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The *Toastmaster* magazine (ISSN 00408263) is published monthly by Toastmasters International, Inc., 9127 S. Jamaica St. #400, Englewood, Colorado, United States 80112.

Published to promote the ideas and goals of Toastmasters International, a nonprofit educational organization of clubs throughout the world dedicated to teaching skills in public speaking and leadership.

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

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Are You Really There?

Every day it seems our world grows more and more online. There is an endless barrage of online meeting after online meeting. Work? Online. School? Online. Doctor's appointments? Online. And of course Toastmasters meetings ... online. It's so routine now that I'm scheduling Zoom calls with family members who are in the next room.

In speaking to Toastmasters around the world, I know many of you are experiencing the same thing, and are finding your club meeting a respite, a time to break free from your daily routine.

My question is, after a day of what seems to be one online meeting after another, when you join your club meeting or attend the meeting of another club somewhere in the world, are you *really* there? Are you engaged in the meeting or are distractions preventing you from *being there*?

There has never been a time when we have been required to stay so far apart yet needed to be so close together.

When looking at attendees on the screen, you can sometimes tell when they are texting, eating, speaking to someone in the room, or otherwise preoccupied. They are there but not *really* there! Maybe on occasion that person has been you; I can honestly say that it's been me at times. Reflecting back, I wonder how it was perceived by club members and, importantly, how it was perceived by guests. Was I contributing to a positive member experience? Were you?

It's easy to become distracted, but it's important to be fully engaged, so I began employing several practices to help me focus; they may help you as well:

- ▶ **Lose the phone and tablet**—I try to put my phone and tablet somewhere where I can't reach or see them to avoid the temptation of texting someone or checking social media.
- ▶ **Close any unneeded windows on the computer**—it is too tempting to check email notifications.
- ▶ **Take notes with a pen and paper**—without all the distractions on my computer, I can focus more intently on the speaker.
- ▶ **Close the door**—simply closing the door, or going into another room, helps block distractions from family and pets.

There are many other ways we can avoid or cut down on distractions while attending online meetings and I would be interested in hearing your strategies.

We all need to ensure we are fully engaged during meetings, that we do everything that we can to avoid distractions, and that we positively contribute to the member and guest experience. So let me ask again, "Are you *really* there?"

Richard E. Peck, DTM
International President



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Clubs gather for celebrations and transitions.



Members of Moratuwa Toastmasters of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, hike Bible Rock—a mountain near the town of Aranayake, Sri Lanka.



The 2020–2021 club officers of Microsoft Speakeasy Toastmasters in Redmond, Washington, meet to transition into their new roles.








Members of the Gurgaon Toastmasters Club of Gurgaon, Haryana, India, celebrate their 550th club meeting and reflect on the many positive memories made.



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.

www.toastmasters.org/Magazine

-  **Watch** informative videos.
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WHAT'S ONLINE THIS MONTH:



Toastmaster Greg Van Borssum (in back) with his family.

Family Ties

For some families, evaluations at the dinner table and improved communication with the kids are the results of involvement in Toastmasters. Learn how multi-generational families encourage each other to grow, and view a photo gallery to get to know them better.

Humor How-to

Can you make your audience laugh, or do your jokes fall flat? If you struggle with finding humor for your speeches, listen to these tips from Toastmasters Toolbox author Bill Brown, DTM. You might be funnier than you think!

WEB RESOURCE

Send Us Your Story Ideas!

The new year is approaching fast, and we want to hear innovative and inspiring tips from YOU! Do you have an article idea or topic that you want to read about, but not write yourself? Simply [fill out this form](#) and submit it to the magazine team. No idea is too big or too small!

2020: Year in Review

This year is one for the history books. From the sudden shift to online meetings, to Pathways becoming the official education program, to the first-ever virtual



convention—Toastmasters around the world rose to the challenge. Revisit the significant moments of 2020 with photos and videos.



This icon at the top of a page means an online extra is included with the article at www.toastmasters.org/Magazine.

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► CLUB EXPERIENCE

Meet Some Masters of Online Meetings

These members from around the world were nominated for their outstanding contributions in helping others adapt and excel in a virtual environment. This is part of a [recurring series](#).

John Drinkwater • England



Preparation Pays Off

John Drinkwater of Epsom Speakers in Epsom, England, had a head start on effectively conducting Zoom meetings. By December 2019, Drinkwater, with eight years of webinar teaching experience, had hosted eight webinars for District 91. So when COVID brought about a lockdown, John recorded and posted 21 videos on how to use Zoom on the District 91 YouTube channel, gaining more than 20,000 views. For six weeks, he helped clubs with their first experiences on Zoom.

John then turned his attention to the upcoming speech contests. He held many conference-team meetings and walk-throughs to practice the process, and hosted one-on-one trainings with contestants to ensure lighting and sound were working. His hard work during the contest allowed 800 people to watch without a hitch. He was later honored as District 91's Toastmaster of the Year and spoke on a Toastmasters International webinar panel focused on thriving during social distancing.

John is now planning for the 2021 competition season. He is taking the production to another level by preparing hybrid systems that could mix online and physical events. Whatever the COVID limitations, members know he will be ready.

Nominated by Janet Alkema, DTM, Farnham Speakers Club of Farnham, England, and Godalming Speakers of Godalming, England.



Jay Jornales • Philippines



Overcoming Adversity with Enthusiasm

Area Director Jay Jornales helped many maintain their sanity through the unprecedented online Toastmasters meetings taking place locally and all over the world. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and she brought smiles to members in Asia, Europe, and the United States. Jay hosted the Grand Central Toastmasters Club's first international joint meeting with other clubs in the Philippines and seven other countries.

Through helping others and leading online meetings, Jay was able to deliver speeches and complete Pathways projects. While she continued to develop her own skills, she gladly made herself available to join any club as a guest, serving as a general evaluator or prepared speech evaluator.

Jay overcame the adversity of the coronavirus to help her club and did so with enthusiasm, no matter what.

Nominated by Ma. Edelfa P. Demano, DTM, A.L.A.B. Toastmasters and Grand Central Toastmasters Club of Caloocan, Philippines.



Manjeesh Pimplekar • India

Keeping the Team Spirit Alive

Manjeesh Pimplekar quickly adapted to the new normal of virtual meetings, and began hosting them for his club TCS Maitree Toastmasters Club Indore, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India. He tried multiple platforms such as Zoom, Cisco Webex, and Microsoft Teams. Once he decided on a platform, he trained all the members to use it and conducted demonstration meetings before every Toastmasters meeting to ensure anyone with a role felt comfortable.

Even though there were challenges along the way, he never lost hope and maintained a brilliant spirit to keep members upbeat and positive. He kept the team spirit alive and worked to help the club excel even during the pandemic. Manjeesh regularly attended online meetings in different countries to learn new ways to help his club and how to implement new ideas.

Manjeesh portrayed enthusiasm and interacted with new members and guests. As an experienced Toastmaster, he supported the club officers and guided them through the utilization of online tools and resources. Ultimately, his confidence and excitement were contagious. Manjeesh was instrumental in helping the club adapt to the virtual environment and conduct flawless meetings and events.

Nominated by Shruti Shivhare, TCS Maitree Toastmasters Club Indore of Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.

► PRESENTATION SKILLS

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. “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.



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

(Reprinted from the December 2018 issue of the Toastmaster magazine)

Simon Bucknall, a speaking coach and facilitator based in London, England, placed second in the 2017 World Championship of Public Speaking™. He was a presenter at both the 2020 International Convention and a Toastmasters general audience webinar on public speaking. Visit www.simonbucknall.com.

► ONLINE OBSERVATIONS

Title Topics

Toastmasters and movies make a great mix, so members recently had some online fun with that topic. Exercising their creativity, they put a Toastmasters twist on well-known movie titles. Here are a few posts from the Official Toastmasters International Members Facebook Group:

- *The Wizard of Oz – The Wizard of Ahs* (Kim Krajci, DTM)
- *All the President’s Men – All the Immediate Past President’s Men* (Brett Burdick, DTM)
- *Nightmare on Elm Street – Nightmare on Ummm Street* (Anant Katyayni, DTM)
- *Blazing Saddles – Blazing Gavels* (Megan Loiaconi Hurley)
- *Remember the Titans – Remember the Timers* (Donni Krier, DTM)
- *The King’s Speech – The King’s 5-7-Minute Speech* (Kristen Keryk)
- *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them – Fantastic Clubs and Where to Find Them* (Brian Arthur)
- *The Empire Strikes Back – The Ah-Counter Strikes Back* (Frederick Allen)

Extra Credits: Read more about how [the movies have brought some standout speeches](#) to the screen throughout the years.

► NEWS FROM TI

In Memory of Past International Director Don Enschede, 1926–2020



The Toastmasters world lost one of its most venerable members on October 9, when Don Enschede died at the age of 94.

He was, amazingly, a member for more than 60 years. Enschede even recalled speaking several times to Toastmasters International founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley. He served in leadership roles on the Toastmasters Board of Directors (1981 to 1983) and earned designations as an Accredited Speaker and a Distinguished Toastmaster. Perhaps most memorably, Enschede served as the announcer for the annual Toastmasters International Convention for many years, becoming known as “The Voice of Toastmasters.” His deep, booming voice and impeccable appearance made him well-known to legions of convention attendees.

A longtime citrus grower in California, he co-founded the Sandpiper Toastmasters Club in Ventura, California, in 1976. Enschede was known as a staunch advocate of Toastmasters principles and protocol, and he will be missed by many.

▶ **SNAPSHOT**

Members of Kegalle Toastmasters of Kegalle, Sri Lanka, pose with their magazines in a stream near the home of their charter club President Padmini Herath Jayasena. The village is surrounded by nature, so the club members enjoyed natural baths, water games, and a relaxing lunch.

▶ **NEWS FROM TI**

Tune in to *The Toastmasters Podcast*

If you're looking for some fresh and interesting content to listen to, check out episodes of the official [Toastmasters Podcast](#). Hosts Greg Gazin, DTM, and Ryan Levesque, both of whom are Toastmasters, interview members and experts from around the world on a broad spectrum of communication and leadership topics. Get to know Toastmasters World Champions and Accredited Speakers; learn how to build meaningful connections; hear from an expert on why emotional intelligence matters, and much more.

*Check back in January for an article by Greg Gazin about the possibilities of podcasts.

Plan for Nashville!

It's not too early to be thinking about Toastmasters International's next convention at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in [Nashville, Tennessee](#). Mark your calendars for August 25-28, 2021.

Anatomy of a Toastmasters Meeting

Do you ever wish you had an easy way to explain meeting roles to guests and new members? You can now share this one-page document "[The Anatomy of a Toastmasters Meeting](#)" with them! Thank you to Angel Rios of San Juan Toastmasters for creating the original version of this document and allowing us to share it.

Feel Confident in Online Meetings

Social media is a great way to recruit prospective members for your club, especially during the global pandemic. If you are looking for a way to engage with people on your social channels, share the "[Feel Confident in Online Meetings](#)" infographic! This graphic outlines tips to feel confident and find success while participating in online meetings and can help potential Toastmasters understand how they can grow as a member.

TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



GET CREATIVE! Traveling *Toastmaster* wants to highlight creativity in quarantine! Take a picture in your home or socially distancing with your magazine or other Toastmasters memorabilia. Send your fun photos to photos@toastmasters.org.



1 | DEBORAH MCADAMS of Palm Springs, California, explains the benefits of Toastmasters to a new friend at the Living Desert in Palm Desert, California.

2 | Distinguished Toastmasters **JOE JARZOMBEK**, a Past International Director, and **SHARYN JARZOMBEK**, of New Braunfels, Texas, travel across the state to Paris, Texas.

3 | DALE ROSENFELD of Kapaa, Kauai, Hawaii, enjoys a socially distanced hike at the Windy Point on the Kalalau Trail on the island of Kauai.

4 | JUSTIN and CHRISTINA WADDELL, DTM, of Henrico, Virginia, enjoyed their honeymoon to Capri, Italy, in September 2018.



View additional photos in this month's Traveling *Toastmaster* photo gallery at www.toastmasters.org/Magazine.

Adapting to Change in Chennai

My club in India, like clubs around the world, has experienced dynamic changes, even before COVID-19.

BY NINA JOHN, DTM

In the words of the author Charles Dickens: *It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.*

It's been nearly a year since the devastating coronavirus arrived to change the world as we knew it. For Toastmasters used to meeting in person every week, COVID-19 initially caused chaos and confusion. Yet faced with a Hobson's choice of going online or not meeting at all, Toastmasters across the world have risen to the challenge magnificently. More than 80% of clubs now meet virtually, so in that sense, we have enacted the best possible response to the worst of times.

As devastating as COVID-19 has been, it has spurred growth and innovation for Toastmasters, as we've learned to communicate through different formats. It's yet another step forward in changing how we conduct our meetings and business—an evolution that began well before the pandemic. In fact, since joining Toastmasters, I, as well as my club and District, have literally experienced a world of change.

For example, when we chartered Chennai Toastmasters Club in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, in 2004, all members had to share one manual. When our club kit arrived, with *Competent Communication* and *Competent Leadership* manuals for each of us, we were so excited! Our charter documents went via fax machine to World Headquarters, which was in Southern California at the time. We corresponded via snail mail, resulting in delays on both ends. Business transactions were not always simple, and necessitated navigating varying financial regulations required by both India and the United States.

My club spent hundreds of hours writing agendas and meeting notes on postcards that we mailed to members or discussed by phone over landlines. Today, that's done with the click of a computer button.



My District, 82, initially spanned all of India and Sri Lanka, a landmass covering more than 1 million miles. Area and Division Governors, as they were called then, often traveled by train to set up new clubs. If a demo meeting was within driving distance, five of us would go, conduct the meeting, confer with club leaders and prospective members, plan for follow-up, and finally head home. Each of us paid our own way for these exploratory adventures. It added up to quite a tidy sum, but the bonding between members and the camaraderie were priceless.

When the internet was born, someone crowed, “Geography is now history!” Toastmasters has proven them right.

When I was District Governor in 2012, my leadership team lived in three cities across two countries. Skype video conferencing became a godsend, allowing us to connect for productive planning and strategy meetings.

At the same time, technology was transforming how our international organization served members. The first hybrid club meetings began to emerge, followed by some virtual leadership training. Then came the online Pathways learning

experience, a distinct departure from the original, paper-based legacy program.

And then came COVID-19.

When the internet was born, someone crowed, “Geography is now history!” And boy, Toastmasters has proven them right. Our clubs and Districts enthusiastically meet virtually, joining activities in countries members have never—and may never—visit in person. Meetings draw hundreds of Toastmasters and guests. Superior programs include current or former international Board officers, World Champions of Public Speaking, subject matter experts, and other eminent presenters.

Not everyone has received the online meeting model with equal felicity. The idea of not being able to shake hands, or hug a club colleague after a long break, or even clap and applaud a well-delivered speech in person is anathema to many of us. Yet this is likely to be the new normal for the foreseeable future.

However, for many Toastmasters, COVID-19 has created an unexpected technological gateway to other clubs and cultures, improving the very skills they need to interact in a wired world. Online meetings, webinars, and podcasts offer a nearly matchless immediacy of impact. This technological competency is a useful tool in office interactions as well.

In my case, it has helped me transition to an entirely new profession as an ebook author.

COVID-19 has indeed brought the worst of times; yet this pandemic has also prompted adaptation to daunting challenges. And that is an evolution to celebrate. **T**

NINA JOHN, DTM, is director of the coaching firm *Envy Communications*, and a member of the *Chennai Toastmasters Club* in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. She has released *Navigating Corporate Seas* on Kindle.



Make Your Speeches Something to Laugh At

Tips to discover your funny bone.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

There is a saying among professional speakers: Do you need humor in your presentation? Only if you want to make money.

Humor is not only important for the pros, it is important in any speech. If nothing else, it keeps people's attention. The problem is, where do you find it, especially if being funny doesn't come naturally to you?

I am not a stand-up comedian. I am a speaker. I have had my share of laughs and my share of quiet rooms. If you sometimes struggle with humor, maybe my approach can help.

I have found that it is important to understand what you are going for. Too many times I, and many others, have settled for "you-had-to-be-there" humor.

I remember a speech a Toastmaster gave about a time when he was watering the hanging plants on his patio. When the water hit one plant, a bird flew out. After he told the story, he was surprised that we didn't laugh. After all, he had. There is a reason we didn't laugh—it wasn't funny to us. He said it best, "I guess you just had to be there."

Instead of settling for this, look for what I call general humor, humor that most people will find funny regardless of their experiences. Once you have general humor, you then look to have laugh-out-loud humor as opposed to mild-chuckle humor.

How do you strive to make your line very funny? Try it out and see what reaction you get. Then tweak it until you get the response you want.

Now, how do you find the humor in your speech as a whole? The important

point to remember is this: Find the humor *in* the speech. Don't go out of your way to add a joke. And don't set up the punch line. Let the comedic impact flow naturally from your script.

My primary style of humor is what I call "the alternative meaning." Open any dictionary and you will find that many words have multiple meanings. I like to take one of those alternative meanings, obviously not the one intended, and act like it applies.

Find the humor *in* the speech. Don't go out of your way to add a joke.

I live in Las Vegas. If I am asked if I am a vegan, I respond, "No, but I am a Las Vegan." Alternative meanings can also be found in similar-sounding words, like "pique," "peak," and "peek." Since the words have different meanings, opportunities for humor abound.

Sometimes the situation itself gives you an opportunity for humor. I once gave a contest speech centered around an event that happened at my university back in the 1800s. When I first mentioned the incident, the audience started laughing and I realized that they took my comment to mean that I had been at the event. I quipped, "I know what you're thinking. But, no, I wasn't there that day. [Pause.] I was out of town."

In another speech, I used a little misdirection. I brought in an illustration involving Walt Disney. I told of his early life where he saw no success, then one day he developed a character that really took off. I then said, "And you know who that was, don't you? Of course, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. [Pause.] What? You were expecting someone else?" Rather than just say the character's name, I toyed with the audience and let them have some fun in the process.

That is how I approach humor, based on my own style. If you have your own style, figure out how you can easily weave it into your presentations.

If you are not a particularly funny person, experiment. I suggest that you start with puns. That is where I started, and it gave me a feel for finding the alternative meaning in a statement. The Las Vegan quip, for example. Or you talk with a friend who does have a funny bone and ask them for their input. Figure out why their line is funny and how you could have found the humor.

There is much more that we could say about humor, and so I will. Listen to my audio segment in this month's online magazine for a few additional pointers.

If you struggle with finding humor in your speech, take heart. It's there for the finding. Or, at least, that's what I've found. **T**

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

Prepare Your Technology Like a Pro

Take steps to avoid last-minute mishaps and meltdowns.

BY GREGORY E. ZSCHOMLER

You've just begun delivering your work presentation—a speech using PowerPoint. You've planned it meticulously, practiced countless times, and things are going just fine ... until your computer screen freezes, leaving you frantic to fix the problem.

Technology—it's great when it works, helping to create visual elements to enhance your speech, but one little issue and everything can go off-track. The last thing you need is to be flustered and appear unprofessional. I've seen it all too often. And it's happened to me.

However, you can take steps ahead of time to avoid such mishaps. *Dare to prepare.*

First off, never assume everything will work out like it's supposed to or as you expect. Be prepared for anything and have a plan B (and C) for all contingencies.

Second, keep in mind that your presentation materials are not your presentation. Technologies such as Keynote and PowerPoint are support materials. Your talk should stand on its own if need be.

And, third, if something *does* go awry, go with the flow, keep your cool, and move on.

Here are some tips for heading problems off at the pass:

- ▶ Always arrive early to get things hooked up and tested. The last-minute, down-to-the-wire, harried hookup is no one's friend and will bite you more often than not.
- ▶ If using a laptop, make sure you have power. Is your battery fully charged *and* do you have access to a power outlet? It's always best to have access to a power source with battery as your backup, not the other way around.

Never expect your battery to be fully charged, because someday it won't be.

- ▶ Make sure the projector, microphone, and speakers are working. Have all the right connections and cables with you. Never assume the venue where you are speaking will have what you need. Bring extras; have adapters and extensions.
- ▶ Unless there is some very important reason that necessitates traveling light, don't put your presentation on a USB flash drive or memory stick and expect to just plug into whatever the venue might provide. If you do (and even if you don't), make sure your presentation is fully "packaged" to go. Use universal fonts and imbed them in your presentation file. Make sure all your media is right where you linked to it. This can be complicated, so it's best to not use video clips and to keep things simple if you use a device other than the one you used to create your presentation.
- ▶ Don't rely on having an internet connection by imbedding hyperlinks you expect to show during your presentation. Take screenshots and then imbed the links so you can click to them *if* you have internet, but also have a reference if you don't. And be sure to establish your device's internet connection *before* you go on if you'll need it.
- ▶ Finally, make sure you have all notifications, warnings, and apps turned off to avoid pop-ups and update interruptions.

Room for Zoom

As Toastmasters members well know, many people are meeting remotely these days via tools like Zoom and Microsoft

Teams. These applications are wonderful to have—when everything works, but they can also present frustrations and limitations, especially for those new to using them. The problems I most often encounter or notice in electronic group meetings are the limits of participants' equipment, technical savvy, and/or connectivity. Any of these can distract, hamper, delay, or frustrate communication.

If something does go awry, go with the flow, keep your cool, and move on.

Be sure that the meeting host tells participants in advance what they'll need as far as apps and connectivity. Each participant should make sure they will have adequate bandwidth (whether by Wi-Fi or cellular data). And if you're the host, run a test connection well before the meeting so you can address any questions or problems. (For more tips about meeting or presenting online, check out [Toastmasters Online Meeting Tips](#).)

Above all, when it comes to presenting with technology, even if you've tried to avoid potential problems by being prepared, know that things can go wrong. Don't spend time making apologies or fiddling with the equipment. Keep your cool, move on, and keep on track. **T**

Gregory E. Zschomler is a freelance writer, author, presenter, and professional multimedia artist. He's worked with all manner of technology in colleges, conference centers, churches, and theaters for more than 40 years.



Speak Up, Young Professional!

6 reasons to hone your public speaking skills early in your career.

BY NATHAN MAGNUSON

Several years ago a handful of high school students showed up to my Toastmasters club, and as anyone who has been to a meeting knows, we enjoy having guests. In this case, hosting youngsters was a special treat—even if they appeared slightly less impassioned than we were. After Table Topics®, I turned to one of the high school guests and commented, “Aren’t these speeches fun?”

“Eh, why’s that?” he asked.

“Because, you don’t need to prepare anything, you just get up and talk,” I answered.

Without missing a beat, my young friend replied, “By that logic, all speeches are fun ...”

Ha! What he lacked in enthusiasm, he made up for in humor.

Many of us join Toastmasters because we need to sharpen our public speaking

skills to achieve our professional goals. That’s probably why it’s exciting to see young people attending—they have a chance to accelerate their growth before their careers even begin.

I was 24 years old when I realized the professional path I wanted to take depended in part on my public speaking abilities. In fact, I remember exactly where I was: contemplating my future while on a U.S. Army deployment in Kirkuk, Iraq. I knew I wouldn’t be in the military forever, and wherever I ended up, I didn’t want to fail during a big presentation. I decided to join a Toastmasters club when I returned home.

If you’re a young professional, don’t wait until the night before a big presentation to realize you need to get better at public speaking. Here are just a few of the reasons it’s time to start speaking up now.

You’ll Stand Out From Your Peers

If you’ve ever wavered at the thought of speaking in public, you’re not alone. Fear of public speaking is often cited at the top of people’s most anxiety-producing situations. That’s not just for young people, that’s everyone.

But if that fear goes unchecked, it can stand in the way of promotions, self-confidence, and the ability to eloquently articulate thoughts and ideas. “Nothing replaces the sound of the human voice speaking to us,” observes Christina Heilig, a former member of Loveland SPEAKEASY Toastmasters Club in Loveland, Ohio, who was 32 when she joined Toastmasters. “In a world of text messages, emails, and instant messages, the ability to speak well is only going to become increasingly important and noticeable.”



Raising your hand and speaking in a group signifies a self-confidence that can help you stand out from the rest of your peer group. And if you know you'll need to sharpen your public speaking skills at some point, why not do it early on and get the benefits—and credit—for it now?

You'll Demonstrate Leadership Potential

As a consultant who helps facilitate the corporate talent review process, I've lost count of the times a competent individual was presented to senior leadership for promotion consideration only for the group to hesitate. "She could do the job but she's just not ready yet," would be the consensus around the table. The typical reason? Leaders felt the person needed more executive presence, polish, or "seasoning." Essentially, it came down to communication skills.

The best way to demonstrate executive readiness is to confidently and competently speak in public. Leaders take note of this skill. When your name comes up in promotion discussions, the impression you want the decision-makers to have is that you can handle the spotlight. (You might want to find out if your company sponsors a corporate Toastmasters club. If it does, join! It's a great way to connect with a cross-section of colleagues while also developing speaking and leadership skills.)

Young professionals today are the leaders of tomorrow. But you don't need to wait until tomorrow to prepare to lead. Confidently speaking in public is so closely associated with leadership ability that it's your quickest ticket there.

You'll Become a Better Thinker

Speaking in public teaches you to master your own ideas. Whenever you express yourself, whether verbally or in writing, your mental processes become clearer. Preparing to speak helps us clarify our thoughts as we prepare to articulate them verbally.

There's a saying that the best way to learn a topic is to teach it—or at least to

speaking it. Young professionals growing up with smart technology are used to having all the answers at their fingertips, and also communicating digitally. Nothing reinforces an idea like speaking it out loud, especially in front of a group. If you want to really master a subject, the best way is to present it in front of an audience.

You'll Gain Credibility (Whether You Deserve It or Not)

One of my personal aspirations is to be respected the most by the people who know me the best, both at work and at home. That said, I've seen many instances of leaders who lacked either character or competence but gained credibility and respect based on their ability to speak well in public. In one extreme example, I observed a team deeply unhappy and frustrated with their incompetent boss. Ironically, he was widely admired in the organization because of his engaging and heartfelt executive presentations.

When you're the one with the courage to speak up, your ideas rise to the top.

In a perfect world, our character and competence would earn respect and credibility on their own merits. But communication skills, and public speaking skills in particular, are a wild card. Articulate your ideas well in public and people will shower you with credibility, whether or not you deserve it.

"To me, leadership starts with a commitment to principles," said Jace Wann, recounting his motivation for joining a Toastmasters club in San Marcos, Texas, when he was in his early 20s. "But your leadership ability won't seem to matter if you can't communicate effectively."

Your Ideas Get Considered

As a young professional, it may feel like organizational directives often come from the top. That's not always the case. Even the most autocratic work cultures require

some degree of debate to make decisions. This means someone has to speak up and provide a point of view. Quite simply, the ideas that get presented get considered—because of, or in some cases in spite of, their merit.

When you're the one with the courage to speak up, your ideas rise to the top.

It's a Ton of Fun!

I'll be honest, there's just something about delivering a punchline in front of an audience that makes me smile on the inside. Whether I'm inspiring a group, presenting a solution to a problem, or simply facilitating a discussion, there is an art to the performance.

"Your voice is powerful," notes Musna Yusuf of Frederiksberg Toastmasters in Copenhagen, Denmark. She was 29 when she joined and feels "it's imperative for young professionals to learn to connect their message with recipients in a powerful way."

Sure, sometimes it can be a challenge to keep people awake right after lunch, but most times, it's a rush. It's fun to reach new speaking goals, or present new topics to new audiences. It's even more fun (and meaningful) to hear someone tell you how much they appreciated your talk—and how it helped solve their problem. Sometimes you even get to change people's lives. It doesn't get much more fun than that!

Anyone who has given presentations for any length of time will be quick to admit there is still much room to grow. After all, none of us were born knowing how to communicate effectively. We all needed to learn how. Regardless of where your speaking skills are on the spectrum, the best time to take the next step is right now. **T**

Nathan Magnuson *delivers innovative, high-ROI corporate programs designed to attract, engage, develop, and retain emerging talent. He's also the author of Stand Out! and Ignite Your Leadership Expertise. To learn more, contact Nathan at nathan@nathanmagnuson.com.*



All in the

Cross-generational family members find connection, camaraderie, and conversation through Toastmasters.

BY MEGAN PRESTON MEYER

On a scale from 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend Toastmasters to a family member? For these Toastmasters tribes, the answer is a resounding 10.

The Barbers: Family Dynamics

The Barbers of Santa Cruz, California, are a poster family for Toastmasters. Rita Barber, DTM; her husband, Tom; her son, Jeremy; and her daughter, Rory, have all been enthusiastic members. “If our dogs could speak, they’d be in a club too!” Rita jokes.

Shortly after joining Toastmasters, Rita realized that the rest of her family would benefit from it too. She also realized they might be reluctant to join on their own. “If you don’t go to Toastmasters with me,” she told her son in jest, “I’m not going to pay for your college any longer.” Jeremy wisely chose to attend.

Rory didn’t want to join the Gavel Club at her high school because she was shy. If she had to make a presentation, “she was upset that morning and upset that night.” But Rita was convincing; she made joining Toastmasters a condition of Rory getting her driver’s license.

Rita knew that Toastmasters would be good for her children, but she didn’t realize just how much they would benefit. Jeremy was already a good communicator, but “(Toastmasters) brought him to another place,” she says. Rory progressed so much that she now performs stand-up comedy. The girl who once cried when she had to make a presentation at school now takes the stage to make people laugh.



Tom, Rory, and Jeremy Barber have all been members of Toastmasters.



Not only has Toastmasters helped the Barbers communicate better with an audience, it's also helped them communicate better with each other. Learning how to properly give feedback has changed how Rita interacts with her children. "The evaluation side definitely made me a better mom." She also credits Toastmasters with improving her and Tom's communication.

Toastmasters leads to lively dinnertime conversation, as well. Rita recalls



Rita Barber, DTM, encouraged her children to join Toastmasters at a young age.

"I knew that Toastmasters would be good for my children, but I didn't realize just how much they would benefit."

—RITA BARBER, DTM

one particularly heated argument between Jeremy and Rory: "You're wrong." "No, *you're* wrong." When she inquired about the topic, they demanded she choose a side. "Mom—what's the more important role at Toastmasters?" they asked. "Is it being the evaluator or being the speaker?"

The Barbers have attended meetings together, argued over roles together, and started clubs together. They have all earned education awards in the traditional program. Their shared Toastmasters experience is an important part of their family life, and "it's a joyful thing," says Rita.

Gail Marsh and Jen Czaplá:

Home, No Matter Where You Are

When Jen Czaplá, DTM, of Tonawanda, New York, learned about a Toastmasters club that met in the building she worked in, she decided to check it out. "I knew what Toastmasters was because of my aunt ... I think if I didn't know what it was at the time, it never would have occurred to me to join."

Her aunt, Gail Marsh, DTM, of Gambrills, Maryland, had been involved with Toastmasters for more than a decade. She joined her first Toastmasters club in 1996 while living in Belgium. When she moved back to the United States, she saw an ad in the newspaper for Kritikos Toastmasters Club, which met right around the corner from the Maryland hotel she was staying at while house hunting. "I found my home club then. Before I even had a house, I found a Toastmasters club!" she laughs. She's still a member of Kritikos Toastmasters today, as well as the Phase II Advanced Toastmasters Club.

Gail Marsh, DTM, and her niece Jen Czaplá, DTM, are members of clubs in different states, but travel the world together with their Toastmaster magazine.



Jen also realized the importance of Toastmasters when settling into a new city. “When I moved to Buffalo, New York, (I went) to as many Toastmasters meetings as possible to meet people.” She’s now a member of two clubs in western New York: Amherst Chamber Toastmasters and AM Lockport Toastmasters.

Because they live in different states, Gail and Jen have never been members of the same club, but they still share the Toastmasters experience. They attended the 2016 International Convention

in Washington, D.C., and have been all over the world together. “We like traveling together and then we have to take our picture with the *Toastmaster* magazine,” Jen says. “Our next (travel) goal,” Gail adds, “is ... finding a Toastmasters club with a meeting we can attend. We’ve always looked for it, but it’s never fit into our schedule.”

As Gail and Jen know, Toastmasters is a place to build connections—and to feel at home no matter where you are.



Greg Van Borssum: The Next Generation

Accredited Speaker Greg Van Borssum is world class ... literally. He is a World Action Pistol Champion, took part in three Mr. Universe bodybuilding competitions, and has choreographed and directed Academy Award-winning films. In 2013, Greg joined Sea Eagles Toastmasters in Brookvale, New South Wales, Australia, and began using his voice to champion mental health issues in Australia and around the world. Just five years later, in 2019, he became the first Toastmasters Accredited Speaker in the Southern Hemisphere.

“If (young people) can find their voice, and if they can learn to structure things and speak with confidence, it’s going to take them to great places.”

—GREG VAN BORSSUM

He comes from a long line of winners—his maternal grandfather was a decorated World War I hero, and his father, Colin, was a world-champion kayaker. He credits his mother, Lesley, for getting him involved in Toastmasters, though her association with the program came at a time when women were not yet allowed to officially join the organization. “(She) was a member for 21 years back when (women were) ‘Toastmistresses,’” Greg says. He resisted at first her suggestion to join, but he had heard her talk about Toastmasters, and he had seen how it improved her life.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Debbie, Maya, Macyn, and Greg Van Borssum; the family at the 2019 Colorado International convention; Greg Van Borssum receiving his Accredited Speaker certification from 2019–2020 International President Deepak Menon; Macyn displays an award from a school public speaking contest.

When he began speaking publicly about mental health issues, he finally took her advice.

With this family history, it's no surprise that he's passing the drive for success—and passion for public speaking—on to his own children. His son Macyn, 13, while too young to officially join a Toastmasters club, has already won public speaking contests at his school, and has introduced his father at two District conferences. He adds that his daughter Maya, 9, is already a “great storyteller.”

Understanding the importance of effective communication, Greg wants to help other children, in addition to his own, learn the techniques. He runs a martial arts school where public

speaking and communication skills are an integral part of the curriculum. It's a logical combination, says Greg. “Martial arts teaches (kids) self-confidence and awareness; it teaches them how to lead. And then if they can find their voice, and if they can learn to structure things and speak with confidence, it's going to take them to great places.”

Leadership, communication, confidence, and drive: These are the values that Greg is instilling in his children and his students. “My mom helped me find my voice. My father taught me how to find a dream and chase it.” Now he's helping the next generation to do both.

Alex de Jong: Extended Family

“When I was introduced to Toastmasters, it wasn't very politely or gently,” says Alex de Jong. His father, ahem, *persuaded* him to attend a meeting. “I was kind of shoved into the back of a car—and I mean that literally—shoved into the back of a car.” Alex's father, Gerard, drove him to a meeting in Reading, England. Even though Alex hadn't chosen to go to Toastmasters on his own, he remembers thinking, *I wish I could do that.*

Twelve years later, Alex doesn't have to wish. He's a trainer, coach, and speaker, and his Toastmasters journey—despite its jarring start—has given him so much. He met his girlfriend, Kristina Sharykina, through Toastmasters. He's also formed such close relationships with his mentors that he now considers them family too.

“I have a few mentors ... that I would call mother and father figures. They aren't my parents, not my birth parents or family of origin, but people I've gotten so close to.”

His mentors George Smith and Olivia

Kristina Sharykina was introduced to Toastmasters by Alex de Jong, who was introduced by his father years earlier.

BOTTOM: *One of Alex's mentors, Olivia Schofield (left), has become like a family member to him.*



Schofield, a World Championship of Public Speaking® finalist in 2011, have played a vital role in Alex's life.

George and Alex bonded at a Starbucks cafe in Bristol, England, where they met every week while serving on the committee for the Northavon Speakers Club. Alex says when he went to a District International Speech Contest, George was the most pivotal person in helping him win, homing in on even the smallest details. The night before the contest, George noticed that the shoes Alex had brought weren't properly shined and the laces were frayed. He asked his wife, early on a Sunday morning, to go out and find shoe polish and new shoelaces.

Alex met Olivia at a contest, as well. She approached him after the semifinals of a Humorous Speech Contest to give him feedback. They formed a connection, and later, after a particularly powerful conversation, they shared a hug. “As I was hugging her, she said ‘just stay present,’” Alex recalls. “It's amazing how a hug can be one of the greatest pieces of feedback anyone can ever receive.

The best feedback is often not the words we say, but the connection that we bring to a relationship.”

Alex knows that connections and close relationships are what help make Toastmasters what it is. “It's something as simple as a type of father-son relationship in a Starbucks,” he says. “It's about getting someone a pair of shoelaces when they need it.”

For all of these families, Toastmasters teaches more than just communication and leadership skills. It provides a common language, a shared experience, and an opportunity to see one another in a different light. It strengthens relationships and brings generations closer together. All of which begs the question: Which family member will you introduce to Toastmasters? **T**

Megan Preston Meyer is a member of TM International Club Zug in Zug, Switzerland, and a regular contributor to Toastmaster magazine. She is the author of *Fifo Saves the Day: A Supply Jane Adventure*. Learn more at www.supply-jane.com.

True Lies

The Tall Tales Contest is a chance to stretch your speaking skills while engaging your audience's imagination. (Really!)

BY KATE MCCLARE, DTM



A fish called Rover who gets hooked on classic movies. A high school nerd who vanquishes his nemesis. A hero who saves a beautiful woman and an entire village from a savage crocodile.

True stories? Not likely. But that's not the point. They're tall tales: entertaining stories that stretch the truth and the imagination of both storyteller and audience. These particular whoppers were told, respectively, by Toastmasters Mary Lou Williams, DTM; Robert Cravalho, DTM; and Venkata Ramana Dittakavi. The tales are part of a worldwide folk tradition that's celebrated as one of Toastmasters International's officially sanctioned speech competitions, the Tall Tales Contest.

"I love tall tales," says Williams, a member of Naples Advanced Toastmasters and Fort Myers Toastmasters in southwest Florida. "This particular kind of speech is beneficial for a Toastmaster to do because it stimulates creativity and originality. And tall tales are stories. Therefore, they have a plot with a beginning, middle, and end; characters; and action. They motivate a Toastmaster to develop and enhance storytelling skills."

Almost every culture has its tall tales, often starring at least one superhuman character who performs mind-boggling feats. You may remember them from childhood: heroes like Paul Bunyan, America's giant lumberjack, clearing millions of acres with a single swing of his ax; Crooked Mick, the champion Australian sheep shearer who really does move mountains; Finn MacCool, the Irish hunter-warrior who creates the Isle of Man when he hurls a clump of Ireland at a rival and it lands in the Irish Sea.

To (Not) Tell the Truth

The Tall Tales Contest is an optional speech contest for Districts. Some hold the contest at their District conference; some don't hold it all. However, even if a District does not hold the event, clubs still can.

Tall tales are like storytelling on steroids, and in that spirit, the Tall Tales Contest challenges speakers to turn up their oratorical heat. According to the Toastmasters International [Speech Contest Rulebook](#), the Tall Tales Contest speeches are to be three to five minutes long and their subject "must be of a highly

exaggerated, improbable nature and have a theme or plot."

"The Prom Queen" certainly fills that bill. Imagined and performed by Accredited Speaker Robert Cravalho of Na Hoku Kai Toastmasters in Honolulu, Hawaii, it was the winning entry at the District 49 contest in 2013.

In the story, Cravalho loses his high school sweetheart to his arch-enemy, Big Billy Beeterman, and he exacts revenge on Billy. It ends with Billy freezing in fear—and Cravalho laughing maniacally.

To craft his tale, Cravalho started with a true story and embellished it to a fantastic, but still believable, level. "In high school, the love of my life broke up with me and started dating an athlete. I was crushed and somehow wanted to take revenge on him for stealing my girl. To get my revenge, I had to create an Achilles heel for my villain so I could exploit it, and that was the fear of heights." This villain chased Cravalho to the top of the bell tower, "and once he had me cornered, all I had to do was remind him how high off the ground he was [so I could] trigger his fear of heights. He froze and I escaped back to my girlfriend's arms.



“At the end of the speech, I wanted my audience to wonder, ‘Did that really happen?’” he says. “I think that is the telltale sign of a great Tall Tales speech; the story is not so far-fetched that it couldn’t be true.”

Some tales, however, succeed exactly because they’re so over-the-top outlandish—a thrill ride steered by an expert storyteller.

Venkata Ramana Dittakavi, of Hyderabad Toastmasters in Hyderabad, Telangana, India, competed in a Tall Tales Contest in District 82 (now District 98) in 2008. He won the contest, which concluded at the Area level.

“The real kicker was the last line ... the audience roared with laughter. What a great feeling!”

—ROBERT CRAVALHO

“I wanted the audience to be glued to my speech,” he says, and they surely must have been enthralled by his tale of saving a woman and her movie-producer husband from a savage monster.

“A crocodile hit the boat and the woman fell into the water. I jumped into the water, fought with the crocodile with one hand and held the lady close to me as she was unconscious. I killed the crocodile and threw it onto a nearby hill. Its blood fell all over a tribal village. The villagers were so happy, as that crocodile was killing whoever got into the river to fetch water.”

Mary Lou Williams’ “Rover, A Fish Story” is literally a fish-out-of-water story about a fish that learns to live on land while watching such classic films as *Moby Dick* and *The Little Mermaid*. Impossible? Williams describes Rover’s

transformation so logically and matter-of-factly, you might think, well, maybe it could be true.

The Payoff

Leaving the audience guessing is a powerful attraction for Williams, who shared Rover’s story at a District 48 workshop on tall tales. She has not competed in the contest but is a fan of the event “because of the variety and outlandishness of the ideas that contestants come up with in creating their tales and embellishing them with ever-more-fantastic flights of fancy. For example, one participant told a tale about being a donut farmer. He used Cheerios for seeds.”

Cravalho believes speakers can benefit by telling this kind of story at a club meeting. “Improving on creativity helps you to perform better in all that you do.”

And you can’t beat the immediate payoff of the speech. For Cravalho, that came with the last line of his tale, “when I tell the audience that Big Billy Beeterman remained frozen in time in the church tower because I never told anyone what happened until just now.

“The audience roared with laughter. What a great feeling!”

Tall tales can take your speaking skills to new heights, says Dittakavi. “They help us to realize how powerful our imagination is, and the power and influence of our words. ... They test your skills in storytelling, persuasion, entertainment, word usage, and many more skills.”

Dittakavi’s story about the movie producer, his wife, and the crocodile ends with Dittakavi getting an offer to star in a movie about his act of heroism, and attend a village ceremony dedicating a statue to him. “I refused both of the offers as I had this Tall Tales Contest on the same day, and I am a passionate Toastmaster committed to

TALL TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

Mary Lou Williams

Tell the tale in deadpan style, to enhance the audience’s belief in your sincerity. The greater the contrast between deadpan style and over-the-top content, the greater the comedic effect.

Robert Cravalho

Be careful not to stretch the story too far. If you do, the story becomes unbelievable, and you run the risk of creating a fairy tale. You want to keep the realism in the story and leave the audience wondering if the story really occurred.

Venkata Ramana Dittakavi

Be crazy in your wild imagination. Enjoy your story and then you can speak from your heart. Create stories from your own experiences and never borrow from others.

improving communication and leadership skills.”

Now *that* we believe! **T**

Editor’s Note: Learn more about the art of storytelling in the Pathways project “Connect with Storytelling,” an elective available in all paths.

Kate McClare, DTM, is President of Miami Advanced Toastmasters in Miami, Florida. She is a copywriter and editor whose career has included covering space aliens, the world’s fattest cat, and other astounding phenomena as a tabloid reporter. (Really.)



Self-Care Is Part of the Program

Members find mental-health benefits along with skill strengthening.

BY PAUL STERMAN

It has been a brutal 16 months for the B.U.T. Abaco Trail Blazers, a 66-year-old club on the island of Abaco, in the Bahamas. In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian struck, devastating the island and the country as a whole. Club members were among the thousands of residents whose homes were decimated by the storm.

In the hurricane's aftermath, members had to relocate to other countries. The club's physical meeting space was also destroyed, along with all the Toastmasters contents inside. Club banner, books, flag, gavel, lectern, new member pins, new member kits—all gone.

Then COVID-19 hit. Two members of the Abaco Trail Blazers contracted the virus, one of whom was hospitalized for three months.

Amid the displacement and distress, Toastmasters was a beacon of light, says Club President Neulessa Lundy-Major. Online club meetings became a haven.

"Just being able to connect through Toastmasters, hear each other's voices from Canada, Guyana, Jamaica, and other parts of the Bahamas, made us feel better," says Lundy-Major, a member since 2011. "Even more so than before, we encourage each other to achieve goals while helping each other to heal. It is an extraordinary thing for us here in the Abaco Trail Blazers Club."

Their experience reflects the role that Toastmasters plays in many people's lives. The program is about much more than skills development—it can also be a source of emotional comfort, say members. Close friendships are formed, and fellow members become a support system.



“The bonds that we create in our clubs rally us through difficult times.”

—SAGNIK BISWAS, DTM

“I saw my club members rally around me during a particularly difficult time a few years ago, offering company and solace, and taking care of me when it was most needed,” says Sagnik Biswas, DTM, a member of two clubs in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. “The bonds that we create in our clubs rally us through difficult times.”

Confidence and Self-Care

Psychological growth is built into the Toastmasters culture. Embracing the vulnerability that comes with public speaking is its own act of bravery, sparking self-confidence. Toastmasters say participating in club meetings is like an act of self-care, a routine that boosts mental health.

Lundy-Major, a longtime teacher in the Bahamas, says that has been particularly true this year. “Every week, instead of worrying about COVID and my home repairs and all the other stressful



things around me, I would just pause, turn on my laptop, and travel to the exciting room we call Toastmasters, where I find tranquility, peace, and positive thinkers who are assisting me with facing the future and developing goals to make my world a better place.

“Even if it is only for two hours, it’s like the great escape.”

Strengthening communication skills is a key to connecting with people and improving relationships. That leads not only to more emotional fulfillment but a more harmonious society, a belief strongly advocated by Toastmasters founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley. Author John Bowe delved into that principle, highlighting Toastmasters in his recent book [*I Have Something to Say: Mastering the Art of Public Speaking in an Age of Disconnection*](#).

GRAPPLING WITH ANXIETY

When COVID-19 hit the U.S., Alex Kiester found herself battling severe anxiety. But it wasn't directly related to the pandemic—it was tied to communication issues, she says. In the past, the professional writer had struggled mightily with anxiety over public speaking, an anxiety so distressful that it prompted multiple panic attacks on a daily basis. That's what spurred Kiester to join Toastmasters three years ago, leading to a dramatic transformation, her fears abating as she gained a sense of confidence and control.

The young Texan was initially preoccupied with making sure her family was healthy and safe when the pandemic first emerged. Her participation in Toastmasters lapsed.

"And then I started noticing I was having my old severe anxiety, which had nothing to do with the pandemic—it was specifically about communicating with other people, and I was experiencing it in a way I had never experienced it before, like in virtual meetings with my clients, even with some friends," says Kiester. "And I thought, *Oh, man, I've got to get back to Toastmasters.*

"So I went back, and I'm not exaggerating: After that first meeting back on Zoom, it was night and day. It was a complete shift in my mental health and my confidence level. I was like, *Oh, yeah, I'm in control again.*"

Kiester, the author of a published novel and another one to be released in early 2022, believes it's important to talk openly about topics like anxiety, to erase any stigmas that might exist around mental health issues. A member of two clubs in Austin, Texas, she says she's grateful for the impact Toastmasters has had on her life the past few years. (Her mom is a Toastmaster too.)

"I wax poetic about Toastmasters all the time," says Kiester. "I truthfully say Toastmasters saved my life."

"For individuals and for society, speech training really constitutes the ultimate survival skill," Bowe said in an [August Toastmaster magazine article](#). "It's what keeps good people engaged with all of life's fights—in family life, politics, at work, and so on—and keeps us alive for another day, hashing out problems, instead of sulking off to the sidelines, filled with resentment."

Toastmasters in the Time of COVID-19

As the coronavirus pandemic has cast its shadow around the world, people have felt isolated, scared, and anxious. Toastmasters has provided connection and community.

"Every week, I look forward to my Toastmasters meeting to de-stress and decompress."

—TANWI KUMARI

Trà Pham, of the Hanoi Speakers in Vietnam, says her club members have grown closer in recent months. Meeting online, they've managed to add fun activities, such as giving impromptu speeches while rollerblading, playing the piano, or doing yoga.

"I felt quite gloomy during the pandemic, but I can join online meetings and connect with other members, and they have such energy that helps lift my mood," says Pham, the club's Vice President Education.

Other Toastmasters, too, say club meetings are a soothing constant during hard times. "Every week, I look forward to my Toastmasters meeting to de-stress and decompress, where everyone talks of hope and faith, and discussions are fun-filled and yet full of learning," says Tanwi Kumari, of the PSN Toastmasters Club in Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

Being able to laugh together has a healing effect—whether listening to comedic speeches, being playful in Table Topics®, or just making quips in conversation. The Abaco Trail Blazers select "hilarious Joke Masters to open our meetings," says Lundy-Major.

"We use humor a lot to help get us through, because 2019–2020 was really life-changing for us."

"Laughter—that is the key," adds Carol Ashton, a member of the Wetaskiwin Toastmasters in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada. "The key to learning, the key to staying connected, and the key for success. We have a great group that adds humor in their speeches in general."

Communication and Catharsis

Chitra T V, a member in India, finds therapeutic value in Toastmasters. And she should know: She is a therapist herself. In Toastmasters, she notes, people express themselves, listen attentively, provide nonjudgmental support and helpful feedback, and build their confidence and emotional strength. In many ways, "it's like a therapy group," she says. T V, who belongs to the Kaggadasapura Toastmasters Club in Bangalore, even



recommends that colleagues tell their clients about Toastmasters.

“There are young people who don’t want to continue in therapy but they struggle with their communication skills. I find Toastmasters very useful,” she says.

For Sagnik Biswas, life instantly became more hectic once the pandemic struck. He works as an event facilitator for Capgemini, a giant technology and outsourcing company, and suddenly all his work was completely online. On top of that, he was the District 92 Club Growth Director and then became its 2020–2021 Program Quality Director. Thus the “informal banter” sessions his clubs held at the end of each meeting, after the regular activities had concluded, were much appreciated, says Biswas.

“It helped me to have those 20 minutes of levity, where I could relax, sit back, and enjoy the wit, banter, and most importantly, the learning through fun that Toastmasters International advocates, and that Toastmasters clubs live,” he says. “It helped me get through an immensely difficult time—and I am thankful to my clubs.”

In Lundy-Major’s club in the Bahamas, after the club adjourns the formal part of its weekly meetings, some members use the same Zoom link to stay on and socialize—sometimes for as long as two hours. “We would just talk about life, COVID, Pathways ... and just thank God for pulling us through amidst all of the turmoil.”

When the pandemic hit, Ashton—the Canadian member—was working as a waitress, and she found herself without work for three months because her restaurant had to close. Being able to attend various club meetings on Zoom made her feel less isolated, she says.

“That cold feeling of staying home turned to a big warm fuzzy. I met people from all over the world,” she says. “I woke up early to meet the Witty Birds [an online club based in the United Kingdom], and stayed up late to visit a club in Singapore. Any time I wanted a warm fuzzy, I found a club that was meeting that day.”

Talking About It

Toastmasters often talk about the impact of COVID-19 in their conversations with each other and sometimes incorporate the topic into meetings. Chitra T V, the therapist in India, says a number of her club’s speeches touched on the pandemic. Participating in Toastmasters “is allowing people to talk about what is happening to them,” she says.

At one meeting of the Abaco Trail Blazers, the theme of the Table Topics session was: “If I could change one thing right now, what would it be?” The session turned out to be cathartic, says Lundy-Major.

“Most of the presenters spoke about their lockdown experiences, and it was a coping thing for them and those who listened. ... Some of the jokes were about the crazy things people tried while in lockdown.”

For the Abaco club, there is still a long road ahead nearly a year and a half after Hurricane Dorian, which left more than 80,000 residents of the Bahamas homeless. Lundy-Major’s island home is slowly being rebuilt, and the country is trying to recover from the worst natural disaster in its history. But she and her fellow Trail Blazers are on the path together, buoyed by their club and their connection.

“Yes, this is a frightening time,” she says, “but we try to make the best of our time together.” **T**

Paul Sterman is senior editor, executive and editorial content, for *Toastmasters International*.

The Quest for Confidence

Take a chance, fail fast, learn, and grow.

BY EMILY SACHS

Taking a leap of faith in your own abilities is not only a hallmark of the Toastmasters learning experience, it's a scientifically proven method of boosting confidence. Confidence is born in our brains—it's the sum of thoughts and actions that lead us to believe we'll succeed.

Self-belief is the great enabler in getting you to where you want to go, research shows. Quell your internal doubts, and you eliminate your biggest self-imposed barrier to success.

This is a well-traveled mindset for Toastmasters, the majority of whom join to boost communication skills and conquer an underlying lack of confidence that may prevent them from reaching goals.

Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, authors of *The Confidence Code*, suggest a trifecta of steps to cultivate confidence: leave your comfort zone, fail fast, and nurture a growth mindset. Fortunately for Toastmasters, we practice one or all three of these steps every time we start a new Pathways project, give a club speech, take on a meeting role, or agree to run for office.

Here's how these confidence cultivation steps dovetail with Toastmasters experiences.

Take a Chance

From natural herbs and hypnotism to seminars and self-help books, Susanna Smith had tried almost everything to combat her anxiety around public speaking in order to progress in her career. It turns out all she needed to do was stand up.

"I'm an expert in communication and language," says Smith, a children's speech and language pathologist and educator in Essex, England. "But getting up in front of people to talk about it is, like, *no, it's not happening*. Not until Toastmasters."

At her first meeting of the Romford Speakers, a club outside London, audience members were asked to introduce themselves to the room. "Even though I was trembling, I did. If I hadn't, I would have kicked myself. And I may not have felt the need to come back," she says. The experience of pushing past her fear was so profound that she joined the club that same night.

"Toastmasters reminded me that I've got what it takes to conquer my world."

—AYOTOLA OLANREWAJU

Through Toastmasters, Smith found a supportive group of formerly fearful communicators aiming to face risk and grow from it.

She took further action by volunteering for club meeting roles. At her fourth meeting, she delivered her Ice Breaker—conquering the task was her "exposure therapy" to public speaking.

Smith has since incorporated Toastmasters practices into her professional training seminars too. Instead of presenting a dry laundry list of patient symptoms,

she employs storytelling—walking the audience through sharable client experiences and conclusions. Smith has noticed her students have come to appreciate the approach and often follow her storytelling lead in their own interactions.

"I never would have thought I would be saying public speaking is my new passion," Smith says. "To me, it's turned everything around, and I'm totally grateful."

Fail Fast

Historically, tech industry startups embrace the concept of failing fast; they view mistakes as lessons. The faster you learn, the closer you are to developing that all-new product or service. "Failing fast allows for constant adjustment, testing, and then quick movement toward what will actually work," authors Kay and Shipman write.

Toastmasters set up an experience akin to fast failure through meeting activities like Table Topics®. Lessons come quickly. Frequent challenges also exercise your self-compassion—you more readily accept you won't always succeed, and you learn that failing doesn't feel nearly as bad as you envisioned.

Ayotola Olanrewaju, an aspiring actress and motivational speaker in Lagos, Nigeria, was a natural talker and loved the attention of being on camera and onstage. She felt at home the first time she visited Lighthouse Prestige Toastmasters in Lagos.

Participating in Table Topics, she took note of evaluators' suggestions to



improve, whether it was delivering a better punch line or sticking to a few main points. Based on her club colleagues' feedback, she discovered that she was her own harshest critic.

She began delivering speeches and felt so good that she competed in the 2020 International Speech Contest at the club level. And she won. She went on to place second at the District level.

"Toastmasters reminded me that I've got what it takes to conquer my world," she says now.

Mind Over Matter

The third component of confidence is the growth mindset. Those who believe they can learn new skills are the most likely to do so and gain confidence in the process. The growth mindset is at the core of the Toastmasters Pathways learning experience, which features more than 300 competencies to help members master increasingly complex capabilities in communication and leadership.

Riyas A.F., a two-time Division speech champion and member of Calicut Toastmasters in Calicut, Kerala, India, has been a Toastmaster for six years, but says he grew the most in the six-month

period leading up to the 2020 contest season. Through feedback from others, he learned that his stage presence was strong, but he needed to sharpen his speechwriting. Working closely with his mentor, Arjun Sundar Raj, DTM, he focused on writing for the ears rather than the eyes and on presenting a global message rather than a local one. He made it to the District finals in 2020.

Quell your internal doubts, and eliminate your biggest self-imposed barrier to success.

A.F. is a long way from the nervous MBA student whose first Toastmasters speech was in front of 200 people attending a demonstration meeting for a new club. He joined Toastmasters thinking it

would help get him a job. How right he was. In 2016, the self-proclaimed "serial entrepreneur" and two other Toastmasters started Samathva

Center for Excellence, a corporate training company that teaches employees at various companies how to improve business communication. He also trains groups on the art of confidence.

"I was a pathetic speaker when I started the journey," he says. "Now I'm getting invitations from different companies, corporations, colleges, and institutes. I never thought that would happen." **T**

Emily Sachs is President of Long Island University-Brooklyn Toastmasters in Brooklyn, New York. A former newspaper reporter, she took her own leap of faith in pitching this article, her first in 14 years. She works in financial regulatory compliance.

Toastmasters 2020: Resolve Reimagined

It's been a year of drastic change and uncommon resilience.

BY STEPHANIE DARLING



The 2020 Toastmasters calendar year is one for the history books.

Two notable events—the formal transition to the Pathways learning experience as the organization's official education program, and the International Convention originally planned for Paris—would be distinctive milestones in any year. But 2020 is not any year. In fact, it has been one of the most uncertain, sobering, yet exhilarating periods in Toastmasters history.

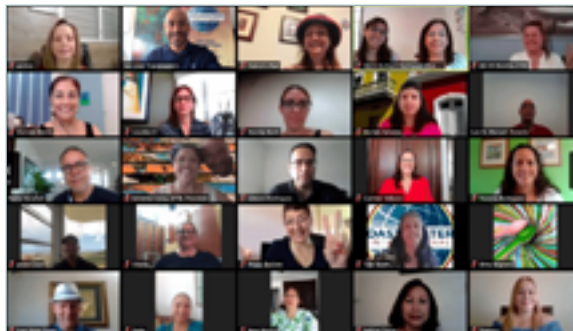
The year opened with COVID-19 shock waves, which spread daily in devastating intensity. The initial impact on our global organization, with its 96-year history of in-person learning, was jarring. Yet almost immediately, members and leaders mounted a worldwide drive to preserve club viability.

The Board of Directors acted quickly to allow all-online meetings; clubs, Areas, Districts, and regions responded with what turned out to be a deep, untapped zest for technology and creative innovation.

“This uncharted territory has caused the organization, at every level, to innovate in ways previously believed to be improbable, or even unacceptable. But courage and commitment to Dr. Smedley’s movement has, so far, prevailed,” said Toastmasters

Chief Executive Officer Daniel Rex in his [August 2020 CEO Report](#).

Here is a look back at 2020, highlighting how Toastmasters members reacted not only to ensure, but to exceed the expectations of that experiment.



People’s lives around the world went virtual in 2020; so did Toastmasters.

Virtually Unstoppable

Toastmasters’ rapid, organization-wide transition from in-person to virtual meetings tops the year’s news. The numbers tell the story:

- ▶ By September, some 83% of clubs were meeting online, up from 5–6% in early 2020.
- ▶ Meeting technology propelled Toastmasters over geographic boundaries

and time zones. Members either ramped up existing technological skills or became overnight tech experts to create brand new meeting experiences on a global scale. More than 100 members were peer-nominated as [Masters of Online Meetings](#), a *Toastmaster* magazine series celebrating virtual tech training heroes.

- ▶ Four first-ever [professional development webinars](#), featuring expert Toastmasters presenters, drew 40,000 registrants.
- ▶ The [2020 World Championship of Public Speaking](#) became the first all-virtual championship in Toastmasters history; the contest video drew at least 98,000 views by September 1.



- ▶ When the Paris convention was postponed, Toastmasters created a free, first-ever [online convention extravaganza](#) that attracted some 60,000 registrants from 203 countries. Nearly 90% were first-time attendees.



- ▶ In rapid response to COVID-19, World Headquarters staff created a flood of [online materials](#) to help members preserve club vitality during the unprecedented upending of traditional meeting formats. New webpages featured pandemic-related news and hundreds of targeted resources, such as videos, Q&As, virtual membership and programming materials, virtual meeting tutorials, professionally designed meeting backdrops, exclusive *Toastmaster* magazine stories, and even a space for clubs to share online successes. All traditional materials were retooled for online sharing.

Milestones

Pathways

“Trust me when I say that you are on the cusp of an adventure of a lifetime (with Pathways),” said [Lorinne Griswold](#) of ChevMasters Club, in San Ramon, California, on what she realized after resisting and then ardently embracing Pathways.

On July 1, Pathways became the official education curriculum. Highlights from the 2019-2020 Pathways annual report:

- ▶ 86% of surveyed participants said they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with Pathways projects and real-life applicability.
- ▶ Innovative Planning is the most popular path; “Connect with Storytelling” is the most popular project.
- ▶ 170,000 Ice Breakers have been given since Pathways began.

Translations

Four new paths—Presentation Mastery, Leadership Development, Visionary Communication, and Effective Coaching—are now available in Korean and Tamil.

The Rotary/Toastmasters Alliance

Nearly a year into a unique alliance between the international organizations, Toastmasters has created eight custom education courses for Rotary. Want to



reach out to Rotary members in your community? There are [dozens of resources](#) designed for collaborative interaction.

Above and Beyond

Despite the pandemic, Toastmasters continued to prize excellence in action, as these numbers demonstrate.

Dynamic Districts: On July 1, [four new Districts](#) formed—District 117 (Eastern North Carolina); District 119 (South Manhattan and Long Island, New York); District 120 (Tamil Nadu, India); and District 121 (Kerala and Karnataka, India).

Bravo: To these [Distinguished Districts](#) that faced COVID-19 challenges for a significant part of the 2019–2020 program year, and still rose to Distinguished status.

So Many to Celebrate: The overwhelming positive energy of clubs, even in the midst of a global health crisis, is a continued cause for celebration. The Board of Directors created [new awards](#) at the club, Area, Division, and District levels just for the 2019-2020 program year.

Generally Great News

- ▶ [I Have Something to Say](#), John Bowe’s new book about his Toastmasters experience, was among the nominees for the Fall 2020 Next Big Idea Club, a list of must-read nonfiction titles compiled by noted authors like Malcom Gladwell.
- ▶ The original Toastmasters club, Smedley Chapter One, in Irvine, California, held its 2,300th meeting this year. The club first met on Oct. 22, 1924.
- ▶ LinkedIn ranked Toastmasters third among its [Top 10 U.S. volunteering](#)

[organizations](#), based on the number of volunteer activities the site’s users listed on their LinkedIn profiles.

- ▶ The *Toastmaster* magazine received three [editorial awards from Folio](#), which recognizes outstanding writing and design in the publishing industry.

The *Toastmaster* Magazine

What Were You Reading?

Cost and distribution issues related to COVID-19 led to the temporary suspension of the print edition; the magazine went online-only in May. Interestingly, 2020’s top three articles were pandemic-related exclusives:

1. [“It’s Time to Meet Online”](#)
2. [“How to Appear Your Best Online”](#)
3. [“Suddenly, Life is a Series of Table Topics”](#)

Other top articles: [“Evaluations: Bridging the Culture Gap,”](#) [“Be Our Guest,”](#) and [“The Power of Body Language.”](#)

Where Were You Reading?

The magazine’s popular [Traveling Toastmaster](#) section pictured members taking their magazines around the pre-pandemic world, from Istanbul and Cape Town to the Taj Mahal and the Grand Canyon. The magazine went on skydives, paraglides, and scuba dives. Later in the year, as people were forced to stay close to home, members creatively submitted pictures of themselves with their magazine in their hometowns and front yards.

Postscript

Members and leaders persevered and elevated the Toastmasters mission in 2020. You were vigorous in reaching out for answers and assistance: Between March and September 2020, World Headquarters fielded 20,900 phone calls, 10,500 emails, and 11,000 chats. **T**

Stephanie Darling is senior editor of the *Toastmaster* magazine.



Here's to ...

Holiday toasting when everyone feels a little burnt around the edges.

BY JOHN CADLEY

It's December, a time when we would normally be engaged in joyous holiday merrymaking. This year we'll simply be celebrating the fact that we made it to December—no small thing considering 2020 was one of the most frightening years since the Great Disco Plague of 1970. Social distancing, aggressive hand washing, mass nostril swabbing ... who could have imagined? I still can't get used to everyone wearing a mask. If it's homemade I think I'm being robbed; if it's light blue I'm afraid someone's going to remove my gallbladder.

And yet, being the social animals that we are, people *will* have December get-togethers, if only virtually, and someone will call for a toast. Who will they call on to give it? The Toastmaster. The master of toasts. *You*. Are you ready?

I have full confidence that in normal times any Toastmaster could give a rousing toast without thinking twice. In the time of COVID, however, some forethought is in order. First and foremost, funny is out. As of February 12, 2020, 97.4% of the world's population lost its sense of humor. There was nothing to laugh about anyway. Twenty-twenty was the first year since the dawn of civilization when absolutely nothing funny happened. *Nothing*. I thought maybe business magnate Elon Musk's SpaceX Starship project to send humans to Mars was worth a chuckle, but now it seems like an eminently sensible idea. Floods, fires, and pandemics are one thing, but when a 3.1 magnitude earthquake hits *New Jersey*—yeah, that happened—it's time for a nice long trip into space.

The rule of never toast yourself still applies as well. Yes, you've been through a lot and yes, you deserve recognition for

surviving 2020 without your hair turning gray overnight. Nevertheless, raising a glass and saying, "Here's to me," just looks bad. What if others did it? You'd have a group of people all toasting themselves, which is even more ridiculous than an earthquake in New Jersey.

Avoid off-color toasts as well. Decorum discourages it; history warns against it. According to an article about toasting by Lorraine Eaton in a Virginia newspaper, the English started raising their glasses around A.D. 450, and by the 17th century to drink without toasting was considered rude. Eaton follows this observation with the sentence: "Debauchery followed." See, that's the problem. Saying "Here's mud in your eye" is one thing, but when the toast veers into the risqué, you might be setting the tone for behavior that is referred to in more genteel circles as *misbehavior*. Haven't you had enough trouble for one year?

"Hear! Hear!" and "Bottoms up!" may be all right for some, but not for a Toastmaster. You can do better.

Clichés are off-limits, too. You may be hard-pressed to find just the right words in these challenging times, but whatever you do, don't start with "in these challenging times." How many times have you heard *that*? Likewise, "Hear! Hear!" and "Bottoms up!" may be all right for some, but not for a Toastmaster. You can do better. You *must* do better, especially if there's another Toastmaster present who may feel

obligated to report you for dereliction in the line of duty.

You really have only two themes that won't get you into trouble: cheery optimism or heartfelt sentimentality. You start, as always, by standing up and getting everyone's attention. Clinking a glass is usually a no-no, but since the custom comes from olden times when they rang bells to thwart the devil, I say do it. We need all the help we can get. Then begin with "I'd like to propose a toast." It sounds so much better than "Hey everybody, shut up!" If you go the optimism route, you could wax eloquent with something like, "Here's to 2021 ... and to the abiding human faith that the darkest events of the past can never obscure the brightest hopes for the future." To me that's more inspiring than, "How much worse can it get?"

If you opt for sentimentality, remember that a little goes a long way. It's like putting sugar in your coffee—better to use a teaspoon than a shovel.

In all likelihood you'll be giving your toast by Zoom, which should be plenty of incentive to give a good one. Extrapolating from the dictum by the famed English writer Dr. Samuel Johnson that nothing clears a person's head like the shadow of the gallows, we could say similarly that nothing clears a Toastmaster's head like the prospect of the mute button. And so I propose a toast to *your* holiday toast for 2020. Cheers! **T**

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

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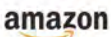


CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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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