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Remain Undaunted



It was 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 1, 2003. I was nervous and uneasy. I had been elected President of the Toastmasters Club of New Delhi. It seemed like such a daunting task.

As a fairly new member of the club, with no experience serving in any club officer position, I was apprehensive at my first meeting as President. Somehow, I gathered courage and hesitatingly spoke about my vision for the club when, to my shock and amazement, my club members began applauding! Little did I know then that I had embarked on a leadership journey that would culminate in becoming the Toastmasters International President 16 years later.

I can imagine the stress many of you are going through now as you begin your leadership journey, perhaps for the first time. There is added pressure from the ongoing pandemic, which has altered our lives in unimaginable ways. Leadership in normal times requires special competencies and attributes that we learn as part of our Toastmasters experience. The present unusual situation requires more adroit actions to ensure that we continue serving our members.

What can we do to stay on track in these extraordinary times?

Teamwork is critical to the success of any project and more so now in Toastmasters. Motivate the team, share your vision, and plan together for success. Review the plan frequently and if necessary, tweak it based on evolving needs. Be resilient. As we've seen in the past six months, our members have demonstrated resilience brilliantly, as they coped with the crisis and emerged victorious!

Leadership in normal times requires special competencies ... The present situation requires more adroit actions to serve our members.

Be adaptable. When we are inflexible and unwilling to change, we are often left behind. Get creative. The pandemic appeared to present an insurmountable meeting challenge. But you adapted to the new world and switched to an online format, making clubs more successful than ever before!

Have compassion and stay calm. We are all in this together. If we practice active listening, empathy, and care, we will be serving our members to our full potential.

Be generous with kudos to those who have contributed directly or indirectly to your success. Create an environment of positivity and support. Appreciation and gratitude at all times lets members know that we value them.

Stay on track with enthusiasm and passion, remain undaunted, and enjoy your leadership experience. When it is time to take up a new leadership role on July 1, 2021, look back to this year with satisfaction and say, "I did it!" Better still, "We did it!"

Deepak Menon, DTM
International President

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An open platform for your tips, tactics, comments, and encouragement.

Embrace Change

COVID-19 has brought much of life to a standstill, and Toastmasters are experiencing change too. Many clubs are grappling with the details of hosting virtual meetings, including how to master technology and convince all members of the benefits of making this effort.

Change is inevitable; what isn't pre-ordained is our response. We have a choice to be positive in the face of difficulty. By focusing on the benefits of change, we have the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills. Toastmasters across the world are trying new programs and learning online group etiquette. There will be bumps, but the online community is sharing successes and best practices. We are all here to help each other.

When this passes, we will have gained useful skills—skills we can use at work, in volunteer roles, and even with our families. Change forces us to add new tools to our tool belts for dealing with obstacles. It also strengthens our community by sharing our humanity during this difficult time. This is a shared experience, so bring out the best in others while you are being the best you can be. Embrace the change!

Sarah Chaffee

Concord, New Hampshire, U.S.
Concord Toastmasters Club

Continuing Member Achievement

I wanted to share an exciting developing Toastmasters story that has come out of the coronavirus pandemic. The story of my



Members of Grosvenor Square Speakers in London, England.

In early March, Grosvenor Square Speakers of London, England, celebrated their club's 40th anniversary. The club was established in 1980, and members believe it was the first Toastmasters club in London. They are proud to have achieved the President's Distinguished Award every year since 2009.

career change from a clinical veterinarian to working in a congressional office was featured in the January 2020 edition of the *Toastmaster* magazine. As mentioned in the article, I develop lessons focused on [One Health](#)—a global initiative working for optimal health for people, animals, and our environment.

I have now created One Health lessons focused on the coronavirus to teach children where the virus likely came from, how we can protect ourselves (the reason for social distancing, washing hands, etc.), how viruses mutate, what scientists are now doing to protect people in the future, and how we can all take action to prevent a future infectious disease pandemic. Toastmasters clubs in Belgium, Hong Kong, and San Francisco are sharing and translating these lessons in their communities through teaching online classes. This allows for more public speaking practice for Toastmasters and enables them to give back to their communities.

Deborah Thomson

Washington, D.C., U.S.
United States Senate Club

The Cherry on Top

Participating in a speech contest is a great way to boost your confidence in public speaking. It forces you to come out of the box and perform. Earning a place in a contest

is only the cherry on top. Do not wait until you are ready to compete, because you will never feel ready. By participating in contests, I learned how to lose gracefully. When you diligently prepare and give it your all, losing can be very disappointing. However, that is how we grow as people and redirect our approaches and challenge ourselves.

After losing in a Division speech contest, I redirected my disappointment to focus on earning my Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award, which I completed in February. Had I won the Division contest, I probably would not have had the motivation to become a DTM.

My advice is to participate in as many contests as possible. Focus on the journey. Whether you win or lose, your speaking skills improve significantly, and you will learn invaluable lessons such as how to redirect your disappointment—that is, if you lose.






Disna M. Weerasinghe, DTM

Downingtown, Pennsylvania, U.S.
Brunswick Toastmasters Club

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

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WHAT'S ONLINE THIS MONTH:



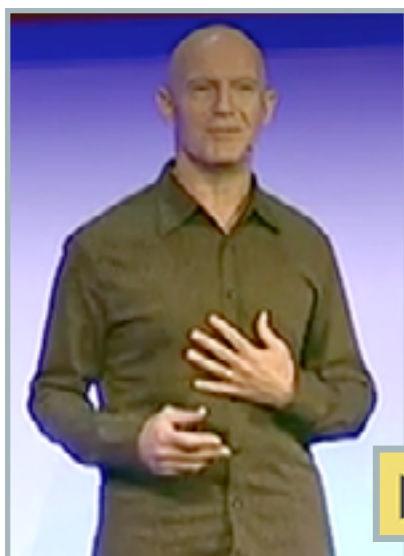
Paint a Picture



Do you want to give a speech that sounds more vivid? Listen to Toastmasters Toolbox author Bill Brown, DTM, for techniques to effectively use descriptive language.

Build a Stronger Team

Extraordinary teams, like great machines, require certain components that hold their pieces together. Watch Lee Rubin, a 2019 Toastmasters International Convention speaker, reveal practices for achieving your team's common goal.



What's That Sound?

Sounds, both pleasant and awful, affect us in significant ways, as author and sound expert Julian Treasure shows in this TED Talk.

WEB RESOURCE

Member Tools



Looking for the latest from Toastmasters International? On the main page of the [Toastmasters International website](http://www.toastmasters.org), you can find helpful resources to stay updated and connected. This includes timely organizational announcements, online meeting tips, the *Toastmaster* digital edition, and more.



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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MEMBER RECOGNITION

Showcasing members, mentors, and clubs

Andrew Tan, DTM (pictured left), of Selangor, Malaysia, became **Albert Khor's** mentor in 2017. Khor, DTM, of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, didn't realize the immense leadership opportunities he would be exposed to in Toastmasters, but Tan helped lead the way and inspired his mentee. When the two first met, Tan was the District 51 Director. "He advised me to often reflect on what I do and try to improve," Khor shared. With Tan's consistent encouragement and reassurance, Khor has steadily advanced in his Toastmasters leadership journey. He began as Club Secretary, then became Vice President Education, then Area Director, and most recently, Division Director. The picture above shows the two men at a ceremony where Khor was recognized as District 51's Area Director of the Year. Khor says of Tan, "His mentoring made me see the leader in me and the value of mentoring in Toastmasters. As a result, I am mentoring nine Toastmasters and served as a sponsor for two new clubs. It's the ripple effect from his willingness to mentor."



Just as many clubs around the world did, Riyadh Toastmasters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, elected a new set of officers in May. However, Riyadh Toastmasters made club history! Members are thrilled to have the club's first female Club President—**Daad Alamoudi** (pictured). They also elected a female Vice President Education—Mashael Alhumaidan. Area Director and Club Treasurer Riyas Ibrahimkutty says, "We're empowering Saudi females to seek leadership roles!"

Cris Birch, DTM (pictured left), of Vienna, Virginia, U.S., celebrated his second career retirement with Toastmasters from District 36, including Club Growth Director **Bonnie L. Maidak, DTM**, of Germantown, Maryland, U.S. He was honored at a meeting of the M Street Verbalizers in Washington, D.C. Many District officers were in attendance, as were many former club members who traveled back to Washington, D.C., to see Birch—a mentor for approximately 40 Toastmasters.



Birch first joined Toastmasters in 1983 and is currently a member of and mentor to the NOVA Toastmasters in Northern Virginia and M Street Verbalizers. One of Birch's mentees, Accredited Speaker Tamara Smiley Hamilton, DTM, said, "I would not be an Accredited Speaker and Distinguished Toastmaster without Cris' support and unconditional kindness. I entered my first speech contest because he told me my story mattered and more people needed to hear my voice. He helped me find my authentic voice. I am forever grateful that he is my mentor and friend."



Tebogo Ramaahlo, DTM, of Entrepreneurs Toastmasters Johannesburg Club in Johannesburg, South Africa, achieved the Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award in April. Ramaahlo joined Toastmasters in 2015 and didn't consider pursuing her DTM until three years after joining. A friend pointed out that she was already halfway through the requirements, so Ramaahlo decided to complete the rest. Looking back, she says, "I realize the DTM journey stretched my resilience, my emotional intelligence, and how I relate to those around me. Honestly, had I not pursued my DTM, I would have missed out on opportunities as a leader and a follower. The pursuit allowed me to be vulnerable and taught me to ask for help, because you cannot do it alone."

TALK TO US! Do you have a short story (aim for 130 words), fun photo, inspiring anecdote, or Toastmasters "Ah-Ha" moment you'd like to share? Mark your submission "Member Recognition" and email it to submissions@toastmasters.org.

► NEWS FROM TI RESEARCH

Toastmasters Up Close

Toastmasters is truly a global community. This has never been more notable than now, as clubs and Districts are connecting online during the coronavirus pandemic. Toastmasters has become a community of virtual voices as members meet across datelines and distance to share a love of speaking and learning.

In general, Toastmasters are well-educated, enthusiastic, and global, according to the latest Toastmasters Demographic Survey, completed in December 2019. The survey, conducted every two years, drew responses from members in 123 countries.

Almost 94% of members credited Toastmasters for helping them achieve personal or professional goals. Improving presentation skills was listed as the No. 1 reason for joining a local club, followed by career advancement, and networking.



Most Toastmasters are multilingual, according to the survey. Some 61% list English as their primary language. But there is

a cacophony of other tongues among members: A number of respondents reported speaking at least one of 75 other diverse languages as their primary language (see image below, left). The top six languages among members are: English, Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, French, and Tamil.

To see more survey results, [visit the Statistics and Data Hub](#).

New Materials to Connect with Rotarians

In 2019, Toastmasters International and Rotary International announced an alliance, teaming up to help members of both organizations improve their skills and broaden their networks. Toastmasters and Rotary are inviting their members to learn more about each other.

Welcome a Rotary member to your club, or invite a Rotarian to be a guest speaker. You can also customize an email template and use it to help your club connect with Rotary clubs. If your club is meeting online, you can explain that in your email. Find out more about the template on the [Rotary Resources page](#).

A number of Toastmasters have created their own materials when reaching out to Rotary clubs. You can also use a [Rotary alliance PowerPoint template](#).

Please remember that any branded materials you create need to be emailed to brand@toastmasters.org and approved by Toastmasters World Headquarters.

Learn more about the [Toastmasters-Rotary alliance](#) on the Toastmasters website.

New Resources Available

Online Meeting Videos – Three new videos help clubs transition to online meetings. **Keep Your Club on Track with Online Meetings, Successfully Filling Online Meeting Roles, and 7 Tips for Attending Online Meetings** are great tools to help find success during these challenging times. Visit the [Online Meetings webpage](#) to watch the videos, and share them with your club's members! If your club or District has members who are hesitant to attend online meetings, or you have friends or family who may be interested in Toastmasters, ask them to watch these videos.

Online Club Fliers – Invite members and guests to join your club's next online meeting! Use [customizable fliers](#) to alert current and prospective members to your club's online details.

Publicize Your Online Club – An [email template](#) has been created for Vice Presidents Public Relations (VPPRs) to publicize their online club through their local media. The template can be customized by replacing the bolded text with the appropriate club information, and shared with the local media via email. A list of media outlets in your area for you to contact can be accessed through [Mondo Times](#). Email pr@toastmasters.org with any questions.

Pathways Updates – Wondering what is coming next for Pathways? Want to make sure you plan training sessions around Base Camp outages? Visit the newly created [Pathways Updates page](#) at to keep up to date.

▶ **SNAPSHOT** 



Members of Gamuda Toastmasters of Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia, dress up as site engineers and construction workers in honor of their meeting theme: “Uniformity in Diversity.” The joint meeting was held with clubs from District 102, Division D (Selangor, Pahang, and Terengganu). Many members of Gamuda Toastmasters—a corporate club—work in the construction and engineering fields Gamuda specializes in.

▶ **MEMBER CONNECTIONS** 

Toastmasters Celebrate Virtual Victories

Members of Daniel Wright Club of Gurnee, Illinois, U.S., don't let a pandemic prevent them from connecting with one another and improving their leadership skills virtually, just like many Toastmasters clubs! Visit [the Toastmasters website](https://www.toastmasters.org) for more club Virtual Victory photos and important updates from World Headquarters. Send your photos to socialmedia@toastmasters.org.





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 | **ANAND SHARMA** of Mesaieed, Qatar, reaches the base camp of Mount Everest in Nepal—Earth's highest mountain.
- 2 | **BINDU BANSAL** of Ambala, Haryana, India, poses in front of Vishalakshi Mantap—a meditation hall—in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. The glass dome on the top on the building is adorned with a decorative kalash that is 15 feet, 3 inches high (4.64 meters)—the tallest in Asia.
- 3 | **TJIN-SHING JAP, DTM**, of Taipei, Taiwan, looks over Lake Wakatipu and Queenstown, New Zealand, after a gondola ride.
- 4 | **PAKSHI RAJAN M** of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, treks with his magazine in the Pogthigai Hills on the border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, India. The area is said to be where the sage Agastya created the grammar for the Tamil language.



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



The Silent Evaluator

Offering personalized speech feedback to *any* Toastmaster *anywhere* in the world.

BY BOB TUREL, DTM

When the world changes, we have choices to make. My world changed three years ago when I received my diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). This is a nervous system disease that weakens muscles and affects physical function. After the shock of the diagnosis sank in, I wondered what the rest of my life would be like. I quickly realized this deadly disease was affecting my ability to swallow and speak, among other challenges. It soon became evident I could no longer speak clearly, which meant reconsidering my future as a Toastmaster.

I was saddened by no longer being able to participate in club meetings. Then it struck me. What did I love to do most as a Toastmaster? The answer came easily: Evaluate speeches! Ever since I joined Toastmasters in 1996, I was drawn to the evaluation part of our program. It resonated with me, especially in light of my career as a professional development trainer. We used the “sandwich method” of constructive feedback in every leadership training program I facilitated.

So it was a natural fit for me to gravitate to the evaluation process in Toastmasters as well. I have been honored to conduct evaluation workshops at clubs, Toastmasters District Leadership Trainings (TLIs), and District conferences. I produced an evaluations training manual with the foreword written by 2005 World Champion of Public Speaking Lance Miller, DTM. And many Toastmasters have complimented my contributions as their evaluator. Basically, what makes me effective at evaluating is that I love coaching! Isn't that what evaluating is all about?

My challenge was figuring out how to offer verbal evaluations if I no longer had a voice to audibly speak. Once again, the answer was easy—if speakers provided video recordings, I could submit written feedback.

I began video recording the speakers in my home club, Downtown St. Pete



The author, Bob Turel, DTM, being recognized by Past International President Balraj Arunasalam, DTM (left), with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019. This was the last time Turel was physically able to facilitate a workshop.

Toastmasters in St. Petersburg, Florida, and offering my feedback through email. As this process was welcomed by many members, I thought, Why not try and expand the concept to other clubs? So I did, through email invitations to literally every District leadership team in the world.

My invitations [offering silent evaluations](#) by email espoused the rationale that video recording one's speech allows the speaker to actually see what the feedback refers to in the evaluation! In fact, with a video file, the speaker might review it several times for potential adjustments to their speaking style. And this video feedback process might include any number of Toastmasters, even beyond my home club. Recently, the world changed again. This time with a global pandemic

that has caused Toastmasters everywhere to consider the option of using video in their online meetings, trainings, and contests. As fate would have it, online video conferencing offers a major advantage in videoing speeches!

Like our organization's transition to Pathways, change happens, and we have a choice on how to react to those changes. I am asking all Toastmasters to embrace the idea of video recording your presentations and use it as a rehearsal tool for your speech preparations, in your club meetings, and in trainings. Since the beginning of Toastmasters as an organization, the core of its mission has been to assist one another in the development of communications and leadership skills. Let's keep doing that as a global team of Toastmasters! Embrace using video to connect with your Toastmasters family and allow members like me to help you reach your goals and become a better presenter.

Zoom and other video-conferencing programs make recording your speeches easy and accessible to others, with your permission. Consider if this is a benefit to you. If so, I'm looking forward to seeing your speech and offering my feedback, honed by my more than two decades' experience as an evaluator and as a Distinguished Toastmaster. I may have lost my voice in the physical sense, but I retain a keen eye and offer to assist a fellow Toastmaster along their journey to becoming a better speaker and leader. I hope you are interested in exploring this exciting new addition to the evaluation process.

Send me an email at bob.turel@gmail.com, and we'll create a plan for silent, helpful evaluations! **T**

BOB TUREL, DTM, is a 24-year member of Clearwater Sunday Speakers in Clearwater, Florida, U.S. He is a District 48 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, and affectionately known as “The Sandwich Master.”



Painting the Verbal Picture

Create descriptive images by drawing on common experience.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

The goal of speaking and speechwriting is communication. That's not exactly a news flash, I know. But as Toastmasters, how can we choose the best words to communicate what we want to say?

Speakers are typically trying to persuade audience members to change how they think or feel about something. To that end, creating mental pictures to reinforce your points is particularly valuable. The old cliché says a picture is worth a thousand words, but when all you have are words, how do you create that picture in the listener's mind? Should you use long, fancy words? In speeches and most written communication, that would probably seem out of place. Simple language is usually the best.

Normally, when you think "description," you think of adjectives. After all, their job is to describe. But you can also use nouns, verbs, and adverbs. The key is word selection and specificity. If you look in a thesaurus for any particular word, you will probably find many synonyms. But not all synonyms convey the same meaning. Each word group has a circle of meanings, with each word claiming its own unique place in that circle.

Let's take a simple example—the color green. You have your basic green, dark green, hunter green, lime green, and chartreuse, just to name a few. No one would confuse dark green and lime green. Yet they are both green.

When you try to describe something, choose the particular word that fits best. A thesaurus may be helpful for that. The more specific you are, the more effective

your description will be. Take the time to find the right word.

If you are telling a story, create the picture in your audience members' minds by evoking as many of the senses as you can. An example: "The swimming pool had that pungent chlorine aroma and the bright blue color of a cloudless sky." Sometimes a description can include more than just the physical appearance. You might want to include the effect that it had on you. The famed United States Army General Douglas MacArthur, in a speech reflecting on his battlefield experiences, mentioned "the witching melody of faint bugles." I can hear them now.

Create the picture in your audience members' minds by evoking as many of the senses as you can.

Another technique that helps create a mental picture is onomatopoeia. This is when the word imitates the sound made by or associated with what you are describing. MacArthur, in that same 1962 speech, refers to the "crash" of guns and the "rattle" of musketry. The technique is useful because it helps your listener hear what you are describing.

Sometimes it is helpful to use a comparison: *Sweet as honey. Sour as a lemon.* Find a common experience and link to it.

Using an analogy can be effective for that. And don't be afraid to put words

together that are not normally associated with one another. I have a training segment in my coaching videos where I talk about speech organization, and I mention speeches that seem disjointed. I say, "You have probably heard speeches that seem to jump around like a kangaroo on caffeine." This, hopefully, accentuates the picture of disjointedness—and makes my point stronger and more memorable.

Sometimes you can borrow a word from an entirely different arena. As I write this, I am in the midst of a COVID-19 shutdown. I am in the "at risk" age group. My wife is interested in health and nutrition and has me using a number of products that boost the immune system. Some of them are topical and each has its own unique smell. Unfortunately, those smells don't complement one another. One morning it struck me that they produce an aromatic cacophony. "Cacophony" refers to sound, but the image it creates describes the competition of smells better than any aromatic term that I know. We have all heard dissonant sounds and know how they make us feel. That word captured what I wanted to convey.

The key to description is to tap into our common experience. Don't describe it from your personal perspective. Find something that your listeners or readers have experienced. That is when the description becomes vivid, real, and effective. **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.



8 Ways to Make Your Voicemail Matter

Emphasize your goal and your humanity to make an impact.

BY JOEL SCHWARTZBERG

Even with so many ways to communicate in the business world, phone calls have not gone away. The persistent advantage of leaving a voicemail—versus a text or email—lies in the resonance of the human voice, with its unique power to emphasize, intone, and attract. As a result, voicemails come across as more authentic, personal, and direct.

An effective voicemail can be the difference between an opportunity gained or lost. Think of that list of prospective member phone numbers you solicited at your last Toastmasters club meeting—online or in person. You know a phone call will be more effective than an email in converting those members, but you're going to be leaving a lot of voicemails as you make your way down the list.

Success starts with knowing that a voicemail is a proposal, not a conversation. The person on the other end doesn't need to know all about you or your organization; they just need a good reason to return your call. These eight suggestions will give your voicemail the highest likelihood of generating that hoped-for response.

1 Know your goal. Identify the goal you're trying to achieve. Are you hoping to acquire an email address or invite the person to another Toastmasters meeting? Know precisely what you want to happen so you know what to suggest after you've made your proposal.

2 Think in points, not paragraphs. Your recipient will probably make a decision within seconds, so your proposal needs to be made quickly and concisely. To cut unnecessary information, think of your message in terms of points, not paragraphs.

- ▶ **Point 1:** What are you proposing?
- ▶ **Point 2:** How would the proposal benefit the recipient?
- ▶ **Point 3:** Suggested next step.

3 Practice out loud, not in your head. Practice your voicemail message a few times out loud. Rehearsing aloud conditions your mind and your mouth to work together, which is essential because leaving a voicemail requires both thinking and speaking.

4 Start slowly and articulate clearly. When you hear the beep, start with a short salutation (“Hi, Sarah.”) and immediately identify yourself and your affiliation. (“I’m Bill from Toastmasters.”) Do this *slowly* with emphasis on *articulation*. If you rush, the listener may spend the rest of your voicemail thinking, “Who is this?” instead of paying attention. If relevant, briefly note your connection to the recipient. (“We met at Big Voice Toastmasters last week.”)

5 Avoid prefaces. It's vital to [get to your point](#) quickly, so avoid all stories, coincidences, and even praise as you start. Remember: Your goal is not to entertain or endear yourself to the recipient. Your goal is simply to advance to the next step.

6 Stick to one proposal. Keep your proposal simple and make only one. Multiple requests only complicate the message, putting an extra burden on a listener. If you have several proposals to make, pick the most intriguing one.

7 Make your contact information clear. Remember that information familiar to you is brand-new to the recipient, so give only one form of

contact information slowly and with extra articulation. Then repeat it. If you're giving a phone number, insert a tiny pause between each number. Your objective is to be so clear that the recipient will not have to replay the voicemail.

8 Close with confidence. Many people start their voicemails well, but end with a meandering mess. (“Okay, so, I guess, alright, so ...”) To avoid this calamity, plan your ending in advance. Confident conclusions contain both appreciation and a next step. (“Thanks so much for your time, Sarah. I look forward to working with you.”) Ending on an action step elevates the probability of the recipient acting on it.

By the way, people occasionally still answer their phones, so don't be thrown off if you get a live voice, not a prerecorded one. Continue to lead with the most important and relevant information. If they have questions, answer them. Don't steamroll over their responses, but make your point before the end of the call.

Phone calls may not be the dominant form of communication they once were, but people still make them, which means there's opportunity for success and potential for self-sabotage. So don't just “phone it in.” If you prepare well, stick to your points, and articulate clearly, you'll give your voicemail the best chance of breaking through. **T**

Joel Schwartzberg is the senior director of strategic and executive communications for a major national nonprofit, a presentations coach, and author of *Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter*. Follow him on Twitter @TheJoelTruth.

Build a Great Leadership Team

Follow these 5 “C’s” to form a solid team that gets the job done.

BY LEE RUBIN

One of the many benefits of being a Toastmaster is the opportunity to be part of a team. In fact, teamwork is at the heart of the Toastmasters experience, with leadership teams at the club, Area, Division, District, and region levels. If you’ve ever been part of a high-performing group, you know how confident and capable it makes you feel. And if you’ve been on a not-so-stellar team, you know how disheartening and discouraging it can be.

Throughout my life, I’ve had the privilege of being a member of extraordinary teams. From my days as a student-athlete in college to my time working as a human relations specialist at Fortune 500 companies, I’ve spent more than 25 years studying how great teams make individuals stronger.

Teams exist because certain challenges or opportunities are too big for one person to handle alone. The good news is that skills and techniques demonstrated by a highly successful group can be learned. I’ve rounded up five essential components of extraordinary teams. I call them the “5 C’s.”

1 Thriving teams are composed of competitors.

Being a competitor doesn’t mean you want to be better than everyone else, and it doesn’t mean you have to be *the* best; it simply means you want to be *your* best. As a Toastmasters team leader, inspire your teammates to give their best at every

meeting. Resist the urge to compare your club to another club or your District to another District.

Competitors have a passion for what they’re doing. As a leader, find out what members of your team are passionate about. Often what seems like a lack of motivation or buy-in from someone is simply a disconnect between what’s important to them as an individual and what’s important to the organization. Without passion (or at least an interest in the topic), people quit, especially when things get monotonous or boring. You want people who care about the outcome.

2 They have a common goal.

On great teams, everyone melds their talents, experience, and passion to achieve a common goal. And to achieve that goal, every team member must be willing to make a sacrifice on some level at some time. To make sure everyone stays focused on that common objective, even when disagreements emerge, look to your Club Success Plan and the Toastmasters core values: integrity, respect, service, and excellence.

Ask team members to make sacrifices when it’s best for the team and be willing to make them yourself. Sacrifice doesn’t have to mean taking on more yourself or giving something up—it might be doing something differently. Often we do something a certain way because that’s the way we’ve always done it. But we need

to question *why*. Why are we doing it this way? Is there a better way or new ideas from younger or newer members that could help us do things better or cheaper?

Adversity and discomfort are the birthplace for creativity and solutions; that’s often when people are the most innovative, creative, and thoughtful.

And if your team does make a bad decision, don’t point fingers or sweep things under the rug. Take time to analyze—talk to people, conduct a survey, review what happened. Mistakes are always learning opportunities, both for your team and for individuals.

3 They communicate, communicate, communicate.

Teams need to have open and honest communication; it’s the only way to build trust. It doesn’t matter how many talented, passionate individuals you’ve amassed or recruited—if there is no trust, there is no team. People won’t extend themselves or go the extra mile for people they don’t know and therefore don’t trust.

So how can you build that trust? Early in the program year, get together outside of your normal structure or routine.



but now you're leveraging the pain to get better, to learn something, to grow.

5 They are consistent.

You should strive for your best possible meeting each time. Think about a guest coming to a club meeting. If they go once and it's just okay, maybe they'll go again, and if it's still just okay, they probably won't go back. But if it's a good experience, people will join, they'll tell their friends, they'll want to be more active.

That said, it's important that leaders decide what is critical to a successful meeting. Many leaders want to check 35 things off the list, but it's impossible to focus on a wide range of priorities, so think about your must-haves for every meeting. Determine the top priorities—a personal greeter, a clear agenda, new member packets, etc. That way, if something slips, it won't be one of these things.

Aristotle said we are what we *repeatedly* do. Excellence is not an act (you can't be good periodically), it's a habit. You can't have 467 priorities and master all of them; for consistency and excellence, you have to focus on a few and practice them with a level of excellence to build machine-like consistency.

Take a look at the Toastmasters team you're on. Is it composed of competitors? Does it have a common goal? Do members communicate constantly? Do they have chemistry? Are they consistent in striving for excellence? If the answer is no to any of these questions, ask yourself what you can do to build a stronger team. **T**

Lee Rubin is a professional speaker at corporations and conferences throughout the U.S. He has 15 years' experience as a human resource professional with Fortune 500 companies. This article is excerpted from his education session at the 2019 Toastmasters International Convention. Learn more at www.leerubinspeaks.com.

Grab breakfast or a cup of coffee, or meet for lunch. You just want to experience a different environment in a different context and get to know people outside of their club role. Leaders need to make a concerted effort to reach out and build healthier relationships, because ultimately that will lead to more open and honest conversations. If you have to tiptoe around feelings or you're suspicious of motives, it's a lot harder to work together.

Gaining trust and opening the lines of communication also illuminate the range of perspectives on a team. Sometimes what appears to be disagreement is more a matter of people looking at an issue from different perspectives. As a leader, you have to be open to all points of view, not just the ones you agree with. Communication is about listening, not just talking.

The top reason people leave their jobs (or their clubs or their relationships) is they don't feel valued, appreciated, or heard. Even if a team is wildly successful, if people don't feel valued, appreciated, or heard, they'll be unhappy. Cultivate trust and respect from the beginning, so that members feel they can communicate openly without repercussions.

4 They have chemistry.

At its most basic definition, chemistry is about how atoms and elements act and react with one another—it's about the bonds that form. Most bonds are formed under heat and pressure. The same is true of teams: The stuff that tears some groups apart is the same thing that brings extraordinary teams together.

Heat and pressure are part of life and part of being on a team, and when times get tough, leaders have an opportunity to rally their team and approach challenges as opportunities. Adversity and discomfort are the birthplace for creativity and solutions, and that's often when people are the most innovative, creative, and thoughtful. If you've opened the lines of communication, and you have a team that trusts each other, you should be able to work with them, ask for help, and admit you don't know everything.

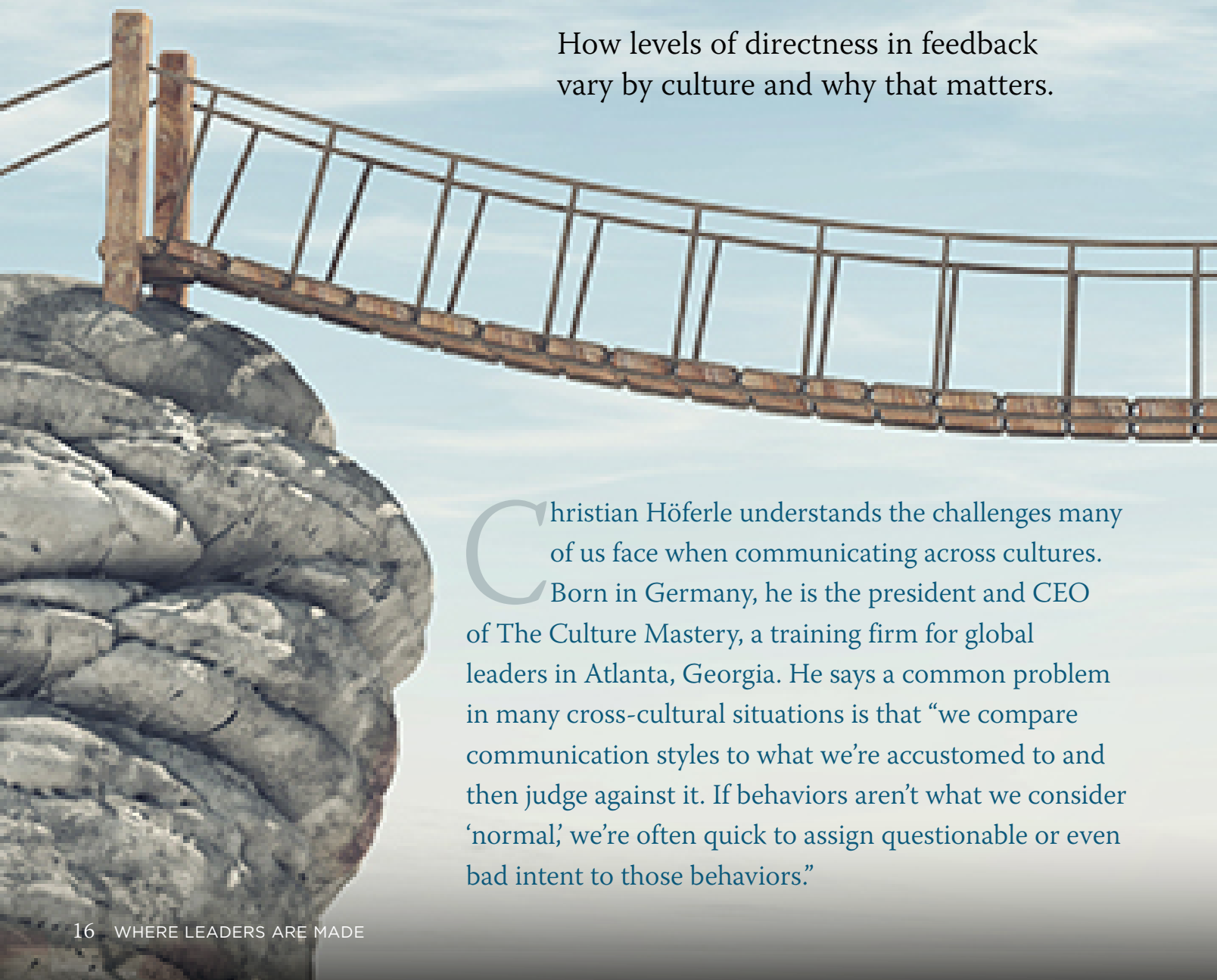
Leadership teams can use difficult or uncomfortable situations to grow stronger and better. When things get uncomfortable, rather than ask, "How am I going to get out of this?" try shifting the perspective and ask, "What can I get out of this?" It's the same situation, the same pain and discomfort,

EVALUATIONS:

Bridging the Culture Gap

BY DAVE ZIELINSKI

How levels of directness in feedback vary by culture and why that matters.



Christian Höferle understands the challenges many of us face when communicating across cultures. Born in Germany, he is the president and CEO of The Culture Mastery, a training firm for global leaders in Atlanta, Georgia. He says a common problem in many cross-cultural situations is that “we compare communication styles to what we’re accustomed to and then judge against it. If behaviors aren’t what we consider ‘normal,’ we’re often quick to assign questionable or even bad intent to those behaviors.”

“You need to understand the ‘cultural code’ before giving and receiving evaluations.”

—KRISTEN
HAMLING, PH.D.



you’re accustomed to, can make the difference between evaluations that are helpful or hurtful to club members.

Understanding Cultural Feedback Norms

Höferle says one of the most important traits anyone can bring to cross-cultural communication

is an open mind. “This is a difficult

thing for us as humans because we’re wired to

jump to conclusions,” he says. “When we encounter something we don’t consider ‘normal,’ our immediate reflex is to either reject that behavior or judge it in some way.”

“Many of us are still guided by stereotypes that we learn through television, movies, social media, or music,” Höferle says.

Take giving feedback, for example. “In Germany, communication is often very direct, blunt, and to the point,” Höferle says. When he offered what he considered “normal” feedback to his staff in the southern United States, “we lost employees because people thought I was mistreating them, so I learned quickly that I had to adjust my style.”

With clubs in 143 countries, Toastmasters regularly interact with members from other cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds in their clubs as well as in their places of employment. This is particularly true in recent months as the trend to online clubs has allowed members to visit clubs around the world. As a result, Toastmasters often give speech evaluations to members from other cultures who may have learned vastly different ways to deliver or interpret performance feedback.

For example, someone from a culture known for its tough, direct feedback style might use an “upgrader” style that’s designed to make negative feedback sound stronger: “This is *fully* unacceptable,” or “Your analysis *completely* lacked good research and clear thinking.”

Conversely, those from a culture with an indirect feedback style might use “downgraders” to help a speaker save face, to protect their social standing, or to soften their message: “I’m not sure you want to continue doing these things in the future,” or “Your pacing was slightly quick in some areas” are examples. The traditional Toastmasters “sandwich” method of evaluation—critical feedback sprinkled in among positive affirmations—can leave people in some cultures confused about whether they performed well or poorly.

Developing a foundational knowledge of those cultural differences, and striving to suspend judgment as you encounter feedback styles that may be far more direct—or indirect—than

“My impression of the United States was very much shaped by what I was exposed to growing up in Germany. But just like the United States is not a monolithic culture where everyone thinks and behaves in the same way, so too people from Germany, Brazil, Nigeria, China, or any other country don’t always behave in the same way. There are cultural patterns but there are also a variety of behaviors and beliefs within countries and regions.”

While it’s important to understand cultural differences, the act of developing that knowledge

TO ADAPT OR NOT TO ADAPT?

GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTING ACROSS CULTURES

David Livermore, a cross-cultural communications expert and president of the Cultural Intelligence Center, says he’s often asked, “Who should adapt to whom?” when people from different cultures come together in a variety of professional or personal settings.

Livermore says these situations are rarely straight-forward, and he stresses the need for understanding specific scenarios. “In some situations, you should fully adapt to the other culture, and in other situations it might feel insulting to people,” Livermore says. He recommends considering two questions when deciding whether or not to adapt to a culture’s norms:

How rigid are they? If you are in New York City, locals might think it strange if those from other cultures overtly try to adapt to cultural norms there, Livermore says. “But if you’re in Korea there is high expectation that you conform strongly to the norms there,” he says.

Will the cultural differences strengthen what we are trying to accomplish, or minimize it?

Livermore gives the example of when Starbucks first opened stores in China. “Starbucks made most of those stores closely resemble a traditional Chinese tea house that mainly served tea and little coffee,” he says. “The Chinese were irritated because they believed they already had great teahouses and wanted the unique Starbucks experience with double mochas and lattes.”

without having a greater curiosity can lead to stereotypes, says David Livermore, Ph.D., founder and president of the Cultural Intelligence Center, a cross-cultural training and consulting organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In other words, Livermore says, people need to do more than attend a workshop on how to conduct business in Singapore, Slovenia, or Scotland to be able to effectively provide feedback to people from those cultures.

“It makes sense to teach cultural differences on a foundational level, but the problem is that’s often *all* that is taught,” Livermore

says. “We overlook things like learning how to suspend judgment, read cultural cues, and stay open-minded.” Livermore’s organization developed the concept of cultural intelligence, or CQ, as a way to measure four capabilities needed to be effective with people from different backgrounds: drive, knowledge, strategy, and action.

If you have only knowledge, without the other three dimensions, it’s easy to get overconfident about your cultural intelligence. “If you just have the knowledge but not curiosity—what we call drive—you are at risk of taking a little piece of someone’s identity that may have a kernel of truth to it and then overgeneralizing,” Livermore says. Höferle also considers humility and vulnerability two “super-powers” when it comes to communicating successfully across cultures. “We do our research and often think we know



everything about other cultures, but we usually don’t,” he says. “If you have the humility to say to someone from another culture, ‘I haven’t fully understood what you meant or said, can you give me more information?’ that can go a long way toward developing rapport and creating good will. Showing your counterpart that you are human, that’s when the magic happens.”

The “Zone of Appropriateness”

Höferle says understanding a concept called the “zone of appropriateness” can be helpful when giving evaluations to Toastmasters from varied cultures. “We all have a zone of appropriateness in our behaviors, which means we don’t just act one way all of the time,” Höferle says.

While Höferle says Toastmasters shouldn’t go to extremes to mimic another culture’s feedback style, because it risks looking inauthentic, we should adjust our own evaluation styles appropriately within the zone to accommodate another culture’s expectations or norms. Pellegrino Riccardi, a cross-cultural expert and communications consultant from the United Kingdom, now based in Oslo, Norway, has learned to expand his own zone of appropriateness in 30 years of traveling the globe for his business.

Riccardi has encountered a variety of direct and indirect feedback styles from his audiences and his students in that span. “People in some cultures are very honest and direct when they evaluate your performance,” he says. They “believe it’s their primary job to be forthright and that their mission as an evaluator is to help you improve through candor. They feel they aren’t being authentic if they don’t tell it exactly as they see it.”

“While negative feedback can be difficult to hear, the intent in these cultures usually isn’t to hurt you,” he says. “The feedback is being delivered according to cultural norms in a way that’s

considered constructive by the evaluator, whose main goal is to help you improve as a speaker.”

When Riccardi began giving speeches in Norway, he was taken aback by the neutral facial expressions and body language of many in his audiences. “There was little non-verbal feedback, but I came to understand this was the Scandinavian way to focus and

listen attentively,” he says. “The intention of the audience was very positive. Part of becoming culturally savvy and not being offended by feedback is to learn to accept unfamiliar behavior.” **T**

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

HOW TO GIVE AND RECEIVE EVALUATIONS IN CROSS-CULTURAL SETTINGS

Speech evaluations in Toastmasters are crucial in helping club members improve as speakers. Evaluators give specific rather than general feedback, avoid judgmental language, and identify areas where speakers excel as well as where they can improve.

But evaluations can become complex when you are asked to comment on—or receive them from—members with different cultural backgrounds. While you should never stray from the core tenets of helpful evaluations, consider the following factors:

Know the cultural backgrounds of club members. Kristen Hamling, Ph.D., a psychologist and former Toastmaster in Whanganui, New Zealand, says, “Read about the culture, research how to give feedback in that culture, and watch how others give feedback before giving it a go yourself,” she says. “You need to understand the ‘cultural code’ before giving and receiving evaluations.”

Hamling also suggests finding a “cultural mentor” to provide guidance about giving and receiving feedback for specific cultural groups.

Teach yourself how to cope with direct or negative feedback. It’s normal to feel some degree of hurt and rejection when receiving feedback you don’t agree with, or that is overly direct or negative.

Hamling says not to take such comments personally, and to learn from the process. Adopting a growth mindset—an eagerness to learn and improve—makes it easier to understand that becoming a better speaker requires taking risks, making mistakes, and learning from those mistakes, she says. “Rarely do people become great by playing it safe and being perfect all of the time.”

Understand that giving praise is not a universal practice—especially outside the Toastmasters environment. Just because some evaluators do not overtly praise your performance doesn’t mean they think you did poorly. For example, Christian Höferle, president and CEO of a training firm in Atlanta, Georgia, says that in his native Germany, praise is often given sparingly. “In some cultures, giving explicit praise is only warranted if there is some extraordinary accomplishment that goes far beyond an original objective.”

Avoid offering effusive praise; it may come across as disingenuous. “Praise can actually backfire in some situations because it can be seen as a tool to manipulate or suggest that you may have a hidden agenda,” Höferle says.

Evaluation styles differ in neutral and affective cultures. David Livermore, president of the Cultural Intelligence Center, says it is helpful to understand different cultural norms of expressiveness around the

world when giving or receiving performance feedback. Neutral cultures, such as found in Japan, Scandinavian countries, and Germany, believe that minimizing emotional expressiveness is a sign of respect and dignity, Livermore says, while affective cultures, such as in Italy, France, Brazil, and some countries in the Middle East, place more value on expressive communication and sharing feelings.

Uses and interpretations of eye contact vary. The use of eye contact in face-to-face evaluations also is interpreted differently around the world, Livermore says, with varying connotations in hierarchical and egalitarian cultures. Hierarchical cultures place an emphasis on titles and honorifics, while egalitarian societies do not value titles as much and show less deference to leaders.

“If the person being evaluated is more senior than you in title or age, in some cultures it’s considered an offense to look them directly in the eye or to sustain eye contact,” Livermore says.

Failure to understand such cultural norms can create misunderstandings. “If you didn’t understand such cultural differences, you might think those not making eye contact in these situations were trying to hide something or had little confidence, when in fact not making eye contact is how they show respect,” Livermore says.

The General Evaluator

Assessing the quality of your club meeting helps everyone improve.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

If you want to strengthen your speaking, listening, evaluation, and leadership skills, and help members and your club all at the same time, look no further than the General Evaluator position. This meeting role can maximize club effectiveness and meeting impact, yet it is often underutilized and undervalued.

Helping Individuals

The General Evaluator's main job is to review and assess the club meeting—from the time people arrive to the end of the program's educational component—and report their findings. The general evaluation should highlight how members have performed in their meeting roles, including preparation, organization, timeliness, enthusiasm, and carrying out the duties themselves.

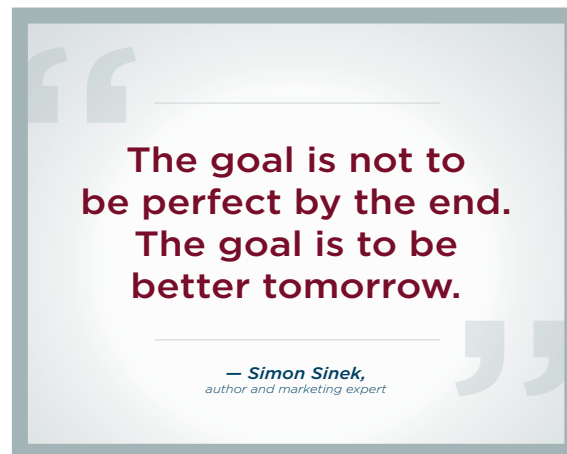
"General Evaluators help individuals improve their speaking and leadership skills by providing motivating, structured, and specific feedback," says Lynne Cantor, DTM, from Excalibur Speakers in London. "They should offer commendations and recommendations on what and why something came across well or didn't."

That means the General Evaluator must understand each of the meeting roles to provide an accurate assessment and meaningful suggestions. "I've sat through so many General Evaluator reports when I waited to hear where I could improve [in my meeting role] but didn't hear anything," says Cantor. "I know

I can improve."

Examples of the type of specific feedback that can be offered:

- ▶ The transitions from the Toastmaster of the meeting and/or the Table Topics-master were well-paced, or too long and rambling.
- ▶ The Toastmaster of the meeting did or did not introduce the speakers effectively to prepare the audience.
- ▶ The grammarian presented a word of the day that helped members learn or was too difficult or obscure.



The General Evaluator also ensures evaluators are offering feedback to speakers according to the objectives in the speaker's particular Pathways project. The General Evaluator should only add to a speech evaluation if an evaluator didn't provide a relevant and motivating assessment highlighting a speaker's strengths and offering specific ideas for improvement.

Leading the Evaluation Team

In most clubs, the General Evaluator also manages the evaluation section of club meetings. That means overseeing the evaluation team: the speech evaluators, timer, grammarian, Ah-Counter, and Table Topics evaluator, if the club has one.

"The opportunity missed most by General Evaluators is the ability to take charge of the evaluations—tell the evaluators what's required of them and set the tone of the evaluations before the meetings," says Adrian Watts, DTM, who belongs to several clubs in the Perth area of Australia.

Some clubs don't use the role as much as other clubs. In some cases, the Toastmaster of the meeting oversees the evaluation team, or clubs combine the Toastmaster and General Evaluator roles—or don't use the latter position at all. That, too, is a missed opportunity, says Cantor. "Some people say, 'It doesn't matter if we don't have a General Evaluator,'" she explains. "Of course it matters. Individuals and clubs miss out on valuable feedback that can enhance leadership and speaking skills."

Helping Clubs

The General Evaluator's report can also assess meeting structure and protocol, and how well members have fulfilled club responsibilities. This perspective offers a big-picture view of club performance to ensure members are learning, meetings are efficient and effective, and the club is thriving.



For example, Cantor knows of one club where no one greeted guests at the door. “This was picked up on by several General Evaluators, and now the club has an official ‘meeter and greeter,’” she says. “It makes a difference how the club is perceived.”

In the I’m Just Sayin’ Club in Englewood, Colorado, earlier this year, a General Evaluator offered recommendations to help the club engage more members at meetings. During a St. Patrick’s Day-themed Table Topics session, the Topicsmaster asked for volunteers and selected three people who had raised their hands. During his report, the General Evaluator highlighted the fact that the three members were regular, enthusiastic contributors. He noted that while it was always fun to hear them speak, it’s important for Topicsmasters to call on and encourage members who don’t speak as often. That way, more members benefit from the impromptu speaking practice, and club engagement increases.

One way to boost the quality of feedback and obtain new perspectives is to

schedule a member from another club to serve as a General Evaluator. This provides an unbiased, independent view and can offer new ideas to the club or confirm its following best practices.

Maximizing Opportunities

Some members don’t capitalize on the chance to serve in the role. “People are often threatened by the General Evaluator role,” says Zoya Mabuto-Mokoditso of the Social Network Toastmasters Club in Johannesburg, South Africa. “It feels too big, some say. And it is big, but so is the learning opportunity that comes with taking it on.”

Here are some tips for both individuals and for clubs to ensure the role is afforded the opportunity to be successful and offer impact:

Individuals

- ▶ Use the Toastmasters [General Evaluator checklist](#).
- ▶ Review [A Toastmaster Wears Many Hats](#), a free resource from Toastmasters International that outlines

the expectations and duties of each meeting role.

- ▶ Serve as a speech evaluator before being General Evaluator.
- ▶ Offer reports identifying specific issues and suggestions.

Clubs

- ▶ Have a General Evaluator run the meeting’s evaluation section.
- ▶ Schedule ample time for a robust General Evaluator report.
- ▶ Ask members outside the club to [fill the role](#) occasionally.

Serving as the General Evaluator helps develop your speaking, listening, evaluation, and leadership skills. The role also helps other members and the club itself grow. So challenge yourself, and sign up to be the General Evaluator today! **TM**

Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM, is a member of AAMC Toastmasters in Washington, D.C., and a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster magazine*. Learn more at www.jenniferlblank.com.

Are You Listening?

Active listening is not about you; it's about the other person.

BY PEGGY BEACH, DTM

Listening seems to be a dying art. Modern society is fast-paced and noisy, with television, podcasts, web series, and more all competing for our attention. Our society is so fast-paced that according to a Microsoft study, the average attention span of people has declined from 12 seconds to 8 seconds since the year 2000.

“We live in a society that values aggressive personal marketing. To be silent is to fall behind,” says Kate Murphy, author of *You're Not Listening: What You're Missing and Why it Matters*.

Yet active listening is a more important skill than ever. What exactly is active listening? It's different than merely “hearing” words that are spoken—essentially a passive process. As noted in the “Active Listening” project in the Toastmasters Pathways learning experience, “Listening occurs when you take what you hear and extract meaning. Active listening is the process of understanding and repeating what you have heard.”

Active listening isn't always easy, but the rewards are great. Murphy points out that listening plugs us into life. It gives us a richer social life, makes us less lonely and more fulfilled. Instead of getting our information or forming opinions based on tweets, posts, and texts, it's crucial to hold a thoughtful two-way conversation to truly understand another person and their point of view.

“Listening well can help you understand other people's attitudes and motivations, which is essential in building cooperative and productive relationships, as well as discerning which relationships you'd be better off avoiding,” Murphy wrote in a *New York Times* editorial this year.

Whether in a conversation or a club audience, use the touchstones of good listening. Among tips in the “Active Listening” project:

- ▶ Give the speaker your full attention; remain relaxed and engaged
- ▶ Respect the speaker's point of view
- ▶ Reserve judgment
- ▶ Avoid interrupting
- ▶ Give nonverbal cues to show your interest

In online settings, where a speaker isn't physically in front of you, it can be even more challenging to listen attentively, but it's equally important. The same qualities that apply to in-person listening apply to listening in a virtual setting.

The Connection to Speaking

Being a good listener also makes you a better speaker. That's one reason evaluations are so central to the Toastmasters experience. To give truly helpful feedback to a speaker, you must listen carefully, absorbing all the details. Such close observation helps drive what works in a presentation and what doesn't. You





benefit from those insights each time you speak. And honing your listening skills through evaluations contributes to critical-thinking abilities that pay off in other settings too, like your home or workplace.

Many times people aren't looking for solutions, rather they simply want someone to acknowledge their situation.

In fact, the strong relationship between public speaking and listening has long been studied by researchers. The late Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, known as the “father of listening,” noticed the relationship while teaching debate at the University of Minnesota. His best debate students, he noted, were the ones who listened to their opponents. “The most basic of human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them,” said Nichols, who founded the International Listening Association in 1979. In the early years of Toastmasters, the motto was “For Better Listening, Thinking, Speaking,” with listening being the first skill in the list.

Listening is such an important skill to cultivate that District officers received training in active listening at the 2020 Mid-year Training sessions. They focused on the four common areas of difficulty in listening:

1. Thinking three to four times faster than people speak
2. Listening with the intent to respond rather than to understand
3. Wanting to give advice
4. Understanding cultural barriers

Pipat Puengmongkolchaikij, DTM, District 97 (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam) Director, finds the second area of difficulty to be especially hard. He admits he often wants

to respond quickly when listening. “My biggest obstacle is that I tend to think of the answer very quickly even when I am listening,” he says. “It distracts me. Sometimes I lose my focus because of this habit. I need to stop jumping to conclusions too quickly and allow myself to fully understand the speakers more.”

Ways to Become a Better Listener

Fortunately, listening is a skill that can be developed. By focusing your attention on the person who is speaking and understanding the subtext in what is/isn't being said, you can train your ears and become a better communicator.

1 Minimize distractions.

To truly listen, cultivate the right environment. When someone is talking, whether at a meeting or in conversation, always set aside the cellphone, laptop, tablet, and other devices.

Tiffany Shlain, author of *24/6: The Power of Unplugging One Day a Week*, advocates regular electronic downtime. She encourages people to establish guidelines for when and where screens can be used (like no phones on the table during meals) and to consider using a paper scheduler instead of a phone. She also recommends using a feature on your smartphone that sets limits on screen time or social media use.

Putting down your devices and spending time offline allows you to focus more carefully on friends and family—and gives you more time to listen to their stories.

2 Don't interrupt, but do ask questions—open-ended questions.

Ana Isabel Lage Ferreira, Past District 107 (Spain and Portugal) Director, believes that good listeners are curious about people. A key to listening, she says, is to not interrupt the other person. “You need to be quiet and pay full attention to the other person,” she says. “When others are talking, and especially if the conversation is interesting, it is too tempting to interrupt and start mentioning your own experience, ideas, or episodes.” She adds, “You will become a much better listener and a better communicator if you can resist that temptation.”

Rather than waiting for someone to finish and then jumping in to share your story, try asking open-ended questions before giving advice. Questions like “And what happened after that?” or “What did it feel like when that happened?” encourage the speaker to give more information and tell more of their story. Wanting to help others is a common human trait. And while often this is a good thing, it's also important to simply listen to what the other person is saying. Many times people aren't looking for solutions, rather they simply want someone to acknowledge their situation.

Listening is not about you. It is about the other person.

3 Don't be afraid of silence and be aware of cultural differences.

Often when there is silence, it's tempting to jump in and say something. Resist that temptation. Develop a tolerance for silence. This is hard in many countries, particularly in Western cultures, where people may interpret silence as disapproval. Many Asian cultures are more comfortable with silences, and Western businesspeople are often at a disadvantage in countries where silent contemplation is more valued.

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Puengmongkolchaikij, a native of Thailand, said that Thai people don't interrupt speakers because of the "Kreng Jai" culture. "In Thailand, it is the culture to spare people's feelings," he says. "Thai people are good listeners because we don't listen for things to interrupt or to argue. We just listen quietly. A lot of times I asked the person I talked with to tell me when he or she had to leave, because they wouldn't dare to interrupt even if they were going to be late for a meeting already."

Communication barriers can happen even between people from the same country who speak the same language but are in different life situations, such as people who have a job and people who don't work, people with children and people without. A common language challenge often happens between people working in different professions. For instance, people working in medical, technical, and financial fields frequently use terms and acronyms that people outside their field don't recognize. Whether you're listening to someone from a different culture, a different generation, or a different industry, don't be afraid to ask clarifying questions and encourage others to expand upon their experiences.

Cultural differences actually open up opportunities for listening. Ferreira once led a team of Toastmasters from diverse backgrounds. "My team had people from The Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, England, and Greece," she says. "Teams are naturally diverse, and this cultural diversity also taught me that the more you listen, the more you learn and the better your decisions ultimately will be."

Toastmasters Can Help with Listening

The Toastmasters experience is designed to help members become better listeners. "The need to give useful feedback to

TIPS TO HELP YOU KEEP YOUR FOCUS WHILE LISTENING

If you're someone who likes sharing your experiences or offering advice, here are some tips to slow down your brain and help it focus solely on what the speaker is trying to say.

- ▶ Since we tend to think faster than people speak, a good way to minimize the distractions in our minds is to identify the speaker's key points while listening. When there is a pause, state, "What I'm hearing is ..."
- ▶ If someone seems hesitant to continue, rather than begin offering advice, encourage them to give more information and explore the topic further by simply saying, "Tell me more" or "That seems like a really difficult situation."
- ▶ Before offering advice, ask questions to make sure you understand the problem or issue the other person is actually addressing. "So the microphone made that noise throughout the speech? What did the audience do?"
- ▶ If you're tempted to jump in and share your own experience and story, pretend that you'll be quizzed on what the other person is saying to prevent your brain from jumping ahead and formulating your own response.

the speakers helped me develop this ability to follow a speech to the end and not to wander in my own thoughts when others are speaking," says Ferreira.

Use the experience of being an evaluator to cultivate your listening skills. Evaluators must focus intensely, organize their thoughts, and then articulate their response. When you're having a conversation, pay attention to how you are responding. Are you giving the other person your full attention, paying attention to what they're saying and not just preparing your response? Being an effective listener is an important part of being a strong communicator. As Dr. Ralph C. Smedley said, "Real communication is impossible without listening." **T**

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Editor's Note: "Active Listening" is a Level 3 elective project in eight paths in the Pathways learning experience.

Sound Affects ... You!

How to control the sound you create and the sound you consume.

BY JULIAN TREASURE

Toastmasters are familiar with the power of the human voice—but did you know that all sound affects you, often profoundly? Understanding how this works, and how to pay more attention to what our ears tell us, can transform lives. Sound is constantly affecting your happiness, effectiveness, and well-being.

In a noisy, fast-paced world, we often unconsciously suppress our awareness of the sound around us, perhaps because not much of it is pleasant.

The more conscious and discerning you become in your listening, the more you control the sound you create *and* the sound you consume.

The Four Effects of Sound

Exactly [how does sound affect you](#) so strongly? It does so in four ways.

Physiologically

Sound changes your breathing, heart rate, hormone secretions, brain chemistry, and even your brain waves. Hearing is your primary warning sense; your body will respond to a sudden or unexplained sound by creating a physical fight or flight response way faster than you respond to any visual input. Repeated exposure to loud noise causes hearing damage, while chronic exposure to even moderate noise increases blood pressure and the risk of heart attack or stroke. On the other hand, a gentle surf sound can act as a calming sedative—ideal for anyone who has trouble sleeping.

Psychologically

Music demonstrates this best: Think of your favorite happy or sad song and your

feelings will follow. Perhaps that's why there's no human society on this planet that doesn't have music. But music is not unique: Natural sound can affect our emotions too. Birdsong tends to create a sense of security and well-being, because we've learned over millennia that when the birds are happily singing, things are usually fine.

Cognitively

When you're trying to think, unwanted conversation is distracting. You have no earplugs, and you are programmed to decode language. Background conversations are impossible to ignore, and nobody can understand two people talking at the same time. The result: It's impossible to think clearly when someone else is talking. That's why open-plan offices have been shown to slash productivity by up to two-thirds!

Behaviorally

Loud noise tends to create stress, leading to behavior that's less sociable and helpful to others. Fast-paced music speeds up eating, walking, and driving, while loud music in bars causes customers to drink faster and consume more. We will try to move away from sustained unpleasant sound if we can, so when stores and restaurants expect us to shop or eat in cacophonous surroundings, we often leave, or at least stay for a shorter time, which means we spend less and they lose out.

Why Noise Matters

Noise may be endemic, but we ignore it at our peril because it can have devastating effects.

In schools, poor acoustics damage health: Research indicates that chronic exposure to 65 dB (decibels) significantly increases risk of heart attack, so teachers may well be shortening their lives by working in this much noise year after year.

In hospitals, noise levels have been estimated by a Johns Hopkins study to be 8-12 times higher than the World Health Organization's recommendations. Noise degrades the quality and quantity of sleep, which is our most important route to rapid recovery.

*The more conscious and discerning you become in your listening, the more you control the sound you create *and* the sound you consume.*

And in corporate offices, noise has been the No. 1 complaint ever since someone decided that open-plan was a one-size-fits-all solution. If you're trying to concentrate in this environment, that person chatting behind you is taking up most of your auditory bandwidth and squashing your ability to listen to your inner voice. Many of us have felt the frustration that ensues. With an estimated 6 billion square feet of open-plan office in the world, the total loss of productivity is mind-boggling.

So noise is damaging our health, productivity, and enjoyment of life—but we're not paying any attention. We urgently need



to start designing spaces *for* (and *with*) our ears as well as our eyes. Here's how.

How to Design With Your Ears

There are four steps to a space that sounds good, whether it's your living room, a meeting room, a classroom, a hospital ward, an open-plan office, or a concert hall. If you control any of the spaces you frequently inhabit, these are the principles ... and if you don't, please pass them on to the people who do.

Step 1: Acoustics

Hard surfaces such as metal, stone, glass, and plaster all reflect back most of the sound that hits them. Meeting rooms with stone floors, polished wood tables, and glass walls may look impressive, but with plenty of confusing sound bouncing off all those hard surfaces, it's no wonder people at the other end on conference calls often can't understand a word.

We need to move from hard to soft. Any room in which speech matters should have reverberation time of well under one second, which can be achieved by installing absorbency. Consider using acoustic tiles or plaster for the ceiling, and old-fashioned carpet for the floors.

Step 2: Noise sources

Close your eyes and listen attentively in any room and you will quickly identify noise sources—heaters, air conditioning, IT cooling fans, and the like—and decide if you want to move them or muffle them. The most distracting sounds of all are

alarms, ringing phones, and other people's conversation. If you're in an office with no widely accepted etiquette for open-plan offices, why not have a meeting and agree on rules for your workplace, with some sign to indicate "I'm thinking here, please don't disturb!" or agreed-upon areas where quiet working is the rule.

Step 3: Sound system

When you need or want to introduce sound, for example public address

announcements for life safety, or sound for entertainment or pleasure, make sure the system is of appropriate quality. Low-quality sound creates a low-quality environment.

Step 4: Content

Remember that even beautiful sound on top of noise just becomes more noise, so sometimes adding nothing is the best option. Most "background" music is very distracting (it is designed to be listened to after all!), so it's ideal for when doing routine work, but not when trying to think. Nature-based sound such as birdsong and sounds of gentle water or wind has been shown to create healthier and more productive spaces.

Even if you can't influence the sound around you, you can take steps to mitigate noise and choose silence. And don't forget to use your vocal power to complain in restaurants and offices offering sensory overload. In an ever-noisier world, listen consciously and design your surroundings with your ears. Your health, happiness, and productivity will all benefit. **T**

WHAT TO DO WITH NOISE

Move - Get into the habit of checking in with your ears, and if the sound is unsuitable, simply move somewhere else.

Block - If you can't move and can't change the noise, headphones can help. Consider using sounds like birdsong. I don't recommend music, as it often replaces one distracting sound with another.

Seek silence - Silence is the baseline for all sound, so it's a great way of recalibrating your listening and regaining your sensitivity to the adverse effects of noise. Give yourself a few minutes of silence every day.

Julian Treasure is founder and chairman of audio branding consultancy *The Sound Agency in the UK*. His five TED Talks about sound and communication skills have been viewed over 100 million times. He is the author of *Sound Business* and *How to Be Heard: Secrets for Powerful Speaking and Listening*. Learn more at www.thesoundagency.com and www.juliantreasure.com.

Queen of Quotes

My mother had quite a way with words. They just weren't hers.

BY JOHN CADLEY



My mother loved to read, and she remembered what she'd read. Whatever situation I found myself in as a child, she would respond with a quotation from some poem, novel, or play that was tailor-made for the occasion. As I got older, I realized I had been raised not so much by Olivia Cadley as by *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*.

To wit: One evening when I was around 7 years old, I wandered into the kitchen to ask when dinner would be ready. My mother looked up from the pot roast she was preparing and said, "Ah, yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look." I turned around to see who she was talking to but it was just me and the dog, whose name was Sparky. I asked what she meant and, while chopping an onion, she replied: "Shakespeare, sweetie—*Julius Caesar*"—two more weird names I'd never heard of.

I took it in stride because I knew it was just mom being mom, although I did peek in the mirror to see if I looked lean. I thought I was just hungry.

Olivia was particularly fond of the Bard. She said if you only read William Shakespeare and the Bible, you would know everything worth knowing. Thus, it was that one summer evening I went out to play kickball with the neighborhood children. The game called for two captains who would select their teams from those gathered.

Several children were always last to be picked, and I felt sorry for them. One night I was captain and I found myself in a bind: I wanted to pick the good players so we would win ... and I wanted to pick the bad

players so they wouldn't feel like outcasts from a leper colony.

Racked by indecision, I went in the house and told my mother the responsibility was killing me. She got that look like she was about to roll out the heavy artillery, and she did—from old Willy's *Henry IV, Part 2*: "John," she said solemnly, "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." I told her there were no crowns in kickball. I just wanted a solution. Her answer? "You'll figure it out. Necessity is the mother of invention." So what did I do? I picked the good players, we won, and I have been tortured by guilt for 57 years.

Impatience would bring on the bromide "A watched pot never boils," which mystified me because I wasn't watching a pot.

There are so many more. Around age 5, I was walking down the street with Olivia when we ran into a friend of hers. The lady looked at me and said, "You have such a handsome boy!" To which my mother coolly replied, "Handsome is as handsome does." Very confusing: First I get a compliment, then I get a warning. In the second grade when I had my first crush, I pointed out the object of my affection to my mother, who remarked, "Well ... beauty is in the eye of the beholder." I thought she was agreeing that my beloved was beautiful. Little did I know.

A few others: Every time she saw me sitting around doing nothing, she warned that "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." I thought I was possessed. If I was upset about something trivial, it was "a tempest in a teapot." Impatience would bring on the bromide "A watched pot never boils," which mystified me because I wasn't watching a pot. When I was late I was reminded that "time and tide wait for no man."

The one that really got me was the time I had an essay due the next day that I hadn't started because I couldn't think of a topic. My mother assured me that I would. When I asked how, she calmly invoked the observation of Dr. Samuel Johnson, the distinguished 18th century writer, that "nothing so concentrates the mind as the sight of the gallows." I mean, I knew not doing the assignment would get me in trouble ... but not *that* much trouble.

I can't help but wonder what literary gem Olivia would have pulled out for the COVID-19 pandemic. She avoided bad news like the, uh, plague, citing the dictum that "what you don't know won't hurt you" for justification. I can imagine trying to tell her that in this case what she didn't know *could* hurt her, only to have her hold up her hand, smile serenely, and hit me with her favorite line from the English poet Thomas Gray: "When ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." Love you, Mom. **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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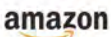


CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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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