a single meeting are now stored, categorized and easily accessed for future presentations.

## Immersive technology

**Inscale Interactive** develops next-generation corporate presentations, augmented reality, virtual reality (VR) and mixed reality solutions to engage audiences in new, immersive and meaningful ways.


Although this company wasn't at the Presentation Summit, **VirtualSpeech** has a tool that can help prepare you for Toastmasters meetings and improve your career skills. The app can be used to improve your communication skills in realistic virtual reality scenarios and works with mobile VR headsets.

(For other companies offering immersive technology products, see the article “A New Era in Presentation Technology” in the February issue of the *Toastmaster* magazine.)

## Graphics, videos and icons

**Pixabay** is a community of creative professionals that shares more than 1 million copyright-free images and videos. All content is covered under Creative Commons CC0, which makes them safe to use without asking for permission or giving credit to the artist—even for commercial purposes.

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**The Noun Project** features more than 1 million royalty-free icons created by a global community for use in presentations. Find the icons you want, change their color and size if desired, and insert them into your slides or documents. 

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



**ONLINE EXTRAS:** Discover new presentation apps, tools and technologies through hyperlinks.



## I'm Rich

I've always wondered what it's like to have millions of dollars. Now I know.

BY JOHN CADLEY

**Y**ou're not going to believe this. I can hardly believe it myself. I'm going to be rich! Me, the guy with the 2008 Nissan Sentra. Rich! Miracles abound.

Just imagine this: I get an email this morning from "Rev. Mark James" with a subject line that reads "Director of Western Union, Diamond Bank, Porto-Novo, Benin." Whoa! What's *this* all about? I'll tell you what: "I am writing to inform you that your funds are in our custody and it is \$4,700,000 U.S. dollars. We, the Western Union, under the operation of Diamond Bank, Porto-Novo, Benin, are ready to start sending these funds to you. And you will be receiving \$10,000 twice every day until your \$4,700,000 is completely sent to you."

I know what you're thinking: This is a scam. No way. I checked. Benin is a real country in West Africa, Diamond Bank really is in Porto-Novo, and the email is from a member of the clergy. Criminals run scams, not reverends. Plus, they're not asking for any money. All they want is my name, address, phone number, occupation, sex, age, passport ID and driver's license. That is *not* a lot of information. And in return I become a multi-millionaire! I don't know how I have all that money, but this is not the time to be asking questions.

Then I get *another* email from Benin—so I know this place is for real—especially since now they're trying to *protect* me from a scam: "This is to inform you that the American Embassy office Benin Republic has instructed to transfer your fund totaled \$985,000 U.S. dollars compensating all the scam victims and your

*email was found as one of the victims by the American security leading team and America's representative officers here in Benin Republic.*" I know—the grammar is a little suspicious. But he's a financial guy. Is *your* accountant a poet? What I do understand is \$985,000, and the fact that they're being nice enough to keep my first \$6,000 payment on hold until I send them \$59 plus my bank routing number, birth certificate and Social Security number so they can verify who I am. Obviously, these people want to make certain I don't get scammed again.

**"I don't know how I have all that money, but this is not the time to be asking questions."**

So here I am, 15 minutes into my morning and I'm already up \$47,985,000. But wait! What's this? *Another* email—from the "Co-Chief Operating Officer of Bank of America." Bank of America? Don't tell me *that's* not legit. They even had a meeting about me: "After a brief meeting on 13th of this Monday we deem it appropriate to intimate you that your funds will be transferred into the bank account given by the Government of Benin Republic as the Country Originator of this Fund if you failed to send the required fee. The actual transfer of your funds to the bank account given by the Government of Benin comes

*up next 3 days because Government of Benin Republic has agreed to pay any fees regards to this transaction."*

OK, this one needs a little parsing but I think I understand—although my calendar doesn't have a "13th of this Monday." Maybe it's a Benin thing. And I'm not sure what "intimate you" means. I mean, I don't even know these people. But that's nitpicking. The bottom line is there's 20.5 million smackers waiting for me if I pay a fee within the next three days, or else the Government of Benin gets my money. What's up with that? In the last two emails they were *giving* me money. But it's all good because the email says the fee is only \$250 (reduced from \$600!) and once they get it I can start withdrawing my money *the same day*. Take *that*, MasterCard® Outstanding Balance!

Sounds too good to be true? Well, just remember—not only is this from THE Bank of America but they've absolutely assured me: "This transaction is being monitored by the united state government in order to guard against internet impostors." You can't get much safer than that.

So right now, you're looking at a guy who's worth a cool \$68,035,000. The bad news is I won't be writing this column any more. Now I can retire and buy a 2018 Nissan Sentra. Of course, if it is a scam I'll be back next month. But I doubt it. **T**

**John Cadley**, a former advertising copywriter, is a freelance writer and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Learn more at [www.cadleys.com](http://www.cadleys.com).

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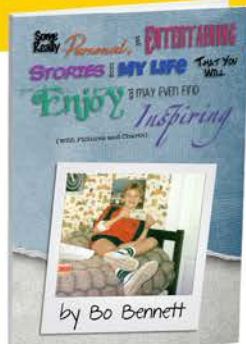
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## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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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