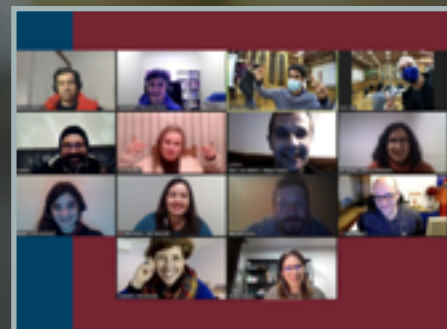
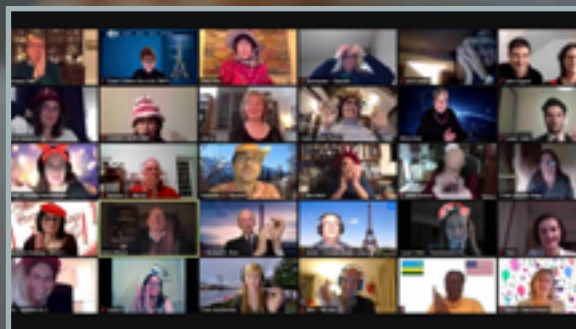


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Forget Jet-Setting ... Try Zoom- Setting Around the World

In the past year, we've seen the global pandemic place its stranglehold on the world.

Last March I was visiting Toastmasters World Headquarters in Denver while more and more countries began going into lockdown, and restrictions on social interactions began being implemented. While the other Board members and I discussed the situation, I watched as their expressions grew more concerned. There were many sleepless nights that week—and in subsequent months—as I thought about our members, our organization, and what the future might hold. At the time, I was the International President-Elect, and I can only imagine what was running through the mind of International President Deepak Menon. Throughout these uncertain times, our members have shown greater resilience, creativity, and unwavering support for one another.

I propose using the term “Zoom-setter” for members who frequently travel by Zoom to club meetings around the world.

A silver lining for me this past year has been the opportunity to visit clubs around the world online. I've been able to witness firsthand the creativity of our club meetings. At a meeting of the Szó Da Toastmasters Club in Budapest, Hungary, members conducted a PechaKucha-style Table Topics® session. PechaKucha is a PowerPoint presentation with 20 slides advancing automatically every 20 seconds. The speakers' timing needs to be perfect to ensure they are speaking to the correct slide. For the Table Topics session, each participant was presented four slides, which changed automatically every 30, not 20, seconds! A totally unique approach. Many clubs are also sharing information about their country and culture with the guests. They may even teach you a word or two in the local language. Members of the Swakopmund Toastmasters Club in Namibia taught me how to say thank you in Afrikaans ... Dankie!

I have also noticed the willingness and desire of members to visit clubs around the world, not just watching but taking on roles and actively participating. I have met Eliza from Singapore, Ram from the U.K., Thaine from the U.S., and many others at online meetings. The term “jet-setter” is used to describe someone who travels frequently by plane and often to exotic locations. With the current travel restrictions, being a jet-setter may be a thing of the past. I propose using the term “Zoom-setter” for members who frequently travel by Zoom to club meetings around the world. Won't you join them?

As we continue to face the unknown, I encourage you to remain resilient, to find new and creative ways to keep your meetings fun, and to join others by becoming a Zoom-setter!

Richard E. Peck, DTM
International President



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Learning to Evaluate Everybody

—and— Don't be intimidated by title or tenure; both new and advanced members benefit from honesty.

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Global Reconnection

As much as COVID-19 has been inconveniencing all of us, it has given me a long vacation from work. I run a wellness and fitness studio that had to be closed for many weeks. I started reading books, decluttering my closets and drawers, brushing up my rusty Japanese, signing up for webinars and classes, and looking up Toastmasters. I had been a member in the U.S. from 2006–2011 and thought 2020 was a great opportunity to rejoin.

When I discovered clubs were meeting online, I began calling clubs, hoping to visit as a guest. Two District leaders helped me narrow down the bilingual clubs in my area, and after some visits, I found what became my home club in Hong Kong—New Experience Toastmasters Club.

Though I love my new club, I became nostalgic for my first club—Desert Basin Toastmasters Club in Alamogordo, New Mexico. I contacted the former Club President and was happy to find that she was still a member of the club. After that, we exchanged emails for a few weeks, and I rejoined the club! I am excited to be with my “original” family again. It would be a crazy idea to join a club in the U.S. when you are physically on the other side of the earth, but now everything is a possibility.

My new club in Hong Kong is like my adopted family, and they are giving me the opportunity to grow and develop speaking

in Mandarin. They have also organized joint meetings with various clubs in China, Japan, and Taiwan. The cultural exchange and international friendships are priceless, to say the least.

When you share life stories and encouraging remarks with others, learn to communicate with people around you, and follow specified paths toward a common goal, the people in the clubs are not just members, they are extended family.

I am continuing to expand my family and recently chartered a new club called Earthlings Toastmasters. It is a 100% online club with members from all over the world, including the U.S., Jamaica, China, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Canada.

Toastmasters, thank you. It's good to be home.

Angie Palmer, DTM

Hong Kong
New Experience Toastmasters Club Hong Kong, Desert Basin Club, and Earthlings Toastmasters Club

Creating Family Connection

I was looking for some meaningful activities to do with my 10 grandchildren, who range in age from 13 to 25. Culturally we're very diverse. I hail from India where we do not know baseball but do know cricket. Football in India is actually soccer in the U.S. But my grandkids grew up in the U.S. and talk about American sports, players, teams, and statistics to no end, and when they do, I sit in silence.

Thanks to Toastmasters, I found some common ground.

For the past few years when my family got together during the holidays, we played “surprise topics”—very similar to Table Topics. All the participants enjoyed it.

“When you share life stories and encouraging remarks with others ... the people in the clubs are not just members, they are extended family.”

—ANGIE PALMER, DTM

Since my grandchildren enjoyed surprise topics, I looked into the [Toastmasters Interpersonal Communication program](#) in an attempt to further connect with them.

The program is designed to assist teens in developing listening, expression, and communication skills. The program can be purchased and presented by anyone in the community, including teachers, guidance counselors, mentors, etc. Each chapter has details of activities to be performed with the participants. I supplemented with cartoons and presentations from the web.

We held 10 Zoom sessions, and the last one was the most enjoyable. My grandchildren gave speeches on their future goals. The speeches revealed what the family youngsters were thinking about as careers. All my grandchildren have their speeches and I recommended they periodically review and update them.

By conducting this camp, I've learned about these youngsters. I am impressed that each one of them thought so deeply about their future. Now I can talk with them about their future plans.

If you are a parent who has run out of activities or a grandparent who cannot travel to see grandchildren, try an informal Table Topics or Interpersonal Communication program to bring you closer together.

Vishwa Bhargava, DTM

Henrico, Virginia, U.S.
Dominion Energy Toastmasters

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



Listen for tips on the Word of the Day in this month's Toastmasters Toolbox.



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



Virtual Fun

Are your online meetings becoming dull? Discover ideas and advice from clubs around the world to help bring some vitality to your virtual meetings.



Answer Questions With Confidence

Watch a short video for tips on preparing the Q&A session during your next presentation.



March 21 is World Poetry Day, and we want to hear what you have to say. First, learn about your inner poet; then get on our social media pages and show it!

Share your favorite poem using [#talkingtoastmasters](#).



The Wedding Day

The bride and groom aren't the only ones with nerves on the big day. Read about two Toastmasters World Champions who officiated weddings for their family members and the lessons they learned along the way.

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▶ INSPIRATION

Wise Words About Human Connection

Over the past year, amid the in-person restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining a sense of connection and community has never been more important. People have reached out to others—be it friends, family, or fellow Toastmasters—in any way they can, including phone calls, emails, and online interaction.

The need for human bonding is timeless and universal. Here are some inspiring quotes on the topic.

We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.

—Dorothy Day, American journalist and activist

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

—John Donne, British poet and scholar

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

—African proverb

I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.

—Mother Teresa, Albanian-Indian Roman Catholic nun and missionary

The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.

—Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright and poet

Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

—Marcel Proust, French author

The golden way is to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human family as one.

—Mahatma Gandhi, Indian politician and social activist

▶ CLUB EXPERIENCE

Meeting on the Small Screen

Whether you're on the go, have limited privacy at home, or don't have access to your computer, sometimes a smartphone or tablet are your only options to join an online meeting. Don't worry—you can still look professional and attend a virtual meeting on your small screen! Here are a few tips to get you started:

- ▶ Download the meeting application (Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, etc.) on your phone or tablet ahead of the meeting and update your settings and permissions so your microphone and camera can be accessed.
- ▶ No matter what device you use, always make sure you have the link to the online meeting prior to joining.
- ▶ Ensure you are in an area with a decent internet connection for the best quality video, and close out of any other apps.
- ▶ Just like on a regular computer, ensure you are muted when you join the meeting. While the iPad and iPhone do have built-in microphones and speakers, you could also use wired or wireless [earbuds](#) to help cut out background noises.
- ▶ Even on a smaller screen, your background still matters! Try to find a room or space free of clutter and distractions, and make sure to use good lighting.
- ▶ Holding up an iPhone for an hour isn't ideal or comfortable. Use a media stand, such as Toastmasters' [PopSockets](#)®.
- ▶ Taking on a club meeting role might be more difficult on a smaller device, but it's not impossible. Speak with the



Toastmaster of the Day before the meeting and let them know your situation.

For more tips and tricks, visit the [online meetings resource page](#) on the Toastmasters website.

Promising Products

Enhance your online meetings with these items from the [Toastmasters Online Store](#).

- ▶ [USB Webcam & Microphone](#)—This provides true color, high-definition images with auto white balance and 480p resolution. The noise reduction microphone will ensure smooth communication for your next video call.
- ▶ [Clip-On Ring Light](#)—This features three levels of brightness so you can find the perfect fit for your lighting situation.
- ▶ [Bluetooth Earbuds](#)—Outfitted with silicone ear tips and connected by a single sports performance-style cord, these buds will never lose each other.
- ▶ [PopSockets](#)®—Compatible with all smartphones and tablets; use one or two PopSockets® as a stand for hands-free viewing.

▶ LOOKING AT LANGUAGE

Make Smart Choices With Your Words

Words are a valuable commodity in the Toastmasters world. They wield a powerful impact—in our speeches, evaluations, meeting reports, and other oral communication. To pack the strongest punch, use words that are precise, clear, and vivid.

Make it engaging. Some words are vague and stale, while others are crisp and specific.

Example of the former: “I liked the movie because it was scary and the acting was good.”

More interesting: “This lively thriller captivated me with its suspenseful action and colorful cast of characters.”

Make it active. Use the active voice. In this construction, a subject performs the action being described. In the passive voice, the subject is no longer doing the action—it is the recipient of the action. In general, using the passive voice weakens the impact of a sentence.

Passive: The chair is moved by Annette over to the corner.

Active: Annette moved the chair over to the corner.

Make your verbs and adjectives sing. Verbs are your action words—use ones that are strong. Adjectives are words that describe—use ones that are vivid and evocative. Compare the following examples.

Jose played the drums with great energy.

Better: Jose pounded the drums with ferocious enthusiasm.

Mary threw the ball to another player.

Better: Mary hurled the ball to an eagerly waiting teammate.

[Practice your word usage](#) in your Toastmasters speeches and club meetings. Be bold in your choices! And take advantage of the Word of the Day to stretch your working vocabulary. Learn the word, understand it, and use it. Such practice helps expand our language skills and, ultimately, improve our message.

▶ **SNAPSHOT**

In September 2020, Qatar Toastmasters Club in Doha, Qatar, hosted its first hybrid meeting, abiding by government regulations. A few members attended in person and wore masks, while others participated virtually.

▶ **TOASTMASTERS NEWS**

Special Event Fliers Are Here — Use these [customizable fliers](#) to promote your events: Download, personalize, and share them with friends, family, coworkers, and other members of your community!

The Guiding Light of Club Central —

Are you a new officer? Or a current officer who is looking for a way to provide financial receipts to your members? Great news! The [Club Central Tutorials](#) walk an officer through all the different tools in Club Central, from adding members to club achievements.

Dues Renewal — To ensure your club is in good standing and receives credit for the Distinguished Club Program, remember to log in to Club Central and submit your dues payments by April 1, 2021. Per Policy 2.0, the minimum renewal requirement is eight paid members—at least three of whom were club members during the previous renewal period. Unpaid officers lose access to Club Central 30 days after their membership expires. Email the Club and Member Support Team at renewals@toastmasters.org if you have questions.

**Generate Publicity Through Local Awards** —

Many newspapers and publications give out awards recognizing local organizations for their outstanding work. District Public Relations Managers and Vice Presidents Public Relations can raise awareness and attract new members by searching local publications' websites for any upcoming awards and apply for those relevant to Toastmasters.

A recent success story of this type of initiative: Toastmasters was named Best Business & Career Training organization by the *Toronto Star's* Readers' Choice Awards.

2021 Online Convention Experience — In 2020, Toastmasters had the opportunity to be part of history by attending the first-ever online convention. The opportunity for virtual connection will continue as the Board of Directors decided to conduct an online convention August 23-28, 2021. This event will be held in place of the previously announced in-person convention in Nashville, Tennessee. For more information and updates, visit our [website](#).

TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



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



1 | LAVERNE WOJCIECHOWSKI, DTM, of Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba, Canada, poses in Neko Harbor, Antarctica, in February 2020.

2 | AURORE PONT, DTM, of Dandenong, Victoria, Australia, stands in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway, the world's northernmost settlement. When she visited in August 2019, the town was in a phase when the sun is always visible.

3 | PRATHEEKSHA R of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, enjoys the onset of winter with her Toastmaster magazine.

4 | JAN-PAUL ROODBOL, DTM, of New York, New York, looks over the Cape of Good Hope in Cape Point National Park in South Africa, prior to the pandemic.



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

Using My Skills to Honor Family

Memorializing my cousin online allowed me to provide comfort.

BY CAREN S. NEILE, PH.D.

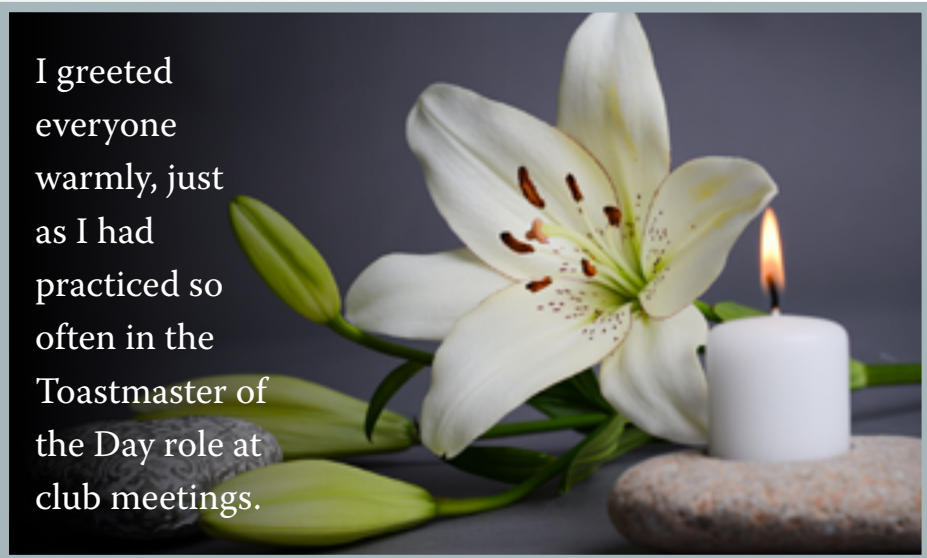
“That must’ve been hard.” A caring friend said those words to me when I told her I had recently facilitated a cousin’s memorial gathering on Zoom. I knew she was being kind, but the sentiment was nearly as strange to me as if she’d said, “That must’ve been hilarious.” Far from being emotionally draining or depressing, hosting an outpouring of love for Jane, who passed away in September 2020, was one of the most gratifying things I’ve ever done with my Toastmasters training.

When my cousin passed away unexpectedly, I was fortunate to live nearby in south Florida, so I could provide a bit of immediate comfort to her husband, Jeff, and their son, Aaron, in the days that followed. Most members of our family and Jane’s many friends were not so lucky. They were from places as far-flung as Hawaii, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and England. A good number of them would not have been able to attend an in-person funeral or memorial service even under normal circumstances, much less during a pandemic.

That’s why Jeff and his brother Ric asked me to facilitate a Zoom remembrance gathering. They both had watched me emcee public events, and they knew I was doing a lot of that work online these days.

I agreed immediately. And then it made me think: How many of us have sincerely told loved ones to let us know if there is anything we can do to help in a time of crisis? When I attended my first Toastmasters meeting, it never occurred to me that over two decades later, my skills could be put to use at such a difficult time.

By the time the event took place, I had already participated in two online memorial gatherings. Our gathering to remember Jane took place on Zoom about two weeks after her death. In keeping with her wishes and personality, it was extremely simple: no prayers, no recounting of her biographical information, no music or flowers in the



I greeted everyone warmly, just as I had practiced so often in the Toastmaster of the Day role at club meetings.

background. According to the event invitation, any participant who wished to speak was invited to do so, for about five minutes.

At the appointed time, I greeted everyone warmly, just as I had practiced so often in the Toastmaster of the Day role at club meetings.

“Welcome everyone, and thank you so much for coming,” I said. “We are here to honor the life of our dear wife, mother, cousin, and friend, Jane Schnur. Anyone who wishes to speak, whether to tell a story, to read something, or just to say how you are feeling, can do so, whether or not you’ve already let me know. I will call you in the order that you gave me your name and then ask if anyone else is interested. Remember, please try to limit your remarks to about five minutes, so that everyone has a chance to talk.” (More Toastmasters training there, although I did not use a signal to tell speakers their time was up.)

Jeff spoke first, and about 20 friends and family members contributed after him. I remembered that an effective meeting Toastmaster does not attract undue attention to herself, especially in a situation like this. For that reason I kept my segues

(“Thank you very much; that was beautiful”) and introductions (“And now, we turn to John Smith”) as brief as possible. At the end of the event, I gave my own remarks in tribute. We had planned ahead of time that Jeff himself would have the final word.

As expected, we had tears and laughter—particularly when more than one of us revealed that we had thought it was *we* who were Jane’s best friends and most trusted confidants. We also had surprises, such as when the son of Jane’s old friends revealed how strongly he had felt about her. Above all, we had each other.

It’s said that the greatest gift is the ability to give. In a time of sorrow, my comfort with public speaking and leadership enabled me to honor my cousin and help support our family and community. And for that, I will always be grateful.

“That must’ve been hard,” my friend said.

Not at all. Thanks to Toastmasters, it was as easy as saying I love you. **T**

CAREN S. NEILE, PH.D., teaches storytelling studies at Florida Atlantic University. She is a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster magazine*.



A Word About the Word of the Day

Choose a term that is challenging but also accessible.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

Have you ever stopped to consider the life span of a Word of the Day? Does it last until the end of your meeting before it is forgotten? Does it last until the end of Table Topics®? Or does it last only as long as it takes to announce what it is?

Shouldn't it have a life after the meeting ends?

In theory, we select a Word of the Day to expand our vocabulary. More times than not, at least in my observation, it is merely something we do because we always have. All too often, it is not even used by anyone.

Why not? One reason is that it may not be a priority for the club. Some clubs require using it to win Best Table Topics Speaker. Others just want the word to be used and the use reported on, but they don't really care if you do or don't. It's just there.

Personally, I usually forget to use the Word of the Day. I remember it only when the grammarian gives the report at the end of the meeting.

The word also might be ignored because it's not easy to use in a sentence. In one of my first meetings, the Word of the Day was *garbology*, the study of an ancient culture by the study of its garbage dump. I did use it, although it was a stretch. Granted, after all those years, I still remember it, but I can assure you I don't use it in everyday conversation—or any other conversation, for that matter.

What, then, makes for a good Word of the Day?

I suggest the word should stretch our vocabulary. But stretch it how? If you select a fancy word like *acidulate*, *asseveration*, or *contumelious*, would anyone

use it? Probably not. But if they did, they would most likely butcher the pronunciation. Does anyone really learn a word they can't pronounce? I suspect not.

The words listed in the above paragraph are not easy to say. Better to choose a word that is easy to say and whose meaning is easy to understand. And make it a word that has a high probability of being used in the outside world but is not necessarily common.



I find it best to select an adjective. It can frequently be applied in several situations. A verb can also be used. A noun, on the other hand, can often be so specific that it has limited use.

Where, then, do you get ideas for the Word of the Day? One place is www.dictionary.com. It has a Word of the Day right on its homepage. Other dictionary websites may help as well.

I do a lot of reading. When I discover an interesting word or one I don't know, I

type it into a document on my computer. I then look up the word in the dictionary, logging its definition next to its listing. I have well over 1,000 words on my list. When I am responsible for the Word of the Day, I merely go and select one from there.

But how to make that word last for more than a fleeting moment? Perhaps we can issue a reminder during the club meeting of the word used in the previous two meetings. The grammarian can count and report the use of any/all three words at the end of the meeting. That might develop a habit of usage.

Granted, some words aren't going to gain traction regardless of how many times you mention them. *Garbology* might be one of them. Surprising, I know! When that happens, make a note of it and don't use words like that in the future. Or maybe if a word is not well used, the grammarian can ask the club why not. That could get members thinking about what makes a great word.

And I don't remember ever hearing a General Evaluator comment on the effectiveness of the Word of the Day. Shouldn't it at least get honorable—or dishonorable—mention?

I firmly believe that the Word of the Day can be a much more valuable part of the meeting than it is right now. Let's make that happen. ■

Bill Brown, DTM, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of two clubs, Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette and Ahead of the Curve Toastmasters in Las Vegas. Learn more at www.billbrownspeechcoach.com.

Channel Your Inner Poet

What speakers gain from using poetry.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

*Courage isn't a brilliant dash,
A daring deed in a moment's flash.*

So began Karl Walsh, member of Dún Laoghaire Toastmasters, a club just outside Dublin, Ireland. As the evening's Poetmaster, Walsh recited the poem *Courage* by Edgar Albert Guest.

Since the early 1980s, a Poetmaster has helped start Dún Laoghaire meetings. "It's the one role that everybody wants to do," says Walsh. Some members even read their own poems.

The role's goal is to inspire an upbeat or reflective start to meetings. "Poetry gets people hearing powerful phrases and thinking from the very beginning," says Walsh. "The poems touch me and others. They lift members' spirits."

Indeed, poetry is a rich source for Toastmasters. Speakers can mine this medium for inspiration and evocative language. This month is a particularly good time to do that, because March 21 is [World Poetry Day](#). Started in 1999 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the annual celebration highlights "one of humanity's most treasured forms of cultural and linguistic expression and identity."

It's a great day to immerse yourself in verse. Pick favorite poets from around the world, past or present, to read. And if you're looking for a good poetry website, visit www.poets.org; it features a wealth of free resources, including a curated collection of more than 10,000 poems from writers across the globe.

An Epic History

Poetry has existed for thousands of years. Long before humans started writing

down their stories, there were the oral traditions of Greek and Latin epic poems and the Japanese renga, a genre in which two or more people produced alternating parts of a poem.

How does reading poetry help you as a speaker? For one, you can quote from a relevant poem to underscore a strong point in your speech. For another, studying the power of poetic language can improve your speechwriting and ability to engage an audience. Poetry sharpens our focus on description and economy of words. Incorporating a sense of cadence and rhythm can lend a more musical quality to your presentations.

In their online textbook *An Introduction to Poetry*, professors Alan Lindsay and Candace Bergstrom discuss poetic language. They compare literal language, which is direct and exact, and figurative language (such as symbolic imagery), which is indirect and "used to give more weight or authority to a statement." Figurative language can help bring new connections and understanding—by comparing something new to something familiar—or help you see or experience the world in a new way.

"Poetic language is the fullest possible language. Poets pack the absolute maximum of meaning (in every sense of the word) into every part of the poem," write Lindsay and Bergstrom. In addition to an emphasis on word selection, poems are enriched with poetic devices—specific literary tools that convey and amplify meaning, such as rhetorical questions, metaphors, repetition, and imagery.

Read famous speeches like political activist Emmeline Pankhurst's "Freedom or Death," Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream," and Nelson Mandela's "I Am

Prepared to Die," and you will find a range of poetic devices.

Master Poetry

With Ireland's strong literary tradition, it's not surprising that a number of Toastmasters clubs throughout that country have a Poetmaster role. But Ireland is not alone. Other clubs around the world also have the role on their meeting agenda.

It is helpful to read poems out loud to hear their cadence and practice delivery techniques, which can improve our ability to use vocal variety. To be effective Poetmasters, members of the Dún Laoghaire club are expected to communicate the right tone for the poem. "Members should pitch their voice to the mood of the piece and use appropriate vocal variety and facial expressions," says Walsh.

Writing poetry can also be beneficial. This can help us understand figurative language and poetic devices firsthand. By reading, studying, and writing poetry, we can bring power to our words and messages and craft, and deliver speeches that are engaging and memorable.

When asked why she wrote poetry, the late poet, author, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou replied, "Poetry is music written for the human voice." Start reading and learning from poetry today, and let your speech sing. ■

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.

Continue the conversation on social media and use #talkingtoastmasters to share your favorite poem.



Speechcraft Gets an Update

A digital component and Pathways connection highlight the revision.

BY PAUL STERMAN

Speechcraft® is like Toastmasters 101—a chance for clubs to teach what is essentially a course on public speaking. The training workshop can be a valuable membership-building tool, as experienced members share Toastmasters fundamentals with non-members, who ideally decide to further their learning by becoming members themselves.

The Victoria Quay Club, for one, has made excellent use of this popular outreach program. David Nicholas, DTM, co-founder of the Western Australia club, says the group typically presents Speechcraft at least once a year.

“We have recruited new members from Speechcraft regularly, and some of those members have been outstanding and stayed (in the club) for a very long time,” says Nicholas, a 25-year Toastmaster. “I think Speechcraft is one of the best things available to clubs.”

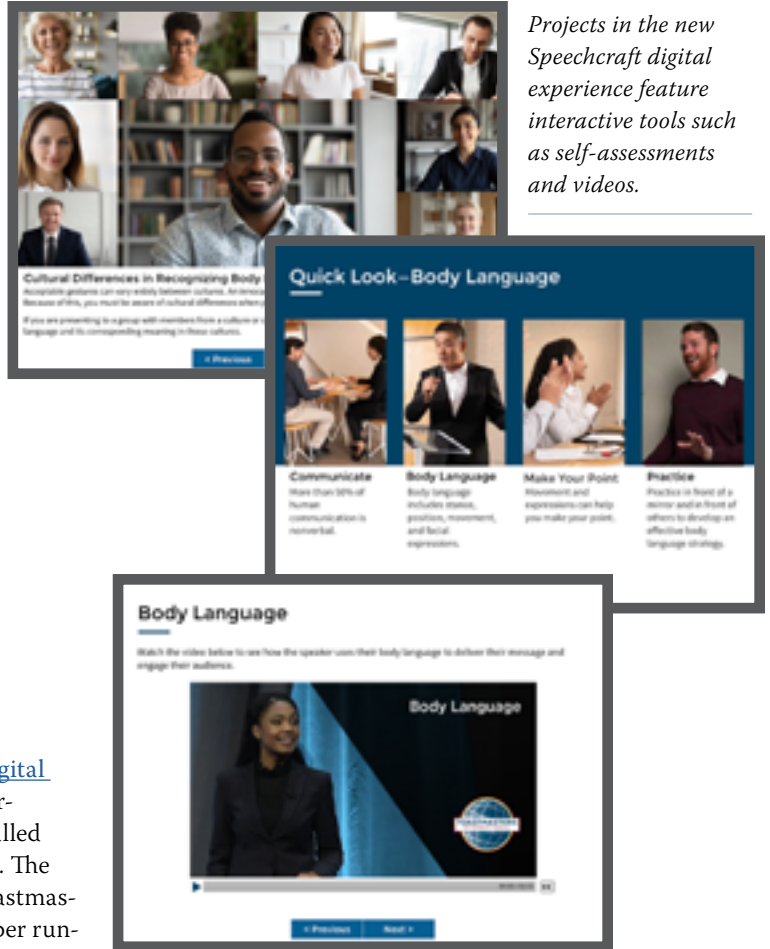
The program is expected to become even better. As durable as Speechcraft has been, it needed modernizing, and to that end, the program has been updated by the Toastmasters International Education Team. Speechcraft content—previously contained in a series of print materials—is now digital, including projects, forms, and resources. Participants’ projects feature such interactive tools as videos, quizzes, and self-assessments.

In the [new Speechcraft digital experience](#), participants are called Speechcrafters. The sponsoring Toastmasters club member running the sessions is the coordinator. Coordinators and Speechcrafters register for Speechcraft on the Toastmasters website, through Base Camp, the online Toastmasters gateway to Pathways learning.

A Better Fit With Pathways

Speechcraft is not being overhauled—the program’s core aspects will remain in place. The training workshop can still be presented in four, six, or eight sessions, typically for one to two hours each, and each session features a structured agenda, including Table Topics®, speeches, evaluations, educational presentations, and other meeting elements. But the content has been revised to better reflect the principles of Pathways, the organization’s education program. One key concept: applying what you learn. Whether Speechcrafters gain valuable tips from a speech evaluator, from program content, or through some other method, applying that information in future speeches is the best way to improve.

Projects in the new Speechcraft digital experience feature interactive tools such as self-assessments and videos.



For example, in “Vocal Variety,” one of 10 projects in the updated Speechcraft, participants learn that using silent spaces in a speech is one way to engage your audience’s attention. At the end of the project, Speechcrafters must “identify at least one place in your next speech you will try to use silence to make your point.”

Speechcraft participants can earn educational credit in Pathways for the speeches they deliver in the workshop.

The final project references future speeches, with the expectation that Speechcrafters will join Toastmasters clubs to continue their experiential learning. They can earn educational credit in Pathways for the speeches they

View an [informational webinar](#) presented about the new Speechcraft digital experience.

deliver in the workshop. They can also earn digital badges—one for each speech, plus two “feedback” badges they can receive from (and give to) fellow Speechcrafters. Coordinators, meanwhile, can earn credit toward the Distinguished Toastmaster award.

Beginning With the Basics

Speechcraft gives non-members as well as new club members a short-term immersion in the basics of the Toastmasters experience. The coordinator and other experienced club members guide participants in each session. The workshop can be conducted as part of your club meeting (which can also be helpful to new members), or outside the club setting, like in a community organization or business. It can also be held in person or virtually. If done in person, coordinators can print out the digital materials needed.

Members who present Speechcraft sessions also benefit from the experience. Helping beginners learn about public speaking is a great lesson in leadership and mentoring, says Nicholas, the veteran Australian member, who refers to workshop presenters as trainers.

“I tell club members who are going to be trainers, ‘If you help me run this course, you will get more out of it than those who are taking the course.’”

Coordinators will be assisted by “guides,” who work one-on-one with the Speechcrafters.

Going Forward

If clubs conduct Speechcraft in virtual sessions, they should tailor the workshop to online audiences, says Karen Ryan, DTM, a member of the TGIF Advanced Toastmasters in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. “That means learning new presentation skills as well as using Zoom features such as breakout rooms, white boards, and other online conference features to support the

MORE TOASTMASTERS OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Along with Speechcraft, a program for adults, Toastmasters can present youth-oriented workshops in their communities:

Youth Leadership Program

This workshop consists of eight one- or two-hour sessions, where young people under 18 can practice communication and leadership skills. The program is usually presented during or after school, or on weekends.

The Youth Leadership Program (YLP) teaches participants to organize and give speeches, give constructive feedback, improve their vocabulary and gestures, and more.

Interpersonal Communication

Unlike the YLP, this community-based program doesn’t need to be presented by Toastmasters members. The program helps teenagers build stronger listening and communication skills while understanding their own communication style. Materials are designed to be used by teachers or other adults who mentor teens, such as youth program administrators, guidance counselors, community religious leaders, and others.

The materials cover effective listening, expression, and communication. Participants also learn that skillful communication includes body language, voice control, and using appropriate words to defuse conflicts.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the YLP and [here](#) to learn about Interpersonal Communication.

Speechcraft program delivery,” notes Ryan, who works on Speechcraft training for District 60 in Ontario, Canada.

“I think Speechcraft is one of the best things available to clubs.”

—DAVID NICHOLAS, DTM

Clubs can offer Speechcraft for free, or charge participants and use the funds to help meet club needs. (Speechcraft cannot be held as a District event.) The new [Speechcraft Digital Bundle](#), which includes access to Base Camp and materials for five participants and one coordinator, costs \$50 USD. With that in mind, your club can decide on a reasonable amount to charge to meet your fundraising needs.

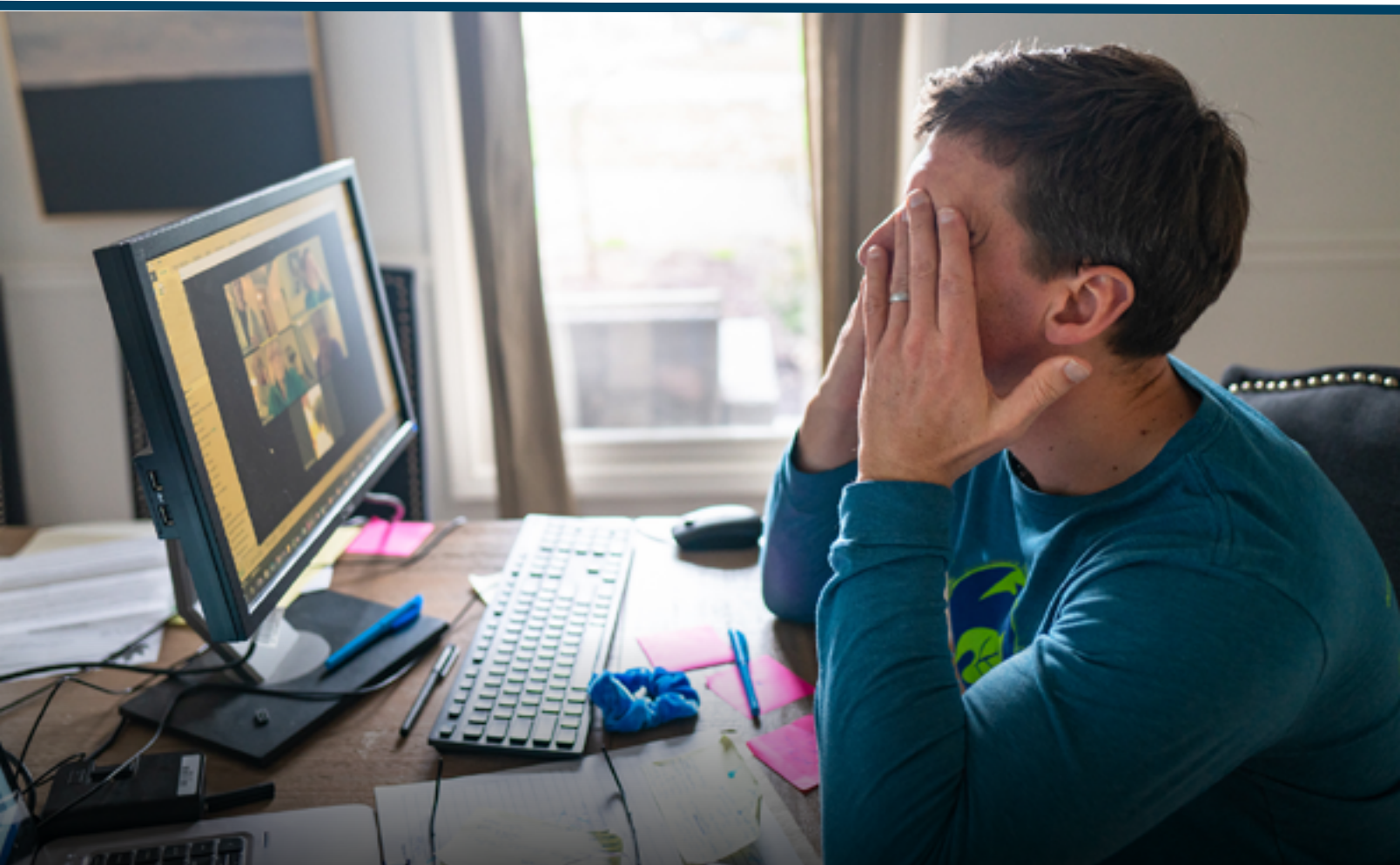
Unfortunately, some Toastmasters clubs have abused Speechcraft in the past, not using the program in an

appropriate manner, say Toastmasters World Headquarters staff. The program is not intended to be a profit-making tool but, rather, a fundraiser for the club and a learning tool for everyone involved.

One advantage of the new digital experience is that it will enable World Headquarters staff to collect Speechcraft data, making it easier to track participation so that coordinators and participants earn the proper educational credit, and also to identify prospective Toastmasters.

Ryan, the Canadian Toastmaster, points to an inspiring Speechcraft story in her District. Thelma Baker joined Toastmasters after being introduced to the organization through a Speechcraft workshop at a senior center, 14 years ago. She was 76 at the time. Today the 90-year-old is still going strong: She is a member of not one but two clubs in Ontario. **T**

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



Zoom Fatigue, Be Gone!

Keep your online meetings fresh by shaking things up.

BY MEGAN PRESTON MEYER

Online meetings: First they were challenging, then fun and exciting, and then, for some, the monotony set in.

Early last year, when clubs had to adapt to changing circumstances from COVID-19 restrictions, Toastmasters around the world responded with enthusiasm. Thousands of clubs moved their meetings online, finding fresh, novel ways to optimize against constraints. It was an adventure, something new, and we were all in it together.

But now, the adrenaline is wearing off.

At this point, many clubs have been meeting online for close to, or even more than, a year, and many members' daily routines revolve more and more around their computer screen. As

meetings and gatherings continue to be virtual, one Zoom call inevitably fades into the next, and they all start to look the same. Our eyes are tired from all that blue light, and our minds are tired of the monotony. Fatigue is setting in.

Luckily, you can counteract it. When life gives you lockdown, creativity is the key. Here are some tips to keep your virtual meetings fresh and fun, to keep growing and improving, and to keep your members coming back.

Change Things Up

As humans, we get used to things very quickly. Just think back to how strange your first online Toastmasters meeting felt—now, for most of us, we barely remember in-person meetings. Get creative! By incorporating novelty into the tried-and-true Toastmasters structure, you can help members stay engaged.



Switch up the agenda. One way to keep people’s interest is to make sure things don’t get too predictable. “We’ll change up the agenda periodically just to keep it fresh,” says Krista Rowan of Glen Abbey Toastmasters in Oakville, Ontario, Canada. “We don’t deviate from the integrity of what Toastmasters is ... we just give it some spice.”

Her club incorporates upbeat music at breaks to keep energy levels high during online meetings. They also get creative with Table Topics®, using screen-sharing capabilities to add a personal touch to prompts—for instance, the Table Topicsmaster may display a snapshot of herself on a past beach vacation and ask the participant to describe a travel destination that he’s dreaming about—and they have even featured improv lessons, taught by a member. For more ideas on how to change up your Table Topics sessions, see the sidebar on page 18.

Add a theme for variation. Glen Abbey Toastmasters has also introduced themed meetings. Many clubs have embraced this concept, weaving a common thread through the Toastmasters’ welcome, the Table Topics session, and the Word of the Day, but online meetings allow you to take the theme even deeper. Encourage members to take advantage of technology by using virtual backgrounds, costumes, and props. Meeting participants can even change their display name to a theme-appropriate alias. For example, if you have a Disney theme, spark some smiles by labeling yourself Ariel and changing your background to an underwater scene, or add an outer-space backdrop and call yourself Buzz Lightyear.

Encourage members to take advantage of technology by using virtual backgrounds, costumes, and props.

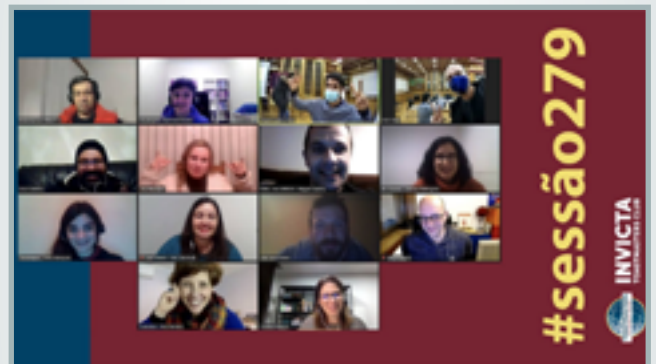
If you’re looking for themes, holidays are always great choices. April Fool’s Day is a fun option, as are other lesser-known holidays like Pi Day (March 14), World Music Day (June 21), and World Photography Day (August 19).

You can change the way you incorporate themes into meetings, as well. While announcing the next meeting’s theme well in advance gives people time to prepare, it could add additional stress to busy members. Try announcing the theme 10 minutes before the meeting begins. This puts everyone on equal footing and encourages creativity. You’ll be amazed at the spontaneous ways your members find to participate!

Play with backgrounds. At Invicta Toastmasters Club in Porto, Portugal, there is a good-natured competition to see who can come to the meeting with the best virtual background. Taking advantage of Zoom’s video background feature, club members create elaborate animated scenes—often featuring themselves. “We record over recorded-over screens,” says Club President



Members of Glen Abbey Toastmasters use hats, music, and themed backgrounds to keep their meetings lively.



Invicta Toastmasters Club is finding new ways to engage with each other, both in person and online.



Rafael Marques of Invicta Toastmasters uses his background to enthusiastically show his support three-times over.

Rafael Marques. Notable mentions include a member appearing to row off the screen using an office chair as a boat, “triplets” waving at the camera, and a member bringing himself a beverage in the middle of the meeting.

The creativity entertains current members, and encourages guests to return. “A lot of (new) members come to meetings thinking it’s going to be very strict and bureaucratic. When we show that we are having fun, people stay with us,” says Club Secretary and Iberian Toastmaster of the Year Sérgio Águia.

INSPIRED IDEAS FOR TABLE TOPICS

Visual Table Topics: Instead of giving each participant a prompt individually, give everyone the same prompt and allow two minutes of prep time. Each participant looks for an image related to the prompt, and then shares their screen while giving a brief explanation of their choice. Multimedia communication at its finest!

Reverse Pictionary: Inspired by this idea from Museum Hack, try a game of Pictionary—in reverse! The Table Topicsmaster provides an image to the participant, who must describe it to the audience using geometric shapes. For instance, if the image is a snowman, the participant could ask the audience to draw three stacked circles with diagonal lines coming off each side of the middle circle. She could then instruct them to add two dots, an upside-down triangle, and a curved row of dots to the top circle. Afterward, everyone holds their sketches up to the camera to determine how effective the instructions were—and how creative the audience members are.

Telephone: Val Pramana from Leading Edge Advanced Toastmasters in Brisbane, Australia, suggests a game of “telephone.” The Table Topicsmaster reads a short story to the first participant while the others wait “outside” the meeting room. The second participant enters the meeting room, and the first participant recounts the story. The third participant enters the meeting, and the second participant tells them story, and so on. It’s hilarious to see which details are remembered and which are forgotten—and how different the ‘last’ story is from the first!

By keeping humor in the foreground, Invicta Toastmasters Club keep members coming back.

Stay Social

One of the hardest portions of the Toastmasters meeting to recreate online is the part that’s not on the agenda: the socialization that happens before and after the meeting or during breaks. To keep members engaged, find ways keep them connected.

Open the room early. One of the simplest ways to encourage chitchat is to simply start the video call 15 minutes before the meeting starts, and leave it open after the formal agenda items are completed. That’s what Glen Abbey Toastmasters does. “It’s amazing how many people don’t drop off. After a two-hour meeting, people still want to talk,” says Rowan. Also, if you usually play theme music as people log on, save that music for later on in the meeting to give people time to chat before the meeting officially begins.

Create offline connection. Members of Invicta Toastmasters Club have found another way to stay in touch, even between meetings. In a group chat open to all members, they talk, share pictures and GIFs, and even challenge each other to informal video or audio “Table Topics” throughout the week. They also keep their website updated with member bios and pictures so that new members can connect with and get to know other members.

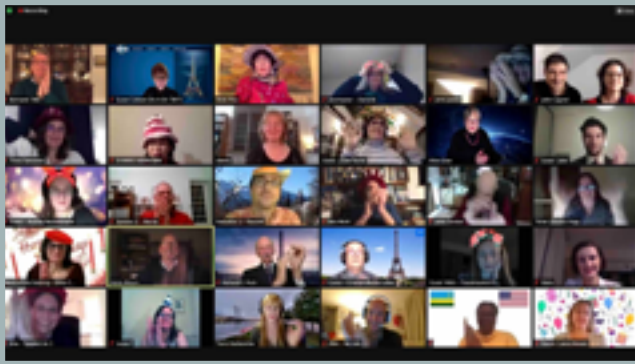
“A lot of new members come to meetings thinking it’s going to be very strict and bureaucratic. When we show that we are having fun, people stay with us.”

—SÉRGIO ÁGUIA

“There’s a need to communicate informally that there wasn’t before,” says Club President Marques. “[The website and group chat] is something we felt like we needed to complement this lack of physical contact.”

Support new members. Remember your first few Toastmasters meetings? Before you had everything figured out, you likely had questions—and you probably just turned to the person next to you for clarification or asked an experienced member during the break. That type of interaction is more difficult online.

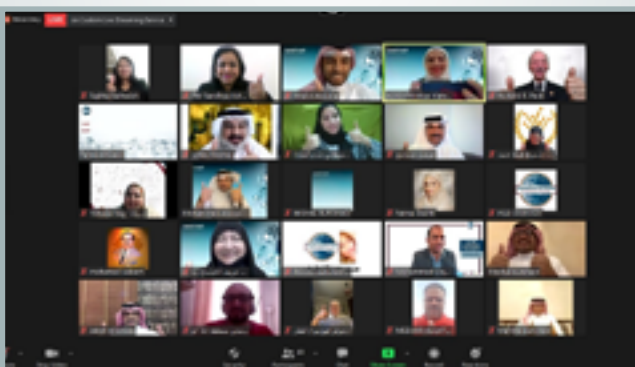
Help new members find and connect with mentors, and encourage open lines of communication. Consider setting up a “New Member Session,” during which members can ask questions, get acquainted with the club, and even meet with their mentors in breakout rooms.



Toastmasters of Paris members held a virtual birthday party to celebrate the club's 45th anniversary.



SPOT ON Advanced Online Toastmasters created a photo collage celebrating their charter meeting.



Clubs in District 20 (Bahrain and Kuwait) came together to hold a training session and celebration between Arab countries.

Continue to Improve

As you try new ways to energize your meetings and engage members, make sure to monitor the response. Ask your members what works and what doesn't, and make changes accordingly.

Gather feedback. The best way to keep your members engaged is to make sure you're giving them what they want. Rowan explains the importance of gathering feedback from meeting attendees, especially guests. "When you're familiar with a Toastmaster meeting, you don't have the same perspective as an outsider. It's nice to have guests' feedback of their experience and perspective. Did they feel value in the meeting and want to return? When you're trying to retain membership and appeal to new members you want to make sure that they're benefiting and leaving with a good experience."

Provide opportunities for all meeting participants to provide feedback, and encourage the General Evaluator to comment specifically on the virtual meeting format, as well.

Test and experiment. Like Rowan, Águia also emphasizes the importance of gathering feedback from members and making tweaks in response to that feedback. Invicta Toastmasters has pioneered a hybrid model, meeting both online and in person, according to local regulations, and much of the club's success is due to experimentation.

Águia and Marques perfected the physical setup based on feedback, rearranging the room so that in-person speakers could see the online audience projected onto a screen, and so that online speakers could see the in-person audience.

They also added a second Sergeant at Arms to handle the online portion of the meeting. The Zoom master switches between Speaker view and Gallery view as appropriate, makes sure everyone is muted, and helps with screen-sharing and other technical issues.

Their experimentation has paid off. "We've been doing this since July and it works," says Águia. "It really works." Gather feedback, experiment, and find out what works for your club.

Focus on the Human Element

Whether in person or on a machine, engage your members to keep them coming back. Connection and communication are more important than ever, and Toastmasters provides opportunities for both. Take advantage of technology to make your meetings fresh and fun, but focus on the human element. After all, "communication is the human experience," says Rowan, "especially online."

Megan Preston Meyer is a member of TM International Club Zug in Zug, Switzerland, and a regular contributor to Toastmaster magazine. She is an avid collector of jargon and the founder of [Corporately](#), a website that exposes the hidden logic of the workplace.

Officiating a Wedding Ceremony

Even World Champions get nervous, especially when leading a deeply personal event.

BY MARK BROWN AND DARREN LACROIX, AS

You've just been asked to officiate a wedding. Where do you start? What do you do? How is it different from other public speaking assignments? Those were questions confronting my friend Darren LaCroix and me recently when we unexpectedly were asked to officiate wedding ceremonies ... for our sister and daughter, respectively, less than two months apart! We are both experienced professional speakers and Toastmasters World Champions of Public Speaking. But this assignment was different and posed an unusual and humbling challenge: It was personal and emotional in nature, and we had never done this before.

Last August, I officiated the wedding of my only daughter, Andrene. Six weeks later, Darren officiated his sister's wedding. As we both can confirm, officiating a wedding isn't like delivering an acceptance speech, eulogy, toast, or a project in the Presentation Mastery path.

But the experience was unforgettable, and we learned important lessons along the way. No matter how experienced we may be in speaking to wide audiences, we both were surprised to struggle with nervousness during a deeply personal ceremony like this. Here are some of the lessons we learned.

Expect and Embrace the Nerves

Darren: I'm confident when talking about what I know, but speaking to family and friends in a different capacity than I am used to made me very

nervous. I've been doing this for over two decades, yet at one point in the ceremony I was literally shaking.

A wedding isn't a presentation; it's a ceremony, and the atmosphere is different.

If you get nervous, congratulations, you are human! When you care about the presentation, and you are delivering it only one time, it's not going to be perfect. Just make sure your heart is in it, and the audience will give you grace. Remember, as Mark often says, to have fun and enjoy the moment. I took a deep breath and pulled in my portfolio with notes so no one could see it shaking. I chuckled at myself and kept going.

Remember, It's Not a Presentation

Mark: Being asked to officiate my daughter Andrene's wedding was this daddy's delight! Giving her hand in marriage was extremely emotional for me, and I had to maintain my composure. A wedding isn't a presentation; it's a ceremony, and the atmosphere is different. Instead of an audience taking notes, we had family and loved ones sharing a joyous experience.

Darren: I had to acknowledge that the audience is different (friends and family), the intention is different (love and romance), and the outcome is different (it's about the couple, not the audience).

Get Out of the Picture

Mark: "Keep it short, Pops!" was Andrene's most specific command ... er, request ... along with "We want traditional vows." I had to doff my "speaker hat" and become a facilitator, guiding Andrene and Roland with words I had not written myself. My research and preparation led me to wedding sites and YouTube videos, culling, editing, constructing, and tweaking to create the best experience for my family.

Darren: This was new to me, but since I live in Las Vegas, the wedding capital of the world, I reached out to friends who perform weddings and got insights from all of them. Mark even sent me a video with helpful tips. My favorite? Right after saying, "You may now kiss the bride," step *out of the way!* No one wants the officiant in the picture of "THE KISS"!

Establish a Personal Connection With the Couple and the Audience

Mark: As a speaker, I establish a personal connection with the audience immediately. During a wedding, it's important to establish the connection between the couple and the attendees. A simple sentence like, "On Andrene and Roland's behalf, I welcome you all to this joyous celebration of love and commitment" can accomplish this easily and effectively.

Darren: I wanted to make the ceremony special for my sister and her husband, so I asked about their expectations. When you officiate, the couple may want a unity candle, sand ceremony,



Darren LaCroix officiates the wedding of his sister, Donna LaCroix, and Dave Richter.

PHOTO BY SHAWON DAVIS

cord of three strands, communion, or special music during the ceremony. It's also important to ask if there is anything they *don't* want. Even though I have a background in comedy, my sister told me to "go easy on the humor." I complied ... for the most part!

Focus on the Couple

Mark: My presentations always include personal stories, but I had to resist the urge. However, I did point out that I had predicted years earlier that Andrene would marry a man like her dad ... and I believe that she did. It's always more appropriate to share stories, fun facts, and lighthearted anecdotes about the couple. It's their day. Tell *their* story.

Darren: Mark is right. As we know, great stories are the heartbeat of a great speech. If you don't know their "story," be sure to ask! How did they meet? How are they similar? How are they different? What funny experience did they share? Ask their friends and family for stories as well. You never know where you will find the perfect anecdote.

Have Fun, But Follow the Script

Mark: Have fun! A wedding is a joyful celebration of love and happiness. There's no need for excessive solemnity. Enjoy the experience and help everyone in attendance enjoy the occasion as well.



Mark Brown leads the wedding vows for his daughter, Andrene, and her husband, Roland. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE STUDIO B PHOTOGRAPHY

Darren: It's a good idea to work with a script. There should be a rhythm and a flow to the ceremony; your script will keep you on track ... and on time. If you need help, ask for it. You may want to rehearse with a trusted friend or fellow Toastmaster until you're comfortable. The key is to be ready. I recorded the celebration using my phone's voice memo feature and listened to it first thing in the morning, before bed, and even while driving. Print your script in a large font so it's easy to read. Mark suggested getting a nice black portfolio that looks professional but serves the practical purpose of having notes at my fingertips.

Be Prepared for the Unexpected

Mark: Be flexible. Any number of "hiccups" can occur, especially if the ceremony takes place outdoors. Wild animals, trains, rains, a nervous flower girl, a scared ring bearer, or any number of unanticipated

distractions can pop up. Be ready to adjust immediately, have a funny line prepared, and go with the flow!

Officiating a wedding need not be a scary undertaking, especially when doing it for family and loved ones. It's a wonderful opportunity to use your Toastmasters skills to bless people you love and to provide everyone present—not only the couple—with an unforgettable experience! **T**

Mark Brown and Darren LaCroix, AS, are both World Champions of Public Speaking (1995 and 2001, respectively) and Certified Speaking Professionals.

Learn more about Mark at www.markbrownspeaks.com and Darren at www.darrenlacroix.com. Check out their [Unforgettable Presentations Podcast](#) to get secrets, stories, and strategies from some of the best presenters in the world.

Reap the Benefits of Being a Distinguished Toastmaster

Achieving the DTM award is more than just three letters after your name.

BY PEGGY BEACH, DTM

For many members, achieving the Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) award is a highlight of their Toastmasters journey. The award represents the highest level of educational achievement in the organization, and was first awarded 51 years ago, in March 1970.

“My DTM award is a source of pride for me,” says Norm Thibodeau, DTM, who belongs to two clubs, Air Line Trail Club and UnitedHealth Group Club, both in Connecticut. “It means that I am one of the many people who has successfully leveraged an amazing training program to hone my communication and leadership skills.”

“It is a massive sense of achievement,” says Lynne Cantor, DTM, of Excalibur Speakers in London, England. “When I joined Toastmasters and eventually understood about the DTM award, I wondered why it would take three to five years to achieve. It took me 10!”

Achieving the DTM designation is not for the faint of heart. Toastmasters does not pass out the award as a party favor. [DTM requirements](#) include completing two paths in Pathways (before Pathways launched in 2018, members had to earn several education awards in the traditional program to fulfill this part of the requirement), serving as a club leader for at least a year; serving as a club mentor or coach; serving as a club sponsor or conducting a Speechcraft or Youth Leadership program; serving as a District

leader for a year; and completing a DTM project (where members create and implement a project of their own design, which demonstrates the skills and expertise they have gained).

So why undertake it?

How a DTM Helps

Pam Christopher, DTM, Past International Director and a member of Northwestern Club in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, says the journey toward getting a DTM made her a better person and opened up new opportunities. “I learned new ways of communicating, presenting, and being a good leader. That was so valuable at that time in my life,” she says. “Promotions at work were available to me. My employer told me that the skills I learned in Toastmasters made me the best candidate for the position I was applying for. Hearing those words was magical to me.”

She adds that skills developed through achieving a DTM are relevant elsewhere. “When we are able to follow directions, find resources, and present a project, we can apply (those skills) to other parts of our lives, making us educated to do many other things.”

Earning a DTM also inspires self-confidence and a newfound belief in yourself. Cantor, the London member, says her DTM experiences mean “nothing fazes me, especially at work, because somewhere along the line, I have already done it. It means I can share my knowledge and experience with others, perhaps even inspire them.”

The process of earning the award naturally helps develop valuable soft skills that members say often aren’t easily acquired anywhere else. Some of those skills include being a team player, having emotional intelligence, being adaptable, and having a strong work ethic. Thibodeau, of the Connecticut clubs, believes



“I think it is important to understand the DTM requirements, which I didn’t for the longest time,” says Mark Reynolds, DTM, a member of two clubs in Australia (Limestone Coast Toastmasters Club in Mount Gambier and Devils Advocate in Penna, Tasmania). He adds, “I found a mentor to help guide my way toward the DTM.”

that honing such skills in Toastmasters helped him navigate changes in the workplace environment. Other skills he developed as a member and through the process of earning his DTM include developing a growth mindset, being open to feedback, and becoming an active listener.

Achieving a DTM brings other rewards as well. Khushi Pasquale, DTM, of the Center Berlin Toastmasters in Berlin, Germany, says attaining the award helped renew her commitment to Toastmasters. “Wearing a DTM pin is like carrying a banner—it says, ‘How can I help?’” she says. “Having the DTM designation not only means that I’ve learned and grown but that others see me as a potential collaborator. It means more opportunity to serve, more opportunities to give back to the organization and people who contributed to my growth. That is a huge joy factor for me.”

Obstacles Along the Way

Besides the rigorous requirements for achieving the designation, members face other challenges. Jerry Clark, DTM, of the Advanced Richmond (Virginia) Toastmasters and Richmond Club, was a District Governor in the late 1990s for District 50 (parts of Texas and Louisiana). “One obstacle I had to overcome was finding time to finish my DTM while dealing with the responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities of District leadership,” he says. He also found it hard to schedule and locate a Youth Leadership Program. “Finally, someone suggested that I contact the 4-H club in Dallas. I presented the Youth Leadership to 14 students who were homeschooled.”

Christopher found her biggest obstacle was becoming a club sponsor. Living in a rural area meant everything was at least an hour’s drive away. “Finding a club that I could attend after my work hours was difficult,” she says. “With the help of my District leader, I was able to help with a corporate club and its charter process. Waiting to find that club was the most difficult part.”

Advice to Those on the DTM Journey

Cantor recommends that members keep striving for a DTM for as long as it takes. “At first, it can seem too far away, and too much to do, to achieve,” she says. “Focus on one speech and one project at a time and you get closer and closer with each project completed and suddenly, it is within your sights. It is what you give to and gain from, the journey that is important.”

Pasquale, the member from Germany, agrees with Cantor. “The path to DTM is not a race. It’s not how quickly you finalize this award, but how you can best learn on your way,” she says. Saying yes to every opportunity will lead to progress. “Look around, listen, and jump in when you find a need you can fill. Growth is the product of each new project.”

Pasquale compares the DTM journey to the 10,000 steps she tries to walk every day. “Sometimes the easier route tempts us, but that’s not where we are going to get the best exercise. The energy boost comes not when I reach home, but in every cell of my body along those 10,000 steps.”

She also recommends choosing projects you love and involving others. “Cross club borders. Challenge yourself. Enjoy the process. Believe me, that is how you will get the most benefit.”

“Don’t think of the DTM as the end goal,” says Thibodeau. “You’re not done with Toastmasters once you earn your DTM. What the next step will be is up to you. Toastmasters provides the opportunities; you just need the desire and ambition to continue your development,” he says. “You can get another DTM, finish another Pathways path, or even repeat a path. It’s up to you.”

Learn more about the [Distinguished Toastmaster](#).

Peggy Beach, DTM, *Past District 37 Governor, is a freelance writer and editor in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is Vice President Education at Hi-Rise Toastmasters in Raleigh and Top Triangle Toastmasters in Morrisville, North Carolina. You can reach her at writereitorpeggybeach@gmail.com.*

Learning to Evaluate Everybody

Don't be intimidated by title or tenure; both new and advanced members benefit from honesty.

An unfortunate phenomenon plagues some Toastmasters clubs, and it's one we don't often talk about. It holds members back from achieving their potential and progressing as quickly as they could.

Rita Barber, DTM, of San Jose, California, is working on her third Distinguished Toastmaster designation, and she calls it “the curse of the DTMs” because the title tends to intimidate other members. This “curse” can affect any experienced member and just as unfortunately, it affects less experienced members, as well.

The issue is this: New members sometimes feel unqualified to evaluate experienced speakers, and are therefore too intimidated to try. This means that seasoned speakers miss out on valuable fresh perspectives, and new Toastmasters miss out on the opportunity to improve their evaluation skills.

With that in mind, here are some tips to build the confidence you need to evaluate even the most advanced speakers in your club.

Consumer vs. Producer Feedback

What do you do when you're asked to evaluate a very advanced speaker, and you've just barely made it through your Ice Breaker? What feedback can you give on a truly excellent speech—one where the body language is open and authentic, the vocal variety is appropriate and engaging, and the content is well-structured and fluid? What value can you possibly add?

The answer: a lot. You may think that your evaluation won't benefit the speaker because you are not as experienced as they are, but that's almost never the case. The trick is to determine what type of feedback is most appropriate.

Daniel Mouqué, DTM, of the Brussels Toastmasters Club in Brussels, Belgium, borrows from economic theory in distinguishing between two methods of evaluation: **producer feedback**

and **consumer feedback**. Producer feedback is instructional; it tells the speaker how to deliver a speech more successfully. Consumer feedback, on the other hand, is reactionary; it tells the speaker how you perceived their speech.

Mouqué came up with the idea after asking volunteers from an econometrics lecture that he was teaching to evaluate his comedy routine. He found that, while they were “not equipped to *produce* comedy, they did know what they found funny.” The audience couldn't teach him to be more humorous, but they could—and did—identify which jokes they liked best. These reactions helped him to refine his routine, focusing more on what his audience enjoyed and less on what they didn't.

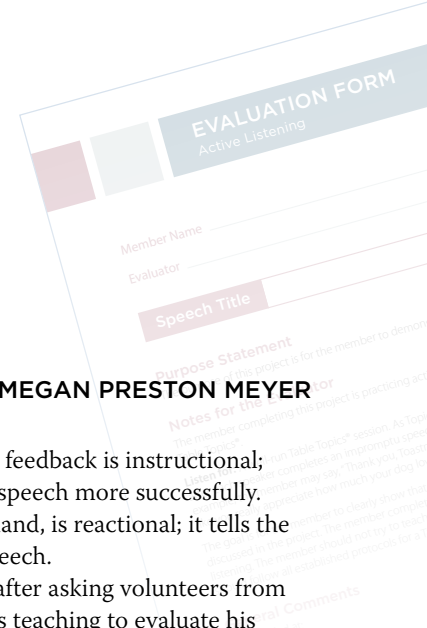
Most of us are not public speaking experts yet, and may not be able to offer feedback to the top speakers in our clubs—and that's okay. If speakers rely solely on evaluations from people with greater or equal technical mastery, the base of potential evaluators shrinks quickly. “When you get to a certain level, there's a mystique to it,” Mouqué says. People mistakenly think that if you're a World Champion of Public Speaking, you “must only listen to World Champions.” But there are only a handful of World Champions, and if they limit themselves to feedback from within their small circle, they will all start to think—and speak—alike.

You don't need to be a better speaker than the person you're evaluating; producer feedback is not the only way to evaluate effectively. We are all experts on our own perceptions, so we are always qualified to deliver consumer feedback.

Valuable Perspective

But is consumer feedback valuable? Absolutely. Just as companies measure customer satisfaction to make small but important tweaks to products, advanced speakers need listener perspectives to make small but important tweaks to their speeches.

Experienced members often don't need tips on technical skills; they're looking for feedback on how their message is perceived. As a professional keynote speaker, Lars Sudmann, DTM, another



BY MEGAN PRESTON MEYER



are such an integral part of the Toastmasters experience. Evaluating advanced speakers takes that experience to the next level.

If you only evaluate newer members, you may find yourself offering the same constructive feedback over and over. An evaluation featuring basic advice like, “Try using vocal variety to add emphasis” or “The structure of the speech could be clearer” will be beneficial to the speaker but is not likely to challenge your own evaluation skills.

Contrast that with evaluating a speech project from a seasoned Toastmaster. There may not be obvious opportunities for the speaker’s improvement, which makes finding feedback more difficult but ultimately more valuable. Evaluating experienced members forces us to notice, articulate, and convey nuances of public speaking that might otherwise pass us by—and once we’ve identified what works for other speakers, we are far more likely to incorporate it into our own communication.

Overcoming Intimidation

Despite all the benefits of evaluating senior speakers, it can still seem intimidating. But just like with any skill, Lukacher says, you’ll get better with practice. “It’s going to be awkward. It’s going to be hard at first,” but that means you’re making progress. “If it’s not awkward, you’re learning at a snail’s pace.”

Remember that any intimidation you feel is likely your own invention. Lukacher has been in Toastmasters for more than a decade, but whether you’ve been with your club for 20 years or 20 minutes, “when you’re there, you’re a Toastmaster. We create an environment where we’re one and the same. We share a common goal.”

Barber, the two-time DTM from California, agrees. “*Everybody* [in Toastmasters] is learning and growing ... and they cannot do that without meaningful feedback.”

So set aside any intimidation or awkwardness that might hold you back, and sign up to evaluate the most experienced Toastmaster you can find. Even if you can’t offer “producer feedback,” advanced speakers will benefit from your consumer feedback—and you will benefit from providing it.

Megan Preston Meyer is a member of *TM International Club Zug in Zug, Switzerland*, and a regular contributor to *Toastmaster magazine*. She is an avid collector of jargon and the founder of [Corporatery](#), a website that exposes the hidden logic of the workplace.

member of the Brussels Toastmasters, actually prefers evaluations from newer Toastmasters members; he values the fresh perspectives they bring and their willingness to relay their emotional response to a speech.

Don’t worry if you can’t identify concrete areas for improvement; instead, Sudmann recommends that you “write down three things you liked and dissect those.” What elements of the message resonated the most with you, and why? Describe your journey as you watched the speech. How did it make you feel? By focusing on what worked and articulating why it worked, you’ll deliver valuable feedback to the speaker, allowing them to fine-tune their message.

Evaluating experienced Toastmasters forces us to notice, articulate, and convey nuances of public speaking that might otherwise pass us by.

Experienced speakers can assist newer members in evaluating them, as well. “It’s a great opportunity ... to coach newer members to develop strong evaluation skills and to provide feedback in uncomfortable settings,” says Gusanita Roberson, DTM, of Mableton, Georgia. She suggests giving less experienced evaluators “a specific objective to evaluate, along with the formal evaluation.” For example, “Which anecdotes are the most memorable?” or “If I had to cut 30 seconds of my speech, what part should I remove?” This type of guidance can ease the intimidation factor and encourage less experienced members to sign up for evaluations.

Learning by Teaching

“It’s counterintuitive to think that you can improve by evaluating someone much more advanced than you,” says veteran Toastmaster Jon Lukacher, of Irving, Texas. But that’s exactly what happens. We learn by teaching others, which is why evaluations



Handling the Q&A Session With Confidence

Lead a lively, informative exchange that audiences will remember.

BY DIANE WINDINGLAND, DTM

Too often, when people prepare a presentation, they focus solely on the main content. That's good, but it's also important to think about the question-and-answer (Q&A) session. Since this part typically comes at the end, it's often what you are most remembered for.

Of course, there's no way to know what questions the audience will ask (oh, that there were!). However, no matter what your topic is, there are ways to prepare for questions, increase audience engagement, respond intelligently, deal

with presentation hijackers or dissenters, defuse loaded questions, and own the end.

Prepare for Questions

Write down a few questions you anticipate being asked. Rehearse your answers. One of the questions can be used to get the ball rolling in the Q&A session, especially if no one has a question right away.

Reinforce key messages. It can be very effective to end your answer with a

relevant key point from your presentation. "And that's why we need to [state a point from your presentation]."

Focus questions on specific topics you are comfortable discussing.

For example, when discussing an upcoming project, and your part is mostly the project timeline, you can ask, "What questions do you have about the project timeline?"

Increase Audience Engagement

Near the start, announce there will be a Q&A session. Ask attendees to write down questions as they think of them.

Ask presumptively. Be specific and ask, "What questions do you have about [topic]?" Then pause, look around, and wait several seconds. You can try using body language to encourage questions, such as leaning in and taking a step forward, or extending one arm toward the audience.

Plant a question or two. Have a buddy in the audience ask a "break the ice" question that you already have a great,



short answer prepared for. Then say, “Next question?”

Answer your own question. If there are no questions, try saying something like, “Many people have asked me . . . [a typical question]?” And then, answer your own question, followed by, “What questions do you have about [related topic to the question you just answered]?”

Respond Intelligently

Listen. Pause. Repeat. Respond.

1. **Listen** to the question without interrupting.
2. **Pause** a few beats. You will look thoughtful.
3. **Repeat** the question, paraphrasing if needed, to both clarify your understanding of the question, and to allow the audience to hear the question in a large meeting room.
4. **Respond.** Give a short, direct answer. State your point, give a reason, provide an example or evidence, then restate your point. If you’re not sure of an answer or it requires more time to explain, offer an alternative.
 - **Defer:** Put off answering the question if it is beyond the scope of the presentation, one that you don’t have an immediate answer for, or one that requires more detail than you want to get into right then [“Let me talk to you later”].
 - **Alternatives to “I don’t know”:**
 - “I don’t know, but I’ll find out and let you know. However, I do have some thoughts around that question . . .” [And then give some of your related thoughts].
 - “I don’t have enough information on that yet. I’ll need to get back to you.”
 - “That’s an interesting idea—I hadn’t thought of that.”

Start and end your response by making eye contact with the questioner. Look at other audience members in between to involve them.

Deal With a Presentation Hijacker

Cut off the long comment. When the person takes a breath, cut in and say, “Excuse me, do you have a question?” or “I’m looking for a question. Do you have a question?”

Redirect the off-topic comment: “Excuse me for interrupting, but we need to stay on topic. Do you have a question related to [your topic]?”

The Q&A session is often what you’re most remembered for.

Move on from the persistent questioner. While you should allow for a follow-up question, if the questioner persists, your next sentence can be: “I’m happy to discuss this with you after the presentation.” You can also say, “Thank you for your interest! I’d like to hear from others, as well.” Break eye contact with the questioner and look around at others. “What other questions are there?”

Deal With a Dissenter

- **Validate the dissenter.** “Thank you for your opinion. There is almost always more than one way to look at a situation.”
- **Agree.** If possible, find something in common to agree on. “I think we can both agree that . . .”
- **Offer to discuss later.** “Let’s discuss this later.”
- **Move on.** Break eye contact with the dissenter and appeal to the audience, “Next question . . .?”

If the person is highly disruptive, ask for someone else to deal with them so that you can continue.

Defuse the Loaded Question

Loaded questions can be tricky because they include an assumption that puts

you on the defensive. For example, “Has your project finally stopped falling behind schedule?” Whether you say yes or no, you are admitting to falling behind at some point. The general rule is to never answer the question as it was asked, but to deflect or to defuse it.

Question the assumption. Ask, “What makes you ask that?” or “What are you basing that on?”

Empathize and redirect. If you get a loaded question, such as “Why are you charging so much for your program?” try empathizing and redirecting. Empathize with the person, “I can understand your concern with the price.” Then, redirect the question to one that you want to answer. “I believe your concern is whether you are getting a good value for the price . . .”

Defer. If the person is unsatisfied or becomes hostile, offer to speak with them after the presentation.

Own the End

You don’t want someone else to control the end of your presentation, so don’t end it on your last Q&A response. If you have to say, “Well, my time is up,” you’ve lost control. A more compelling way to wrap up is to save your concluding words for after the Q&A. Use your final remarks to reinforce your key message and probably share a call-to-action.

Finally, watch your time. As you get within a few minutes of the end, offer to “take one last question.” Or, if you realize you don’t have time for one last question, segue into your conclusion as you end your response.

Follow these tips and the Q&A session can be the best part of your presentation! **T**

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



Micro Business, Macro Results

How to cultivate communication skills that grow your small business.

BY LYNNE STRANG, DTM

From introducing yourself at meetings to interacting with vendors or customers, communication is an integral part of everyday life for all business owners. That includes leadership coaches, photographers, public speakers, computer consultants, freelance writers, and anyone else who operates a “micro business.”

One such business is owned by Praveen Zade, a Toastmaster in Pune, India. Co-founder of a web-based company started four years ago to offer made-to-measure clothing, Zade struggled to give talks that held the audience’s attention and conveyed his message clearly. In February 2019, he joined Toastmasters for Pune Entrepreneurs, a club formed by start-up founders. “Toastmasters has made me a better listener, a better thinker, and a better speaker than I used to be,” he says.

Zade is among the many entrepreneurs who have joined Toastmasters to learn and practice their communication skills. Approximately 53,000 Toastmasters own a business, according to 2019 member demographics from Toastmasters International. For these “Toastpreneurs,” club meetings provide opportunities to network, rehearse business pitches, find mentors, and gain hands-on leadership experience that carries over to their entrepreneurial endeavors.

Micro Businesses and Their Communication Challenges

While definitions vary, micro businesses typically have fewer than 10 employees and less than \$250,000 in annual sales.

Often, the business has a single owner with no employees. In all countries, the vast majority of enterprises (between 70% and 95%) are micro businesses, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

As the world emerges from COVID-19, some micro-business owners will begin to rebuild, and some who lost corporate jobs will join their ranks. “What is certain is that businesses everywhere, in a forthcoming brave new post-COVID-19 world, will need to increase their capacity to adapt, improving their flexibility, resilience, and responsiveness. This is exactly where small- to medium-business owners’ strengths tend to lie,” says a 2020 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report.

To succeed in a post-pandemic marketplace, new and veteran business owners must also confront their communication challenges. Some business owners avoid public speaking because they harbor a fear of the unknown. As a result, they miss speaking opportunities that can help them build confidence, establish credibility, and create awareness of their brand. This can be especially detrimental for micro enterprises, which typically depend upon word-of-mouth advertising to obtain referrals.

Basile Lemba of Galloping Governors Toastmasters Club in Fairfax, Virginia, feels consistent practice in front of his club helped him become a more confident speaker. “It’s like a professional basketball player who goes to the gym and spends hours practicing a shot,”

says Lemba, founder of a company that hosts expos, monthly breakfasts, and other business networking events. “Now you can take that shot and you’re not worrying about it.”

When owners of small businesses give talks to generate sales or raise capital, poor presentation techniques may undermine their goals. Some ramble. Others go overboard with minutiae. As a result, the audience tunes out before the presenter can make the “ask.”

Communication Skills to Master for Business

On the flip side, the micro-business owner with solid communication skills is better positioned to get buy-in as well as resolve disputes, respond to customer emails, leverage social media, and negotiate better deals. Successful communicators in business tend to be strong in these areas:

- **Listening** – “My biggest challenge is listening to hear, not just to respond,” says Gwendolyn E.V. Monroe, an Atlanta, Georgia-based Toastmaster whose businesses include a leadership coaching practice. Active listening makes others feel valued, reduces mistakes, and produces better feedback for employees.

- **Storytelling** – While most businesspeople can present facts and figures, what’s often missing is the emotion. Savvy start-up owners tell their story in a compelling, memorable way. This grabs attention and gets the audience excited about what they have to offer.



Micro-business owners armed with robust communication skills—such as those gained in Toastmasters—are better positioned to confidently and persuasively promote their brands in the post-COVID marketplace.

■ **Organization** – Skilled business communicators use a well-defined structure to organize their thoughts and present them in a logical order, focusing on what the audience wants to hear.

■ **Persuasion** – Business owners contend with a variety of situations—from negotiating contracts to coaxing decision makers—that require an ability to persuade. You're more likely to get the results you want when you appeal to your audience's interests.

How to Tap Your Toastmasters Training

As you begin or continue your entrepreneurial journey, it's wise to evaluate how you measure up in each of these areas. Use this self-knowledge to determine where you need to improve, and which Toastmasters activities will benefit you the most in your role as a business owner. Some options:

■ **Choose a Pathways learning path aligned with your mission.** Lemba, for example, chose Presentation Mastery because its projects focus on developing speaking techniques and improving connections with audience members.

These skills apply to his networking business, which involves facilitating discussions, introducing speakers, and leading workshops.

■ **Join a club for small-business owners.** Monroe says belonging to Your Small Business Toastmasters in Atlanta enhances her business experience. "The conversations we have and the speeches we give serve the core needs of entrepreneurs," she says.

■ **Practice your pitches.** When possible, use club meetings to rehearse and refine upcoming presentations. There's no safer place to learn from mistakes.

■ **Fill meeting roles that strengthen weaknesses.** To improve your ability to give positive, constructive feedback, serve as an evaluator. Other examples: Sign up as the grammarian to sharpen listening skills, or the timer to become more mindful of the clock during your talks.

■ **Serve as a club officer.** Each position—from President to Sergeant at Arms—teaches both communication and leadership skills (such as team building,

problem solving, and strategic planning) needed in business.

■ **Expand your network.** For micro-business owners, making new connections is one of the most valuable aspects of Toastmasters. "My club has not only answered my 'why' but it has opened doors to other venues and opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise," says Monroe.

■ **Gain visibility.** Participate in a club, Area, or District-level speakers bureau to increase awareness of your professional expertise within your community.

While owning a business can be rewarding, it isn't easy. In today's challenging economy, the micro-business owners who succeed will be the ones with strong communication skills. Take advantage of every opportunity to improve yours. **T**

Lynne Strang, DTM, is a member of *Galloping Governors Toastmasters* and *Sparkling Speakers* in Fairfax, Virginia. She is a freelance writer and the author of *Late-Blooming Entrepreneurs: Eight Principles for Starting a Business After Age 40*.

Word Play

Words are like matches. When you play with them, your meaning could go up in smoke.

BY JOHN CADLEY

I was in a men's clothing store recently when I happened upon a display of shirts marked "performance flannel." I was sorely tempted to ask a salesperson, "What time does the performance start?" I didn't, of course, and not just out of courtesy but because I spent 33 years as an advertising copywriter creating the same sort of catchy phrases. My friends joked that I lied for a living, which I did not. I simply dipped the truth in sugar. You must admit that "performance flannel" sounds better than just plain "flannel" and, while it doesn't sing or dance or juggle flaming torches, it does, by keeping you warm, *perform* its duty as a flannel shirt. Close enough.

It is unfortunate, however, when someone tries to dip the truth in sugar and misses the bowl entirely. I saw an example of this on a billboard for a convenience store that read: IF YOU DON'T LOVE OUR COFFEE, IT'S FREE! This seems to assume that if their coffee tastes like crankcase oil, I'll like it better if it's free, because people like anything that's free, right? In fact, I'll be so grateful for their generosity I won't accuse them of trying to poison me. Or ... what if I like their coffee but don't really love it. Half price?

If "performance flannel" is legitimate, so too is "trained psychiatrist." A trained psychiatrist sounds good, but if you're untrained you're not a psychiatrist, you're my neighbor, who will be happy to diagnose what is wrong with you—not to mention the entire human race—free of charge. In the same category, we find the "factory-trained technician," which I can only take to mean that a technician trained in a factory is somehow more qualified than one trained

elsewhere ... like a classroom, maybe?

And what of this pandemic? If anything calls for sugarcoating, it's a worldwide plague that forces you to spend 24 hours a day with your children. To make it more palatable, we refer to these times as "challenging," "uncertain," "trying," or "unprecedented"—words that conjure images of warriors fighting gallantly in a great struggle, even if it only means wrestling a senior citizen in the supermarket for the last roll of toilet paper.

Would you rather have a nice *cholecystectomy* or hear your doctor say, "Your gallbladder's shot"?

For politicians, of course, sugarcoating is baked into the job description. It's a legislator's job to tell voters what they want to hear. If by some strange coincidence it happens to be true, that's a bonus. On the other hand, a politician must always *appear* to be telling the truth lest she or he lose the trust of the people who don't want to hear it. To accomplish this act of linguistic prestidigitation, a pol will frequently begin his or her remarks with "Make no mistake" or "Let me be clear." This positions the speaker as a true statesman who is about to take a definite stand on some issue whether the audience likes it or not—which, of course, they do because 27 focus groups have said so. Another way of putting it might be: "This seemingly bold and risky position I'm taking is no *mistake* because my

exhaustive demographic research makes it *clear* you'll love it."

As you might imagine, the medical profession faces special challenges here. Certain clinical diagnoses are best not stated bluntly lest the patient add panic disorder to his other maladies. Would you rather have a nice *cholecystectomy* or hear your doctor say, "Your gallbladder's shot. I gotta open you up and pull it out"? On the other hand, there are certain occasions when a patient might like a little more information. Case in point: The results of my latest physical exam indicated tersely that it was "unremarkable." Now, this is a good thing—my physician found nothing of concern—yet I somehow felt slighted. When a person my age gets a clean bill of health, it's pretty remarkable, and I think "remarkably unremarkable" would have been a fine way to say it.

I myself don't sugarcoat anything, especially when it comes to transgressions against my beloved English language. For example, when someone references a large number as "hundreds and hundreds," it is incumbent upon me to reply, "That's one hundreds too many. 'Hundreds' includes all the hundreds there are. If I bought a carton of eggs would I say I purchased eggs and eggs? Really?! Let's think before we speak."

Does that make me sound like an irascible old prig? Tell me. And don't sugarcoat it. **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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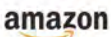


CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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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