

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | FEBRUARY 2021

# TOASTMASTER®

Stephan Dyer,  
DTM, and others  
talk humor

**The Healing  
Power of Humor**

**Reviewing Your  
Life's Achievements**

*The  
Formula  
for  
Funny*

**TOASTMASTERS**  
INTERNATIONAL

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**C****onfidence!**

**TIP**

Leave your camera on while listening to speakers. Give them the same attention you would in person so they can adjust to reactions and you can both better engage.

For more helpful tips, go to: [www.toastmasters.org/OnlineTips](http://www.toastmasters.org/OnlineTips)

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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



WHERE LEADERS ARE MADE

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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 the String, the Bow, or Both?

**F**lowers, candy, cards, and Cupid. Is this what comes to mind when you think of February? After all, this is the month of St. Valentine's Day. Or do you view February as a month to reflect on your relationships? Those that you would like to strengthen, as well as those that you would like to develop.

An interesting characteristic of Cupid is his bow, which, at first, may seem to be odd for a cherub to have. Believe it or not, Cupid's bow can be used to describe relationships, regardless of whether the relationship is between individuals or with a group or a team you lead.

How can a bow be used to describe a relationship? Let me explain. As the string is pulled back, the bow bends or gives. The stronger the pull, the greater the bend. If the string pulls too hard, the bow will break; conversely, if the bow remains too rigid, the string will break. Just like a relationship, it's all about give-and-take. Take too much and the relationship will fail; give too little and the relationship will fail. When you reflect upon your relationships, are you the string, the bow, or a little of both?

**Believe it or not, Cupid's bow can be used to describe relationships between individuals or with a group or team you lead.**

Building and maintaining relationships is more than just give-and-take, but knowing how to balance the two is vital to understanding the dynamic of relationships. Knowing what you are asking of others, or what they are asking of you, and knowing how they, or you, are likely to respond will help you identify the balance in the relationship. I have had personal experience with trying to pull a team too hard. The harder I pulled the greater the resistance I felt. Needless to say, the relationship was not successful.

As you continue to strengthen your current relationships and work on developing new ones, remember Cupid's bow and ask yourself, *Am I pulling too hard ... giving too little ... or is everything in balance?* Relationships are built throughout the year, not just in February, but this is the time of year that we tend to reflect on them!

There is evidence that having close, positive relationships gives us a purpose and sense of belonging. This is more evident today, in these challenging times, than ever before. I wish you much success as you continue to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones.

**Richard E. Peck, DTM**  
International President

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The Official Toastmasters International Members Group on [Facebook](#) is always filled with conversations started by and for members. Below are a few posts and comments that may help clubs across the world or spark some inspiration.



### Silver Linings

Rupinder Singh, DTM, of New Delhi, India, and a member of Blue Quest, Professional Speakers, and Turning Point Toastmasters asked,

*“When it comes to Toastmasters, what is the one thing you’d thank COVID for?”*

Being able to attend meetings all over the country, Europe, and world! Learning how to host a virtual training; becoming a Zoomer; attending more meetings as I can from home (am caring for my elderly mum!).

**Sandra Lizioli, DTM**  
Brussels, Belgium

Learning in different directions—both online skills, and learning to help others get through the tough hours. Learning the value of taking a deep breath, and hoping your best is good enough, and then learning that it usually is.

**Mike Diggins, DTM**  
Auckland, New Zealand

I made new close friendships with Toastmasters in three continents and even in my own city. World champions became so accessible, and I indulged myself in attending their master classes. Being a Toastmaster became even more fun, and I expanded my horizon of Toastmaster creativity!

**Virginia Mercouri**  
Brussels, Belgium

I was able to practice more speeches, and one speech many times. The most I did: delivered the same speech in 13 clubs.

**Santosh Akella**  
Mumbai, India

Sharpening video performance skills. This is usable not only in online meetings, but also in filming offline promotional videos.

**Jim Emery**  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Being able to invite a couple of friends when I gave a speech. One was in a different state and the other probably wouldn't have ever been able to make it in person.

**Emily Barker**  
St. Louis Park, Minnesota



### Chat Box Creativity

Losoradores Toastmasters in Sacramento, California, asked,

*“What are some fun ways to use the chat box for Toastmasters online meetings?”*

My club uses the chat box to send messages to the speakers; we call them love notes.

**Peggy Carr, DTM**  
Brigham City, Utah

Initial greetings, welcome new members personally, feedback, and Word of the Day descriptions.

**Deval Patel**  
Vadodara, Gujarat, India

I used it as a speaker to ask the audience a question. Responses are delayed so it works better for a general question like “What is your favorite weekend activity?”

**Jeff Brown**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sending out a link to a form that populates our Google guestbook.

**Birgit Starmanns, DTM**  
Mountain View, California

We invite guests and members to build their network by providing email and/or phone numbers. We even do this for our new member orientation. Great way to start building relationships immediately! It also helps when we suggest that folks connect with each other via LinkedIn. For everyone in the meeting, we try to ensure folks have each other's full name (to make it easier to find on LinkedIn).

**Kathy Shine, DTM**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Join the conversation! Search for the group on Facebook or use #talkingtoastmasters to share your thoughts and tips.

[www.toastmasters.org/Magazine](http://www.toastmasters.org/Magazine)

Get social with us! Click, read, and share:



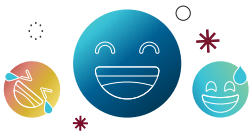
TUNE IN



Hear the latest episodes from [The Toastmasters Podcast](#).




Listen for tips on decoding the organization's acronyms in Toastmasters Toolbox.



Watch this month's Humor Workshop, a two-part [webinar](#) about all things funny.

## Looking at Humor



What is humor, and how can you add it into your speeches? Learn how to make others laugh, and don't miss the accompanying podcast.



### 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](mailto:photos@toastmasters.org).

## The Timer's Toolkit

Discover everything you need to succeed as timer of the meeting. Find resources like [timing cards](#) and colored [Zoom backgrounds](#).



### Online Exclusive

In honor of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science on February 11, [read about](#) some female members who use their Toastmasters skills in their scientific discipline.

## ▶ MEMBER MOMENT

## For Club and Country

South African attorney wields a passionate service mindset.

BY STEPHANIE DARLING

Around age 13, Michael Shackleton, DTM, decided to follow in the footsteps of South Africa's great social justice leaders, such as Nelson Mandela, Tony Leon, Helen Suzman, and Colin Eglin. "I was inspired by their outlooks to bring people together and make positive contributions to the broader society," Shackleton explains.

His aspirations included holding public office so he could join fellow leaders in enacting policies that would ensure a united, economically strong country for the next generation.

Now, at age 33, Shackleton has fulfilled many of his public service dreams, representing diverse constituents while serving in the local, provincial, and national levels of the South African government. He is one of only a few people in his country's history to do so. Fittingly, in 2019, he was named one of the country's [100 Young Mandelas of the Future](#) by News 24, a major news outlet in South Africa. It's a feat he says never would have happened without Toastmasters.

"Toastmasters has given me the tools I need to make my life a success. I always say that it hasn't made me better than others, but it has certainly made me the best version of myself," notes Shackleton, a partner in Shackleton and Mohapi Attorneys, a civil and criminal litigation firm in Pretoria.

Shackleton joined Open Society Toastmasters, also in Pretoria, in 2011, determined to overcome a serious stutter he had developed in his first year at the University of Pretoria, brought on by the devastating loss of his parents and looming financial hardships.

"It knocked my confidence and left me extremely anxious about how I'd go on in life," he says. Fortunately, his paternal grandparents stepped in to pay study fees. Yet his stutter persisted, threatening his professional and political aspirations.

"When I joined Toastmasters, I had narrowly missed out on becoming a city councilor in Pretoria. It was clear that my stutter contributed in a big way to this scenario. It was also negatively affecting my job opportunities," Shackleton says.

After polishing his speaking skills during three years of Toastmasters club and public speech experiences, Shackleton was elected a Pretoria city councilor.

"Toastmasters certainly helped me overcome stuttering in public speaking by placing me in many situations, such as speaking to small and large crowds, and even being interviewed on the radio," all of which were significant confidence-boosters, he says. Shackleton was later recognized by an international youth organization as an outstanding South African for his accomplishments, including mastering his stutter.



Michael Shackleton

Shackleton has continued as a dedicated Toastmaster. He is 2021–2022 Area Director for Y4 in District 74, overseeing four corporate clubs and one community club. He serves on the District Ethics Committee, and is a founding member of South Africa's Midrand Groundbreakers in Midrand, and a member of Accenture Toastmasters Club in Johannesburg. He has held numerous club offices, countless meeting roles, and is a frequent guest speaker in his community.

He also set his sights on higher public office. He studied law, following the careers of his political heroes, Nelson Mandela and former Parliament member Tony Leon. Shackleton completed his master's degree in constitutional and administrative law in 2017. The following year he became a member of South Africa's Parliament, taking a seat in the National Assembly. In a country of 57 million people, only 400 citizens are allowed at any one time to occupy one of these seats for a five-year term.

He completed his public office trifecta in 2019, when he became a member of the provincial legislature in his province—Gauteng—the economic hub of South Africa.

Shackleton is determined to work within South Africa's decision-making bodies to repair what he calls his country's "deeply divided and fractured past." He credits Toastmasters for giving him the skills, vision, and confidence to serve his country.

"Toastmasters has given me the ability to make public speeches in legislative houses and communities and to genuinely listen to community members from all walks of life, to take up their issues and deliver. In South Africa, we have 11 different official languages, all racial groups, and multiple religions. Political and even daily success in ordinary life depends on harnessing the very best of diversity and living harmoniously across socioeconomic and racial lines," he says. "Toastmasters promotes respect for diversity and the innate talent that we all have."

Stephanie Darling is a senior editor for the Toastmaster magazine.

► TOASTMASTERS NEWS

**Hybrid Club Tips**

If your club is a hybrid club or looking to become one, you may be interested in some tips on how to find success with both in-person and online attendees. Spend some time reviewing the [“Running a Successful Hybrid Club Meeting”](#) document. Share it with your fellow club officers or with clubs in your District, and set some time aside to discuss how you can better suit your members’ needs in a hybrid club format.

**Online Meeting Resources**

Clubs and members who have struggled to adapt to online meetings can visit the [Online Meetings page](#) on the Toastmasters website for a wide assortment of resources. Under the **Tools** tab, find tips and infographics, virtual backgrounds and camera frames, digital ribbons, and more. Click on the **How-To Videos** tab to share videos with fellow members to help them get situated in online meetings. The **Quick Reads** tab provides a variety of articles from the *Toastmaster* magazine on topics like virtual meetings, video conferences, staying connected, and visiting clubs globally.

**New Corporate Clubs Flier**

Club Growth Directors and their teams need simplified support when prospecting. The [Corporate Club Marketing Flier](#) was

designed to easily introduce Toastmasters as a professional development training solution to corporate cultures. Download this one-page PDF in the Resource Library today!

**Member Profile Reminder**

Every Toastmaster has an account on the Toastmasters International website if they provided a valid email when submitting their membership application. To access your member profile, log into [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org) and click on “Login” at the top of the page. In your profile there are archives of your past educational awards, offices held, and past product order receipts, along with other records of your Toastmasters journey. If you are unable to log in, please use the [Forgot Password?](#) tool or email [membership@toastmasters.org](mailto:membership@toastmasters.org).



► COMMUNICATION

Speaking to Diverse Audiences

Giving a speech or presentation to an audience of people who speak various languages or have differing cultural backgrounds requires special tact on the part of the speaker. Here are some tips and techniques on how to effectively engage a diverse audience:

- **Enunciate clearly.** For this type of event, be extra careful about enunciating your accent as clearly as possible.
- **Don't speak too fast.** Remember that the normal pace of speech in one language might become incomprehensible for people relatively new to that language.
- **Be careful with metaphors.** Some metaphors that are appropriate in one culture can be offensive to another. A good example is references to sports not popular or practiced in a certain country, or phrases that are comical in one culture yet offensive in another.
- **Know the meanings of words outside your native language.** Unless you are absolutely sure of the meaning and pronunciation of a word you are using in a given language, do not use it. In some languages, slight variations of a vowel will completely alter the meaning of a word.
- **Avoid slang, jargon, and idiomatic expressions.** Diverse audiences may not understand slang from a given country.



English phrases such as “that dog don’t hunt” or “cool as a cucumber” might be colorful, but the meaning could be lost on a large part of the audience.

- **Be mindful of body language, eye contact, and personal space.** Posture, mannerisms, and eye contact speak volumes, and physical gestures taken for granted in one culture might be considered offensive in another.

To get more tips about communicating across cultures, view our [recent webinar series](#).



▶ **SNAPSHOT**

*For three decades, the Toastmasters Club of Paris in Paris, France, met at the same venue—a 19th century restaurant across from the Opera Comique theater. These meetings included a three-course dinner, during which members listened to, encouraged, and evaluated speakers. Like many other members, they are now meeting online, and virtually celebrated their 45th anniversary in November 2020.*

▶ **LOOKING AT LANGUAGE**

## Words of the Year

Among all the 2020 end-of-the-year compilations (best record, best book ... ) were those produced by dictionary publishers choosing their word of the year. Not surprisingly, the language landscape—like so much in 2020—was enveloped by COVID-19.

COVID-related terms dominated the linguistic lists, with both Merriam-Webster and Dictionary.com citing “pandemic” as their premier word. The choice reflected the top word searches on their online sites and the term’s transformative role in public communication. Words like “quarantine,” “coronavirus,” and “asymptomatic” also appeared on their lists.

Oxford Languages, publisher of the Oxford English Dictionary, said it wasn’t adequate to pick just one word, given the huge scope and impact of COVID-19-related language in 2020. So its report highlighted many ubiquitous terms; along with the obvious ones like “coronavirus,” it listed “remote,”



“lockdown,” and “furlough,” as well as media-heavy phrases like “stay-at-home,” “social distancing,” and “flatten the curve.”

Also standing out: “Doomscrolling,” in which people compulsively scroll through social media stories consuming every last bit of increasingly dire news.

Additional terms chosen by the world’s word monitors underscored other explosive issues in 2020, including political elections and social justice. The Global Language Monitor announced “WHO” (World Health Organization) as the top name of 2020.

A few highly ranked searched words carried lighter connotations, such as this one on Merriam-Webster’s list:

“kraken.” It comes with a sports context: When a new hockey team in Seattle, Washington, chose “Kraken” as its team name, on July 23, searches for the word increased 128% that day, according to Merriam-Webster. And what exactly is a kraken? A mythical Scandinavian sea monster.

## 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](mailto:photos@toastmasters.org).



**1** | *Smedley, the WesBank Toastmasters club mascot in Johannesburg, South Africa, visits the Palace of the Lost City in Sun City, South Africa.*

**2** | **NEEV CONDES** of Ajman, United Arab Emirates, stands at the foot of the highest mountain in United Arab Emirates—Jebel Jais—prior to the pandemic.

**3** | **RONNIE GUTIERREZ, RED JOPILLO, and BRIAN JOSHUA GALO GIMENEZ, DTM,** of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, pose at Jebel Fihrayn near their hometown in December 2019.

**4** | **NOEL M. GERMANO** of Quezon City, Philippines, takes his magazine on a work trip to do efficiency testing at a power plant in Dupax Del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines.



View additional **Traveling *Toastmaster*** photos in the [online magazine](#) for some extra inspiration.

# Coming Back to Toastmasters

I returned to find virtual meetings, Pathways, and the potential to improve my skills even more.

BY RUTH NASRULLAH

*Get a little tickle in my throat, which grows to an irritation. I can't will it to stop, so I turn away and cough into my elbow, the hygienic way we've been taught to cough or sneeze, even before the pandemic.*

*Wait, why did I do that? I'm sitting in front of a computer screen!*

Since March 2020, I have been in enough virtual meetings that I shouldn't be surprised at the persistence of such behaviors. But this is a Toastmasters meeting, and I feel like every gesture is critical.

I returned to Toastmasters in October 2019 after several years away. I have found that ingrained habits are hard to break, whether they're simple courtesy (like coughing into your elbow) or the fundamentals of a good speech (like a strong intro). I instinctively scan the room while speaking and use expansive arm movements. I learned such habits during my 10-plus years of Toastmasters training.

The world changed in many ways in 2020, and we are all navigating the challenges. I found my return to Toastmasters to be similarly fraught—and also full of potential solutions.

## Challenge #1: Pathways

Pathways was not around when I was last a member of Toastmasters. Initially, I resisted it. I was nostalgic for a manual with a glossy cover. I wanted to earn awards that contained words like “leader” and “advanced.” When I saw DL3 or PM2 (Pathways designations) next to someone's name, I was unimpressed; it seemed to lack the authority of the old designations.

But then I managed to breeze through the first level of the Presentation Mastery path. As I advanced through the projects, I grew more impressed. It felt more comprehensive, more like a curriculum than the previous education program.



Ruth Nasrullah

I selected Presentation Mastery as my first path very deliberately. Last year I began volunteering at a nature preserve near my home in Houston, Texas. I'm training to be a trail guide, and I want my communication to be as polished as that of the pros I watch leading hikes. Returning to Toastmasters was an obvious way to improve my communication and presentation skills.

## When I earned the PM1 designation, I surprised myself with how accomplished I felt.

Each speech I gave in Level 1 related to my volunteer work. I spoke about the great horned owl in one meeting and genetically modified mosquitoes in another; I also took my club on a photographic tour of outdoor sculptures in the Birmingham, Alabama, civil rights district.

When I earned the PM1 designation (Presentation Mastery, Level 1 completion), I surprised myself with how accomplished I felt. I logged on to the Toastmasters website

several times just to see the formal record of my achievement.

## Challenge #2: The Small Screen

Of course, I can't ignore the limitations of a virtual meeting. I don't always know where on the screen to look in order to avoid the appearance of staring at my lap or at the wall beyond my desk. I don't know how to modify hand gestures to integrate them into a virtual project. And it's certainly a challenge to gauge the audience's reaction to my speech.

One thing I really miss from the old days is walking to the lectern while the audience applauds. It got me ready to dive into my presentation, and no matter how well I did, the applause on the way back to my seat was comforting. There's nothing online that can duplicate that.

## A New Club

My new club, Pearland Toastmasters, helped me adapt. Until the coronavirus hit the U.S., the club met at a YMCA in Pearland, Texas, a small city south of Houston. If they were still meeting in person, it would be about a 20-minute drive for me, depending on traffic. Other clubs are closer to my home and meet at a less extreme hour than the 7 a.m. starting time, but I chose Pearland because I could see from the club's website that it had a truly diverse membership in terms of ethnicity, culture, ability, and age.

I continue to adapt to the new environment and the new program. I have stopped resisting change. Speech by speech, role by role, I really do feel like a Toastmaster again. **T**

**RUTH NASRULLAH** is a member of the Pearland Toastmasters Club in Pearland, Texas. She is a freelance journalist based in Houston. You can read her work at [www.ruthnasrullah.com](http://www.ruthnasrullah.com).



# A Language of Its Own

Decoding the acronyms of Toastmasters.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

**L**ike any organization, Toastmasters has a language of its own. And it seems to major in abbreviations.

Walk into any meeting and you can't miss it. "She is a DTM. He is a VC5. Susan is our VPE. We are making good progress in the DCP." Huh? Did I just wander into a bowl of alphabet soup?

Several years ago, I wrote an article about the various buzzwords that a new member will, sooner or later, encounter. At the time of the article, the Pathways learning experience was in the future. That article was about Toastmasters' traditional education program.

With the completed transition to Pathways, the language has changed a bit. And even some of us old-timers might be a bit confused. It's time for an updated article. It's time for a new lexicon.

## Education Designations

Many members have letters and numbers listed after their names. Those designations indicate the progress they have made in the Pathways program. At the time I am writing this, there are 11 specialized learning paths. And each one has five levels.

Each path has a name with two words in it. Its designation is a two-letter abbreviation for that particular name. For example, DL for Dynamic Leadership, MS for Motivational Strategies, and so on.

The number after the two letters refers to the level the member has completed—if a person is a PM4, for example, that means that they have completed Level 4 in the Presentation Mastery path. A member's Pathways designation refers to the highest level they have achieved in a path.

Some Toastmasters carry the designation DTM. This is the highest earned rank within Toastmasters and means Distinguished Toastmaster. To earn the DTM in Pathways, one must complete at least two learning paths, serve as a leader at various levels in the organization, and complete a DTM project. If you have any members in your club with a DTM, get to know them. They are a great resource as you grow your speaking and leadership abilities.

You may notice that some members have a different set of designations. They earned those awards in the traditional system. Don't worry about what they mean at this time.

## Leadership Positions

You may have heard terms like VPE, VPM, and VPPR bandied about during a meeting. These are three of the officers within the club. The VPE, or Vice President Education, ensures that all meeting roles are filled and members are achieving their goals. The VPM, or Vice President Membership, works with guests to bring them into the club, and the VPPR, or Vice President Public Relations, promotes the club to the outside world.

A club functions with a total of seven officer roles that members can volunteer for. I assume that President, Secretary, and Treasurer are self-explanatory. The Sergeant at Arms takes care of the club supplies and the meeting setup (whether in-person or online).

## Organizational Structure

To give the individual clubs full support, Toastmasters has an extended organizational structure run by members like you.

The first level above the club is the Area. Each Area has an Area Director, who assists typically four or five clubs to keep them informed of Toastmasters news, meetings, etc. They also work with their clubs to make sure they are achieving their goals.

Four to six Areas make up a Division, which has its own Division Director. Above the Division is the District. The District Director, along with a number of other District leaders, supports about 200 clubs.

Up until July 2015, the directors were called "governors." You may still hear that term used, especially in reference to Past District Governors, so don't be confused. They are the same.

Let's look at one final buzzword.

To further ensure that clubs are providing value to members, Toastmasters International developed a series of measurement criteria. This is known as the DCP, or the Distinguished Club Program. You will, no doubt, hear frequent reference to it, especially around June, which marks the end of the Toastmasters program year.

There is a lot more to Toastmasters terms, but this will get you off to a good start. Hopefully, it will get you through a typical meeting without feeling like you need an interpreter. In fact, before long, you will find yourself speaking the language just as fluently as us old-timers. So sit back and enjoy the alphabet soup. **T**

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# The Timer's Toolkit

As the timer, you play a fundamental role in keeping club meetings and members' speeches on track.

BY MEGAN PRESTON MEYER

**T**he timer is a simple but essential meeting role. Like a plumber or an appliance repair technician, the job is often underappreciated—until you realize that your quality of life, or the quality of your Toastmasters meeting, would decrease rapidly in its absence.

The timer of the meeting monitors each participant, indicates when they are nearing the end of their allotted time, and, at the end of the meeting, reports the length of each prepared speech, Table Topics® response, and evaluation. The role is straightforward, which is a great way for new members to get involved. Even if you've served as timer several times, challenge yourself to take it to the next level.

To be effective, a timer—like a plumber or a repair tech—needs the right toolkit: an agenda, a signal, and a clock.

**Agenda.** When serving as timer, you'll need a detailed agenda of the meeting. It would also be helpful to have the [timer script and log](#). Review the time requirements for each prepared speech; in general, the timing indicator goes on at the five-, six-, and seven-minute mark, but Ice Breakers and advanced Pathways projects have different time limits.

You'll also use the agenda to help the Toastmaster of the meeting keep the session on track. Depending on your club's particular structure or what the Toastmaster might request, you monitor one-minute evaluation silences between speeches, ensure timely transitions between meeting segments, and watch the clock to make sure the Toastmaster brings members together promptly after the break.

**Challenge:** Time everybody—and everything. How long did the Club

President spend making announcements? How long did it take for the applause to die down after each speech? Add some levity and spice to your timer's report ... just make sure to stay within your *own* time limit!

**Signal.** Green, yellow, and red come in many forms. There are more than 16,000 Toastmasters clubs in the world, and nearly that many types of timing signals. The simplest option is a set of colored cardboard cards, like the [Toastmasters Timing Cards](#). Some clubs have literal flags, made from painted dowels and colored felt, which the timer waves wildly in the air and then displays in a wooden stand.

## Armed with your toolkit, you are their greatest ally in their race against the clock.

If you're looking for something glitzier, an internet search will reveal a world of possibilities: traditional tabletop stoplights; non-traditional tri-color light boards; customizable colored bulbs controlled by app or remote control ... The list goes on. Virtual meetings have inspired even more creative timing signals, including objects around the house. Post-It Notes don't come in grass green, banana yellow, and apple red, but they *do* come in fluorescent lime, high-vis yellow, and neon pink. Colored building blocks or markers, when held close to the webcam, also work well. And if your meeting is on Zoom, try one of Toastmasters' [Timer Backgrounds](#), which are translated into 11 languages including English. You'll give new meaning to the term "green screen."

**Challenge:** Create a timing device for your club—as simple or as elaborate as you'd like. Bonus points if it can be used virtually, too!

**Clock.** The timer needs a timer. These days, a mobile phone usually serves that purpose. Whether it's the default clock app or the timer feature on the [Toastmasters International app](#), the humble smartphone is the most common timing device in use around the world. However, rare sightings of [actual stopwatches](#) have been reported.

Many signaling devices have timing functionality built in. You can program in the speech time limits, and the signal will display the appropriate color at the appropriate time. Then you can condense your toolkit from three items down to two!

**Challenge:** With many meetings going virtual, why not shake things up a bit and go analog? Try a clock or a wristwatch with a second hand. You'll need to do a bit of math, so you'll get an extra boost of brainpower from the practice!

One of the most important lessons that Toastmasters teaches us is how to convey a clear message within an allocated time frame. When you serve as timer of the meeting, you play a fundamental role in helping fellow club members master this skill. Armed with your toolkit, you are their greatest ally in their race against the clock. **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](http://www.supply-jane.com).

# The Value of Virtual Connections

Online mentoring relationships can flourish even when members are a world apart.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

**W**hen Misako Yoke became Club President of Buddies, an online Toastmasters club, there were six members. Yoke focused on recruitment, and the club grew. With so many new Toastmasters, she needed help onboarding them. One of those helpers was online mentor Tricia Grow, DTM, a member of both Carlisle Community Toastmasters, in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, and CompetitiveCommunicators.com, an online global club.

“Tricia has been mentoring Toastmasters all over the world,” says Yoke. In the Buddies club alone, members live worldwide, including China, Japan, India, Norway, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the United States. For more than a year, Grow mentored several of Buddies’ new members. She also served as an on-call mentor before the weekly meetings for people who had questions about their roles or needed support.

Mentoring is a time-honored practice in Toastmasters. Through the years, members from the local level to International Presidents have time and again attributed part of their successes to mentors. Clubs regularly emphasize the role of [mentoring](#), and it is a Level 2 component in every Pathways path. Now, in the online environment, it’s more valuable than ever.

## Online Mentoring Benefits

The ability to connect with anyone, in any location, is a major benefit of online mentoring. “Being able to click a button

to access a club without having to go anywhere was attractive to me as I am disabled and dislike having to drive great distances,” says Grow. “It is also great to be able to immerse myself in another culture.”

Svetlana Rakhimova, DTM, agrees. She founded two online clubs—Witty Storytellers Online and Witty Birds—with global memberships. Members prize mentoring relationships; Rakhimova has been a mentor and a mentee.

“I believe online mentoring is more rewarding and convenient than the traditional,” says Rakhimova. For rewards, she cites greater cultural interactions and opportunities to help people when there are language and skill gaps. There’s also satisfaction in showing people the possibilities of body language and performance within the online environment.

Conveniences include time and money saved because no travel is involved. For online club members, particularly those in remote areas or places far from traditional clubs, a virtual connection might be their main or only mentoring option.

It can also connect people beyond geographic boundaries. Through recommendations, Yoke also recruited two online club coaches—one from the Caribbean and another from northern Canada—to help grow Buddies. “There was quite a variety of clothing in the online meeting room!” says Yoke.

Other benefits include those gained from any kind of mentoring: growth, increased engagement, more in-depth feedback, and shorter club learning curves.

Mentors benefit too. Mentees can spark mentors’ creativity, re-energize them, teach them something new, and increase their engagement. And when people are engaged, clubs encounter less attrition.

## Growth of Online Mentoring

New and improved communication options allow people to connect more easily. As technology is more readily available, easier to use, and sometimes free, collaborating online has grown in familiarity and acceptance.

The growth of online clubs has increased opportunities for virtual mentoring. In March 2016, Toastmasters International changed its policies to permit online clubs. After six months, three online clubs chartered, five were in the pipeline, and more than 190 traditional, “brick and mortar” clubs incorporated online participation into meetings. Of course, due to COVID-19, some 83% of Toastmasters clubs are meeting online anyway, for the time being. This makes virtual mentoring an even more popular, accessible, and unique opportunity.

## A Myriad of Mentoring Types

The traditional mentoring arrangement is a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and mentee. Individuals can also be mentored in peer-to-peer engagements

*Svetlana Rakhimova, DTM (left), and Assyl Boizhanova, DTM, became lasting friends through a reciprocal virtual mentorship in the online international club Witty Birds. During a pre-pandemic trip together, Rakhimova, from England, and Boizhanova, from Kazakhstan, took their Toastmasters spirit to Samarkand, Uzbekistan.*

where there are no permanent relationships. “It’s still one person mentoring another person, but there are as many pairs as there are skills and needs for them,” says Rakhimova. Or, like the Buddies club, there can be an on-call mentor for whomever has a need at the time.

Witty Storytellers Online and Witty Birds offer skill banks to connect mentors and mentees. Mentors can offer up to three public speaking skills. Any member who wants to strengthen a specific skill can reach out for help.

“People feel more empowered when they can offer at least one skill they feel confident enough in to serve as role models and mentors,” says Rakhimova. “The same is true about mentees. Their vulnerability becomes a reason for useful communication. And nobody is stuck with a mentor who is no longer relevant or was not a great match.”

## Mentoring is a time-honored practice in Toastmasters. Now, in the online environment, it’s more valuable than ever.

Online mentoring can happen in groups too. For clubs that offer mentor-mentee clusters, if multiple mentees want to talk with the same mentor, particularly about the same topic, it can turn into a group session.

### Finding an Online Mentor

The right mentor-mentee fit is essential. Mentees should focus on what skills and



goals they’re seeking and who can offer relevant guidance. Communication style and personality are also important. For online mentoring specifically, there are practical issues, like time zones, to keep in mind. Both mentor and mentee should establish clear expectations, goals, and the duration of the official relationship upfront.

Start with your own club. Some clubs, like Witty Birds, have a mentor coordinator. You can also contact District-level leadership through your club’s officers to find someone with the background you’re seeking. Attending Toastmasters events beyond your club can expose you to more members who could be potential mentors.

### Online Dynamics

With online mentoring, the concept of “meetings” can become blurred. For example, emails can be even more important and substantive. Mentors and mentees should discuss communication options, and decide what constitutes a meeting and will work best.

There should be agreement about how often to meet and what type of responses are expected. Check in and confirm what’s working. See if adjustments should be made due to changing circumstances,

unrealistic expectations, or unanticipated issues. It’s also essential to be patient and flexible, particularly with technology issues, and be mindful of tone.

Yoke said Buddies members always felt Tricia Grow’s warmth and openness come through the screen. “She made us feel embraced and forget we were thousands of miles away from each other,” says Yoke.

Grow’s dedication and energy were major factors in her ability to convey her personality online. She also positioned her camera at just the right height to look directly into the lens, as if she were looking into the club members’ eyes.

“We felt like we were getting her undivided attention,” says Yoke. “Her nodding, pausing, and tilting her head made us feel like she was at the other side of the kitchen table, talking one-on-one.”

Don’t let geography limit you. If you want a mentor, find the best one for you, whether that person is next door or half-way around the world. **T**

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# How Far Has Your Bottle Gone?

BY ERNEST R. STAIR

Ask the right questions when reviewing your life's achievements.

**O**ne day in the middle of your life, you suddenly wake up and wonder, *Where did I go wrong? Not that you are in any kind of trouble. You are a law-abiding citizen. You pay your taxes; you are two months ahead on mortgage payments, and your kids' school grades are above average. So what's wrong with the present picture of your life?*

With apologies to Edward Gibbon and Charles Dickens for splicing together the titles of their literary classics, call it: *The Decline and Fall of Great Expectations*. You might be thinking, *I haven't done much with my life. I had greater things in mind for myself when I started out.*

You're not the only one to suffer mid-life disillusionment. Sooner or later it happens to nearly everybody, even to those rich and famous celebrities who parade across the big and little screens of our lives.

Achievement is the culprit. Early on, we plan to make something of ourselves, to leave our mark on the world, to climb some ladder of success all the way to the top—two rungs at a time. That hunger for achievement often returns to haunt us as we measure our progress from those starting points of earlier times. Not much ground has been covered, it seems, and time is running out.

## A Pivotal Point

If you feel yourself in the early stages of a decline and fall of your great expectations, you are standing directly on top of one of life's decisive moments. What's it going to be? Do you settle for less?

Or do you find a better way to pass life's achievement test? To help make up your mind, try seeing your life as if it were a bottle tossed into the sea.

One day, Bill Burrows of Massachusetts searched his house for a seaworthy bottle that could carry the note he had just written to the far corners of the world. The note said, "Will the person who finds this let me know where and when it was picked up?" He added his address, then stuffed the note into a glass bottle, sealed it with wax to keep out the water, and tossed it into the sea from the Massachusetts coastline. Then he went back to his house, dreaming of all the exotic places that bottle with his name inside might travel.

One day, two people walking on a beach found the bottle. They opened it, read Burrows' note, and located him. Burrows was amused to learn that the bottle he had tossed into the sea more than 45 years earlier was found—where? Only a *few hundred yards* from the spot where it set sail!





Use these questions to probe deep into the heart of your character. They measure what you are made of—courage, compassion, and humility.



**A Life in Three Acts**

Sooner or later, a moment of truth like that is bound to show up on everybody’s doorstep. Once it does, it is in no hurry to go away. Then you must ask yourself, *What happened to the big plans I made for myself?* If you are like most people, your life can be divided into three acts:

- ▶ **Act 1:** The Launch and the Dream
- ▶ **Act 2:** Facing the Truth That My Bottle Didn’t Go Very Far
- ▶ **Act 3:** All the Time After That

When the curtain goes up on Act 2 of your life, don’t get discouraged. Just like most plays, your life will go on. You will doubt your achievements. You will recall only the mistakes, the regrets, the mountains not climbed, the horizons not crossed, the adventures not tried. And once you do that, questioning the worth of your life won’t be far behind. The most important question for Act 2 of your life is: *Now what? What will I do with the rest of my life now that I have faced the truth that my bottle didn’t go very far?* Everyone has an Act 2. Not everyone moves successfully from Act 2 to Act 3.

In the theater of life, all the action is in Act 3. Anybody can be happy in Act 1, dreaming of all the wonderful possibilities that lie ahead. Anybody can be miserably mired in Act 2, mourning all the great expectations of the past that show no signs of ever being achieved. But Act 3—all the time after you face up to that feeling that your bottle didn’t go very far—Act 3 is where the courage is. Act 3 is where the wisdom is. Act 3 is where the greatness is.

You will never pass life’s achievement test if you ask the *wrong* questions. Those questions are:

- ▶ How much money do I make?
- ▶ How many square feet does my house contain?

- ▶ How will my job title sound at a high school reunion?
- ▶ Do I get dizzy thinking about my rung on the ladder of success?
- ▶ How many people report to me?
- ▶ How many walls are needed to display my degrees, awards, honors, trophies, and tributes?

These questions have one thing in common: The answers determine your grade on your life’s achievement test based on *other people’s* definitions of success. Other people drive by your property and estimate your net worth. Other people measure your success by your job title. Other people put weight on whether you give orders or take them. Other people size up your achievements by counting the awards and recognitions bestowed upon you with a pinch of pomp and circumstance. If you are asking yourself these questions, you are more about what *they* think about you than what you think about yourself. You trust your precious self-esteem and happiness to everybody else.

To really pass life’s achievement test, you need to start asking the *right* questions:

**How many times did I refuse to quit?** Anybody can be promoted to bigger and better things, but it takes true grit to stay put and see things through when you are not being recognized. Anybody can write somebody off, but it takes exceptional determination to stay beside someone who is making major mistakes in life. Count all the times that you didn’t give up on someone or something.

**How many times did I learn from my mistakes?** A concert pianist will tell you there is no such thing as a flawless performance. Learning how to handle mistakes is as much an art as knowing the right keys to press. Everybody makes mistakes, but not everybody takes the time to examine those mistakes and, without fixing blame, look for ways to chart a new course for the future. Count all the times in your life that you learned from your mistakes.

**How many times did I make a comeback?** The only normal thing about life is its alternating current of highs and lows, brought about by the whims of fortune. To find the secret of success in others, look not at their highs, but at their lows—how they meet the heartaches, disappointments, and tragedies of their lives.

A crowning achievement in your life may not be in your building a way to the top, but in rebuilding after a fall. Count all the times in your life that you made a comeback.

**How many times did I let somebody else have all the glory?** In soccer, an individual’s season score includes assists as well as goals. Throughout life, you have opportunities to help other people get the credit they deserve, then enjoy the applause

Real achievement cannot be condensed into resumes or statements of net worth. Real achievement is always an inside job.

they receive when standing in the spotlight. It is nice to receive an award, but there is a deeper satisfaction in opening a door for somebody else to get one. From that, you will receive the kind of trophy that does not gather dust. Count all the times in your life that you let somebody else have all the glory.

**How many times did I take criticism gracefully?** Criticism is the acid test of character. It brings out the best in us and it brings out the worst. Whether it comes from a supervisor's cutting evaluation at work or an adolescent's whining complaint at home, criticism typically provokes one of two classic responses: the counter-attack (criticizing the critic) or the retreat (wallowing in your own misery). But there is a *third way*. Some rise above the anger and hurt of the moment to hear every nuance of the criticism. These individuals are capable of saving what's useful and deleting what isn't. That way, criticism, fair or not, only adds to the stature of the one who's criticized. Count the times in your life that you took criticism gracefully.

**How many times did I make somebody's day?** A sixth grader basks in your attentiveness as she tells you every detail of the demanding practice it takes to be a champion cheerleader. A friend's posture straightens when you say, "I've seen you come through tough times before, and I know you will do it again." The worried face of a boy struggling with a math

problem breaks into a smile when you say, "You try so hard, I like that." You know your carefully crafted compliments offered to colleagues, neighbors, and even strangers hit the mark when you're told, "You just made my day." Count all the times in your life that you made somebody's day.

These are the right questions to gauge how you are doing on life's achievement test. Instead of sizing yourself up by computing the sum of your property, position, and credentials, use these questions to probe deep into the heart of your character. They measure what you are made of—courage, compassion, and humility.

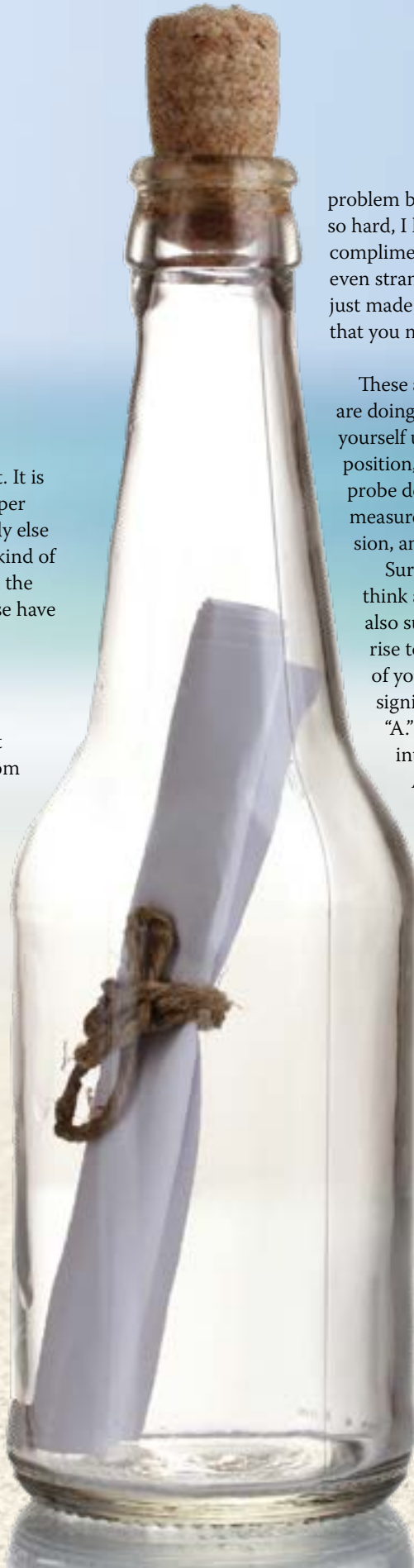
Sure, these questions might prompt you to think about some of your imperfections. But they also succeed in highlighting the true you, as you rise to great heights turning ordinary moments of your everyday life into events of extraordinary significance. That's Achievement with a capital "A." Real Achievement cannot be condensed into resumes or statements of net worth. Real Achievement is always an inside job.

In the theater of life  
... Act 3 is where the  
courage is; where  
the wisdom is; where  
the greatness is.

When you ask yourself the right questions, you may be surprised to find that your bottle went much farther than you imagined. It is just possible that you pass life's Achievement test with flying colors.

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*The late Ernest R. Stair was a minister in the United Methodist Church, with a lifelong love for writing. He graduated from Union College in Barbourville, Kentucky, and Yale University Divinity School. This article is reprinted from the January 2012 issue of the Toastmaster magazine.*





# The Formula for Funny

Try different humor tactics to win grins, giggles, and guffaws from your audience.

BY BETH BLACK

**I**f you can inspire people to laugh, you've found a way to draw them in, amuse them, and engage their interest in any speech ... even on a dry topic.

"Realize that humor can lead to happiness, one of the best feelings on Earth to humans," says Jessica Breitenfeld, President of the Spreeredner Toastmasters Club in Berlin, Germany, as well as a therapist. "If you can dive into humor, your speeches increase in power, relatability, and influence tenfold, because you're harnessing the power of human connection."

As Toastmasters we give all kinds of speeches to inform, persuade, inspire, and delight. Humor is an often forgotten ingredient that can improve every single speech. A sprinkling of levity at just the right moment can reach your listener's heart and mind. Humor needs to be applied sparingly in some cases, and always with skill, but if you think you're not the funny type, don't give up just yet. Your Toastmasters club offers a great place to experiment with all forms of humor, from subtle wit to all-out tall tales.

## A Good Laugh

Humor can be applied in varying degrees. A joke can be subtle, making an audience smile, or it can be supercharged, producing raucous laughter. For anyone timid about using

humor techniques, the good news is that plenty of the easy tactics listed below qualify for the "smile" range—you don't have to be outrageous to add humor successfully.

Andrew "Drew" Tarvin, a former computer science engineer for Procter & Gamble, has built a successful career as a self-described "humor engineer." Now a New York-based comedian, he speaks about blending work and humor before corporate audiences internationally. He encourages speakers to experiment with ways to make their audiences laugh and to be open to shifting tastes. "I think what people find funny is changing. Don't let it be an excuse that stops you from improving as a speaker," he says. "Learn how to adapt your message to meet your audience where they're at."

In Tarvin's viral 2017 TEDx Talk, "[The Skill of Humor](#)," which has been viewed nearly 9 million times, he notes that all his material is "Rated M for Mom," because he always wants his mother to be proud of his performances.

That kind of "general audience" rating is a useful guideline for business settings as well as Toastmasters speeches, Tarvin says. "Would you be comfortable with whatever you said or did showing up on the front page of your hometown newspaper (or blasted all over social media)? If not, then it's probably not appropriate for the workplace."

Humor can be a powerful tool in presentations ranging from a holiday toast to club meetings to business presentations.

Veronica Dangerfield, a founding member of the Oakland Chamber Toastmasters in Oakland, California, uses humor in her job as a financial well-being educator for the Patelco Credit Union. When she makes a light joke during her introduction, she finds it provides an instant, relaxing connection with her audience. “With my last name, I always have a comic introduction,” she says. “I can usually mention the famous comedian Rodney Dangerfield, or with younger folks, I say that it’s a *danger* in their financial *field* if they don’t listen.” Humor offers a “virtual hug” for listeners and an invitation to be playful, she adds.

As Dangerfield learned, humor is an effective tool in navigating workplace



Andrew "Drew" Tarvin



Drew Tarvin presents his 2017 TEDxTAMU Talk on "The Skill of Humor."



Veronica Dangerfield teaches financial well-being.

relationships. “My use of humor has made me successful in teaching people money skills. First, they are shocked to be laughing while learning about money,” she says. “Most people feel shame about money—but here is a comedian, telling them they did a fine job, so far.” Then, when she suggests they figure out how to do better, her students take action with renewed confidence. “Humor is a better motivator than shame,” Dangerfield notes. “When skillfully used,” she advises, “you can articulate the truth in a way that does not hurt anyone’s feelings.”

#### Four Ways To Be Funny

Rod A. Martin, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada, specializes in clinical psychology and has published his research on humor. In his 2007 book, *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, he classified humor into four fundamental categories, centered on a joke’s effect and its target.

“Understanding the four styles helps you determine the type of humor you want to use,” says Tarvin, the New York engineer-turned-comic. These important distinctions offer a simple, practical approach to humor that puts speakers in better control of their jokes.

1. **Self-Enhancing.** Focuses on yourself in a positive way, showing you thriving through something bad that happened to you. *I've learned to accept my limitations, so I can move beyond them!*
2. **Affiliative.** Focuses on others in a positive way, a type of “we’re all in this together” humor about commonly shared experiences. It’s the safest form to use at work or in a club meeting. *Everyone knows that money talks. For most of us, all it says is, “Good-bye.”*
3. **Self-Defeating.** Focuses on yourself in a more negative manner—humor at your own expense. *I would've signed up for the Toastmasters speech contest, but I was too busy practicing my speech.*
4. **Aggressive.** Focuses on others in a more negative manner. *Stuart's always late to meetings, because he gets lost in his cubicle!*

Tarvin, who has a large social media following, explains that many professional humorists pay attention to Martin’s four categories when crafting a joke. Of the four, making fun of yourself is one of the most successful approaches, he explains. If you want to be a transformational speaker, it’s better to focus on the positive methods. If you make jokes about yourself, people are more likely to listen.

Dangerfield, the financial health educator in California, encourages self-enhancing humor in her students for its uplifting

## ENGAGING HUMOR IN PATHWAYS

**T**he Engaging Humor path is a popular one in the Pathways learning experience. Its projects help Toastmasters build skills as humorous and engaging public speakers, offering strategies on writing funny speeches, using effective timing and pacing, crafting strong openings, and even figuring out how to cope when your jokes bomb. (Hint: Don’t be mad at the audience.)

Learn to understand your own sense of humor and how it translates to entertaining audiences, especially by practicing in challenging situations or in impromptu speeches. The projects include interactive activities and videos, and culminate in an extended humorous speech that allows you to apply newfound comedic talents.

effect. She also uses affiliative humor about everyone’s shared emotional experiences with finances. “Money is irrational. It’s based on emotions,” she says. “If you can see your behavior in a funny way that’s shared commonly, it’s not an internal judgment.”

For Tarvin, the New York comedian, using affiliative humor is key to

becoming an effective corporate trainer, because it creates a positive environment where people feel part of a community. He cautions against using self-defeating or aggressive humor in the workplace. While it’s funny at open mic night (where anyone can try out comedy), you really don’t want to brand yourself as a loser or a bully around the office. For example, you could say, “My quarterly report worked out pretty well, especially considering that I wrote it at home. Even the crayon marks added so much.”

But contrast that with “My quarterly report from home was so bad that my kids’ crayon marks were the best part.” Placing blame (especially on children) can cross a line, making the joke sound inappropriate and possibly offensive.

### Surprise! You’re Funny!

Some people aren’t even trying to be funny and they win laughs, as Toastmasters Markus Seppälä, DTM, and Stephan Dyer, DTM, can attest. For many comedians, there is a moment of discovery.

Seppälä, a founding member of the Basel International Speakers Toastmasters club in Basel, Switzerland, was building a speaking career several years ago. He worked at Johnson & Johnson as a specialist in executive compensation and employee share plans, speaking on topics related to compensation at conferences. But seven years ago, he realized at Toastmasters club meetings that he was also unintentionally funny. Club members laughed when he spoke while performing leadership roles, such as General Evaluator. Rather than shy away, he worked to develop his comedic skills. “I began going to comedy clubs. When one of them offered open mic shows, I gave it a go and never looked back.” Now Seppälä is a professional humorist and runs the largest comedy club in his city, Comedy Basel.



Stephan Dyer, DTM, performs stand-up comedy.



Dyer of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, also had no idea he was funny when he joined the Bay Street Breakfast Toastmasters Club in Toronto in 2012. “I just started speaking, and people would laugh regardless of the Toastmasters manual I was following,” he says. At the time, Dyer didn’t know enough about the science of humor to understand why people found him funny. “I was unknowingly using misdirection, comparisons, irony, exaggeration, and more,” he says.

A native of Costa Rica, Dyer is a former banking executive who gave a [TEDxTalk](#) about his journey to become a professional comedian and co-owner of Toronto’s Malpensando Comedy School, performing comedy in both Spanish and English.

### Tackle These Comedy Techniques

Once you understand the four basic categories of humor, you’re ready to try some specific comedy techniques.

**The rule of three** is commonly called the comic triple when it results in laughter. The idea is simply that a joke can come in three parts—setup, anticipation, and punchline. It works because three is the smallest number the human brain needs to set up a pattern. For humor, the pattern is bent in a surprising way at the end. “Humans love novelty, and surprise creates delight,” notes Breitenfeld.

Here’s an example showing how a comic triple can work as a self-enhancing joke:

1. I’ve taken up speed reading. (setup)
2. I can read *The Lord of the Rings* in 10 seconds. (anticipation)
3. It’s only five words, but it’s a start! (punchline)

Another useful tool is **visual humor**, where something the audience sees, such as a funny costume, is part of the joke. That includes physical humor, which relies on humorous body language. Canadian comedian Dyer offers one caveat, “You have to be very clear in communicating the joke’s premise, or the crowd isn’t going to follow your physical humor.” Make sure the audience understands the joke’s setup *before* you perform the

movements. Otherwise, it could be awkward when no one laughs while you’re showing off that unspoken punchline.

If you’re seeking a more subtle humor technique, try a pun—an amusing way to surprise with double meanings of words and phrases. For example, “He was fired from the calendar factory for taking a day off.” If you’re great with witty wordplay—wonderful! But be

sure to adapt to your audience’s familiarity with your language.

One of the best ways to improve your humor skills, Tarvin suggests, is to watch speakers giving popular TED Talks, because humor is always a key component. “Take note of how they’re using humor to engage the audience or make a point.” Before long, you’ll be practicing these techniques in your club. Enjoy each smile and laugh, as you connect with your audience in a new way.

**Beth Black** is a freelance writer in Orange County, California. Her novel, *Where You Go, I Go*, offers smiles and laughs for romantic comedy fans. Learn more at [www.BethScape.com](http://www.BethScape.com).

## ESSENTIAL HUMOR TIPS

**W**hile experimenting with humor, remember these important tips:

- ▶ **Be Relevant.** Affiliative humor works when you share experiences you have in common with the audience. That includes keeping your speech culturally relevant. Learn what you can about a culture before commenting on it. When you go directly to the source for meaningful topics, your jokes won’t be lost in translation.
- ▶ **Be Kind.** Remember, of the four comedy classifications, self-enhancing and affiliative jokes are safest because they focus on *positives* in their punchlines. Make people laugh while creating a feel-good environment at the same time.
- ▶ **Be Flexible.** Table Topics® in club meetings offers excellent opportunities to develop better listening and improvisational skills. Practice the improv technique of saying “Yes, and ...” in your club Table Topics so you are ready to respond to any question.

# The Healing Power of Humor

The importance of laughter for your health.

BY TAMMY MILLER, DTM, AS

*“A good laugh and a long sleep are the two best cures for anything.”*

—Irish proverb

**D**o you like to laugh? The ability to find humor in life’s situations, especially these days, may be more important than you realize. It’s often said that “laughter is the best medicine,” and since the 1980s, much research has been done on the role laughter plays in aiding the physical and mental healing process.

We are bombarded by information about the importance of healthful eating and staying in shape for optimal living—especially during a pandemic. Let me add another crucial component to overall health: the need for more laughter in life.

Jessica Breitenfeld, Club President of Spreeredener in Berlin, Germany, is a therapist with expertise in “laughter therapy.” She volunteers as a hospital clown and says, “Laughter breaks down awkwardness. When you want to make people feel comfortable, help them laugh. Realizing you laughed at the same thing as a stranger makes you feel like-minded and in a trusted circle. You have then created a safe environment where trust, connecting, and learning can occur.”

Why does this have value to you as a speaker? The suggestion is not that you try to *heal* your audience through the use

of humor, but that humor and laughter can make both you and the audience *feel* better.

Norman Cousins is credited with launching the humor and healing movement in the United States with his 1979 book, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient*. Diagnosed with a debilitating autoimmune disease in the 1960s, with no cure or hope from the medical community, Cousins, at the time the chief editor of the *Saturday Review* magazine, started a self-prescribed vitamin regimen and humor process to reduce the stress in his life. While confined to his bed, he found and watched comedy clips and funny movies (such as Marx Brothers classics) to make him laugh. Heartily.

**We are experiencing times of stress throughout our world right now, so take advantage of humor as a coping tool.**

“I made the joyous discovery that 10 minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep,” he wrote.

Cousins eventually published his personal research results in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and helped fund early research on the topic.

## The Science of Funny

Gelotology is the study of humor and laughter, and their effects on the body. Suzanne Steinbaum, cardiologist and director of Women’s Heart Health at the Heart and Vascular Institute, Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, said in a 2014 *Forbes* magazine article about preventing heart disease: “It is also important to never forget to laugh. Laughter improves immune function, lowers blood pressure, enhances mood, and decreases stress and depression.”

What kind of laughter produces the best benefits?

“The duration of the laugh is not as important as the reason behind it,” says a leading preventive care specialist, Dr. Lee Berk, who has studied the health benefits of laughter for three decades and is an associate professor at the Loma Linda University School of Allied Health in California. He says in a 2019 Loma Linda University interview that laughter has benefits similar to moderate physical exercise, and advises: “Mirthful laughter, as opposed to nervous or embarrassed laughter” releases hormones associated





with “good stress (eustress) and decreasing bad stress (distress),” making you more “sickness resistant.” He recommends treating laughter as a discipline, like physical exercise, and setting aside time to laugh for 30 minutes a day, three or four times a week, by watching comedy, reading books that make you laugh, or otherwise enjoying laugh-inducing social company. “Happiness is the optimal immune system responsivity. Laugh as often and as much as you need until you feel good!”

In addition to physical benefits, a hearty laugh also has mental benefits, such as reducing fear and anxiety, improving mood, and making us more resilient when encountering adversity. “Humor keeps negative emotions in

“I made the joyous discovery that 10 minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep.”

—NORMAN COUSINS

check and gives us a different perspective, allowing us to see some of the bad things that happen to us as a challenge rather than a threat,” says George Bonanno, a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University, in a 2020 *New York Times* article.

Experts say more research is needed to bring gelotology into mainstream medicine as a complement to medical treatment, but it is gaining recognition. In addition to the research done by Dr. Berk and his team, organizations like the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, as well as the Israeli Dream Doctors, to name just a few, are dedicated to promoting research on therapeutic humor in hospitals, during times of disasters and beyond, to study this important correlation between humor and healing.

### Laughter Yoga

In the mid-1990s, a new movement started to make its way across India with the concept of laughter yoga and the beginning of laughter clubs. An Indian

medical professional, Dr. Madan Kataria, became interested in laughter and how it improved the mental and physical well-being of patients. Seeing positive results, he set out to bring more laughter to people. With five people in a public park in March 1995, in Mumbai, India, Kataria and his group started sharing jokes and funny stories. People passing by saw and heard the laughter and wanted to join.

“When you want to make people feel comfortable, help them laugh.”

—JESSICA BREITENFELD

To continue the momentum, Kataria went back to the research and surmised that the body cannot tell the difference between real laughter as a response to humor and just starting to laugh out loud. According to Kataria, “Voluntary laughter can give you more benefits than spontaneous laughter because laughter, as a form of exercise, is much more sustained and longer to bring about physiological and psychological changes.” His work proved this point, and the discipline of Laughter Yoga was born, with 20,000 clubs now existing across the globe.

### Value for Speakers

Across all cultures, people are born with the ability to laugh. However, not all humor resonates across all cultures. For some jokes to work, there must be a level of familiarity of terms within the culture to understand why a joke is funny, even when we speak the same language. However, while humor does not always have a direct translation, it can still be very contagious. Most of us have experienced a presentation where one person starts laughing, and others join in the laughter. When you try to engage your audience, use a joke or funny story as a way to promote unity.

## MY LIFE AS HUGZ THE CLOWN

**B**eing a professional clown requires more than makeup and performance. There is a great deal more to the art, including choosing the type of makeup and costume to use, and determining the best method to elicit laughter, such as creating balloon animals or doing magic tricks.

I once was asked to teach at the International House of Humour and Satire in the city of Gabrovo, Bulgaria. My role was to teach young people the art of “clowning” so they could enter hospitals and nursing homes to cheer up the residents. I taught the difference between “street” and “circus” clowning, as well as what works best in different healthcare scenarios. Each method of clowning has its own performance nuances. For example, a hospital clown must adhere to a high level of hygiene and use performance items that are easily cleaned and disinfected.

One of the stops during my Bulgarian trip was a children’s hospital. My colleagues and I did not speak the local language, and except for a few adults, they did not speak ours. In full costume, my fellow clowns and I were privileged to entertain a large room filled with children in hospital gowns using balloons and kazoos. Within seconds the entire room erupted in laughter as we continued to make crazy balloon twists and funny sounds, even pulling the nurses in to help. We did not speak each other’s language, but this was a memorable example of how laughter transcends words and connects with people across cultures.



Tammy Miller (in red and yellow) performs as Hugz the Clown.

We are experiencing times of stress throughout our world right now, so take advantage of humor as a coping tool. If we can laugh in moments of adversity, even momentarily, we can gain hope and a new perspective. So, go ahead, use humor in your next presentation! You may help to lower the cholesterol or blood pressure of your audience—and feel free to laugh along, for your own health’s sake. **T**

**Tammy Miller, DTM, AS**, is a member of State College Toastmasters in State College, Pennsylvania. She is a Past International Director, and a Toastmasters Accredited Speaker, professional auctioneer, and speech coach. She is also the co-author of *The Joyful Journey of Hospital Clowning* and the author of *The Lighter Side of Breast Cancer Recovery*. Learn more at [www.tammyspeaks.com](http://www.tammyspeaks.com).



# Owning Your Expertise

How Toastmasters skills benefit Ph.D. candidates.

BY PAUL ARTALE, DTM, AS, PH.D.

**T**he journey to a Ph.D. is filled with long nights, intense debate, and constant doubts over the question “Can I do this?” Thankfully, Toastmasters helped me answer with a resounding yes! Ten years later I have my Ph.D. and an Accredited Speaker designation and am confident as an expert in the fields of motivation, mindset, and work-life balance. Toastmasters played a crucial part in that success.

In 2010 I walked into a small conference room in Erickson Hall at Michigan State University for my first Toastmasters meeting as a guest. Susan was the first Toastmaster I met, and she asked me why I wanted to join. I replied, “I overcame a physical disability to play college football. I want to use that story to motivate others to achieve their dreams, just like my hero Jim Abbott (a one-handed Major League Baseball player).”

As I reflected on this journey, I discovered five ways Toastmasters helped me (and can help Ph.D. students) to be successful.

## 1 Find an “academic voice.”

My club was where I practiced academic presentations and gained confidence speaking on academic topics. Learning to speak as a scholar or expert can be frightening. Doctoral students are expected to be familiar with academic reading and writing but are rarely taught to verbally communicate or present. This can be intimidating for those who teach classes and present research at conferences. Toastmasters provides ample opportunities to practice expressing your thoughts and develop a strong, confident academic voice.

**2 Find an “expert voice.”** Expert voice refers to the ability to communicate your research in a way a general

audience can understand. Developing my expert voice happened by chance during Table Topics®. I was asked to give an analogy to explain my research, which was on how people’s preferences and abilities to set boundaries affect their job satisfaction. To best describe work-life balance, I thought of a dinner plate at a buffet. Some people go to a buffet and make sure that the food on the plate does not touch, while others pile and mix food. Neither is wrong, but understanding which we prefer is vital in bringing about work-life balance. Two minutes and 31 seconds later, I had the beginning of an analogy that I still use today.

## 3 Develop leadership skills.

Prior to earning my Ph.D., I was the director of university housing. I had a large staff and managed multimillion-dollar facilities. Being a graduate student meant I had to give up that leadership role. Toastmasters became a venue where I could continue to improve my leadership skills by working in a positive, team-based environment. The excellent training from Toastmasters Leadership Institutes also added to my skill set. I eventually served as Club President with six other club officers who were also Ph.D. students.

## 4 Gain an international perspective.

Fifty percent of the members in my club were international. This was beneficial in two ways. First, I became more selective of the language I used and aware of words that are common to American audiences but might cause confusion to those from other backgrounds. Second, the international perspective improved my research knowledge. My fellow Toastmasters were keen to share their cultural perspectives

on work-life balance as well as insights on laws, systems, and practices employed in their home countries. My interactions inspired me to incorporate an international human resources course into my study plan. I became a stronger scholar because of this dynamic.

**5 Discover stress relief and community.** The deadlines and competitiveness of a doctoral education can be toxic. Toastmasters provided a place to unwind, laugh, and relax. My favorite speech I ever delivered was based on the idea that Santa Claus was a Canadian citizen. It was silly, but that silliness helped me get through a very stressful first semester. My involvement in Toastmasters also led to long-lasting friendships that helped me get through challenges.

December 2019: I walked into a small conference room in Erickson Hall to defend my dissertation. Susan was my guest that day. When my defense was completed, she handed me a beautiful gift: a Jim Abbott autographed baseball. As a gift to myself, I had a special championship belt created to commemorate my academic journey. Every image represents an ally that helped me graduate. Toastmasters was represented by the Accredited Speaker logo—a designation I earned in 2019.

In the case of Ph.D. students, Toastmasters has the power to create well-rounded, well-spoken, confident scholars. Trust me, I have the belt to prove it. 🎓

**Paul Artale, DTM**, is an Accredited Speaker and member of Grand Blanc Area Toastmasters Club in Grand Blanc, Michigan. He completed his Ph.D. in Higher Education at Michigan State University in April 2020. Learn more at [www.paulartale.com](http://www.paulartale.com).

# You Think That's Funny?

What makes us laugh? And why? I was afraid you were going to ask me that.

BY JOHN CADLEY



It's one thing to write a humor column, and quite another to write a humor column *about* humor. The latter requires that you not only make people laugh, but that you explain why they're laughing in the process. No mean feat, yet this is the task before me. Curious readers, assuming I'm an expert, have written asking how the dynamic of humor works. Luckily, I define "expert" as someone who is an expert at convincing people they're an expert. So here is my expert opinion: If people laugh it's funny; if they don't it isn't.

I know that sounds simplistic, but if your witticisms merely elicit a chuckle or chortle, the listener doesn't get the considerable health benefits of a good, hearty laugh—increased oxygen to the muscles, heightened endorphins, strengthened immune system, stress relief, burned calories, and a feeling of social connection to those with whom you are sharing the laugh. You may think this type of laughter sounds like *ha-ha-ha* or *ho-ho-ho* but, physiologically speaking, those two sounds are quite unnatural for humans to emit. The only person who can make them is Santa Claus, and he can only do one. What's more, an alternating *ha-ho-ha-ho* laugh is actually physically impossible. (Don't test me by trying or you'll end up in the emergency room with a compound fracture of the funny bone.)

On the other hand, *ho-ha-ha* and *ha-ha-ho* are within our capabilities, requiring the contraction and relaxation of 15 facial muscles, constriction of the epiglottis, and stimulation of the zygomatic major muscle which raises the corners of the mouth. The people who tell us this are gelotologists—scientists who study laughter. I understand they don't laugh

much, not because they are humorless but because they've heard "Hey, nice move with your zygomatic major!" one too many times.

So you see, laughter is quite an accomplishment, and there are so many kinds. Contagious laughter, for instance, is when you literally laugh at laughing. One person starts, then another, and pretty soon 50 people are howling at ... what? Nobody knows. We also have maniacal laughter, indicating psychopathology; cackling, veering toward the occult; and diabolical laughter, which is as funny as an exorcism.

**One person starts laughing, then another, and pretty soon 50 people are howling at ... what? Nobody knows.**

Etiquette laughter is another variety, employed when something is *not* funny to spare the feelings of the person who thinks it is ... and nervous laughter, used when you're afraid of what might happen if you *don't* laugh. Further along the continuum we find uncontrollable laughter, which can actually be fatal; the "snort," which could result in passing food through your nose; and canned laughter, generated by a machine to create the impression that real people are laughing at something real people would never laugh at.

Physically, you can burst out laughing, crack up, dissolve, convulse, end up in stitches, or "laugh your head off," proving that one person's amusement is another person's medical disaster.

Finally, there's laughter from being tickled, which, technically, is not laughter at all. It is a conditioned response to being touched by another, which, to the primal brain, can signal either affection or aggression. Not knowing which, the hypothalamus hits the laugh switch as a signal of submission. Your "laughter" is actually a way of saying "I give up. You win. Take my stuff."

You see, then, that laughter is a funny thing, not all of it funny. The only kind that "checks all the boxes," as we say these days, is the Belly Laugh. This is the Real Thing, the kind that produces all the benefits with no known side effects. If you're going to laugh, this is the one you want. The way I laugh from the belly is by reading about the Darwin Awards, given to real people who prove they are somewhere at the back end of the evolutionary chain by committing an officially documented act of astounding stupidity. One recipient was a man who placed a \$20 bill on the counter at a Louisiana gas station and asked for change. When the clerk opened the cash register the man pulled a gun, demanded all the money, and fled. His take amounted to \$15—\$5 less than the \$20 he had left on the counter, thus accomplishing the amazing feat of *losing* money in a robbery, while presenting law enforcement with the question: Is it a crime to give somebody money at gunpoint?

That man is funnier than I will ever be. **T**

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