

TOASTMASTER®



ENTERTAINING TRAVELERS

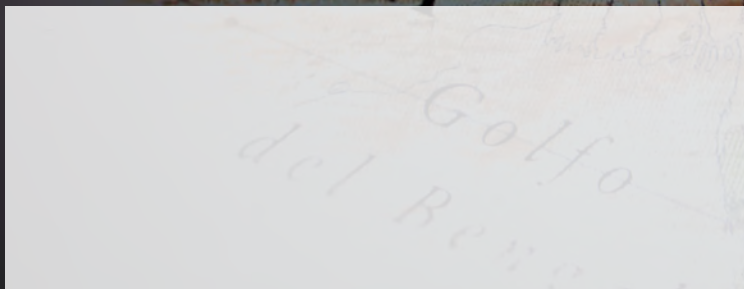
AROUND THE WORLD

Tour guides show clients the value of adventure

Life of the Party

How to be funny on the spot

Master the Toast



Take Ownership of Your Club



Who “owns” your club? Perhaps some active charter members—or a handful of longtime members—are dedicated to ensuring the club’s success, week after week and year after year. Think of the members who can be counted on to show up during easy times and hard times. In many clubs, it may seem as though just a few members keep the club humming.

Despite the visibility of such highly active members, it is crucial to remember: Clubs are owned by each and every member. Club excellence is attained when all members take initiative and feel pride in the success and growth of their club.

The Today Toastmasters in Austin, Texas, one of three clubs I belong to, was chartered in 1989. Its last charter member was my husband, Roger, who died in 2014. The club has a number of longtime members, and they are outstanding coaches. But these veteran members do not “own” the club; *all* members of the Today Toastmasters do. Despite some difficult times, the club has survived and continues to thrive, thanks to this shared ownership.

“Clubs are owned by each and every member.”

A dear Toastmaster friend recently told me about a longtime member who felt obliged to take ownership of his club after the club lost its meeting space. He quickly found a new meeting place and began arriving an hour early every week to prepare the room. He sent out meeting notices, printed agendas and created guest and new-member packets. He perpetually served as sergeant at arms because he maintained the club’s supplies, and as treasurer because he managed the bank account. He was even willing to serve as president each term. The other club officers seemed content with this arrangement.

And then it happened. This dedicated member, “Mr. President,” missed a Tuesday morning meeting. He had suffered an injury and was unable to attend meetings for six months. The other club members were suddenly tasked with all the operational and organizational responsibilities he had handled. So they dove in and made a plan: They sought guidance from the district and requested a club coach. Members stepped up to leadership positions. And club officers attended training to learn how to best execute their roles.

That year, the club achieved Distinguished Club recognition for the first time ever. All the members had taken ownership. Their beloved, tenured member returned to find a club operating just as successfully as it did when he left. He became a valued past leader and continues to support the club to this day.

So who “owns” your club? The answer must be: everyone. All members should provide a quality environment that supports growth, longevity and success.

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Toastmasters International Mission:

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE
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Clubs celebrate achievements and milestones.



CPH City Toastmasters in Copenhagen, Denmark, celebrate the club's 100th meeting with cake and balloons.



Members of three clubs in Delaware—Caesar Rodney Toastmasters, the Greater Newark Area club and the Polished Professional Advanced Toastmasters—celebrate achieving President's Distinguished Club status with a picnic.



Horana Toastmasters of Horana, Sri Lanka, gathered to celebrate the club's third installation ceremony.



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) and size of at least 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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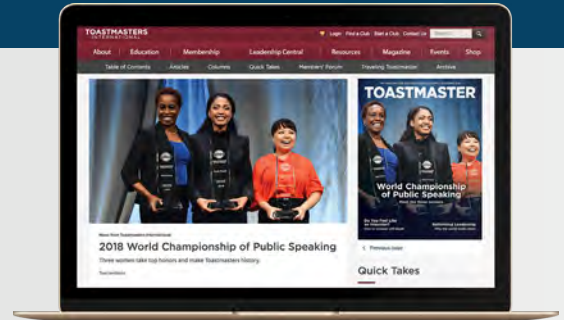
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See more photos, videos and links online at www.toastmasters.org/Magazine

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- **Coca-Cola Attorney Elizabeth Jin Creates ‘Bursts of Happiness’ in Video Blog**—Watch a video of Elizabeth Jin as she reveals her top five reasons to join Toastmasters. ▶
- **Entertaining Travelers Around the World**—View additional photos of tourism in Nepal in an online gallery. 📷
- **Writing for the Spoken Word**—Listen to an exclusive recording by Bill Brown with extra tips on improving the cadence of your speech. 🎧



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▶ MEMBER MOMENT



Coca-Cola Attorney Elizabeth Jin Creates ‘Bursts of Happiness’ in Video Blog

After graduating from law school, Elizabeth Jin worked as a transactional associate in New York and a corporate attorney in London. While she learned the critical skills required of an attorney, the jobs left her feeling run-down by a grueling lifestyle. In 2012, she was ready for a change and applied to the company she’d interned with during college. Jin was thrilled when she landed the position of in-house counsel at Coca-Cola’s headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. Even though she enjoyed her new role, she felt isolated in the massive company. Eventually Jin, ACG, ALB, joined a corporate club, 310 North Toastmasters, to befriend colleagues in different departments.

As she gained confidence through Toastmasters, Jin yearned to express herself creatively. “I think of myself as much more than a lawyer, and I felt compelled to find a creative outlet to tell my stories and to put ‘bursts of happiness’ out into the world,” she says.

She started a video blog and now finds purpose sharing self-improvement tips at www.unburythatbadass.com. Through her “weekly pep talks,” Jin wants to uplift and inspire others with short videos like “Embrace Being a Beginner,” and “Bad Day? How to Feel Better ASAP,” and her most popular video to date “5 Reasons to Join Toastmasters.” She makes time to pursue her passion while balancing her current role negotiating and managing Coca-Cola’s talent endorsements and sponsorships.

How has Toastmasters encouraged you in your daily life?

Toastmasters is not a spectator sport—you alone are responsible for investing in yourself. One speech I gave was titled “No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.” There is simply no substitute for consistent hustle. Slowly but surely, your life will change for the better when you put in the work and give yourself a chance to grow. I now take this attitude with my blog, and I made a commitment to upload a new video every Friday.

Tell us about your website.

I had been creating two-minute films just for fun with my friend who is a videographer. Eventually my short films turned into weekly vlogs [video blogs], and I created a website and YouTube channel. These videos are a sort of live catharsis where I open up about my hopes and struggles and offer encouragement to people who might be facing similar situations. Like me, my blog is a



Elizabeth Jin in her filming studio

work in progress and a testament to the fact that we can all dig ourselves out of whatever rut we are in.

How did you learn to create videos?

Before starting my website, I had never even picked up a camera. I now create, film and edit my own content. I’ve found that if you wait until you have the perfect content or you’re an expert at something, you’ll never start. I bought an affordable camera, a tripod and some lights and just went for it. Once I got the hang of it, I signed up for a class at a local college to learn advanced video editing. Almost 80 videos later and I’m still learning!

What gave you the courage to bare yourself through your vlog?

Toastmasters helped me own my voice and believe that I have something worth sharing. Embrace your stories and your struggle because that’s what makes you *you*. No one else has gone through exactly what you’ve been through. You can’t please everyone, but if you are honest and authentic, your story will resonate with the people it needs to reach.

What do you wish you’d known about leadership when you began your career?

I wish I had known that vulnerability can be a strength and a powerful tool to inspire others. While at Coca-Cola, I’ve applied for roles that I did not get, and I was laid off (before being re-hired). It was painful to endure these public disappointments, but I realized that I had a choice in how I reacted. I decided to create videos on how to be grateful for “failure.” I know now that sharing your story—particularly your stories about struggling—is a gift that someone else could really use.

Tess Iandiorio is senior editor of the *Toastmaster magazine*.



ONLINE EXTRAS: Watch a video of Elizabeth Jin as she reveals her top five reasons to join Toastmasters.



For the fifth year in a row, Toastmasters from different clubs in Nevada and Southern California gather in the desert for Burning Man, an annual popular event that brings a community of people together for art, culture, music and creativity in Black Rock City, Nevada.

▶ **MOMENTS OF TRUTH**

The Truth About Time

The moment of truth has arrived. Your club meeting is scheduled to start. The question is: Will it start on time?

This is no small matter. Starting—and ending—club meetings on time shows respect for all attendees. Everyone has busy lives, and when a club meeting is scheduled from noon to 1 p.m., for example, people want to know they can plan accordingly.

Respecting people's time is a key part of program planning and meeting organization, which is regarded as one of Toastmasters' six "moments of truth." These are crucial opportunities for clubs to make a positive impression on members and guests. The six areas are:

- ▶ First impressions
- ▶ Membership orientation

- ▶ Fellowship, variety and communication
- ▶ Program planning and meeting organization
- ▶ Membership strength
- ▶ Achievement recognition

Moments of Truth, part of Toastmasters' Successful Club Series, offers strategies for being successful in these six areas. It's a tool to help clubs establish standards for excellence and provide a quality experience for members and guests.

When club meetings are carefully planned and organized, everyone learns more and feels better about the time they spend there. Some tips:

- ▶ Make sure members know what the meeting agenda is in advance.

- ▶ Be sure all meeting roles are filled and that those filling them know their responsibilities.
- ▶ Plan creative Table Topics sessions and fun themes.

And start and end club meetings on time. All attendees will be grateful.

Moments of Truth and accompanying resources can be downloaded at www.toastmasters.org/Resources/Moments-of-Truth.



QUICK TAKES

▶ MEET MY MENTOR



Bjørn W. Simonsen

Looking for a book one day, Alexander Kuch, CC, ended up finding a mentor in Bjørn W. Simonsen, DTM, a retired teacher working at the New Zealand bookstore. An avid reader, Alexander frequented the bookstore, and the pair often enjoyed conversations about literature and world affairs.

In 1997, Alexander was adopted from Romania by a couple who took him to Germany and later moved to Auckland, New Zealand. Motivated by his challenging childhood, Alexander felt compelled to advocate for fellow orphans around the world and in his home country of Romania. Due to suffering neglect at a young age, Alexander's verbal and social skills were lacking; it took him years of speech and occupational therapy to reach the level of his peers. Bjørn was impressed by Alexander's persistence and passion and invited him to attend a Hibiscus Coast Toastmasters meeting in Whangaparaoa Peninsula, New Zealand.

With Bjørn's encouragement, Alexander pursued his passion for speaking on international adoption issues and has since become a global voice for children's rights.

How has Bjørn helped you?

When I joined three years ago, I struggled with speaking too fast and making eye contact. I felt it took me too long to improve, and, despite this, Bjørn remained patient and always encouraged me. My speaking improved dramatically as a result.

How has this helped you become an advocate?

I spoke in front of the Romanian Parliament where I shared details on my difficult childhood as an orphan. More recently, Bjørn helped me prepare a written and spoken application to Global Changemakers Forum, and I was accepted.



Bjørn W. Simonsen, left, and Alexander Kuch

After leaving his home country of Denmark, Bjørn taught around the globe. What is something interesting he's shared with you?

He taught English and biology in Africa, China and Australia. He always had a talent for inspiring students to learn. He found out later that, due to his global travels, the Danish government was following him because they thought he was an international spy!

What do you like best about Bjørn?

I really appreciate his sincerity, but also his interest and talent in pushing me to achieve my full potential. I wouldn't have been able to accomplish all this without his help. I've not only become an excellent communicator, but I made a wonderful friend.

Ian Gassman is a former editorial assistant for the *Toastmaster magazine*.

Looking for a mentor in your club? Ask your vice president education who is available to mentor you. To start a mentoring program in your club, order the Club Mentor Program Kit (Item 1163) at www.toastmasters.org/Shop.

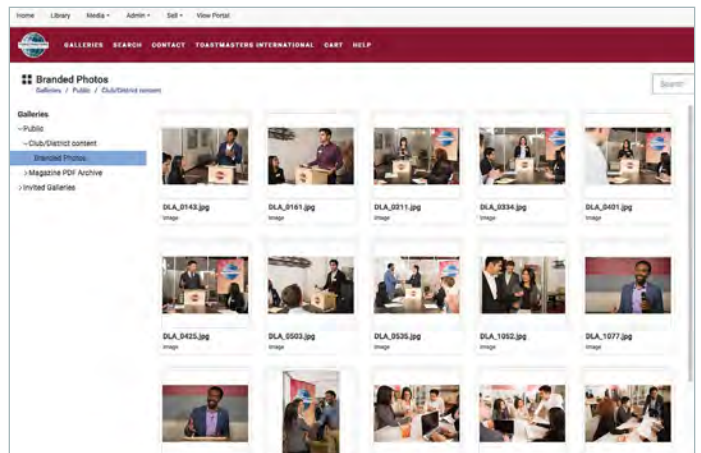
WANT TO NOMINATE AN EXCEPTIONAL MENTOR?

Send a 200-word description and photo (1 MB or larger) of you and your mentor to MentorMoment@toastmasters.org.

▶ CLUB RESOURCES

Toastmasters Gallery: Images and Ideas for Your Club

You now have access to a wealth of free photos and videos, as well as a magazine archive through the Toastmasters Gallery. Download images from this year's convention, full PDF issues of the *Toastmaster* magazine from 1930 to 2011 and Toastmasters branded images at toastmasters.photoshelter.com/galleries. Simply click on the file you want and then hit the download button in the bottom right corner.



▶ HOW TO

Tips for Surviving Awkward Holiday Party Talk

Toastmasters recognizes that natural conversations don't come naturally to many of us and offers a safe place to practice the art of small talk. Whether you're sipping a drink at a friend's home, sharing a holiday dinner with family or attending the office party, Toastmasters experts offer these tips for a more successful experience.

1 Look for a friendly face. When arriving at the event or when you're feeling out of place, seek out the people you know and enjoy spending time with. Remember to navigate toward people who seem to be popular, because it's likely they're good communicators and will help you feel at ease.

2 Watch your body language. Be sure to face the individual who is



speaking, make eye contact and nod to let them know you're paying attention, listening and understanding. Refrain from texting or repeatedly checking your phone, as this is disrespectful.

3 Share your stories. When the timing is appropriate, share your humorous and happy holiday memories. People like to share their own holiday experiences, so this conversation should go over quite well during this time of year.

4 Set your expectations. It's difficult to have in-depth conversations

at holiday gatherings, so prepare for others to join in and even interrupt at times. Conversations will typically be brief so don't expect to resolve any pressing business or personal matters at the event.

5 Know when and how to exit. Before leaving the event, navigate your way around and try to say a brief hello to the people you haven't had the chance to converse with. Be sure to say thank you to the hosts of the party. They likely put in a great deal of effort in the hopes that you would enjoy yourself.

▶ ADVICE FROM MEMBERS

Books to Consider

If you are looking for a new book to make you a better speaker, your fellow Toastmasters have some recommendations. Here are four books, suggested by members on the Toastmasters International Facebook Members Group page, on topics such as mastering the art of conversation and getting your ideas to stick.

Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins: How to Use Your Own Stories to Communicate with Power and Impact

BY ANNETTE SIMMONS

Keynote speaker and international business consultant Annette Simmons spotlights the power of relatability through storytelling. She details how personal experiences, well-placed anecdotes and

even borrowed tales can build emotional connections with an audience.

Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die

BY CHIP AND DAN HEATH

Urban legends, business origin stories and quirky personal profiles comprise Chip and Dan Heath's entertaining exploration on sharing ideas. Using a clever acronym as a guide, the authors share insight into why some ideas are more memorable than others.

The Compelling Communicator: Mastering the Art and Science of Exceptional Presentation Design

BY TIM POLLARD

Dull PowerPoint slides and outdated videos won't hold up to the high standards

audiences have for modern presentations. Craft and deliver presentations the mind can easily register and retain with help from master presenter Tim Pollard.

Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and Life One Conversation at a Time

BY SUSAN SCOTT

In seven simple steps, consultant Susan Scott shows that any conversation, even the polarizing ones on politics or social issues, can blossom into intimate and enlightening discussions.

What book has helped you in your Toastmasters journey? Let us know at letters@toastmasters.org






1 | ALBA LUCIA HINCAPIE, CC, ALB, of Barcelona, Spain, visits the ruins of Machu Picchu, the 15th-century Inca citadel located 2,430-meters/7,790-feet above sea level in Cusco, Perú.

2 | SATISH KUMAR, DTM, of Safat, Kuwait, at the third-place match between England and Belgium during the 2018 FIFA World Cup at Krestovsky Stadium, St. Petersburg, Russia.

3 | SUNNY FRIDGE, ACB, ALB, of Jackson, Mississippi, enjoys a display by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

4 | SAMER KAMAL, DTM, of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, brings the online Toastmaster magazine to the Washington Memorial in Washington, D.C.



 **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!

Seeing Failure Differently

How I overcame my fear of giving a ‘bad’ speech.

BY HARRIET CUMMINGS

My name is Harriet Cummings, and I am a failure.

I’ve failed at many things in life so far—from my disastrous 7th grade piano exam to struggling to learn French despite my determination, to baking a cheese soufflé that never ... soufflé. But why am I telling you this? Because we live in a society that laments failure when, in fact, failure can be really productive. Arguably, if you’re never failing in life, then you’re not taking enough risks. You’re stagnant. And if you’re not taking risks, how will you ever know what you’re truly capable of?

Of course, I can see why we fear failure. None of us likes to talk about the things we’ve done badly. You don’t see politicians address the nation with a list of the endless bumbles they’ve made. The budgets blown, the lies told ... Likewise, you don’t see actors at the Academy Awards strut up to the stage to announce, “Sure, this film was fabulous, but my last three movies weren’t so popular.”

When it comes to public speaking at work, we are under a lot of pressure to perform well, especially when we want to impress our peers. And even in front of friends and family we’re eager to speak every word perfectly. Sometimes we’re even more anxious around people we’re close with because these people have long memories! Any mistake could be relived and retold for years to come.

For these reasons, I did my best to avoid public speaking most of my life. The fear that people would see me nervous, stumbling over my words, felt like too much to bear. When I did speak publicly, I spoke as quickly as I could, relaying the minimum information for fear I’d say something stupid. As a result, I never got any better. I never worked out my personal style or figured out basic things like hand gestures or eye contact. I thought I’d never conquer my fear.



Harriet Cummings

It was only when I joined Toastmasters that things began to change. I liked how, no matter what happened onstage, people would be encouraging and supportive. Here, I didn’t worry about criticism. It was a safe space to get to know my speaking voice.

“If you’re never failing in life, then you’re not taking enough risks.”

These days I’m part of Spa Speakers club in Leamington Spa, United Kingdom. I love how I get to regularly practice different styles and approaches, and I feel like I can take risks without worrying if things go wrong. I also enjoy seeing my fellow Spa Speakers do something outlandish, even if they don’t entirely pull it off. We all learn from each other’s bravery and willingness to take chances. If we can’t experiment at Toastmasters, where can we?

I encourage all speakers to embrace new possibilities and feel free to experiment. That’s the best way we can improve, knowing we’ll receive positive and constructive feedback to figure out what to do differently next time. Failure should never be a dirty word.

In case you’re not quite convinced of the merits of failure, here are some examples from the history of great failures.

1 Henry Ford went broke five times before he finally made it rich with his car assembly line.

2 Beethoven initially struggled with the violin. His teacher warned his parents he might not be cut out to become a composer.

3 J.K. Rowling, Stephen King and Walt Disney all experienced several rejections. In fact, Walt Disney was fired from his job at a newspaper for supposedly having no imagination.

As for my own more modest ambitions ...

I went on to master my 7th grade piano pieces. I tried that cheese soufflé recipe again and, lo and behold, it soufflé! Admittedly, however, my French speaking skills still leave much to be desired.

My point is: Let’s carry on trying without the paralyzing fear of failure. Let’s push ourselves to take risks, to understand that failure is an inevitable part of the process.

So why not print out our rejection slips? Tell a friend about something we got wrong? And, most of all, be proud that we tried. And that we’ll keep on trying. **T**

HARRIET CUMMINGS is a member of Spa Speakers club in Leamington Spa, United Kingdom. She is a freelance copywriter and author of the novel, *The Last of Us*.

DTM From Ghana Grooms Others for Greatness

Patricia Dzifa Mensah-Larkai inspires West African members to reach greater heights.

BY SHANNON DEWEY



Patricia Dzifa Mensah-Larkai

As a leader and mentor in her career, community and clubs, Patricia Dzifa Mensah-Larkai, DTM, says she does not ask people to do what she is not willing to do herself. Since joining Toastmasters in 2010, her leadership ethos has created a ripple effect across Ghana during her service as area director, program quality director and currently, division director.

A self-described “pursuer of excellence,” Mensah-Larkai developed her work ethic at an early age. Her father and mother served in the Ghana Army and Police Service, respectively, and their codes of conduct at work greatly influenced her upbringing. They wanted her to understand that achieving excellence required hard work and perseverance, and that helping others is the whole purpose of humanity—being one another’s keeper.

With these lessons instilled, Mensah-Larkai began her career in 2000 as a cabin crew member for Ghana Airways. She was also taking courses with the International Airline and Transportation Association (IATA), gaining valuable customer service knowledge, which later helped her get a job with CDH Financial Holdings Ltd., after the airline ceased operations in 2004. While working as a front desk executive at CDH, Mensah-Larkai was encouraged by a manager to pursue a double major at the University of Ghana, Legon, and soon after was given the opportunity to apply to the U.S. Embassy in Ghana.

“I believe it was by divine order. It was at the Embassy that I first heard about Toastmasters,” says Mensah-Larkai. “The management course I was taking helped to some extent, but I honed the skills to manage people at Toastmasters meetings.”

As she continued taking leaps in her professional career, Mensah-Larkai also had a yearning to guide and support others, and she did so after joining the Accra Toastmasters club eight years ago. Meetings, she says, offered opportunities to sharpen her leadership skills and communicate better while working at the U.S. Embassy.

What was your role at the U.S. Embassy in Ghana?

In 2009, I was employed as supervisor for the switchboard and telephone receptionists at the U.S. Embassy in Accra, Ghana. My team and I had to collaborate with several departments, which depended on having good interpersonal communication to influence others to deliver on key objectives.

“Successfully grooming others means encouraging them to rise beyond your own level of achievement.”

My team also faced ad hoc tasks with critical deadlines, such as providing services to high-level visitors, including former

United States President Barack Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. As part of the Embassy team on duty, we had the opportunity to listen to them live as they shared their vision for supporting the African developmental agenda and empowering us as a people to hold our own leaders accountable. Honing my leadership skills at Toastmasters meant connecting better each week with my team back at work and holding each other accountable.

You are now the founder and lead consultant at Perissos Horizon. What do you do there?

After getting my MBA, I took a leap of faith and started my company, Perissos Horizon (a human capital development and management consultancy) in January 2017, to train groups, individuals and entrepreneurs. On a day-to-day basis, I create and promote my training work, my public speaking engagements and other events online. My philosophy to people I coach and train is to keep discovering and honing their unique potential, build on their competencies by learning and living out their passion and, then, put those skills to good use to create a positive impact in society.

How has Toastmasters helped your professional life?

Applying book knowledge without a constant practical function, I realized, diminishes one’s ability to execute at varying levels, including managing different

Perissos Horizon Toastmasters club co-sponsor Patricia Dzifa Mensah-Larkai (center, holding gavel) is presented with charter certificates from her mentor and Past District 94 Director Ganiatou Sambaou.



personality types. So, when I moved from CDH to the U.S. Embassy, it was a whole new experience being directly in charge of a team of older colleagues and having to set the pace and lead schedules. I knew I had to get something more than just book knowledge. The practical experience from Toastmasters meetings helped me deal with different personality types and adopt different leadership styles based on each situation.

What are some cross-cultural experiences you’ve had at work or in your club?

I speak bilingually in my work environment and with Toastmasters who are from Francophone countries. I have passion for the French language, so when the opportunity arose to work as a team coordinator for BAT Ghana (British American Tobacco), I accepted. At BAT, I worked on procurement orders with and on behalf of colleagues in Mali, Niger, Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire.

Working for Charles Kingston, the New Zealand Special Representative for West Africa, also required me to correspond with Francophone counterparts. I translated documents from English to French or vice versa.

Tell us about the club you co-sponsored, Perissos Horizon Toastmasters.

Our club consists of both Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians, including Ivorian,

“I knew I had to get something more than just book knowledge”

Ukrainian and Gabonese members. Membership includes professionals, corporate executives and entrepreneurs who share a vision of creating an atmosphere of like-minded people who will sharpen each other, like iron sharpens iron.

What leadership roles have you held in Toastmasters?

I have served in several club officer roles. That propelled me to serve for two consecutive terms as area director for Ghana Toastmasters, when we only had Area 3. I learned a lot from my mentor, Ganiatou Sambaou, DTM. She is a member of Sika Toastmasters in Benin and is a past district director for District 94. She showed me what it takes to make an area successful, and with her help, I led my area to become President’s Distinguished during my second tenure as area director. I also served as the program quality director from 2017–2018, supporting the joint Division of Ghana and Togo, as both countries were being considered for alignment as full divisions. I was elected to lead this new division of Ghana Toastmasters, now Division G clubs, for the 2018–2019 year.

What is your most memorable mentor experience?

Mentorship is so dear to my heart, because, through mentoring, we help others gain confidence in themselves. They become better able to identify their purpose in life and driven to be the change they wish to see.

I recall when past Area Director Sumaya Abdul-Rahman, ACB, ALB, walked into my office at the U.S. Embassy. She was very concerned about her accent and her intense fear of public speaking. Through our mentoring sessions, she was motivated to simply believe in herself and go out every day to speak her truth to her audience. Now, I am in awe listening to her deliver speeches and by her progression in Toastmasters, as well as by her career at the Embassy. That is the joy of every mentor—to see your mentee discover and use more of their potential.

What is your advice for grooming others for greatness?

Successfully grooming others means encouraging them to rise beyond your own level of achievement. This may involve redirecting them to other mentors who have capabilities in areas you may lack. If the eagle is afraid to let go of its young, how would their young ever believe they can soar? **T**

Shannon Dewey is digital content editor for Toastmaster magazine.

Shake Up **Table Topics** With **Creative Ideas**

Keep guests and members engaged with a grab bag, story or tall tale.

BY ALLAN MISCH, DTM, AND ALLAN KAUFMAN, DTM

Mark Twain hit the proverbial nail on the head when he said, “It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.” Table Topics is Toastmasters’ way of teaching impromptu speaking skills and is the perfect way to inject serious fun (uh-oh, an oxymoron) into a club meeting. And as Dr. Seuss said, “Fun is good.”

While Table Topics can be daunting for new members and those with presentation anxiety,

injecting fun into it can help members get involved with an aspect of Toastmasters that they may (eventually) find enjoyable. Thérèse Kinahan, CC, ALB, of Athlone Club in Athlone, Ireland, believes that Table Topics attracts members to each meeting. “Our members really engage with this part of the meeting and don’t like it compromised,” she says, “When we went from three speeches per night to four, we had to start earlier; people did not want to lose Topics time!”

But calling on members to respond to a random list of topics can get stale. Instead, be creative and shake things up. Below are some ideas for conducting more entertaining Table Topics sessions.

Pull From the Past

Bring in a bag of items from the past, such as a rotary phone, protractor, abacus, slide projector or other items. Members pick an item from the bag and describe what it is and how it’s used, even if they have no idea. A speaker once brought in a slide rule and the member who pulled it out of the bag guessed it was used to measure one’s foot size. Everyone, including the Table Topics participant, had a big laugh. [A slide rule is a mechanical calculator, used primarily for multiplication and division.]

You can also blindfold participants and ask them to pick an object and describe it

by just feeling it. This can evoke waves of laughter depending on the items in the bag.

Story

Story topics include several approaches that exercise the creative part of the brain. All involve telling a story or part of a story about a person, place or item. Don Wadleigh, ACB, of Burlington Area Toastmasters in Burlington, Iowa, used a different approach to the story Table Topic. “I printed off about a dozen large photos of several different things: a baptismal gown, a stream in the woods, a windmill, a dog, etc. I put them face down on the table. Each person had to pick one and explain the story behind, or being told, in that photo.”

Heather Perkins of Schooner Toastmasters in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, describes another take on this type of Table Topic. “Give participants four random words and ask them to tell a story using those words. Give each participant a note with the words printed on it so the audience doesn’t know the words. When the participant is finished speaking, have the audience guess which words in the topic were the ones that had to be used.”

Follow-on

Follow-on involves piggybacking on other responses to the original Table Topic. Kinahan describes it this way: “A person is called by name to respond to a Table Topic and is allocated two minutes. About two or three others can request to ‘follow-on’ by raising their hand. The Table Topicsmaster will then recognize



them and allow them one minute to speak to the topic. When calling on members, in the first instance, the Table Topics-master calls on those with no roles first, then those with non-speaking roles, finally those with speaking roles.”

Speed


For everyone to participate in Table Topics, especially in a well-attended meeting, try Speed Table Topics. Create a numbered list of topics. Each member selects a number and responds to the corresponding topic. Each participant has no more than a minute to complete

his or her response. The timer signals green at 45 seconds. At one minute, the timer signals red. Stop the participant if they have not finished responding at the red signal. Repeat this process until all members and guests have participated.

Sell Something

Sometimes it is beneficial for us to stretch our comfort zones and do something we might not ordinarily do, such as sell something. Here is how it works: Bring in a group of advertisements from magazines and/or newspapers. Participants select an ad for a product or service and “sell” it to

club members. This method also works with items picked from a bag.

Shake up Table Topics with creative and fun themes to motivate guests to join and to keep members entertained and retained. 

Allan Misch, DTM, and Allan Kaufman, DTM, are members of the *Randallstown Network Toastmasters club in Owings Mills, Maryland*. They are authors, trainers, speakers and presentation skills coaches. For valuable, free information on public speaking, visit www.nosweatspeaking.com.

9 FUN TABLE TOPICS IDEAS

1 Walking Dictionary

The Table Topicsmaster picks an obscure (but actual) word from the dictionary, and the respondent comes up with (or makes up) a convincing definition of that word and gives examples of its usage. For example: *quarto*, *indie*, *umami*, etc.

2 Life As an Object

Ask the respondents to describe their life as if they were an object in the meeting room. (e.g., a book, a table, a chair, a briefcase, a door, a pair of glasses, etc.)

3 Color Your World

On your next trip to a home improvement store, pick up a paint color chart. At the meeting, pick out unusual colors (e.g., “day-glo orange,” “pea green,” “flamingo pink.”). Then ask questions along these lines: tell us why you plan to paint your house this color; tell the person to your right why they should buy a car in this color.

4 Add-the-Caption

Interesting pictures are selected from magazines or newspapers without captions. The Table Topicsmaster selects one at random and asks the respondent to provide a caption and then discuss what is going on in the picture. (e.g., a man is sitting at a desk reading while another person is looking out the window, or two workers showing off a dirty sports jersey).



5 A Second Chance

Suppose you could go back in time and talk to yourself at age 10 (15, 20 or 30, etc.). What advice would you give yourself?

6 The Day I Met Elvis

Each respondent tells about a time (real or imagined, but preferably real) when they ran into a celebrity.

7 Home Is Where the Heart Is

Discuss an unusual or inconvenient place to live and defend why it is a nice place to live. Examples: next to a nuclear power plant; in a swamp; bottom of the Grand Canyon; top of the Matterhorn; beside a landfill.

8 Did You Know That I Once ... ?

Each respondent is required to tell an amazing story about themselves. The members then vote on whether each speaker was telling the truth or lying. The respondent who fooled the most people either way wins the ribbon for Best Table Topics.

9 It Was a Very Good Year

Bring a bag of coins (or collect them at the meeting). Each respondent pulls a coin from the bag and talks about the mint year stamped on the coin. It could be something in history or something that happened to the respondent during that year.

Steve Chen, DTM, PDG, PID, is a member of *Suffolk Toastmasters club in Setauket, New York*, and was a finalist in the 2013 District 46 Table Topics Contest.

MASTER THE Toast

Tips for crafting celebratory words for both casual and formal occasions.

BY SIMON BUCKNALL

Last summer, I was enjoying a drink with friends while on holiday in the beautiful county of Cornwall in southwest England. We had clear skies (unusual for an English summer), a stunning sunset and all the children were safely stowed upstairs.

It wasn't long before someone raised a glass. "Cheers!" Clink, clink, clink. We promptly tucked into our meal, and the moment passed.

Most people are on autopilot when in "informal toasting mode." Knowing the moment is ripe for a toast, they may say the right word or words, but without any forethought. In some cases, the clinking of glasses can feel almost transactional. There's nothing wrong with a one-word toast, but by adding just a few more carefully chosen words, you can make even everyday occasions a little more special. The question is: How best to do it?

My evening sundowner with friends in Cornwall was just one example of countless millions of spontaneous, informal toasts that take place around the world. To clarify: toasting can be done with any beverage, even water! It's not what's *in* the glass that matters; It's capturing a fleeting moment in time and celebrating it.

Occasion for such toasts include meet-ups with friends, having the in-laws over for dinner, a workplace team celebration or





SAYING “CHEERS!” AROUND THE WORLD

Ganbei

PRONOUNCED:

Gan-bay

Chinese (Mandarin)

Kanpai

PRONOUNCED:

Kan-pie

Japanese

Na zdrowie

PRONOUNCED:

Naz-droh-vee-ay

Polish

L’chaim

PRONOUNCED:

Le-ha-yim

Hebrew

Santé

PRONOUNCED:

Sahn-tay

French

Sláinte

PRONOUNCED:

Slawn-cha

Irish Gaelic

Salud

PRONOUNCED:

Sah-lud

Spanish

Skål

PRONOUNCED:

Skoal

Danish

10 REASONS TO RAISE A GLASS DURING ANY OCCASION

If you're considering offering a few off-the-cuff remarks, you have myriad reasons to do so—no matter the setting. Remember: A toast can be made with any beverage or glass shape of choice. It's the sentiment that counts! Here are 10 topics to toast as the inspiration strikes you:

1. The nature of your friendship
2. A recent shared achievement
3. The stage of life you're in
4. A value/belief you all share
5. The professional occupation of those present
6. A mutual ambition or desire
7. A shared memory/experience
8. A shared hobby or interest
9. A feature of your current location
10. Someone you all know and admire

simply enjoying a restorative beverage at the end of the day with one's husband, wife or significant other.

These everyday occasions may not be as prominent as a wedding-day spectacular, but they matter, nonetheless. "Informal toasts enhance the connection between the people present," says Yo Tang, an international brand manager for a global beverages firm dealing in high-end spirits. Tang lives in London, but his work requires that he have a thorough understanding of toasting customs around the world. He says that wherever informal toasting is done, "it's about celebrating good moments together."

"Whether informal, formal or ceremonial, a toast represents a lighthearted and enjoyable way to celebrate our connection with others."

What if we were to make these everyday occasions better through the power of language? Certainly, as Toastmasters, we have the training to make more of these precious moments of connection. These six tips can help.

Writing an Informal Toast:

■ **Seize the right moment.** An informal toast is most likely to resonate when the energy in the room is running high. This may well be early on, as soon as everyone has arrived and has been poured a drink. Equally, it might be toward the end, especially if there's food involved. Be sensitive to the host if there is one; they may prefer to take the lead. Of course, toasting the generosity of your host or hostess is sure to connect with all who are present.

■ **Have a single clear theme to your toast.** Clarity is key. Just as you might do with a Table Topic, identify your theme and then commit to it.

■ **Look for common ground.** You don't have to come up with something mind-blowingly original or sensational. A simple, clean acknowledgement of what people have in common will work well. "Tap into the emotion felt by the people present," says Tang.

■ **Mean what you say.** The sincerity of your words counts for more than grammatical perfection. Many would say you should always have your toast written down. But this can be awkward or impossible if you're speaking impromptu. It is far more important that the intentions behind your words are felt by those present. Syntactic slip-ups in such circumstances are easily forgiven. Just speak from the heart and be genuine.

■ **Keep it brief.** Enough said.

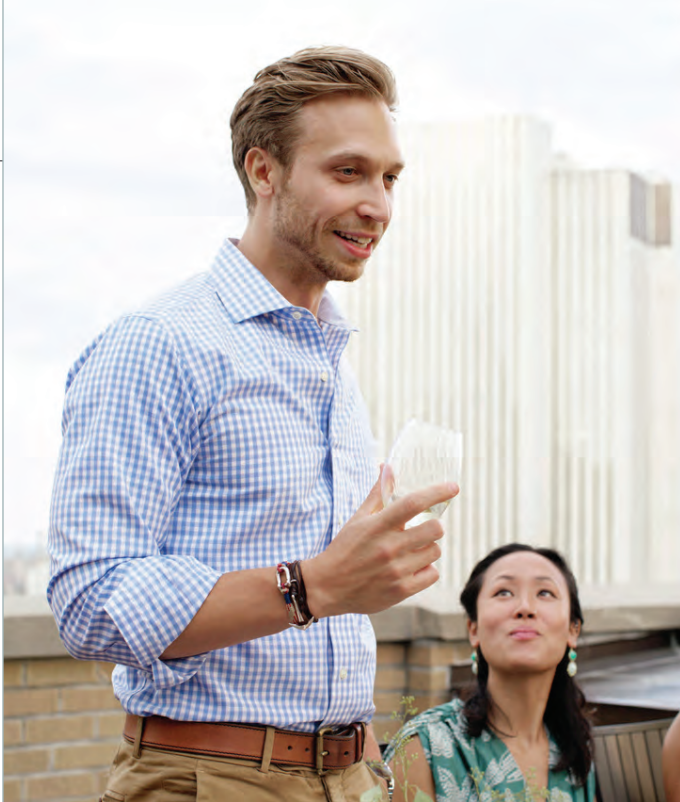
■ **Consider having a T.I.M.P. (Toast In My Pocket).** Great Table Topics speakers consciously build a library of material they can dip into when called on to speak. What if you were to apply the same approach to your toasting?

Michael Vanderosen, CC, a former Toastmasters division governor who works as a professional master of ceremonies, says having material at the ready is wise. Vanderosen has hosted galas and events all over the world, including military, state and royal ceremonies. "It's worth having a 'menu' of common experiences or characteristics you can apply as appropriate to the occasion—profession, current location, age or interests," he says.

Going Formal

Many occasions, of course, call for a formal toast: a wedding, a significant birthday or an official dinner, to name a few. "The very first thing I think of when I think of a toast is that the best man's toast at a wedding is usually either a highly anticipated or highly dreaded moment," says Katina Boetger-Hunter, ACS, ALB, member of the Beaver Club in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, U.S. As a two-time finalist in the Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking, Boetger-Hunter knows that a good formal toast can set the tone of an event—for better or worse.





“It’s vital that you research the occasion, the host family, the person to be toasted and any other guests or celebrities attending.”

—MICHAEL VANDERSEN, CC,
PROFESSIONAL EMCEE

Typically, toasts for such occasions are prepared in advance, scripted and take the form of a short speech, either early on or toward the end of proceedings. Formal toasts can be directed to someone who is present in the room or to a public figure who may not be present. There can also be a fair amount of etiquette to navigate. “It’s vital that you research the occasion, the host family, the person to be toasted and any other guests or celebrities attending. Plus, you must get people’s names and titles right!” says Vanderosen.

Here are three ways to craft formal toasts:

- **Prepare.** Too many speakers “wing it” with their formal toasts, but this is risky. As Vanderosen advises, take your preparation seriously—details matter! Under these circumstances, writing your toast down in advance is a good idea.
- **Allow time for your audience to respond.** So often, the vital words of a toast are drowned out by the sound of chairs being pushed back. Other times, audience members are distracted by the need to top up their glasses. Be crystal clear in your instructions and give the audience ample opportunity to get ready. Signal the need for people to fill their glasses early so it’s not all done at the last minute.
- **Be easy to echo.** What are the *precise words* you want your audience to say during your toast? Think of the words as a brief quote: “Mr. and Mrs. Xi,” “The Queen!” or “To friendship!”

Whatever the words or phrase may be, belt them out loudly and clearly so the audience has no doubt as to what they should say.

Whether informal, formal or ceremonial, a toast represents a lighthearted and enjoyable way to celebrate our connection with others. Spoken language, as it is in so much of life, is the key. So the next time you raise a glass, seize the moment and say a few words. After all, we’re Toastmasters! **T**

Simon Bucknall, ACB, CL, is a speaking coach and facilitator based in London, United Kingdom. The author of *The Best Man Speaker* and *The Groom Speaker*, he is a member of Excalibur Speakers and placed second in the 2017 World Championship of Public Speaking. For more information, visit www.simonbucknall.com.

A HISTORICAL ODYSSEY: TOASTING TRADITIONS OVER TIME

The trappings of formal toasting reflect the long history associated with raising your glass. One narrative suggests that clinking glasses, thereby spilling liquid from one person’s glass into another’s, was a way to allay any suspicions about poisoning. However, the lack of any credible supporting evidence means this can probably be dismissed as apocryphal. What we do know is that in *The Odyssey*, Homer references Ulysses as drinking to the health of Achilles. In ancient Rome, meanwhile, the Senate passed a decree requiring all citizens to toast to the health of Emperor Augustus at every meal.

As for the term “toast” itself, it dates to the 16th century when an actual slice of toast was placed in the wine before consumption. “You only drank wine or beer in those days,” says Michael Vanderosen, a professional toastmaster and master of ceremonies from the U.K. who now lives in Sweden. “You didn’t touch water for fear of typhoid. But the problem with the wine was that it tasted pretty grim! In the Middle Ages, wine contained all kinds of impurities, so a morsel of toast—usually sprinkled with spices and fruit—was added to each glass, soaking these up, making it more palatable to drink.”

Responsibility for this fell to the steward of the household, and by the early 1700s, the role of the so-called “toastmaster” had emerged. One perk for the toast steward: At the end of the feast, he got to sup the dregs of wine and eat the alcohol-infused toast morsels before stumbling off to bed.

Much has changed since then, but toastmasters—and Toastmasters—still have an important role to play in the world of celebrations and toasting.



How to Be the Funniest Person in the Room

Develop the mind of an improvisor.

BY NICK JACK PAPPAS

I'm not naturally the life of the party. Despite making a career writing comedy and telling jokes, I've spent a fair amount of my time standing against the wall, listening to the clinking ice cubes in my glass. For me, writing funny is easy—being funny on the spot is hard.

You might be surprised to learn that most stand-up comedians are introverts. The word “mingle” makes me cringe. The problem, though, is that, no matter what you do for a living, you're often faced with situations where mingling really matters. Careers take off at networking events. Your talent proves your worth, but people provide the opportunities.

Being funny can't be prepared in advance. Recited anecdotes and canned jokes always ring false. What you need is

spontaneity. What you need is the mind of an improvisor.

I took my first improv class at the Upright Citizens Brigade in New York City and it changed my life. Long-form improv consists of entire scenes that are made up on the spot. The longest, called “monoscenes,” can last an hour, which is a scary amount of time to be funny without a script. The experience teaches you how to listen mindfully, trust total strangers and find connections—all the tools you need to be the funniest person in the room in your real life.

Listen, Listen, Listen

Every party or work event has its cast of characters. The worst is the loudmouth who enjoys the sound of their own voice. They tell jokes as if they're throwing darts

at a dartboard. Every once in a while, they hit a bullseye, but most of the darts get stuck in the wall. Don't be the loudmouth. In improv, the goal is to build something funny from scratch with the person you're speaking with, and the only way to build is by listening. Longform improv is a lot like real life in that you don't know what the person in front of you is going to say until they say it.

Have you ever caught your mind wandering during a conversation waiting for your turn to speak? This is passive listening, and passivity and humor don't go well together. Listen actively. Challenge yourself to focus intently on what those around you are saying. Listening helps in so many ways. First, it shows that you care, which is the foundation of being funny.

Any comedian will tell you the first step to funny is getting the audience on your side. Conversations are the same. When you care about the person, you create a lighter atmosphere that lends itself to laughter.

“In improv, the goal is to build something funny with the person you’re speaking with from scratch, and the only way to build is by listening.”

Second, listening leads to thoughtful questions. Veteran improvisors know that the right question will help you move the scene along. When you’re at a social gathering, asking questions not only shows you’re paying attention, it changes boring discussions into conversations that are specific and personal. Specific, personal conversations are ripe for humor because they touch on commonality. When you learn more about what someone cares about, you create a bond. Personal connections are where inside jokes are born.

Yes, And ...

We’ve all trapped ourselves in conversations that sound kind of like this:

Them: It sure is hot outside today.

You: It sure is.

Them: Really hope tomorrow is cooler.

You: Me too.

(awkward silence)

Engaging conversation has two attributes. This conversation has the first attribute, agreeing, but it lacks the second attribute, expanding.

When you learn improv, the only way to create a satisfying, funny scene is to make active choices and move forward. You have to always ask yourself, “yes, and ...?” as in, “Yes, I agree with what you’re saying, *and* here’s a new way to think about it.”

Imagine how much more fun the conversation above would be if you decided

to make active choices by expanding on the initial thought. A boring conversation about the weather could become a chance to connect.

Them: It sure is hot outside today.

You: It sure is. Let’s hold the next party in Quebec.

Them: I’m on board. This party could use more poutine.

You: And what’s a party without a good hockey brawl?

In fact, there are myriad ways this conversation can move away from the weather simply by expanding. The more you know about the person, the more you can interject something specific and fun. Next time you meet someone new, try to avoid dry conversation by using your imagination. Learn about them by asking questions, then expand on their response and be creative. We all learned how to use our imaginations when we were kids, and somewhere inside every stiff businessperson is a kid who wants to come out.

Tricks of the Trade

Listening and formulating creative responses will help you be funny; but once you’ve laid that foundation, you can expand on it in lots of ways. Some of these structures work differently for different people. Experiment with what comes naturally to your sense of humor.

- ▶ **Irony** – When you agree by saying the opposite of what you mean. Instead of saying, “Yes, it’s hot,” you could say, “It’s not that hot. The weather is perfect if you’re an iguana.”
- ▶ **Hyperbole** – Exaggerate your opinion to an impossible level. In this case, you could say, “It’s so hot I don’t iron my shirts anymore. I just walk outside and let the humidity take care of it for me.”
- ▶ **The Callback** – This is the easiest trick in the book. Simply bring up a topic from earlier in the conversation that everyone joked about. Everyone loves a callback, and you already know it will work because it calls back to a laugh you shared before.

What to Avoid

There are other tried-and-true ways to be funny in stand-up and improv that are too risky in polite conversation. These are okay with friends and relatives you know well, but a major faux pas in mixed company.

- ▶ **Shock** – Shock comedians make people laugh by touching on subjects that are considered taboo or make them feel uncomfortable. You might get laughs, but more often, people will go out of their way to avoid you.
- ▶ **Madcap** – You might think acting goofy is enough to be funny, but it’s hard to do well without coming off like someone looking for attention. Canadian-American actor Jim Carrey is a great example of a comedian who does this well. The guy at the party with a lampshade on his head is an example of someone doing it poorly.
- ▶ **Wordplay** – Ninety-nine percent of bad humor is wordplay. This encompasses double meanings, homonyms and puns, the kind of humor that, at best, leads to polite laughter, and, at worst, leads to outright groans. Be safe and leave your “dad jokes” at home with the kids.

“Somewhere inside every stiff businessperson is a kid who wants to come out.”

Anyone can be the funniest person in the room with practice, but no matter what, it’s more important to be the nicest person in the room. The good news is that being nice lends itself to being funny. Nice people are good listeners. Nice people find ways to relate to those around them. So smile. Think of good jokes and laugh when someone tells a good joke. I’ve realized that the funniest people make others feel funny, too. If that doesn’t work, count the ice cubes in your glass. That can be fun, too.

See? Callbacks are easy. **T**

Nick Jack Pappas is a stand-up comedian and comedy writer in New York City. He’s one of the founders of **Comedywire.com**, a start-up that helps businesses, brands and individuals find the funny.

Entertaining Travelers

AROUND THE WORLD

Tour guides from Kathmandu to California show clients the value of adventure.

BY BARNABY DAVIES

Imagine you're a tour guide meeting tired-but-hopeful travelers at the airport. What do they want from you? A guide they can trust—one who will navigate them safely through unfamiliar territory and give them a fun, interesting experience along the way.

You've got that initial five to seven minutes to make an indelible first impression, to build rapport and establish trust by what you say and how you say it. On the first night of a tour, guests don't want to know details about an activity happening in three days' time. They want entertainment, camaraderie and "need-to-know" information—all communicated effectively.

Or to put that in Toastmasters speak: audience engagement, humor and brevity. Leave them wanting more.

Taking Toastmasters Skills on Tour

Toastmasters is the perfect place to develop skills employed in the tourism business. To that end, Pankaj Pradhananga, ACB, helped start the Tourism Toastmasters club in Kathmandu, Nepal, a scenic country where tourism is a key industry. Its 28 members include trek and tour operators, hoteliers, airline managers, tourism consultants, entrepreneurs, a hospitality school founder and the CEO of the Nepal Tourism Board.

Pradhananga became the club's charter president in October 2017. He is the director of Four Season Travel & Tours, a Nepali company with tour operations in the Himalayan region. With its majestic mountains and diverse geography, Nepal is rich territory for all explorers. It remains one of the most popular places in the world for adventure travel. The country's north side offers breathtaking peaks and thousands of trails that crisscross the land; the south is popular for its abundance of jungle and wildlife.

Four Season Travel & Tours specializes in "soft adventure," like trekking in places where the altitude is below 4,000 meters (about 13,000 feet). But Pradhananga says that, with the help of an

“What you know is important. But how you tell people what you know is super important!”

—TOUR OPERATOR
PANKAJ PRADHANANGA

experienced team of trekking guides and sherpas, he has also led some tours high in the Himalayas and made a few trips to Mount Everest base camp, the gateway for those climbing Everest.

Guest speakers from the tourism industry are regularly invited to Tourism Toastmasters club meetings. They bring expertise and anecdotes, says Pradhananga. “What you know is important,” he advises members. “But how you tell people what you know is super important!”

One particularly distinguished guest paid club members a visit earlier this year. Alaina B. Teplitz, the United States Ambassador to Nepal, gave a presentation to the club’s executive committee at Hotel Himalaya in Kathmandu. As an avid traveler to many areas of the country, she was excited to address the group, saying, “I hope my persuasive speech helped inspire a group already committed to showcasing the beauty of Nepal to reach even greater heights by making tourism a major economic growth driver.”

Indeed, the Nepali government is targeting a goal of 2 million annual tourists visiting the country by 2020. “Clubs like Tourism Toastmasters can help more professionals get ready in catering a quality experiences [to tourists],” Teplitz says.

FROM TOP: *Instructors from the tour-guide training company EastguidesWest with a group of tourism students holding the flag of Kyrgyzstan in the capital city of Bishkek. Photo by EastguidesWest; Tourism Toastmasters club president, Pankaj Pradhananga. Photo by Dinesh Shrestha; Veteran Toastmaster and tour guide, Barnaby Davies, left, and Marat Akunov, a driver and guide in the Kyrchyn Gorge, Kyrgyzstan. Photo by EastguidesWest.*



As in any club, speech topics vary, but a good number touch on tourism-related issues, says Pradhananga, a former member of the Everest Toastmasters club in Kathmandu.

During business trips, he has visited Toastmasters clubs in the United States, Europe and China. He says his Toastmasters experience has instilled in him a “much-needed confidence to speak in front of my clients and speak sense. It helped me to weave stories to captivate the people I talk to, whether it is two people or 200.”

A Booming Industry

Tourism is estimated to be a trillion-dollar industry. And it’s growing. According to Allied Market Research, online travel purchases alone will total \$1,091 billion in sales by 2022. People in the tourism industry will continue to need the skills learned in Toastmasters to meet this increase.

Ted Bravos, a veteran of the tourism business, says excellent communication skills are crucial for the success of tour guides. He is the founder of the International Tour Management Institute (ITMI), a U.S. school in San Francisco that trains tour guides and tour directors to lead groups of people on adventures all over the world. “The biggest fear our students have when they lead a tour is what to talk about, when to talk and when not to talk,” Bravos says.

A misconception among tourism professionals is that in a three-hour bus tour, the tour guide should spend the entire time churning out dates and facts, carrying on about something or other for the duration of the trip. But, like an experienced Toastmaster, a good tour guide will gauge the room, read the audience and adapt accordingly. If it’s 9 a.m. after an overnight stay, guests are probably ready for a bit of history; if they’ve just had lunch with wine, they’ll prefer a brief story and a chance to doze.

“A good tour guide will gauge the room, read the audience and adapt accordingly.”

Sjannie Hulsman, a longtime European cruise director, has an executive master’s degree in European tourism management. She says she learned a valuable lesson when visiting a Toastmasters club in the Netherlands that she never learned in school. “I could see I speak too heavy—I sometimes choose words that are too difficult and my sentences can be too long,” Hulsman says. “When I watch Toastmasters speak, what I really see is that they don’t talk to people; they talk *with* them. They’re all much more on an equal level.”

She has drawn on that approach while leading river-cruise tours and training other tour leaders. “Tourists want to have fun and relax,” says Hulsman, who is Dutch and has led tours in Switzerland, Portugal and Hungary, among other countries. “So a lighthearted conversation instead of a lecture is what I try for at work every day since I’ve [gone] to Toastmasters.”

Exploring a World of Opportunity

In California, ITMI is receiving more inquiries from international students, particularly in Asia and Africa. Bravos typically runs eight classes a year in the U.S., with around 20 students per class. Most of the students are American, with a few from Europe. But



Alaina B. Teplitz, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, speaks to the Tourism Toastmasters club in Kathmandu, Nepal, in July 2018. Photo by Dinesh Shrestha

he is now seeing inquiries from Bahrain, Ethiopia and Rwanda, and many from India.

Gina Legalle of Paris, France, who has 20 years’ experience in the tourism industry, describes a well-trained tour director as “a storyteller with a human connection.” When she visited a Toastmasters club as a guest, she was asked in the Table Topics session what her mystery cocktail would be. She didn’t answer the question; rather, she told a story.

Legalle, an ITMI graduate, says tour guides can’t just reel off a list of facts when they’re leading a group. “Guests ask questions all the time. You need to respond appropriately and not just babble off dates,” says Legalle, who is joining a local Toastmasters club in Paris to hone her skills even further. “I love Toastmasters,” she says. “It’s challenging in a good way. A bit like guests, I suppose!”

When you do make a connection with the travelers you’re guiding, it’s a rewarding experience, adds Hulsman, whose favorite tour-group memories include watching the Viennese Philharmonic perform during one trip and dancing in the streets of Lucerne, Switzerland, on another.

“I truly love this job,” she says, “and enjoy so much being with guests who have great vacations.”

Barnaby Davies, CC, is a member of Battle Speakers Club in Battle, East Sussex, United Kingdom. He is the founder of EastguidesWest tourism company. For more information, visit www.eastguideswest.com.

ONLINE EXTRAS: View additional photos of tourism in Nepal and other countries in an online gallery.

TALES FROM THE ROAD

HOW TOASTMASTERS LAUNCHED MY CAREER IN TOURISM

BY BARNABY DAVIES

My journey into tourism began at a Toastmasters club. At the time, I belonged to Battle Toastmasters club in the United Kingdom, and then-club president Giles Robinson suggested I enter the club's Humorous Speech Contest. I took his advice, controlled my nerves as best as I could, and won! Winning that speech competition changed my life and gave me the confidence to take a risk: I switched my career path to tourism.

Enter the International Tour Management Institute (ITMI) in San Francisco, California, founded in 1976 by Ted Bravos. Encouraged by my local club and my head still spinning from the competition, I found myself enrolled in the school and on a plane to California.

Most of the students in the class, who were from all over the world, used filler words, looked awkward standing on a makeshift stage and held microphones in the wrong position. So it was no surprise that one of the first bits of advice Bravos gave us was to join a Toastmasters group in our respective regions of the world. As a member for two years already, one who had been regularly embarrassing myself in Table Topics, I felt I had a great head start.

Shortly afterward, on my maiden trip as a tour guide, traveling around the U.K., I was asked by a guest what sort of trees we were seeing from the motor coach. I didn't know. But a Toastmaster would never say "I don't know" during Table Topics. I picked up the microphone and said, "These trees on the left are wooden ones! They're rather special trees, actually—we plant them on the left-hand side of the road in England. But let's talk about trees in a few minutes, because there's a stretch of Roman wall coming up on your right with a legend attached to it ..."

I was so glad to have the storytelling and improvisation skills I learned in Toastmasters in my back pocket. My mentor at the Battle Toastmasters club taught me to put the audience first. Every time I pick up a microphone to talk with people on a tour, I think *Am I going to give them something of value? Is this fun or relevant, or am I wasting their time? Or, worse still: Am I annoying them with a boring speech?* A colleague of mine once talked for hours to a group after they'd had lunch, and eventually a guest shouted, "Can you please shut up?!"

As in Toastmasters, there comes a time to pass on knowledge and mentor newer members. So in 2016 I co-founded *EastguidesWest*, a company that trains guides and tour directors in emerging destinations. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, tour operators are marketing to the West, wanting to draw travelers from that part of the world. However, as my Dutch business partner, Sjannie Hulsman, and I discovered on a reconnaissance trip to Central Asia, we had to avoid basic preparation and communication mistakes.

Our trip to Kyrgyzstan was an induction by fire. "Toilets?" repeated Marat, our driver guide. He appeared puzzled, gestured toward an expanse of roadside trees and said casually, "In the nature." Sjannie frowned and scribbled "restroom" in her notebook. For a country hoping to cater to more Western tourists, this was an eye-opening start. Marat then drove us to a hotel that was closed.

It seemed a good time to evaluate our first "speaker." Sjannie and I commended Marat on his driving skills, suggested he work on "need-to-know" information and pre-tour preparation, and finished our evaluation with, "Really, we don't know how you drive on these roads. You're amazing." Commend, recommend, commend.

Buoyed, Marat attended our guide training in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. Our program helps new guides learn the kinds of communication skills that people learn in Toastmasters. A month later, responding to increased word-of-mouth business, he was able to increase his prices.

Better communication means better service, which means increased tourism revenue. Who says you can't get paid to travel?



Barnaby Davies, left, wearing a traditional Kyrgyz hat called the "Ak Kalpak," and business partner, Sjannie Hulsman, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Photo by EastguidesWest

Build Your Confidence

4 ways to practice this key leadership trait.

BY JILL J. JOHNSON



To anyone hoping to grow as a leader, one characteristic is sure to help: confidence. Whether you are taking on a leadership role during club meetings or building leadership skills at work, coming across as confident can increase your influence. If you weren't born the confident leader you'd like to be (and who was?), don't fret. Confidence can be practiced and improved upon.

You don't need to make huge leaps or take big risks; even the smallest efforts will help build your confidence over time. Strategies include focusing each day's activities, refining your skills before they are needed, leveraging volunteer roles to practice new skills and working through challenges. Toastmasters provides an ideal environment to work on all four of these confidence-building strategies.

1 Make daily efforts.

If you aspire to leadership in any arena, it must be a daily effort. Breaking down your skill development into smaller components and practicing in more manageable chunks is essential. What do you need to do to advance to the next level? Take on various leadership roles within Toastmasters to learn which aspects of leadership most appeal to you.

Then take those skills and work on them outside of Toastmasters each day.

As you progress to higher leadership levels in the professional arena, opportunities for advancement may diminish. To gain the confidence you will need to keep pushing ahead, it is important to practice and prepare every day. Those who progress to higher rungs of success figure out a path to get there.

2 Build skills before you need them.

The Roman philosopher Seneca is credited with saying, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." If you're not prepared, you won't have confidence in yourself when a new opportunity presents itself. To be prepared to progress to a higher level, you need to look ahead. Pay attention to what others at that level are doing. Ask yourself, "What else is going to be needed from me as I move up to my next level of success?" Develop your skills *before* you need them. Take advantage of every opportunity available in Toastmasters. Once you've taken on club leadership roles, consider taking on a district leadership role. The more involved you are, the more confident you will become in yourself and your leadership abilities.

Preparation is essential to growing more confident, no matter the setting. Preparing will build your confidence when you are in high-pressure situations such as interviewing for a job, giving a speech, making a sale or communicating with someone in a position of authority. You can practice your skills anywhere—at home, at school, in your job or in a club setting.

"Confidence comes to you faster when you practice in a low-risk volunteer environment."

It is also important to have an ongoing focus as you practice. Do you need to build your confidence in presenting critical information at work? Do you need to learn how to give your team members feedback to improve their performance? Do you need to effectively lead meetings? By having specific skills to target, you will not be scattered in your efforts.

3 Practice new skills and prepare for success through volunteering.

You may think you are too busy to take on a leadership role in Toastmasters, or

within another organization. Work and family responsibilities may leave little room in your schedule for taking on any kind of outside leadership role, but volunteering can have an exceptional impact on your career.

“You cannot take big leaps toward success unless you first take small steps to build your confidence.”

Toastmasters is filled with volunteer opportunities designed to help you grow your confidence. By volunteering for officer roles, you gain the opportunity to practice skills you need for your job or career. Confidence comes to you faster when you practice in a low-risk volunteer environment. You may wish to practice an element of a skill you will need to prepare for your next promotion. Or you could practice speaking with confidence in settings beyond your club meetings, including at Toastmasters competitions. Your confidence will compound because you will have multiple opportunities to develop your expertise. Volunteering also allows you to learn to work more effectively with diverse groups of people. You will expand your network of contacts as well.

4 Work through learning curves. As you build your skills, you will inevitably experience failure. That's OK. Chalk it up to experience and resolve to do better next time. The experience you gain in those small steps compounds over time.

The ongoing feedback Toastmasters offers will help you identify where you need to grow and how to do it. By repeatedly testing yourself at each club meeting and preparing yourself for your next opportunity,

10 TIPS TO BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE

1 Focus your efforts. Identify the skill you need to master next. Break your skill development down into smaller parts, then work on mastering them.

2 Be prepared. Most people want to take shortcuts, but preparation is essential to having confidence in yourself when you are in a high-pressure situation.

3 Be aware of your self-talk. Listen to words that will build you up, not tear you down. Don't self-talk in a way that sabotages your confidence.

4 Create a playlist. Music has a powerful impact on your mood. Listen to an uplifting “go-to” playlist when you need a confidence boost.

5 Connect with others. When you are struggling with your confidence, reach out to a trusted confidant to brainstorm actions you can take.

6 Be consistent. Consistent practicing of any skill you are working on builds your confidence.

7 Manage fear and self-doubt. We all go through fearful periods of self-doubt. Stay resilient, even when you think you cannot, and learn to trust yourself.

8 Develop your personal mantra. Write down a short series of words or a slogan you can repeat frequently to help you stay focused and confident.


9 Believe in yourself. The bridge between your dreams and believing you can achieve them is confidence. Find your own value. Know what you have to offer.

10 Take action. The compounded impact of taking small, bold actions can morph into amazing opportunities with the potential to transform your future.

you'll be ready for greater success because you're practicing and progressing in your confidence and skill development.

It takes time to build your skills to a deep level of mastery. It does not happen overnight. With practice, you will build deeper awareness of yourself. You will develop greater confidence. You will demonstrate your emerging growth in mastering your new skill. This will prepare you to maximize your opportunities for success.

Consider how you are preparing for your next level of success. To consistently move forward, you need to intentionally develop new skills and probe for deeper understanding as the issues you address become more complex. The search to understand what it will take to propel you toward your next leadership challenge never stops.

Make the effort to find people who can provide you with new insights about possibilities you may not have considered. As you see the greater possibilities for your life, you will begin searching for opportunities to make them real. As you practice and prepare for your future, you will build more confidence, and the sky can be your limit. Your sky. Your limit. Anything is possible. 

Jill J. Johnson, MBA, is the president and founder of Johnson Consulting Services. She is also a public speaker and management consultant and author of the book *Compounding Your Confidence*. Jill helps her clients make critical business decisions and develop market-based strategic plans for turnarounds or growth. To learn more, visit her website at www.jcs-usa.com.

What Was I Saying?

What to do when your train of thought is derailed.

BY DIANE WINDINGLAND, DTM

Two-hundred pairs of eyeballs are on you after you've just delivered a dramatic, beautifully crafted sentence for a memorized district contest speech. Then your mind goes completely blank. You stare back at the audience with a deer-in-headlights expression for what seems like an eternity as you frantically grope for the next phrase. You can't believe it, but you have no idea what to say next!

Losing your train of thought can happen if you aren't well prepared. But it can also happen if you have been diligent in your preparation and did your best to memorize your speech. Memorizing your speech can actually *cause* problems, like sounding too rehearsed or unnatural. It can also lead to an increased risk of "blanking."

"Proactively practice a 'blanking' recovery plan. It's like a disaster drill for speaking."

Imagine that every time you practice your speech with the exact same words, you are creating a deep rut, a well-worn path in your memory with no alternate paths. When you present the speech in a stressful situation (which could be in a different room, or in front of a different audience), you can be thrown off your well-worn path. And, without alternate paths, you become lost. If you "Internalize; don't memorize" your speech as 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking, Darren LaCroix, suggests, you can reduce the likelihood of blanking.

Having recovery tactics in place will greatly reduce your anxiety, and you may be able to recover without your audience realizing you had a memory lapse. After all, they don't know what you are going to

say next, so if you change it up a bit, they may think you planned it that way.

Recovery Tactics

- **Pause.** Pause for a couple of beats. Give yourself a moment to remember where you were. The audience will likely think you paused for effect.

- **Maintain eye contact.** As you pause, maintain eye contact with a single person. Looking at one person (versus scanning) can be calming.

- **Rewind.** Repeat the last sentence or phrase. This gives your mind both time to think and a little "restart" jolt. One way to do this is to end the last sentence of one point with a word or phrase that you will use to begin the next point. For example, "There are only three things to worry about: bad food, bad people and bad breath. Bad breath is a bigger problem than many people realize." The phrase "bad breath" is positioned at the end of the first sentence to serve as a trigger for the next sentence.

- **Fast-forward.** Jump ahead to content you *do* remember. At some point in your speech you may remember what you were going to say earlier. You can work it in when it occurs to you, and you may even prefer the new arrangement.

- **Take a sip of water.** You will look in control and relaxed. Of course, your mind may be racing. (If possible, drink from a glass instead of a bottle as you'll look more professional.)

- **Check your notes.** Hopefully, you have just a few key words in a large font, as opposed to a page full of detailed notes, so your panic won't intensify as you scan them.



- **Go to the next slide.** If you are using PowerPoint, you can use it as a teleprompter, to jog your memory. (But avoid reading every word on the slides aloud.)

- **Smile.** Smile like you have a secret and just look at the audience for a while. You will look confident and the audience will anticipate your next phrase almost as much as you are.

- **Have back-up content.** Have a short, relevant anecdote to share—a good idea for any presentation, to allow for flexible timing.

- **Get the audience involved.** Initiate a short Q&A session, or have audience members pair up to discuss an important point or do an activity. While they do that, you can review your notes.

- **Make fun of your memory lapse and build rapport.** "I have completely blanked!" (laugh). "Has that ever happened to you? My grandson says I have 'old-timers' disease. Now, where was I?"

- **Have a recovery plan.** Proactively practice a "blanking" recovery plan like this one. It's like a disaster drill for speaking.

Don't freeze like a deer in headlights and get run over by panicked anxiety. Review these recovery tactics, or create your own recovery plan for the next time you lose your train of thought. **T**

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



Writing for the Spoken Word

Loosen the rules and listen for cadence.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

When I grew up, I had an English class every year in school. I was well educated in writing reports and compositions. On the other hand, I had only one semester in public speaking. My training was focused on the written word. Perhaps yours was too.

As an adult, I worked many years in the field of voiceovers, where I read scripts written by others. During that time, I observed that there are three types of writers: those good at writing for the spoken word, those good at writing for the written word and those who are just plain bad writers. But far too many times, the scripts crafted by the written-word writers were the hardest to read aloud. Why? Because they just didn't flow. They had no cadence, no regular beat.

The written word and the spoken word are different. And the rules we learn for writing may not apply to speaking. The spoken word is closer to a song than an essay. Think, for a moment, of your favorite song. It has a certain beat to it, doesn't it? That, in part, is why you like it.

I was working on a speech recently where I wrote the phrase "principles, perspectives and paradigms." The phrase is fine. It is a triad, it has alliteration and each word has three syllables. Yet it feels awkward to say. That's because the accent pattern is jumbled. The accent is on the first syllable in "principles," the second syllable in "perspectives" and the first syllable again in "paradigms."

I then switched the phrase to "principles, paradigms and perspectives." Now the first and second words both begin with an accent on the first syllable. The

soft initial accent of the third word is cushioned by the "and," so it gives the impression of following the pattern. The phrase now rolls nicely off the tongue. It has a cadence.

Sometimes sentences and long phrases have holes in them. I once heard a speaker talking about a dog, and he said something like, "He was a golden that wouldn't swim and a retriever that wouldn't." The second half of that sentence is certainly creative. And, in writing, it looks clever. But it creates a hole when spoken. It feels like something is missing.

"The spoken word is closer to a song than an essay."

It would be better to say, "He was a golden that wouldn't swim and a retriever that wouldn't retrieve." The first phrase sets up a pattern and, hence, an expectation. If you break that expectation, you divert your audience's attention away from your message.

You might be thinking, "Bill, you can't use the same word twice in the same sentence."

Au contraire. That is a rule made for the written word. You can get away with such repetition in a speech if it's needed for either cadence or clarity. If, however, using "retrieve" twice still bothers you, a thesaurus can help.

Another written-word rule that doesn't necessarily apply in the spoken realm will shock many grammarians around the Toastmasters world. Yes, you really can

begin a sentence with *and*, *now*, *but* and even the dreaded *so*. (No, no, say it isn't so!)

Richard Dowis, in my favorite book on speechwriting, *The Lost Art of the Great Speech*, writes, "You need not feel self-conscious with beginning a sentence with *and* or *but* when it seems right."

Let me be clear: You should not begin your speech with the word *so*. And you should not begin virtually every sentence with that conjunction (or any other, for that matter). But sometimes the sentence cadence demands an extra sound. In those cases, conjunctions are not filler words that fill holes where there should be silence; instead, they are transition words, filling holes in the rhythm of a sentence.

Unfortunately, cadence is more of an art than a science. Sometimes I construct phrases with an emphasis in mind. Usually, however, I go by feel. I just sense when something sounds right.

To hone this sense, pay attention to how each phrase rolls off your tongue. You will find some sounding awkward, some just OK and some pure delights to say. Get rid of the first. Add more of the third. That is when speaking gets fun. **T**

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach from Las Vegas and a member of Pro Toastmasters and Ahead of the Curve Toastmasters. Learn more at www.billbrownspeechcoach.com.



ONLINE EXTRAS: Listen to an exclusive recording by Bill Brown with extra tips on improving the cadence of your speech.



A Common Tongue

If we all spoke the same language, we'd understand each other perfectly.
And then we'd really be in trouble.

BY JOHN CADLEY

If you can't understand someone who speaks a language other than your own, blame it on Nimrod, the biblical king who tried to build a tower reaching all the way to heaven. This, of course, was the famed Tower of Babel, and when the Principal Occupant of the celestial abode saw what Nimrod was doing, He didn't much care for the idea. The Almighty had made it perfectly clear how human beings could get to heaven, and taking an elevator to the sky deck wasn't one of them.

At that time all peoples of the earth spoke the same language, and God determined that this was the problem—i.e., a single people speaking a single language could accomplish just about anything, and that was *His* job, not theirs. Hence, He said, “Let us go down and confuse their language ... so they can no longer understand each other.” This is why the Tower of Babel's men's room was marked “GIFT SHOP.” It's also why the world today has some 6,500 languages, providing steady employment for generations of United Nations interpreters, not to mention the company that supplies the headphones.

Fast-forward a few millennia to 19th century Russia and we meet a Polish ophthalmologist named Ludwik Zamenhof, who begged to differ with the Creator. He believed that separate languages divide people, leading to tribalism, xenophobia and conflict. Unify language and you will unify mankind in peace and brotherhood, so he reasoned. The fact that his wife, who *did* speak the same language as Dr. Zamenhof, kept telling him “You're not hearing what I'm saying” appears not to have entered into his thinking.

The good doctor didn't just believe in a universal language; he created one and published it in a book called *Unua Libro*, using the pen name Dr. Esperanto, which means “one who hopes”—an understatement if ever there was one. We must remember this was at a time when Russia had just finished invading the Caucasus in what can only be described as a not very nice way. To think that if the Russians and Caucasians simply spoke the same language they would forget centuries of tribal hatred and hold hands dancing around a bonfire ... well, yes, that would be hopeful. Delusional is another word that comes to mind.

“There is also a movement to make Esperanto the official language of the European Union.”

However, I am here not to bury the man but to praise him. He was a true idealist who made a real effort to make the world a better place. Would *you* spend years developing a language described as “lexically predominantly Romanic, morphologically intensively agglutinative, with phonology, grammar, vocabulary and semantics based on Indo-European languages,” offering a sound inventory essentially Slavic, and a vocabulary deriving primarily from the Romance languages, with a lesser contribution from Germanic, Slavic and Greek languages—all while running a medical practice and raising a family.

I say give the man a cigar.

Nor were his efforts totally in vain. An estimated 2 million people speak Esperanto today, comprising 0.03 percent of the world's population—which doesn't exactly fit the definition of “universal” but still ... the language lives! Or at least it's on life support. For one thing, there was a “self-proclaimed artificial island micronation” named Rose Island that used Esperanto as its official language. The idea of something being artificially official strikes me as odd, but if it was self-proclaimed, in a place nobody could find on a map, who could argue?

There is also a movement to make Esperanto the official language of the European Union. Now, that might actually stand a chance if it weren't for Brexit. Unfortunately, if the English don't want to share a common currency they probably won't adopt a common language that has them asking for a cup of tea by saying, “*Cu mi povas havu tason da teo?*”

Ultimately, you might say Esperanto is like 3D TV—a nice idea that never caught on. And I know why. It's *too* nice. You can't insult anyone, which—let's face it—is the most creative part of any language. Think of the brilliant French put-down *T'es une tête a faire sauter les plaques d'égouts!* (“You've got a face that would blow off manhole covers.”) That, folks, is genius. Would you have it replaced with *Vi havas vizaĝon kiu blovos la kovrilon de kloako?*

Not me. **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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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM



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

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

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

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

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