

TOASTMASTER®



Club Etiquette:

Lessons beyond the lectern

8 Ways to Boost Team Morale

Show Me the Funny!
Let humor come naturally

Connect In Person

In this age of technology, with all the buzz over the latest Apple or Android phones, tablets and even smart TVs, many people question the logic of spending time and money to actually go someplace to learn something new. Why not just learn online?

Therefore, the question must be asked: Are conferences and conventions obsolete? I say no!

A few weeks ago I asked my friend Frank Storey, DTM, of Linthicum, Maryland: "Have you ever gained any tangible benefits from attending a district conference or International Convention?"

He said the very first district conference he attended, in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1987, was life-changing. Frank had been a Toastmaster for just over a year, and at that conference, then-District Governor Pauline Shirley (who later became International President) introduced him to Past International President Eddie Dunn. She introduced him this way: "Eddie, this is Frank Storey, a rising star in District 25."

"Attending a convention connects you to the big picture of our program."

Frank said those words changed his life and inspired him to dedicate himself to Toastmasters for the rest of the year, and as it turned out, the next 30 years. By now he has attended more than 25 International Conventions, including one where he met his future wife, Karen. Attending a convention is more than just the camaraderie, education sessions and speech contests; it connects you to the big picture of our program. I've heard many amazing speeches at our conferences and had the opportunity to meet world-class presenters and Toastmasters leaders. You can meet people of every age, color and nationality—all united for a common goal. It will renew your faith in humanity.

I attended my first International Convention in Toronto in 2005. The keynote address by former fighter pilot Major Anthony "AB" Bourke changed my life. He spoke about becoming inspired "to perform with flawless execution and reach new heights in your personal and professional life." I purchased his book for \$30 and quickly read it. When I returned home and went back to my office, I changed the way I work. That book helped me learn the art of flawless execution. The inspiration to pursue my leadership journey in Toastmasters started at that convention.

Since then, I have always looked for that one golden nugget from a district conference or a convention you can apply to your life. These Toastmasters events also allow you to gain valuable ideas you can bring back home with you and share with members of your club.

Attend a Toastmasters conference or convention and you, too, can have a life-changing experience. With the 2018 International Convention happening this August in Chicago, take advantage of signing up when registration opens early next month!

Balraj Arunasalam, DTM

International President



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Congratulations to these clubs celebrating anniversaries and other milestones.



Members of the Shenzhen Toastmasters club in Shenzhen, Guangdong, China, celebrate their 600th meeting with cheers, balloons and special T-shirts. Shenzhen Toastmasters was the first chartered club in the city of Shenzhen.



Ryde District Toastmasters club in North Ryde, New South Wales, Australia, celebrates its 30th anniversary with current and former members as well as friends and family.



While celebrating the Hispanic holiday tradition of Las Posadas, members of the Crafted Talks club in Weslaco, Texas, break a piñata.



Send your fun club photos to photos@toastmasters.org. Include a description and your club name, number and location. Photos must be in jpeg format with a resolution of at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) or 1 MB (megabyte). Out-of-focus images cannot be accepted. It is not necessary to include the Toastmaster magazine or other branded materials in your photos, but if Toastmasters materials are displayed, they must reflect the current brand.

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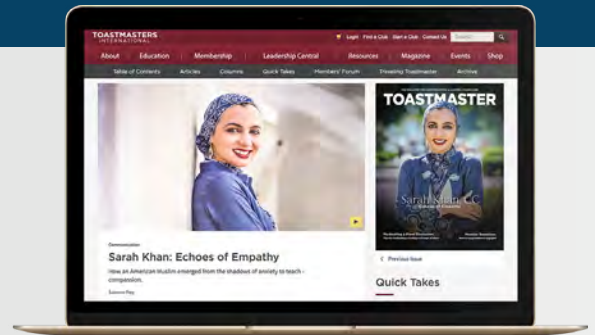
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY BART BROWNE

Toastmaster Magazine Online

See more photos, videos and links online at www.toastmasters.org/Magazine.

April Online Extras:

- **On the Write Path Now**—Discover more about Sinjini Sengupta through additional photos.
- **8 Ideas to Revitalize Your Team’s Morale and Productivity**—Watch highlights of David Dye’s leadership presentation from the 2017 International Convention.
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▶ MEMBER MOMENT 

A Nurse with the Healing Power of Humor

BY MARY NESFIELD

Cynthia Long, ACB, CL, is the plastic surgery clinical leader at Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida. A mother of two, she has had to rebuild her life after tragedy struck in 2008 and she suddenly became a widow. To help her cope with the loss, she was introduced to GriefShare, a program that aids participants in the grief process. She eventually became a GriefShare facilitator and has been leading classes for others since 2009.

The operating room nurse of 38 years is a Ph.D. candidate in communications at Regent University, Virginia. She shares her journey below.

What inspired your growth?

The movie *The Bucket List* inspired me greatly after my husband’s death. I made a list of things I wanted to do each year, and then in 2014, I finally acted on one item on my list: I joined Toastmasters. And in 2015, I attended a friend’s celebration ceremony for his MD/Ph.D. I was excited for him but felt a little jealous too. I realized then how I had always wanted to go back to school but did not have the courage. It had been 22 years since my last degree. I asked myself: *What are my passions in life? What knowledge do I seek?* I love my career in healthcare and I love being a Toastmaster. I wanted to pursue my passion in the medical field but did not know exactly what avenue to pursue until I became a Toastmaster. It was my commitment as a club member that developed my love for the art and science of communication.

I became a better speaker in Toastmasters, but I also became a better conversationalist and communicator. The seed was planted. I put the two together and started my journey as a scholar of Healthcare Communication.

How has Toastmasters helped you in your work?

The staff has noticed my advances and ease of public speaking. Many surgeons know I am a Toastmaster, and they ask me for suggestions after giving a presentation. In surgery, it is vital to have efficient and effective team communication. Professionals in the healthcare arena are becoming more knowledgeable of its importance.

What topics do you speak about?

I enjoy speaking about courage, perseverance and humor. One humorous speech I delivered, “Dating after Widowhood,” won



Cynthia Long with a young patient

first place. I had no idea that having started a fire in my date’s bathroom was so funny.

It is imperative to deliver the humorous side of stories for many reasons, including health benefits and stress elimination. I am passionate about a healthy lifestyle, which includes enjoying humor on a daily basis—it’s a great medicine. One of the plastic surgeons I work with and I even deliver jokes during what we call the “pre-emptive analgesia” part of a medical procedure when we wait for the local anesthetic to work. I have become an excellent joke-master and storyteller during surgery.

Can humor help heal grief?

Humor opens the door for healing. It allows us to be vulnerable with each other through sharing our funny stories. I have many funny stories and, as a Toastmaster, I do not hesitate sharing to lighten the atmosphere.

What are some other items on your bucket list?

I am an avid cyclist. I cycled last year in Oxford, England, while I was there taking a class on [the author] C.S. Lewis. This year I will cycle with my daughter along the Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania and next year in Holland. I will continue writing and giving extraordinary speeches in Toastmasters to entertain and educate about the importance of communication, health habits, and life’s lessons.

Mary Nesfield is associate editor for the Toastmaster magazine.



From left: Aileen Jessica, Limarvin, Jamila Mae, and Lilia and Claudio Fernandez

A Family Legacy

My parents, Claudio, ACS, ALB, and Lilia Fernandez, DTM, joined Toastmasters in 1995 and have brought my siblings and me to meetings since we were kids. As we grew older, we never imagined that we too would follow their exceptional legacy. We are each working on our own DTMs at the Mabuhay Club in Saudi Arabia, hoping to be a family of DTMs. I am proud to be a member of an organization that teaches leadership and communication to make the world a little bit better. The photo is from a recent trip our family made to Cairo, Egypt.

Contributed by Jamila Mae Fernandez, ACB, ALB, of the Mabuhay Club in Saudi Arabia.

Member Testimonials

Watch members from District 33, in Las Vegas, Nevada, talk about their experience with Pathways and what the new education program means to them. Go to www.toastmasters.org/Education/Pathways/Pathways-Testimonials.



World Headquarters is Moving!

The new location is in Colorado at:

**9127 S. Jamaica St. Suite 400
Englewood, Colorado, 80112, or call 720-439-5050.**



The office in California will close later this month. Beginning July 1, the recognized time zone for all recognition-program deadlines will change from Pacific Time to Mountain Time.

► MEET MY MENTOR



Lespar Aquino, ACG

BY MARY NESFIELD

Lespar Aquino, ACG, ALB, is a retired IT professional and author of several published technical papers. Today, the longtime member blogs on topics from fitness to gardening. He also maintains a website for his Toastmasters speeches and projects. He is a member of the BF Community Toastmasters club in the Philippines where he serves as sergeant at arms.

Anne Macalintal, CC, vice president education at Metro South Alabang Toastmasters, is assistant vice president of data monetization at a company in the Philippines. Moving up the corporate ladder in a technical field, she needed communications skills to articulate her ideas and gain buy-in from executives and stakeholders. She met Les when she joined his previous club.

Anne, how did you hear about Toastmasters?

I once was asked to present a project I implemented to our board of directors. I stuttered more than once because of my nervousness and failed to articulate my thoughts well. I told my former boss that I was looking for ways to improve, and she suggested Toastmasters.

How did Les become your mentor?

The first time I visited a club, I found Les to be a quiet observer. When he spoke, I was in awe of his confidence and eloquence. He assured me the club offered fun and learning at the same time. I requested him as a mentor after the first meeting.

What is his mentoring like?

Les is devoted and gracious, and always patient and calm. He can quickly sense my challenges as he guides me to effectively



FROM LEFT: Anne Macalintal and Lespar Aquino

craft and deliver my speeches. He amazes me with his accurate, specific and helpful feedback. He is excited about mentoring and doesn't mind giving up his speaking slots so others may advance in their projects.

Why do you stay in Toastmasters?

Initially, I thought Toastmasters was all about improving one's communications skills, but the experience changed me into a person who's willing to go the extra mile to help others. When I neared the completion of my Competent Communicator award, I felt a surge of confidence. As an advanced speaker, it is now my turn to mentor new members.

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.

► COMMUNICATION

Some "Very" Good Advice

Mark Twain once gave the following advice to writers: "Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very'; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be."

American novelist and columnist Florence King was of the same opinion: "'Very' is the most useless word in the English language and can always come out. More than useless, it is treacherous because it invariably weakens what it is intended to strengthen."

Whether in writing or speaking, "very" is a good word to avoid. Yes, it has its place when used sparingly. The problem is many people overuse "very." It becomes a crutch. Even worse is the use of "really," which is just a weak way of saying "very." When you use weak modifiers, your writing or speaking becomes weak.



How can you drop "very" but still emphasize an adjective? Simply use a better adjective. Jennifer Frost created an excellent infographic for Grammar Check that lists 147 words to use instead of "very." Download the list at www.grammarcheck.net/very.

John Zimmer, ACB, ALB, is a member of the International Geneva Toastmasters club in Switzerland. He is an international speaker and a seven-time champion of Toastmasters district speech contests. John writes the public speaking blog www.mannerofspeaking.org and is co-creator of Rhetoric - The Public Speaking Game™.

▶ **PATHWAYS LEARNING EXPERIENCE**



Celebrating a New Start!

Port Melbourne Toastmasters in Australia was among the many clubs to express excitement when the Pathways learning experience launched in Region 12. On the day the new education program officially became available, the club turned its meeting into a Pathways party, complete with balloons, bubbles and cake. In addition, members took their first practical steps in the program together. Club president Jaqueline Bignell, DTM, says that many fired up their laptops, logged into the Toastmasters website, went to the Pathways learning experience webpage and took the online Pathways Assessment, which helps members choose a path that is right for them.

As a finishing touch, members popped their balloons and announced which individual path they had chosen.

“We started Pathways in this club with a ‘bang’ to get people excited right from



The Port Melbourne Toastmasters

the beginning,” notes Bignell. “That’s how we mean to continue.”

Most Port Melbourne members are young professionals, making them particularly well-suited to the new program, says David Vo, CL, the club’s vice president education. “For this younger generation, Pathways taps into their everyday practice of gaining knowledge and understanding online, while they still gain the valuable experience of presenting to a live audience.”

He appreciates how members can earn early and consistent recognition in Pathways for their educational progress.

Pathways launched in regions 10 and 12 in December. The learning experience is expected to be available in all regions by the end of the program year. To learn more, visit www.toastmasters.org/Pathways.

Contributed by Ann Banham, ACS, ALS, a member of the Port Melbourne Toastmasters club.

▶ **NEWS FROM TI**

Join Us In Chicago!

Come to the 87th Annual Toastmasters International Convention.

WHEN: **August 22–25, 2018**
WHERE: **Chicago, Illinois**

Mark your calendars and get ready for the excitement of the 2018 Toastmasters International Convention! Here are a few things to note if you plan to attend:

- ▶ Registration begins May 7
- ▶ The convention will be held at the Marriott Marquis, located near Chicago’s lakefront
- ▶ Contact the Convention Registration team at conventionregistration@toastmasters.org with your questions



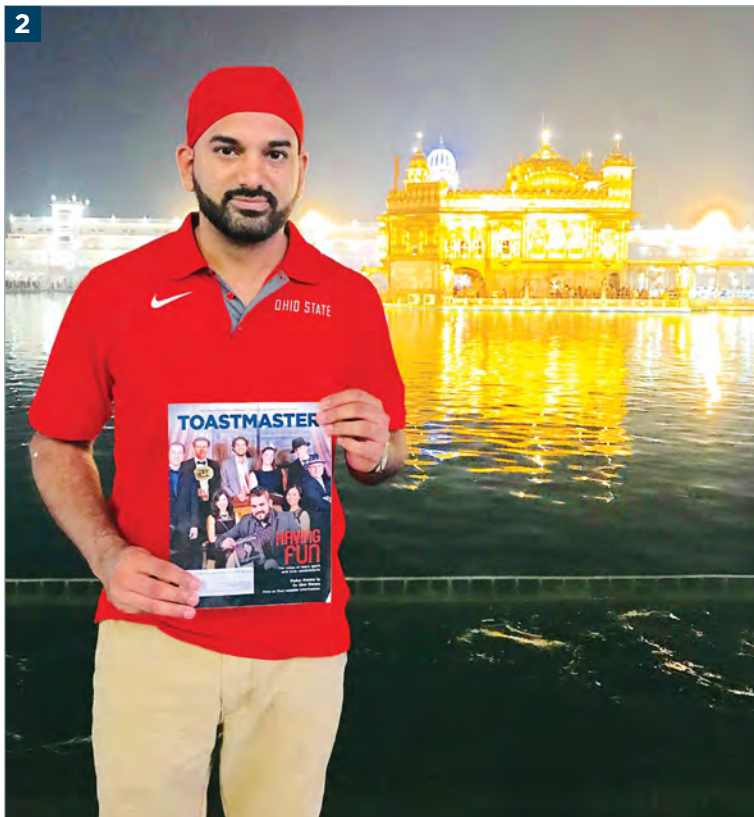



1 | LOUISE BEATON, ACS, ALB, from Coledale, New South Wales, Australia, poses on Diamond Beach, Iceland.


2 | MANU ADHEN, ACB, ALB, from Macedonia, Ohio, visits the Golden Temple in the city of Amritsar, Punjab, India.

3 | CV CHON, from Skudai, Malaysia, wears hanbok, a traditional Korean dress, while visiting Gyeongbokgung Palace in South Korea.

4 | MANSOOR TAVASSOLI, CC, CL, from Ancaster, Ontario, Canada, stands before the Khaju Bridge in Isfahan, Iran.



 **View additional photos** in this month's *Traveling Toastmaster* photo gallery at 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. Bon voyage!

From Plagiarism to Public Speaking

How a teacher's accusation catapulted me into writing professionally.

BY K.T. LYNN, CC

I coasted to my senior year of high school on a mixed bag of A's and B's. Anxiety-ridden and socially awkward, I only cared about words. When my English teacher assigned a personal narrative essay about *The Great Gatsby*, I was convinced this was my time to shine.

After pulling an all-nighter, I submitted six soul-drenched pages. When the day of feedback finally arrived, my paper was returned without a grade and with the note "Please see me" scrawled in red cursive. The lump in my throat grew bigger with each passing second. I willed my legs to work and moved to a seat in the front of the class. My teacher stayed standing and was first to speak.

"I've tried and tried, but I can't seem to figure out how you did it."

"Well ... I just drew parallels between myself and ..."

"No, Miss Lynn. How did you *cheat*?"

Twelve years later, I can still feel that blade pierce my chest. Despite not having a shred of evidence, my teacher was convinced that I didn't author the only assignment I had ever cared about.

"I know your type. You're quiet and nice enough, but nothing special. You couldn't have written this."

I withered. I didn't fight. I believed him. My shame extinguished my love affair with words. I swallowed his accusations whole—I couldn't have written anything beautiful or worthy.

Years later, I picked up my pen out of necessity. Drowning in life changes, I started breathing again the only way I knew how: by writing. After moving to Saudi Arabia from the U.S. for a job designing environmental science curriculum, I was an outsider again. Just as I had in high school, I channeled my feelings of isolation into written reflection.



K.T. Lynn, CC, CL

"Speaking publicly allowed me to share a painful narrative, and to discover the purpose within."

I wrote before work, during lunch and well into the evening. My boss took notice. Curious to what had sparked such an intense work ethic, he cornered me and forced me to reveal my pet project.

"How did you do it?"

I braced myself for impact.

"How did you keep this fabulous secret?" His smile put me at ease but also confused me.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I didn't know we had a writer in our department." A week later, they made it official. My vindication came in the form of a job title: Writer/Editor. Despite the new title, I still didn't feel like a writer.

Even after years of distance, the ghosts of teachers past still haunted me.

About a month after I'd started the new job, I was pulled into a Toastmasters meeting at lunch. When the meeting was over, I returned to my desk with legs of jelly. I'd never been able to read out loud in class, let alone deliver a speech. That week, the president of the Eagles Toastmasters club in Saudi Arabia contacted me and urged me to deliver my Ice Breaker. His persistence paid off. A month later, I was behind the lectern.

I had decided that instead of me providing forgettable biodata, the room should hear about how I ended up standing in front of them, miles away from where I started. In between shaky breaths, I poured my shame into the room. Word by word, the buried shards of humiliation rose to the surface and dissipated.

I used to wish I could go back in time to reason with that teacher who started it all ... or simply to deliver him a swift kick in the shins. I know now that his disbelief was necessary, it catapulted me into writing professionally. I would have never truly known what my dreams were without that crushing blow. It's what led to writing in the darkness, in the quiet hours of the night, where most forbidden loves flourish.

The day my English teacher accused me unjustly was the day I truly became a writer. Speaking publicly allowed me to share a painful narrative and discover the purpose within. The maddening story untold—it drives us all. **T**

K.T. LYNN, CC, CL, is a member of the Eagles Toastmasters club in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. She is a copywriter by day and a novelist by night. She aims to promote cross-cultural understanding through her work. Read more about her at www.ktlynn.com.

On the Write Path Now

Former actuary finds her passion in the world of words.

BY MITCH MIRKIN, CTM

Sinjini Sengupta's debut novel, *Elixir*, released in December 2017, has been a best-seller on Amazon in India. She has won awards in that country and abroad for her poetry and screenwriting—including for the film version of *Elixir*.

Considered one of India's top female bloggers, she also contributes to publications with international audiences, like the *Huffington Post*. And as a speaker, the native of Kolkata (once known as Calcutta) has given TEDx Talks and was a 2017 district finalist in the Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking. Her speech was on unconditional love.

All this acclaim in the world of words has happened relatively quickly for Sengupta, ACS, ALB, a resident of Gurgaon in Haryana, India. An alumna of the prestigious Indian Statistical Institute, she had been working diligently as an actuary for several years, managing financial risk for a multinational corporation. She says she was "addicted to her healthy paycheck" and had no idea of other possibilities her life may have held.

In her 9-to-5 job as an actuary, Sengupta remained unaware she could "write anything other than PowerPoint slides for business presentations or bullet points on meeting-room whiteboards." Then illness struck: depression, fibromyalgia, spinal problems, severe body aches. It all resulted in months of bed rest. Her doctors—she consulted more than a dozen—gave her a stern warning: It was either take a break from work, or face a total breakdown.

The jarring health crisis, however, turned out to be life-changing in a positive way. In its gloomy depths, Sengupta

would discover her voice as a writer. Her creative soul emerged and flourished, and she has not looked back.

"I cannot exactly say if I picked up the pen or the pen picked me up, but something like that happened in between analgesics, physiotherapy sessions and long hours of medicated sleep," Sengupta says. "When I left my job and was bedridden, I discovered writing more as a survival instinct, and I used it for catharsis."

From Numbers to Narratives

Sengupta, a member of the Gurgaon Champions Toastmasters club, went from crunching numbers to crafting narratives that are eloquent, soulful tapestries brimming with raw, honest emotion. "Water!," a poem she wrote in 2016 about love and relationships, was named a winner in a national poetry contest sponsored by the *Times of India*.

"When I left my job and was bedridden, I discovered writing more as a survival instinct, and I used it for catharsis."

— SINJINI SENGUPTA

She's also not afraid to voice strong and potentially controversial views. In her columns and speeches, she is a passionate advocate for emotional well-being and social reforms such as gender equality.

She gave her first TEDx Talk in November 2017 at a TEDx event in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India. Sengupta spoke on gender sensitivity in parenting, pointing

out the biases inherent in children's toys and Disney stories, for example.

At the same time, antagonizing and alienating her audience is the last thing she wants to do. She says she is all about open, honest dialogue, not diatribe and dogma. She has learned that being strident and self-righteous is a sure way to shut down conversation.

Though relatively new as a blogger and columnist, Sengupta says she has evolved in her approach. "A couple of years back, I'd take stronger stances and would be more black-and-white about what I thought was the right or wrong thing to do. I thought I knew a lot of answers.

"Now, I've mellowed in the ways in which I lay my protests, my claims."

Sengupta, who writes in both English and the Bengali language, says change "can't be brought about through divisive hatred. Change is a slow process and it has to be internalized. It can't be forced on people."

Deepak Menon, DTM, Toastmasters International's First Vice President, says Sengupta asked him for mentoring when she competed in the 2017 International Speech Contest.

"During the contest season, whenever I met her, Sinjini came across as a very committed and focused person," says Menon, a longtime Toastmaster who belongs to several clubs in India. "She had clarity of vision and knew her goals."

Menon adds that Sengupta was easy to coach—she responded positively to his advice and was quick to make adjustments to improve her public speaking. "Sinjini is an asset for Toastmasters and serves as a testimonial to how our organization changes the lives of our members."



Sinjini Sengupta

Diverse Platforms

Sengupta's writing ranges from dreamy, evocative meditations to piercing commentaries on current events, social issues and the shared human plight. Some of her stories strike a chord mainly with her countrywomen in India. Most of them, however, cut across boundaries of ethnicity, nationality and gender.

In *Elixir*, she tells of a woman's journey through conflict into redemption as she co-exists in two worlds: the mundane, grinding reality of her days, and the surreal, transcendent dreams of her nights. The distinction between the two realms gradually blurs. In truth, who's to say which is more real, more valid, if the latter can bring happiness?

In 2016, *Elixir* was shown at the Cannes Short Film Corner, organized by the famed Cannes Film Festival in France. After the film was screened in Cannes, the response to it made Sengupta realize

“Sengupta’s writing ranges from dreamy, evocative meditations to piercing commentaries on current events, social issues and the shared human plight.”

“the story is neither Indian nor just about women.” Reflecting on the story's themes—such as the lack of emotional connection in modern urban lifestyles—she says, “We are all headed in the same direction irrespective of our social, economic or geographic positions. Love is our common pursuit, and fear is our common demon.

“We have the same cracks and similar vulnerabilities in our lives, it seems, and we are all on our journey for redemption.”

LEARN MORE

Learn more about Sinjini Sengupta and her work at:

- [facebook.com/sinjinisblog](https://www.facebook.com/sinjinisblog)
- sinjinisengupta.blogspot.in

Her novel *Elixir* is available in paperback in India, the U.S. and Canada on Amazon and on Kindle around the world.

Elixir's Evolution

The book started out as a short story that Sengupta wrote on her Blackberry on her ride back from work one night. It was then made into a short film directed by her husband, Anirban Guha. *Elixir* was screened at the Cannes event as well as international film festivals worldwide. It picked up a number of awards, including Best Short Film at Boston's Bengali Film Festival Kaleidoscope and Best Screenplay for Sengupta at the Pickurflix Festival in India.

After one of the screenings of the film, she received an on-the-spot offer for a book contract from an Indian publishing house. She didn't even have a manuscript yet. Eventually, she turned *Elixir* into a novel. The whole process, she says, has been like a string of miracles.

Today, when asked about her plans for the future, Sengupta says she is reluctant to set goals for her creative life.

“I want to let myself be surprised. I want to trust my instincts, toy with my creative inspiration and follow my guts. The rest, I have come to believe now, will simply fall into place.”

MITCH MIRKIN, CTM, is a member of *Randallstown Network Toastmasters*, based in Baltimore, Maryland. He works as a writer and editor for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.



ONLINE EXTRAS: Discover more about Sinjini Sengupta through additional photos.

Club Etiquette

Lessons beyond the lectern.

BY CHERYL ANDRICHUK, ACB, CL

What do you do when a meeting goes wrong? Our club found itself in a troubling situation when our Table Topicsmaster asked us to speak on topics that were, in his own words, “sexually edgy.” Members were shocked and didn’t know how to react. Our guest walked out—and reported us to Toastmasters International World Headquarters.

With more than 75 years of combined Toastmasters experience in our club, none of us had ever encountered a situation like it. We took what we thought were reasonable steps. Individual members reached out and apologized to the guest, and we asked the Table Topicsmaster to apologize too. He didn’t get it. Instead of a quick “I’m sorry,” he sent emails that rationalized and defended what he considered a healthy conversation.

Then we got an email from Toastmasters International World Headquarters. We were told that the recent Table Topics segment may have upset some of our club members because of its content, and that some email communications between members afterward had not been appropriate.

As a club, we agree with the Toastmaster’s Promise to treat each other with “respect and courtesy” and maintain a “positive, friendly environment.” Yet somehow we had failed. Since a line had been crossed, we talked about the need to put some rules in writing. But that seemed like overkill in this exceptional situation with this particularly intransigent member.

What could we have done differently?

We looked to the Club Quality and Service team at Toastmasters’ World Headquarters for guidance. We were

surprised to learn that Toastmasters International does not prohibit any speech topic, content or type of language. The organization’s policy on the matter states that Toastmasters recognizes that club members “may learn much about the world around them from listening to others’ speeches on a variety of subjects. This variety can add interest to meetings and stimulate thoughts and ideas.”

“If a topic makes you uncomfortable, speaking up may fill you with dread, but it’s also a chance for a challenging impromptu talk.”

At the same time, individual clubs do have the right to limit speech topics with the consensus of their members, the organization says. Toastmasters recommends that club leaders consider the specific context of their club when assessing matters of taste and sensitivity.

With 20/20 hindsight, we should have addressed the issue in real time at the Table Topics session. If a topic makes

you uncomfortable, speaking up may fill you with dread, but it’s also a chance for a challenging impromptu talk. A good strategy is to acknowledge and redirect. Examples of what to say might be:

- ▶ “I’m uncomfortable discussing this here so I’ll talk about something else ...”
- ▶ “Some may find this an interesting topic, but I typically keep my views on this to myself. I would like to say, however ...”
- ▶ “Let me tell you why I don’t want to talk about that ...”

On the flip side, if you are presenting something you know can be a hot-button topic, follow the lead of one of our members who happens to be a sex educator. Her speeches often relate to her job, but she always starts with a warning about the content and tailors the speech to be respectful and avoid awkwardness. The *Better Speaker Series* offers a timeless tip: It’s important to know your audience. If you can relate to your audience, they will relate to you.



Cross-Cultural Awareness

Another touchy area can be cultural sensitivity. I asked Ling, a Toastmaster who recently came to Canada from China, to give me her take on the subject. Spoiler alert: The answer is to make a personal connection. “I felt welcome when people took the time to talk to me and take an interest in me,” Ling recalls.

When she joined our club, we made the effort—as a group and individually—to include Ling in our conversations during breaks and invited her to join us for coffee after the meetings.

People may not mean to offend, but they can come off as being rude or uncaring through ignorance. From Ling’s point of view, “Language isn’t the big issue—it’s the cultural background and the different ways of thinking about things. I think people can be accepting if they make a sincere effort to understand other cultures. I don’t expect everyone to be the same, but if I sense people care and have a personal connection I feel more at home.”

In spite of coming from very different backgrounds, Ling and I have discovered common ground and interests. But more importantly, hearing her stories has expanded my knowledge on subjects that had been outside of my wheelhouse. Cultural communication is a two-way street. Ling was willing to open up to us when she invited our club to celebrate the Chinese New Year, and our group connection became even stronger.

When I think about culture, my mind jumps first to ethnicity or religion, but it’s bigger than that. Toastmasters’ policy is to help all people become better communicators and leaders, in an accepting atmosphere “regardless of race, color, creed, gender, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability.” While Ling’s observations are personal and specific to being a newcomer to Canada, they also apply to the larger issue of cultural sensitivity.

Tackling Tardiness

Another tricky matter that requires respectful communication is tardiness. How you deal with the issue depends on circumstances. Is it a one-off event like the issue with our bawdy Table Topicsmaster? Or is it a persistent problem for many?

If it’s an overall club problem, start with a self-check. Do your meetings always start on time? When I know that meetings consistently start 10 minutes late, I feel like I don’t have to be on time, either.

Next, speak to the tardy members privately. People may have a good reason for their lateness. When my dad was dying, I let my club know that if he was having a bad day, it would affect my attendance. Club members were very understanding. Although I was late or absent more than I wanted to be, I appreciated how I didn’t have to quit the club.

Who should be the one to talk to consistently tardy members? A good place to decide that is at a meeting of the club’s executive committee. Usually it falls to the president or sergeant at arms, but there may be someone else in the club with suitable skills willing to help out.

During an Ice Breaker, late arrivals can be especially distracting to the speaker. You could post a sign to let latecomers know to wait until the speech is done before entering the room. In some clubs, the general evaluator will call out tardiness. But if you don’t know the underlying cause, it may not solve anything and could put people off.

Personally, I like the idea of putting a nickel in the “late jar.” The jar

could also be used for collecting other fines—like if a cell phone rings during a meeting. The idea is to keep the mood light but still send a message about what’s acceptable.

Or maybe your club will decide not to call attention to it. After all, people are late to meetings in real life too and chances are you’ll encounter the situation outside the club setting.

Although I joined Toastmasters to learn how to give speeches, I have also learned that communication is more than standing at a lectern. Working with my fellow club members to solve real-world communication and leadership problems has been an unexpected benefit.

Whether it’s dealing with inappropriate content, cultural insensitivity or a member who is always late, I have learned skills that I can apply in the wider world. Those skills are based on the core of the Toastmasters credo. It’s about communicating effectively in any situation—and effective communication often boils down to having respect for each other. ■

Cheryl Andrichuk, ACB, CL, is a member in British Columbia, Canada.



8 Ideas to Revitalize Your Team's Morale and Productivity

Effective leaders focus on both results and relationships.

BY KARIN HURT
AND DAVID DYE

You're under pressure to get results. Whether you're leading a business team, a volunteer organization or a government department, you've got to get things done, deliver value and meet your goals.

You're not alone. The competitive global economy puts leaders in a difficult position—expected to win, to “move the needle,” to get the highest ratings, rankings and results. Many leaders become hell-bent on winning, no matter what it takes, and they treat people like objects—in short, they lose their soul.

As the CEO and the president, respectively, of our leadership development company, **Let's Grow Leaders**, we work with managers at every level to build the confidence and competence necessary to achieve lasting results and increased influence. We

have both held leadership positions in the corporate world for many years, and we've gained insight into what true success looks like. Focusing on results exclusively may improve outcomes for a time, but it also burns out employees and volunteers, increasing apathy and killing morale. We've seen too many leaders—whether they're managing a work staff or trying to motivate volunteers—end up isolated, frustrated and working harder just to keep results from getting worse because they're caught in this vicious cycle.

Here's what you need to know: You don't have to choose between results and relationships. In fact, the most effective leaders ground themselves in internal values of confidence and humility while focused on both results and relationships. The key to what we call “winning well”—that is, sustaining excellent results over time—is to combine a focus on achieving results with building healthy professional relationships.

If you're a Toastmasters leader, you want to inspire your team—whether it be club members, district officers or a group





running a speech contest—to achieve success and accomplish their goals. Yet you want to do it in a way that doesn't cause resentment or disappointment among those you're leading.

Here are eight ways to obtain that balance inside and outside of Toastmasters that will revitalize your team's morale and productivity.

Rock Your Role

Your team's morale and performance begin with you. Can they look at you and see the excellence you're asking of them? It's hard to bring your A game 100 percent of the time, but the most effective leaders show up to play every day.

If you want to rock your role, don't keep doing what you've always done. It's about progress, not perfection. Hone your craft. Read what the experts are saying about the future in your field. Find a mentor or two who have skills you admire. Invest in a leadership development program for you and your team.

2 Mind the M.I.T.

In our experience, the number one cause of poor morale, performance problems and subpar results is a lack of clarity. You can boost morale and productivity by communicating clear, shared expectations. This is where your Toastmasters training can pay off.

One way to make sure everyone is on the same page is to "Mind the M.I.T." (Most Important Thing). Be sure to prioritize. What is the most important thing your team can achieve this year? This quarter? This week? What is the most important thing they can do today? Does everyone on the team know what "winning" looks like?

3 Ditch the Diaper Drama

Your team needs direct feedback that will help them know what to continue and what to change. However, most leaders struggle to give direct feedback. Gallup recently reported that less than one in four employees



said their manager provides meaningful feedback. We've observed many leaders who struggle to give direct feedback in a way that helps their employees. Like stinky diapers wrapped with plastic in the modern-day diaper pail, they wrap their feedback in layers of self-protection so it doesn't offend anyone.

When giving speech evaluations, Toastmasters learn to strike the balance between positive feedback and constructive criticism. They encourage the speaker but they also point out what needs to be improved. Effective leaders speak the truth. Improve your team's morale and productivity by having the tough conversations using the INSPIRE feedback model (see sidebar) and speak truth with compassion.

4 Channel Challengers

"No one listens around here, they don't know what I do, and they don't care what I think." These are the signature words of ineffective leaders. In contrast, effective leaders recognize the value every person on

their team contributes. They deliberately surround themselves with people who will challenge their thinking.

It's not enough to have an "open door policy" and passively wait for people to tell you what you need to hear. Instead, seek out feedback. Ask your team, "What is working to help you be productive?" Then ask, "As your leader, what is one thing I could do that would help you be more productive at your work?" Listen, respond and watch your team's morale and performance soar.

5 Own the Ugly

Many leaders won't take responsibility for their mistakes. They fear that apologizing makes them look weak or lose credibility. In fact, the opposite is true.

When you make a mistake or hurt someone, it's not a secret. Your team knows and they're watching to see what you do. Can they trust you to own it? Apologize, make it right and move on. Your people will trust you, they'll more likely take responsibility themselves and morale will improve.

6 Play the Game, Don't Game the Score

To maximize your team's morale and productivity, keep them focused on what matters most. Your customer doesn't care what you get on your "scorecard." They care about the value you deliver. Isolate the key behaviors that truly drive the value you contribute to your clients, customers and members.

Reinforce these critical actions every day and the score will take care of itself. Above all else, don't let your team 'game the score'—that is, don't waste time trying to artificially adjust measurements.

7 Put People Before Projects

Productive teams enjoy high levels of trust, connection and collaboration. Collaboration is more than simply working together; it's an attitude that communicates you are in it with your people, not apart from them.

A great employee experience, or a rewarding member experience in Toastmasters, starts as you recognize the unique strengths and perspectives each person brings to the team. Take the time to look at a person's potential to perform beyond her current role. Build trust with, and between, your people. Listen to what is important to them and encourage their success.

8 Trust the Trenches

In your employees and volunteers, you have a tremendous source of product knowledge, insights into customers and performance improvements. Listen to what they have to say. They may not know how valuable their observations can be. Help them learn how to recognize the opportunities, celebrate their success and give them the credit when their ideas work.

Your people are your number one competitive advantage. When you consistently practice these eight behaviors, you'll see your team's morale improve and their productivity increase. That's not just winning—that's winning well. **T**

Karin Hurt and David Dye are authors of *Winning Well: A Manager's Guide to Getting Results Without Losing Your Soul and the CEO and president of Let's Grow Leaders*. David was a featured speaker at the 2017 Toastmasters International Convention in Vancouver, Canada.



ONLINE EXTRAS: Watch highlights of David Dye's leadership presentation from the 2017 International Convention.

THE I.N.S.P.I.R.E. FEEDBACK MODEL

Performance coaching to help your team improve and thrive.

BY KARIN HURT AND DAVID DYE

In our work with thousands of leaders around the world, we've watched people consistently struggle to share feedback that others desperately need. We developed the I.N.S.P.I.R.E. feedback model as a way to draw attention to performance issues, encourage mutual discussion and confirm commitment to new behavior with short, specific conversations.

I.N.S.P.I.R.E. stands for:

Initiate. Initiate the conversation respectfully. Feedback is best received when you've been welcomed to provide it.

For example, you might ask, "Can we talk about what happened this morning?" Sometimes the conversation isn't optional. You may need to be more direct. Even in those instances, you can establish respect. For example, you might say, "I need to talk with you today. Is this a convenient time or would you prefer this afternoon?"

Initiate conversations as close to the moment of concern as possible. Don't wait three days to address something that happened this morning.

Notice. Share an observation about a behavior. For example, "In listening to your calls, I've noticed that you struggle to connect with the customer" or "I noticed that you arrived late this morning."

Specific support. Provide specific, supporting evidence you can actually see, such as: "When the customer told you he was calling to disconnect his line because his spouse had died, you said only that you would be happy to disconnect the line. You did not show empathy." Or simply, "The meeting was scheduled for 9 a.m. and you arrived at 9:30."

Probe. After you present the situation, the other person needs a chance to talk. Ask a question in a neutral, curious tone to allow them to share any relevant information.

Generally, "What happened?" works and allows the person to share information or to own the situation. Adapt your question for the specifics: "What happened on that call?" or "What happened that you were late?" Occasionally there will be an understandable reason for the poor performance, and the late arrival may have been because of a car accident. If so, be sure the person is OK and don't carry the conversation any further.



Invite. Once he's had a chance to share his thoughts, invite the employee to solve the problem. Start with a review of the expectations, then, "What are your thoughts on how we can resolve this?"

If he can't readily offer an effective solution, you can provide specific suggestions on how he can improve. For instance, "Give yourself 30 minutes for a client call before your next appointment. That's what works for me."

Sometimes, you may discover that the employee simply needs more training.

Review. Ask one or two open-ended questions to check for understanding, and then one closed-ended question to secure commitment. For example, "How would your results be better if you did that every time?" and "What concerns do you have about this approach?" Then close with, "Is this your commitment going forward?" Ask the employee to review her specific commitment: "Let's recap what you'll do next time, when you're faced with a similar situation."

Enforce. Enforce the behavior and why it's important, while reinforcing your confidence that the employee can do this. "I'll see you at 9 a.m. for the next meeting. You're an important member of the team, and we don't make the best decisions without you."

You can conclude with, "I have every confidence you can do this well," "I appreciate you taking the time to make this happen" or "Thank you for your work and commitment." **T**

The Meaning of Good Mentoring

How to ensure positive future club experiences.

BY DANA LAMON, DTM

Excellence is listed as the fourth of Toastmasters' guiding principles, not because it has the least value, but rather because it offers stability to what would otherwise be a three-legged stool. The other three principles—integrity, respect and service—are meaningless if quality is not their end. We witness and experience the quality of Toastmasters in our club meetings.

In other words, the time and effort put forth by the Toastmasters International staff to develop materials doesn't matter if clubs do not use them to perform their best. Each member is the keeper and the carrier of Toastmasters excellence—and we maintain excellence by sharing through mentorship.

In 1994 I met a woman while on my way to attend Toastmasters International's annual convention. She, too, was traveling to the convention, and she was going to present a workshop. We took a cab together and talked about Toastmasters.

To my surprise she knew who I was, having won the World Championship of Public Speaking two years earlier. She asked why I was still in Toastmasters, and explained that she left after becoming a professional speaker. I replied that I remain in Toastmasters because I have an obligation to give to others what was given to me. In today's parlance I would say that I had Toastmasters mentors—Paris and Lucille Lanham, Jeanne Nelson and Joe Sweeney—who freely shared with me their knowledge and wisdom. I now have the responsibility to mentor the members of my club and Toastmasters around the globe who seek to know what I know.

In Homer's poem, the *Odyssey*, written in 800 B.C., the character Mentor has the responsibility to teach Telemachus the social norms of manhood. Telemachus' father, Odysseus, left home to fight in the Trojan War when his son was an infant. Odysseus asked his friend Mentor to perform the role of father. Given that Telemachus trusted what Mentor taught him, the Goddess Athena assumed the disguise of Mentor to encourage Telemachus to leave home to search for his father when his father failed to return after the war. Nearly three millennia after Homer wrote the *Odyssey*, we use the term "mentor" to refer to a person who shares knowledge, imparts wisdom and encourages action.

"The success of each Toastmasters club depends on its members' willingness to serve as mentors."

The success and quality of each Toastmasters club depends on its members' willingness to serve as mentors. Unlike the classroom of an educational institution, no one person is appointed to teach. Those of us who teach today were yesterday's students; today's students must become tomorrow's teachers. This cycle of mentoring is required to maintain the viability of a Toastmasters club. The quality of the club depends on the content of the mentoring. Speakers in the Wind in Sun Village, California, one of three clubs of which I

am a member, maintains a high standard of excellence. From its members and meetings, and from my experience visiting Toastmasters districts and clubs around the world, here is what I have gleaned as relevant to mentoring excellence.

Purpose. Every Toastmasters club has a purpose beyond the institutional purpose of making leaders. One club may be formed for employees of a company to hone their communication and leadership skills. Another may exist specifically to work on a single presentation skill such as storytelling. Still another might exist to prepare members for speech contests. The quality of the club is maintained when members know why the club exists.

Each meeting must have a purpose as well. Generally, the purpose is to give members opportunities to practice their communication and leadership skills. Sometimes, however, the focus of the meeting may change, for example, to celebrate club successes, orient new members or conduct an open house. Knowing the purpose guides the planning for the meeting.

Administration. The quality of a club is diminished when it fails to keep current with its administrative matters. Accurate and up-to-date records must be kept of its business, financial and meeting activities. Reports to World Headquarters must be submitted timely.

Relationships. Meaningful mentoring requires a relationship built on trust, as evident in the relationship between Mentor and

FROM LEFT: Erica Bailey, a member of the Speakers in the Wind club in Lancaster, California, is mentored by Dana LaMon.

Telemachus. A club member must have the confidence that each member has at heart the best interest of every other member.

Plan. Quality is more likely to result from a plan—a plan for the year (e.g., the Distinguished Club plan) as well as for meeting agendas. I have participated in grab-bag meetings where a member chooses a meeting role from a bag on the day of the meeting. The purpose of that plan was to practice flexibility and readiness to take on any role.

Promotion. Promote meetings to members who have been absent for a while and to the community. If people don't know about your meeting, they can't put it on their schedule to attend.

Location. The meeting's setting must be conducive to enjoyable learning. It must be a place where participants can sit comfortably and speakers can be seen and heard. If it is held at a restaurant, attendees should arrive early enough have a meal before the meeting begins.

Preparation. Speakers should arrive early with props, visual aids, etc. Speech evaluators should know the objectives of each speech. Other participants, such as the word master or joke master, should come prepared with material.

Promptness. Starting and ending a meeting on time is quality performance. On the other hand, quality is not compromised because the written times on the agenda are not met. The timed agenda should be seen as an estimate, not a mandate.

Performance. Every member holding a leadership position in the club and every person playing a role in the meeting must perform to their best ability to achieve the meeting's purpose.

Participation. Roles should be pre-assigned and Table Topics speakers chosen to ensure that the maximum number of members and guests may participate in the meeting.

Presentations. What you say in a presentation is as important as how you say it. Style should never supersede substance.

Protocol. When guests and new members are present, the meeting formalities we've learned in Toastmasters must be practiced. Less formal meetings may be appropriate among club members who are familiar with proper protocol.

Priorities. When circumstances demand flexibility, it is important to know the meeting's priorities. Adjustments to the agenda can then be made to still fulfill the meeting purpose.

Growth. The day a club stops growing is the day it begins dying. Likewise, when a member stops growing in his communi-

cation and leadership skills, it marks the beginning of the end of his Toastmasters experience. The opportunity to mentor a fellow Toastmaster is an opportunity for both the protégé and the mentor to grow. Changed circumstances, such as Toastmasters' new Pathways learning experience, also offers opportunities for growth. The quality of the club depends on a mentor's ability to spot opportunities for growth, and to encourage it.

Relevance. Membership in Toastmasters and our meeting experiences have no value if they are not relevant to our lives. Mentor's task was not to keep his protégé occupied until his father returned; his responsibility was to prepare Telemachus for life as an adult.

If these principles are included in our mentoring, we can and will ensure the quality of our clubs. A mentor uses words to share knowledge and impart wisdom; that's communication. A mentor must also demonstrate the teaching method by serving as a role model; that's leadership. **T**

Dana LaMon, DTM, AS, is a 30-year veteran of Toastmasters and the 1992 World Champion of Public Speaking. Learn more about him at www.danalamon.com.





Show Me the

Funny!

If you want to be funny, don't try to be. Less is more.

BY JOHN KINDE, DTM

If there's one thing I've learned in my 30-plus years of studying humor, it's this: You can learn to be funny. Some people think you need to be born funny—that if you weren't the class clown, there's no hope. I'm a laid-back, serious Norwegian from North Dakota, and I've won the Humorous Speech Contest at the district level four times. If I can do it, you can do it.

And if you don't look funny or have a reputation for being funny, well, great! You then can take advantage of the element of surprise, one of the basic elements of humor.

Here's a secret I've learned from practicing comedy improv: If you want to be funny, don't try to be funny. Really. Trying too hard kills the joke. Students of improv comedy learn that "going for the gag" is often a sure way to minimize the laughs. Relax. Let your humor come organically from your stories, the essence of your character and your relationship with the audience. Avoid the eager look of expectation when a humor bit fails. That look is what you get from your dog sitting next to the dinner table hoping for a treat from your plate.

Play It Clean

When writing your speech, keep it clean. Sometimes it's tempting to cross the line, but take it from someone who has learned the hard way: Clean material consistently plays stronger. Not only that, playing it clean takes more talent and skill. Off-color humor is a comedy cop-out. Any teenager can get a cheap laugh from



JOKES CAN TAKE MANY FORMS



The following kinds of jokes are examples of how to be funny by seeing the humor in everyday life.

Exaggeration. An exaggeration joke involves an extreme stretch of the imagination. Such things as size, numbers, proportions, facts, feelings, events and experiences are so greatly overstated or magnified they become absurd.

The movie was so bad, people were lined up to get out.

Definition. A definition joke defines a word humorously. It is similar to an exaggeration joke because it also distorts an aspect of the subject.

A consultant is someone who is called in at the last minute to share the blame.

Incongruity. Two generally accepted ideas are associated irrationally.

One professional speaker offers this advice to novices: "Be accurate, be brief, and be seated."

Play on words. Such jokes are based on the fact that some words have more than one meaning.

One hospital in town is taking some unusual measures to cut costs. For example, they have patients make their own beds. When you check in they give you a toolbox and wood.

Understatement. You deliberately represent something as less than it actually is.

During his travels he blogged extensively about the weather, once describing a torrential rain as a bit of moisture.

Implication. These jokes make a point but without directly stating it. The listener has to make the connection.

Grand Canyon guide: "It took millions of years to carve this."

Tourist: "Oh, was it a government project?"

NOURISH YOURSELF WITH HUMOR

Exercising is good for you. Eating fruits and vegetables is too. But did you know that laughing—yes, giggling to your heart’s content—is also a valuable tool in the daily quest for good health?

Humor can help you heal. Laughter is cathartic, relaxing, stress-reducing and just plain fun. Evidence of its benefits, both anecdotal and empirical, has piled up for years. In his seminal book *Anatomy of an Illness*, the late Norman Cousins

recalled a ritual he employed when he faced a life-threatening illness in the 1960s: He prescribed himself daily viewings of zany Marx Brothers movies. “Ten minutes of genuine belly laughter,” he wrote, “would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep.”

Scientists, too, maintain that laughter results in tangible benefits. One well-known study found 20 seconds of laughing gives your heart the same workout as three minutes on a rowing machine. Some studies have shown laughter helping the immune system and reducing blood pressure.

Toastmasters know all about the magic of mirth. Humorous speeches abound in clubs, providing listeners with a happy respite from pressure-filled days. Some members have taken their humor skills to new heights. Caron Keens, CC, is a Certified Laughter Leader™. These facilitators of funny preside over therapeutic sessions at laughter clubs around the globe, as part of the World Laughter Tour (worldlaughter.com). The sessions, held in set-




tings as varied as business offices, fitness clubs, nursing homes and community centers, feature activities that stimulate laughter, with everyone guffawing in unison. Visual aids, games and discussions round out the routine.

Keens, a member of the South Okanagan Toastmasters in Osoyoos, British Columbia, Canada, says the sessions truly make a difference for people. “I believe very often the benefits of laughter are overlooked and disregarded in today’s world,” she says. Keens

says she has led many laughter sessions for health-care workers. (For more about the value of humor in the healthcare arena, read about operating room nurse Cynthia Long, this month’s “Member Moment,” on page 6.)

Keyem Thomez, CC, CL, and Alexa Fong Drubay, CC, are other members helping to spread laughter and joy around the world. They both hold the title of Laughter Ambassador. Thomez, a member of a club in Bahrain, and Drubay, a member of a Springfield, Pennsylvania, club, lead classes in Laughter Yoga. Yes, that’s a thing. In this practice, breathing techniques are combined with laughing exercises, resulting in outbursts of communal glee.

Thomez and Drubay met up recently at the Global Laughter Yoga Conference in Frankfurt, Germany.

So take your humor seriously. Make sure you enjoy a good chuckle every day. After all, notes Keens, there’s another great benefit to laughter: It’s free. 

Paul Serman is senior editor of *Toastmaster magazine*.

four-letter words and bodily-function jokes. Blue humor puts your reputation at risk. One of your goals is for people to want to hear you speak again and to tell their friends about you. When in doubt, leave it out!

Personal stories are your best source of humorous material. Your own stories are original and compelling. Humor comes naturally from the pictures you paint. Drawing on a personal experience is always better than force-fitting a joke to a point. And besides, if you pick a joke off the internet, everyone has probably heard it and your element of surprise will be short-circuited.

Identify the key trigger word in your joke and put it at the very end of the joke’s punchline. It maximizes the tension build-up and the element of surprise. Try to avoid putting even one word after the punch word. Adding clutter after the punch word or punchline buries it and disguises the joke.

Less is more. The more concise you are, the more likely your humor will hit the target. If you have a long setup for a punchline, the punchline carries a bigger burden. So write your material, then edit and cut.

Also, specifics are funnier than generalities. A “2015 red Honda Accord” is funnier than “a car.” Paint rich word pictures.

Invest in your talk by writing and practicing it well in advance of your delivery date. As you're sitting at the speaking venue awaiting your introduction, concentrate on what's going on around you. Check out the features of the room. If it's a dinner event, pay attention to the details of the meal and the service. Listen to everyone speaking before you. Take notes. Look for humorous connections you can drop into your talk—these last-minute lines might be the best part of your entire presentation.

Wait for the Laugh

Never rush your delivery. When you get to the punchline, deliver it and then pause. Wait for the laugh and it will normally come. A Toastmaster friend once told me: "I figured out why you're so funny. You insist that we laugh!" What she meant was that I wait for the laugh and give the audience a chance to get the joke.

"Humor plays best in a well-lit room. Laughter is contagious and people will laugh more when they see others laughing."

Don't be in a hurry to proceed to the next funny line. Don't step on the laughter. Starting to speak too soon is like telling the audience "please don't laugh!" Let the laughter peak, and as it starts to fade (but before the laughter completely stops), continue speaking. The proper rhythm will come with experience.

If you try a joke that falls flat, never apologize or explain it. If the audience doesn't laugh, pretend you mean the line seriously. Your humor is meant to be a surprise. If they didn't laugh, it's your secret. If a long story meant to get a laugh is greeted with silence, try saying this: "And the point of that story is ..." Let's hope your humor has a point!

Animate your speech. Show rather than tell. Know your material well enough that you can deliver it without notes, thus bringing your gestures, movements and facial expressions to life.

Try to deliver your humor in a room that is well-lit. Because comedy clubs are often dark, we sometimes mistakenly believe that comedy plays best in a dark room. Not true! Humor plays best in a well-lit room. Laughter is contagious and people will laugh more when they see others laughing. If possible, arrange the seating so that people can easily see each other.

Practice at Your Club

The best place to practice delivering your humor is in your club. There is no substitute for practice in a supportive environment, and a Toastmasters meeting is the best place to grow and stretch. The people you think of as funny are probably not funnier than you are—they're just more consistent. The main difference between an excellent improv player and a beginner is consistency. Both have moments of brilliance. The great player will just hit the

mark more often. Your humor consistency ratio improves only with experience. A Toastmasters club is the perfect place to be bad while getting better.

In my opinion, the Jokemaster function, in the way it is featured by many clubs, is a waste of time. My observation is that this person usually reads a mediocre joke to the audience and is met with polite chuckles. The joke is normally not very funny and this is not a good way to learn humor delivery.

Here's my suggestion: Replace the Jokemaster with The Observational Minute. This is an observational humor segment placed near the end of the meeting, normally after the evaluations but just before the general evaluator's review of the meeting. The person leading the observational humor segment will ask: "Does anyone have any observational humor?" Members create fresh humor out of the circumstances and flow of the meeting. In time, members of your club will gain some genuine humor skills, creating the best and most powerful form of humor (along with stories): observational humor.

And now it's time to enter the Humorous Speech Contest. Always remember, you learn more when you come in second. Losing is a good thing: it leads to growth. When you're second best, you take a harder look at your material and delivery. And besides, when it comes to a perspective on winning (for example at a district-level humor contest), remember this: For the most part, you are being judged by people who have not accomplished what you are trying to do—win the district Humorous Speech Contest. So don't take the results too seriously. Compete for the sake of competing. And in the long haul, if you do well you'll be like the baseball legend Babe Ruth, who is remembered for his home runs, not his strikeouts. Everyone who competes wins a growth opportunity.

"If you try a joke that falls flat, never apologize or explain it."

If you compete in the Humorous Speech Contest beyond the club level, take comfort in the fact that the further you advance in the contest, the easier it is. Your material becomes more highly refined and tested. The audience is larger. Bigger audiences mean more laughs. The most challenging contest is at the club level.

So when you reach the higher levels, step on the platform with confidence, knowing you are prepared and up to the task. And when the audience is sitting there thinking *show me the funny*, you will! **T**

John Kinde, DTM, is an Accredited Speaker and a member of Powerhouse Pros Toastmasters club in Las Vegas. He is the founder of the Las Vegas Improv. Reach him at www.HumorPower.com.



ONLINE EXTRAS: Learn how to integrate humor into your next presentation by watching an exclusive Toastmasters video.

Member Achievements

Four Toastmasters share their membership milestones.

Michael Hurford

Anglia Communicators club
Peterborough, England



Viva Gli Sposi!—Long Live the Happy Couple!

It was February 2017 and my goal was simple ... to give a great Father of the Bride speech at my daughter's wedding less than six months away.

With a mountain to climb ahead of me, I went to my first Toastmasters meeting at Anglia Communicators with no idea of what to expect. It was cold outside, but the welcome was very warm indeed! As I introduced myself, my throat was dry, my voice tremored slightly and my mind went completely blank.

In six months, my development was phenomenal; I learned how to construct a speech and present it with the audience in mind. I developed techniques on reducing fear and managing stress and nervousness. I also became aware

of the importance of eye contact and not using filler words. From prepared speeches to Table Topics, I went from strength to strength.

How did it go? Well, I knocked it out of the park! A fabulous day, a wonderful speech and an awesome experience, the men laughed and the women cried. Without the regular practice in front of a supportive audience, I would never have done as well as I did. I delivered for myself, I delivered for my wife and most importantly—I delivered for my daughter.

As I finished the final toast (in perfectly practiced Italian!), my daughter, with a tear in her eye, stood and kissed me—she couldn't find the words! I enjoyed a standing ovation, but that's not why I did it. I did it because I wanted to do a great job and enjoy it and, thanks to Toastmasters, I did!



Michael Hurford



Patrice Francois

Patrice Francois, CC, CL

Emerging Speakers of Elmont • Elmont, New York



More Than I Bargained For

I joined Emerging Speakers of Elmont in New York in April 2013 as a way to speak about my past struggles as an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago. Life has been difficult with many hurdles, and I thought this would be a place where people would listen and not judge.

I got more than I bargained for—I met wonderful people, made lifelong friends and even found my soulmate! On November 12, 2016, I was super excited to be crowned the winner of the Humorous Speech Contest in District 46, which serves New York, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties. Not only did I win the contest, but I was able to take that 5- to 7-minute humorous speech and submit it to an organization called UnitedSolo, which is the world's largest solo theater festival. I then wrote a 45-minute, one-woman play called *Frustrated*. I performed off-Broadway at Theater Row, where I had two sold-out shows.

Without Toastmasters, these milestones would have never been realized. Toastmasters prepared me to present in front of a crowd, helped me learn how to use the stage, taught me confidence and to give it my all. I'm now enjoying serving as president of my club. This is only the beginning.



Audrey Ha

Audrey Ha
Atherton, California



A Young Leader Emerges

At a time when screens spew an overwhelming flow of information at students, I am profoundly interested in re-energizing the art of persuasive speaking and human interaction. I am an 8th-grade student at Menlo Middle School in Atherton, California, and believe that Toastmasters can be a vehicle for change in my generation. A Toastmasters Youth Leadership program held at my school had a consequential influence on me.

In 2017, I formed a campus club to help students develop public speaking skills. I reached out to Toastmasters for help, and I am grateful to Mr. Philip Cosby for spearheading the Youth Leadership program (YLP) at Menlo. Mr. Cosby, a long-time member of SRI Organon, a local Toastmasters club, enabled me to co-plan and co-run the program's eight sessions, which evolved into our school's speakers' society. He and other members of his club not only mentored and engaged me in the process of leadership and persuasive speaking, but helped catalyze a group of students eager to learn how to present a talk, give and receive generous feedback, and develop confidence in their interactions. Today, our students can comfortably present on any number of valuable issues. Additionally, by being club officers,

students broadened their leadership skills.

I now run a flourishing public-speaking club composed of students across grade levels. It is through the generosity of, and our experience with, the YLP that I cultivated the skills necessary to move the club forward. I invite all students interested in developing their persuasive communication skills to benefit from the Toastmasters Youth Leadership program.

Rachel Kraemer, ACB, CL

Toast O' The Town Toastmasters • Saint Paul, Minnesota



Rachel Kraemer

The Road to Recovery

In 2001, when doctors found a tumor in my brain, I had just completed college and was in my early 20s. Surgery followed, and recovery seemed easy, but my ability to communicate was impacted. Despite some limitations with speech, I was healthy. I had the support of my friends and family and I maintained a full-time job. A few years later I became a mother of two healthy kids. I also completed my doctorate in organizational development while moving forward in the workplace.

In 2013, I joined Toastmasters to improve my public speaking and develop confidence after getting feedback on speeches that were full of "ums" and "ahs." Four months after joining, the tumor regrew. This time, after a second surgery, recovery was more difficult. Speaking clearly was hard. Reading, even to my young children, was difficult. I felt like I needed to relearn the areas that I learned in elementary school: basic reading, spelling and pronunciation.

Even though recovery was not easy, I was determined to rebuild my health, and my skills. I participated more in my Toastmasters club, and the interaction I had there was an essential part of my recovery—I got better at speaking and reading, while increasing my vocabulary.

Toastmasters continues to be a part of my growth. My speeches have become more creative and clear. Now, filler words are few. I enjoy public speaking. Many tell me that my ability to speak, understand and pronounce words is better than it was before my most recent surgery.

I consider myself lucky. I work, I'm a good mom, and I enjoy spending time with family and friends. As I enjoy happiness and better health, I also continue to improve my confidence and communication skills at Toastmasters, one speech at a time. **T**

Do you have a Toastmasters success story you'd like to share about yourself or another member? Write it in 300 words or less and send with a high-resolution photo to submissions@toastmasters.org.

Lessons Learned from Speech Failure

I didn't prepare well or focus properly, but the experience made me better.

BY MICHELLE ORSI, ACG

It was a flop! My speech during our recent club contest was a disaster.

First off, I had to compete against Gary. Just his name is intimidating. Everyone in my club has heard him speak; he captivates our attention and enjoys what he's doing, and it shows. Not that Gary did anything to psych me out on the day of the contest. No need to, I was already nervous for weeks. But that day, Gary put his hand to his throat and croaked, "Boy, I hope I can make it through my speech. I've had this cough." *Please!* I thought. *How lucky if that's all that's bothering you. I'll take the cough; you can have my nerves.* My mentor, knowing me well, told me to get my stomach butterflies into formation and breathe.

Gary spoke first in the contest. He hooked the audience—especially me. But when it was my turn to speak, I lost my listeners. Truthfully, however, my flop began long before I delivered my speech. I usually give this advice to new Toastmasters for their speech preparation: Organize your speech by using the five-minute guide. Allot one minute for the introduction, three minutes for the body with two or three subtopics, and one minute for the conclusion. I also tell members to memorize their opening and closing statements.

This time, I went against my own advice. I did not memorize my opening. In fact, I was still changing it on the morning of the contest. Then, when it was my turn to speak, I derailed myself within the first minute. I heard my voice say the same word twice in the same sentence. In my thoughts, I attempted to repeat what I'd just heard while battling my mouth as I continued to speak. My son was in the audience, and it didn't help to see him

drop his head, confirming: *Yes, I did just say something strange.*

Making matters worse, my story was too broad, my subtopics were separate ideas, and my transitions did not bridge my points. Basically, I had no speech flow. A successful speech has good subtopics; mine had none.

And, while I was still speaking, my eyes wandered to the back wall. I realized I had never noticed that the wall in our meeting room was green. My internal dialogue began while my mouth kept on with my speech, *How do you know the wall is green, Michelle?* And I answered myself, *Because you do not have eye contact with your audience.*

“When it was my turn to speak, I derailed myself within the first minute.”

While speaking, you need to focus on what you are doing. Be aware of your gestures and how you use your floor space, and have meaningful eye contact with people in the audience.

What was the message of my speech anyway? I should have focused on that thought weeks before the contest and decided on what kind of speech I was going to deliver. I had signed up for the International Speech Contest. For this kind of speech, I needed to inspire my audience, challenge them to take action or move them with an emotion. Instead,



I simply retold the story of something that had happened to me in the past. But this wasn't a storytelling contest, and I did not stir my audience. Be sure you know the criteria for your speech, find your purpose and stay within the time limit.

Lastly, it does not hurt to send a rough draft of your speech to your mentor. It crossed my mind to do this, but I felt too embarrassed. Pride took over, even though I knew the best thing for me to do was to seek help from my mentor.

Lessons learned: Toastmasters is not the place to feel intimidated. This is *Where Leaders Are Made*. All club members work on improving their public speaking skills. If we happen to flop with a speech, it's best to do so in a safe and supportive environment—one that empowers us to develop our communication skills and grow our self-confidence.

Honestly, I needed this experience. I am a better Toastmaster for it, and now I can say, "Watch out, Gary!" **T**

Michelle Orsi, ACG, ALB, is a member of Gettysburg Addressers Toastmasters in Pennsylvania.

A Testament to Talismans

Good luck charms or special rituals give speakers a boost.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

Even with ample preparation and practice, there were times when Rani P. Mohapatra, CC, CL, from IBM Blue Voice club in Kolkata, India, faltered. She would begin speaking to an audience and change from a lioness to a deer in headlights. “I realized confidence is not always directly proportional to efforts,” she says.

Over time, she searched for a talisman—something to bring her good fortune when speaking. One morning, she found it.

She was feeling groggy and grumpy. While brushing her teeth, she stared at herself in the mirror. “My gaze went into my own eyes, deeper and deeper. I saw my reflection as another person who was scared inside. I stared harder and told myself to stop being afraid and affirmed that ‘I am there for you.’ It felt magical!”

Talismans as Rituals

Some might call it speech preparation but Mohapatra calls her deep gaze routine her talisman—a ritual to empowerment. When she can’t perform it, she feels nervous and reverts to bad habits, such as speaking too fast and repeating herself.

Mohapatra is not alone. For Zoya Mabuto, CC, of The Social Network Toastmasters club in Johannesburg, South Africa, the ritual starts with breathing exercises to calm nerves and achieve harmony. Inspired by other successful speakers, she then performs power poses to build energy. Lastly, particularly for major events—she has won Toastmasters speech contests and given a TEDx Talk—she mentally puts on her “long, bushy fox tail,” which helps with posture and presence. Then her ritual is complete.

The tail visualization came from a speaking circle warm-up exercise. Everyone was asked to imagine they had a tail. At first, Mabuto thought it was crazy. But she tried it, picking a fox tail “because it’s regal” and fits her physicality. Now she recom-

mends it to her own public speaking clients. Many are skeptical but she sees it transform people. “I see a spring in their step and an added level of confidence,” she says.

Talismans as Objects

Talismans can be activities but are more often associated with items believed to protect against evil forces. They can also be good luck charms. The idea of talismans is more than 5,000 years old. There are many examples, with rich and varied histories found throughout cultures worldwide. One is the Evil Eye amulet, an ornament or small piece of jewelry.

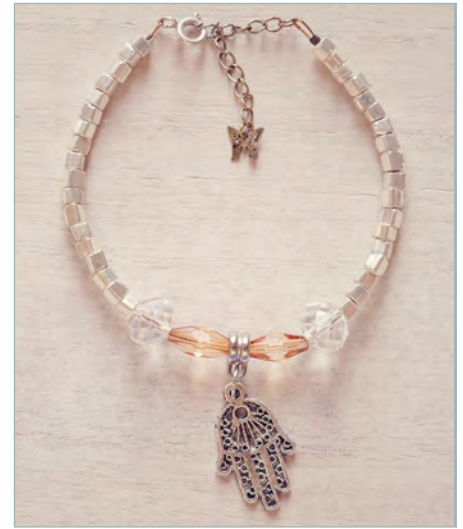


It's believed the Evil Eye amulet will protect you from others' harmful thoughts or wishes.

Known as *Nazar* in Turkey or *Mati* in Greek, the Evil Eye definition and history can vary depending on the culture, but at its core it is about looks or glances that bring harmful thoughts or wishes. The Evil Eye amulet is said to protect against these bad thoughts and is prominent throughout the Mediterranean, Middle East and increasingly the rest of the world.

The Hamsa Hand, also known as the Hand of Fatima, is another symbol used to ward off the Evil Eye and bring happiness. A small sampling of other talismans includes Native American dreamcatchers, Chinese lucky character symbols, four-leaf clovers, horseshoes and images of elephants.

Some people have their own unique items. Stacey Shipman, DTM, from



The Hamsa Hand is a talisman said to bring happiness and good fortune.

Hanover Toastmasters in Massachusetts, created a logo when she owned a yoga and fitness business. The logo's meaning has evolved over the years. A heart surrounded by three open circles now signifies growth in confidence, connection and communication. “It represents courage—to be seen, be heard and be bold,” she says.

Shipman has logo-adorned jewelry and T-shirts and sells them at her events. She will wear her jewelry, particularly for high-stakes events, and rub the logo for assurance. It reminds her to be brave and helps her focus. As a communications coach, she suggests others develop similar anchoring tools and skills.

Aaron Leung belongs to three clubs in Hong Kong. Like Shipman, he uses talismans to serve as reminders: photos on his phone, a ring, and a fish symbol on his key chain. Together the items represent happiness, confidence, courage and reflections of his Toastmasters journey. Without the items he would feel lost, he says.

People around the world have relied on talismans for thousands of years—and counting. While nothing replaces preparation and practice for effective public speaking, talismans might help when you need something more. **T**

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is a member of the Conestoga Toastmasters club in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and is a regular contributor to the Toastmaster magazine.



Read All About It

A good headline makes you want to read on.
Alas, so many accomplish the exact opposite.

BY JOHN CADLEY

I have a tacit agreement with the people who write news stories: If you can intrigue me with a really good headline, I'll read your piece. It's surprising how seldom this happens. The *Huffington Post* apparently thought they could grab my attention with **18 Things You Didn't Know You Could Do with Aluminum Foil**. Seriously? First of all, I'm *glad* I don't know 18 things you can do with aluminum foil. It means I have a life. Second, there *aren't* 18 things you can do with aluminum foil. There are two. The first is to seal leftovers into the Tupperware container when you lose the lid, and the second is to make a little pointy hat so you can receive messages from outer space.

Then there's this from the *New York Daily News*: **5 Safety Tips to Avoid Becoming a Summer Vacation Casualty**. Sorry, folks, but when you pair "casualty" with "summer vacation," I'm out. I don't read stories when the headline makes me flinch.

And this from the *New York Post*: **Chaos in the Hamptons Over Everything-for-\$5 Sale**. The Hamptons comprise an enclave on Long Island, New York, inhabited by some of the wealthiest people on the planet, and they want to tell me about millionaires fighting over \$5 sale items? Granted, in the Hamptons a \$5 sale item could be a diamond-encrusted Versace handbag, but still—as much as I don't like headlines that make me flinch, I definitely don't like ones that make me sick.

Even the illustrious *New York Times* is prone to disappoint. In August of last year, the editors devoted two whole pages to a story entitled **The Secret Life of the City Banana**. They want me to read about what happens to a banana—a banana!—from the day it arrives at the New York docks in the dirty hold of a cargo ship to the moment it goes into my mouth. Boy, if there was ever something I do *not* want to know. On the other hand, if the article had been entitled **Why Bananas Have Those Little Stringy Things You Have to Peel Away Before You Eat Them**, I would have been all in.

“As much as I don't like headlines that make me flinch, I definitely don't like ones that make me sick.”

The August *Times* missed again with this one: **We Need to Talk Some More About Your Dirty Sponges**. No, we don't. I experience deep, crippling shame about my dirty sponges and I would prefer not to talk about them—especially in a mass circulation newspaper, thank you very much.

Perhaps the *Detroit Free Press* will offer something more tempting. Ah, here's something: **Yoga Twerks to Hip Hop's Gritty Trap Sound**. I have a rule: If I don't have the slightest clue what a headline means, I'll read the article to find out what

I'm missing. I have another rule: Never read anything that promises to contain no useful information whatsoever. Which rule to follow? In the end, I passed on the article because (a) I don't practice yoga, (b) I don't understand hip hop, and (c) I don't listen to music described by an adjective that reminds me of sandpaper.

So what headline *did* get me? It was in the *New York Post*'s **Marriage Proposal on Top of Cliff Goes Horribly Wrong**. Yes, I have a weakness for bad things that happen to other people. So do you. Admit it.

It happened in Cornwall, England. A man planned to propose to his fiancée during a romantic hike along the cliff tops, but instead slipped and broke his ankle. I felt terrible. Not for the couple. For myself. Here I was looking forward to something horrible and all I get is a lousy broken ankle. What *did* I want—a fatal plunge from 400 feet dashing the hopes and dreams of a loving young couple? Well ... yeah, sort of. So now I feel cheated ... and guilty for feeling cheated. And when a headline can make you feel cheated and guilty—not to mention frustrated that you didn't even get the perverse pleasure of thinking *Thank God that wasn't me!*—that's the worst headline of all. **T**

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

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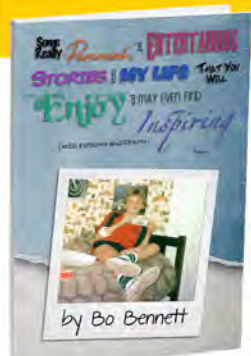
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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM



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

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at 

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