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9127 S. Jamaica St. #400, Englewood, CO, USA 80112  
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For information on joining  
or building a club, visit:

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Article submission:

[submissions@toastmasters.org](mailto:submissions@toastmasters.org)

Letters to the Editor:

[letters@toastmasters.org](mailto:letters@toastmasters.org)

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## Are You Getting the Most Out of Your Toastmasters Experience?



**W**hen I was District Governor in 2013, Toastmasters International President John Lau, DTM, urged every District leader to enhance the member

experience. I could see the inspiration behind the request, and I believed it was a worthy goal, yet I didn't understand or know how I could possibly do more than carry out the District mission of building new clubs and helping all clubs achieve excellence. Wasn't enhancing the member experience part of that?

When I went back to the members of my District with the President's request, I shared my belief that all I could do to enhance their experience was be a good—no, a better—role model. I hoped that I could simply set an example, but instead I invented barriers to doing more.

The truth is, I was trying to solve the problem with the wrong mindset. How could I possibly improve my fellow members' experience if I didn't change my own belief that it could be done? I had a responsibility to figure out my methods, or model, of enhancing my own experience. I had to shift into thinking that my experience was happening *for* me, not *to* me.

Since then, I have created three simple steps to better my experience and the experiences of those around me. Every day, we have the power to boost our skills and abilities, lift up our colleagues, and express our gratitude.

Here's my easy-to-follow 3-2-1 practice to do after each meeting or event:

**3** Catalog the three most important things you've learned. You can take notes or store your observations on your phone. Keep the information somewhere you can review it before the next meeting to recall and elevate your learning.

**2** Give two unique compliments to your fellow members. When I say "unique," I mean unique! Reach beyond the everyday compliments and accolades you might give during an evaluation.

Instead, demonstrate how fully present and observant you are: "Your ideas about member recruitment really demonstrate how in tune you are to what motivates others." "The way you solve problems tells me what a critical thinker you are."

**1** Thank someone who made it possible for you to grow and learn today. Drop a note via email, WeChat, or WhatsApp. Say it in person if you can. Just make sure that you show your appreciation each week to at least one person who made the meeting possible.

We are all guardians of the member experience. Please share your ideas for enhancing it—perhaps your thoughts will be one of the three things I learn from writing this article.

**Margaret Page, DTM**  
International President

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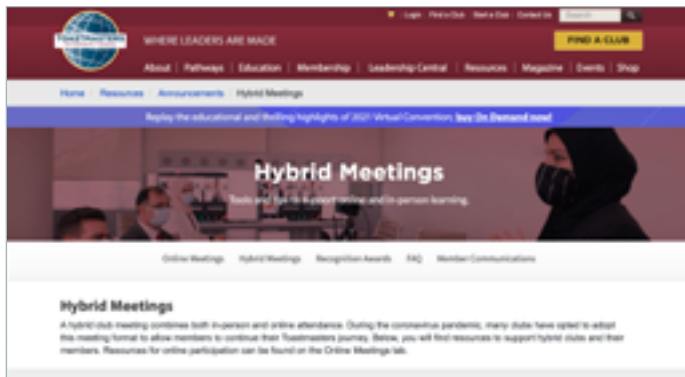


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### Hybrid Meetings Page

If your club has already adopted a hybrid format, or is wondering if it's the right fit, visit the [Hybrid Meetings webpage](#) for resources, tips, and best practices to help run quality meetings.



### New Pathways Level 1

A [new Pathways Level 1](#) is here! This new Level 1 will include four projects: A revised "Ice Breaker," "Evaluation and Feedback" (two speeches), and two new projects, "Writing a Speech With Purpose" and "Introduction to Vocal Variety and Body Language." These projects are designed to introduce fundamental skills that will help members write and deliver effective speeches. This update will also address member feedback regarding project navigation. New Level 1 projects will be available in paths purchased following the October release. For more details, read "Introducing: The Improved Pathways Level 1."

### Toastmaster Online Magazine

Visit the [November online edition](#) for extra features you won't find in the PDF. Watch a video for tips on how to set the stage for a more inclusive meeting, listen to exclusive podcasts, and hear additional audio tips from the Toastmasters Toolbox author. Check back in December, when we'll highlight Toastmasters members and their pets in an online gallery!

## Resources

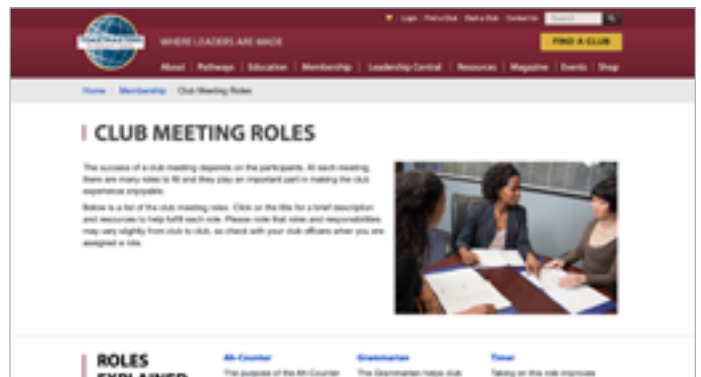


### Quick Tips for Speakers

Whether you're new to giving speeches or are a seasoned Toastmaster, this page is full of [how-to articles](#) to help you hone your skills. Get quick and easy tips for how to prepare and present an award, use visual aids and props, incorporate body language into your presentations, and more.

### How to Use Club Funds

Use available club funds to support the club by purchasing materials, paying for the meeting space, purchasing refreshments, and more. Additional information can be found on the [Use of Club Funds page](#). You can also email [clubquality@toastmasters.org](mailto:clubquality@toastmasters.org) with any other questions.



### Club Meeting Role Resources

Are you taking on a club role for the first time? Or maybe you're a repeat role-taker looking to refresh your skills. Check out the [Club Meeting Roles webpage](#), where you'll find links to each role with information and articles to help you perform your best at your next meeting.

### Help Yourself to Magazine Articles

Need some inspiration for writing your next speech? Looking for tips on giving a workplace presentation? How about advice for enhancing your club's experience? Check out the [Helpful Articles](#) section on the magazine webpage. Here you'll find categories of articles on a range of topics to fit your needs.



▶ MEMBER RECOGNITION



**Akbar Imhotep, DTM** • *Atlanta, Georgia*



## Be Positive Regardless

BY PAULINE MANSFIELD

As a 13-year member of Capitol City Legacy Builders Toastmasters in Atlanta, Georgia, I have had periods of being fired up and periods of deep slumps. However, there was always someone who knew how to relight my fire—Akbar Imhotep.

For more than five years, Akbar battled cancer but still attended club meetings throughout his treatments. He competed in Toastmasters speech contests and even earned one of two Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) designations during this time and served in several officer roles. At the beginning of the pandemic, Akbar came close to dying. While in the hospital, he asked the nurse to write “Be positive regardless” on the board facing his bed. That became his mantra.

Leading by example, he continually reminds me how much I’ve already accomplished since joining our club and how much more is ahead. He reminds me that if I remain positive regardless, I can reach any goal I set out to accomplish. Our entire club has adopted Akbar’s mantra. Our connections have stretched far beyond our weekly meetings, and we have become a family.

The best lesson I have learned in Toastmasters is that the journey to reach any goal becomes much easier when you have caring and supportive people surrounding you. Akbar, we all thank you for being our inspiration, and most importantly, our friend.

▶ TRAVELING TOASTMASTER



**MALLIKA DINESH MADA** of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, signs on for a Toastmasters meeting while vacationing in Kuredu, Maldives.



**UTKARSH AGARWELL** of Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh, India, hikes in the Valley of Flowers National Park in the Indian state of Uttarakhand.

## ▶ SNAPSHOT



The Brussels Toastmasters Club of Brussels, Belgium, reunited past and present members to celebrate their 50th club anniversary at Château Sainte-Anne—the club's original meeting venue in November 1971.



## ▶ HEARD AROUND THE WORLD

[The Official Toastmasters International Members Group on Facebook](#) is always filled with conversations started by and for members. **Amy Russo**, President of Downtown Speechmakers in San Jose, California, asked members this question:

*“What is a tiny concrete tip you like to give to help new public speakers?”*

Don't apologize if you make a mistake. Often the audience doesn't realize you made one, so don't bring attention to it by apologizing.

**Ann Guintivano, DTM** • Carson, California

The best weapon at your disposal is pause. Use it accordingly.

**Vicky McCarthy, DTM** • Tralee, Ireland

Tell stories from your own past ... don't try to memorize facts to recite.

**Barry Doctor, DTM** • Vaughan, Ontario, Canada

Everybody gets nervous. It's how you work through it that makes or breaks a great speaker.

**David Doerrier** • Alpharetta, Georgia

Stop worrying about yourself (how you look, sound, perform), and put all your energy into what the audience is hearing, seeing, and experiencing.

**Kristin Nickells** • Parksville, British Columbia, Canada

Take the plunge and enjoy the ride. Good or bad, the mere fact that you carry the courage to come up and give a speech is enough to make you feel proud of yourself.

**Jyotiprakash Sundaray** • Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Perfectionism does not exist in public speaking.

**Marlene Wolf Smith** • Boca Raton, Florida

Start speaking. If you keep putting it off, it's harder to start.

**Megan Loiaconi Hurley** • San Diego, California





## Have Languages, Will Travel

Online meetings meant not only globe-hopping but brushing up my language skills.

BY NIALL FINN

A few months ago, members of Athens Toastmaster Academy, in Athens, Greece, celebrated being able to meet in person after a year of seeing each other only on the Zoom screen. Though “only” is the wrong word—many participants described how our club’s meetings had been a sustaining beacon of hope, a boost of human friendly contact through the dark days of COVID lockdowns.

I felt very fortunate: My small Greek-island village, with its network of deserted paths through olive groves, meant I had not—like many club members—found my life limited to the four walls of a city apartment. Moreover, like many other Toastmasters, I realized I possessed a passport to other worlds, and I could travel—virtually—to any club, anywhere.

I also realized I wanted to do more than just visit clubs; I also wanted to brush up some language skills. A life lived in numerous countries had left me multilingual, but now, in retirement, I could feel several of my languages sagging, soufflé-like, through sheer lack of practice. For all its awfulness, the coronavirus pandemic represented a unique window of opportunity, one open until clubs returned to in-person meetings, to voyage linguistically as well as geographically.

At first, like a butterfly, I “flew” to a French-speaking club in Paris, to a Dutch-speaking one in Maastricht, Netherlands, and to an English-speaking club in Florida. While I thoroughly enjoyed these visits, they could not provide the full sense of community, of sharing a safe space, that comes with being a regular member of a club. I was already a member of two bilingual clubs in Greece (the other being the equally enthusiastic Kifissia Toastmasters Club, also in Athens), and so I accordingly broadened my “portfolio.” The first



step was a voyage back in time to rejoin Bossuet Gaveliers Club in Luxembourg, where my Toastmasters journey had started a decade before. Founded in 1956, Bossuet’s traditions include a Babel Night, with 2020 speeches conducted in Russian, Esperanto, Greek, and Creole.

Fortified by sharing those meetings with old friends and bright new talents, I embarked on the search for a German-speaking club, and I was very fortunate to discover Duesseldorfer Toastmasters under its remarkable polymath, then-President Malte Wilkes. The club has separate German-speaking and English-speaking evenings, and its massive, varied, keen, and vigorous membership soon made me feel completely at home.

A Swedish-speaking club proved a little less easy to find, as most clubs in the country operate in English. In Sweden’s second city of Gothenburg, however, I struck lucky with Göteborgs Talarklubb. Around half of its members are Swedes; the rest are people like me who have learned Swedish for

professional reasons or to integrate better in their new home. It made for a friendly and encouraging environment in which the native speakers always displayed great tolerance for any mistakes in grammar or pronunciation!

Many clubs have struggled with a reduced active membership during this past year and a half. Some members pine for the fellowship of a traditional meeting; others have been “Zoomed out” by multiple online meetings in the course of a day. Each of my new clubs not only welcomed me heartily but were very keen for me to take on roles, making the experience even more enriching.

Then came the competition season. My five clubs are in four different countries and three different Districts—59, 95, and 109. Competing required some planning since there is a (very reasonable) prohibition on entering the same kind of competition in more than one Area. Producing a Tall Tale in Swedish or a short competition speech in Luxembourgish had not been on my agenda before the pandemic. Nor had I planned on giving a speech for Dutch-language evaluators!

I look forward to the world eventually overcoming COVID and being able to resume in-person meetings. But it will be a bittersweet moment. I’ve enjoyed crossing the threshold of my distant new Toastmasters homes. In the meantime, I intend to enjoy to the fullest the joy of language skills rising like successful soufflés—to be tasted in the company of new Toastmaster friends. **T**

*Niall Finn was born in Kenya and subsequently lived in New Zealand, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Greece. He has been a Toastmaster since 2011.*





# Providing Value When Time Is Short

How to contribute to your club in big and small ways.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

**Z**oom has been a benefit to many Toastmaster clubs, especially when it comes to expanding their membership. The online format even gave me an opportunity to investigate and join a club before I made a planned move to another state. But the pandemic has introduced issues as well.

Some members now have more responsibilities at home, such as childcare, that impact their ability to be as involved as they would like to be. Others have greater pressures at work that demand more time on the job.

It takes time to fully prepare a speech or to be a club officer. Time that some people may no longer have. Perhaps you are at a point where you need to scale back. Maybe, for a time, you need to be in the background. How can you still contribute to the club?

In a general sense, the answer is easy—attend as often as you can. Just being there contributes to the team. As you may have noticed, a meeting has more energy the more people attend. Your being there contributes to the overall experience.

But, of course, there is more.

You can be a strong encourager. Cheer on each speaker. If they did a great job, tell them. And encourage them as they reach for a higher level.

What about newer members? When they give their Ice Breaker reach out to them before and after the meeting. I have seen many new Toastmasters fret about doing their Ice Breaker, so I have a statement that I say as they prepare to go

onstage. I point out that their only goal is to survive. I have a cell phone. If I don't have to call an emergency number, they had a successful speech. They usually laugh and, as a result, relax. You could do something like that to put them at ease. And it doesn't take much time or effort to do it.

Perhaps a new member is performing a role, like [timer](#), for the first time. You could sit next to them and offer to guide them through the experience.

Another aspect of your involvement is the meeting roles. When you are assigned a role, do it to the best of your ability. If your club uses a sign-up system, don't be reluctant to take on a role.

**Your being [at a meeting] contributes to the overall experience.**

When you are the [Toastmaster of the Day](#), be the best one that you can be. You are setting an example for the other members and are encouraging them to reach for a higher level. If you are responsible for the Word of the Day, make it a good one, and a fun one, at that. If you are a [speech evaluator](#), give an encouraging and constructive evaluation.

And if you can, present a Pathways speech now and again. That can help your club achieve their goals in the Distinguished Club Program.

There is also a way that you can help your club outside of the regular meetings. Each one of us has a life outside of Toastmasters. (Shocking, I know, but true.) That could be at work, your child's school, the gym, you name it. We all have some sort of interaction with others, even if it is over Zoom. You can spread the word about your club—simply talking up Toastmasters can help your club get new members. And you would be helping your contacts improve themselves through the organization.

You might be thinking, *Wait a minute. All of these involve my giving. What do I get out of it? Why should I take the time?* Your involvement results in you growing in the process. You grow in speaking skills. You grow in training skills. And, most important, you grow in leadership skills. You receive many of the benefits of Toastmasters even though you are on a limited time schedule. That is real value.

At a minimum, I suggest that you look for a unique way to help your club, even if it is encouraging a new member as they nervously prepare for their first speech. Sometimes the little things are actually the biggest. And it is a way for you to continue to grow. **■**

**Bill Brown, DTM**, is a speech delivery coach in Gillette, Wyoming. He is a member of Energy Capital Toastmasters in Gillette. Learn more at [www.billbrownspeechcoach.com](http://www.billbrownspeechcoach.com).

# A Toastmaster for All Ages

Discover how this 100-year-old still finds value in the Toastmasters experience.

BY BARBARA WALLACE

**E**arly on a recent Friday morning, members of Edmond Club of Edmond, Oklahoma, logged onto Zoom and were pleasantly surprised to see their oldest member, Oren Lee Peters, who navigated Zoom technology to join the club online. Peters, who turned 100 years old in April, says he finds great joy in being a lifelong learner. With more than 50 years of speaking experience to his credit, he still wins the best club speech of the day accolades. Even in his 90s, as the traditional education program was ending, he earned his Advanced Communicator Silver. He never pursued it before, he says, because he already had quite a few badges, including the Purple Heart, a decoration given by the United States military, and the title of Sir Knight by the order of the French government for his service in World War II.

“He was a member of this club when I was a 1-year-old. He’s inspired me to stay in Toastmasters for the long haul,” says Robert Adams, DTM, who like many club members is a bit wide-eyed at the presence of a centenarian sharing stories before them about war, history, and life growing up in 1920s America. Club member Lori Vallejo agrees. “When he would show up to Toastmasters in his 90s, still ready to learn, that made an impression on me,” she says.

## The Introduction

On another Friday morning in 1966, Peters walked into his first Toastmasters meeting. He was in his mid-40s, married with four young children, and a veteran of

both World War II and the Korean War. Talking to people was part of his daily work as a logistics instructor at a local military training institute. When a friend invited him to a Toastmasters meeting, Peters was naturally curious.

*Peters is a lifelong learner with more than 50 years of speaking experience to his credit.*

He remembers being given a chance to speak at the meeting and thinking, *I’m a storyteller, I can do a good job at this.*

“So I got up and did a pretty good job. Then the one in charge of talking to me said, ‘That was pretty good. Your ahs were around 20-some.’” Another evaluator noticed Peters kept his hands in his pockets during the speech, avoiding hand gestures. “I really started feeling that I wasn’t as good as I thought I was,” Peters recalls. But he was hooked. “Every suggestion that I heard I thought, I’m going to nail this thing down. So I studied the book and I was in Toastmasters for good.”

## Club Storyteller

Larry Selby, DTM, remembers Peters as a club leader and an engaging speaker—back then and today. Selby laughs, remembering how Peters, a local Boy Scout leader, taught the club to sing scout songs during one of his speeches. “He has some real energy when leading a group,” Selby says.

But the somber speeches about war are what many club members remember most. Months ago, during a Zoom speech, Peters sat in his home office with a World War II European battlefield map behind him. He recounted a harrowing experience, facing German troops in Italy while serving with the Oklahoma National Guard in the 45th U.S. Infantry. “I want you to know at one time I was looking death in the face,” he said, pausing dramatically before describing the looming German tanks and the despair of lost hope. At the bleakest moment, Peters says, “A P-38 airplane came right over my head and took care of the situation that would have wiped me and my platoon completely out.”

With that, Peters won the Best Speaker of the Day. “He can keep the whole audience sitting on the edge of their seats waiting for him to reveal how it all turned out,” says Suellen Miller, DTM. “He’s good at mastering pauses.”

## Something Worth Saying

In the 1970s, Peters left Edmond for a military job in another state. He tried to start a Toastmasters group there to no avail, and when he moved back to Edmond it was a few years before he rejoined the Edmond Club. He realized that he needed Toastmasters to stay sharp for work and for giving speeches to the schools and civic clubs that were increasingly asking for his World War II stories and other speeches.

“My presentations had to make sense,” Peters says. “You just don’t stand up and start blowing the wind, you need to have something that is worth listening to.” He





*Edmond Club members present Oren Lee Peters with a certificate recognizing his service to the club—a gift for his 100th birthday.*

### **Staying Power**

Like the members who have helped him, Peters stays a Toastmaster because he wants to help and share with others. His son, Pat Peters, says it's part of his dad's extrovert personality. "He just likes people," Pat says. "He likes sharing."

The elder Peters says, "I want to help people." And, he adds, he feels there are a lot of people who should be back in Toastmasters helping too.

*"The zest for life that he has, it's a great lesson that we should constantly strive to learn something new."*

—KIRAN PRABHU

"You need Toastmasters to hold you in line if you're going to be a good speaker. I believe that. If you're getting that good, be there to help the next guy."

Plus, he says, he's still learning. "I pick up something at every meeting. There's a little tic or something I can use."

Peters is planning an Ice Breaker for his next speech. When asked about the topic, he will not say. "I've gone through some pretty tough things," he says. "I have a bunch of stories to tell." **T**

**Barbara Wallace** is the former Vice President Public Relations of Edmond Club in Edmond, Oklahoma.

credits Toastmasters for refreshing his speaking and evaluation abilities. "It has really helped me through the years," Peters says.

But what about those uncomfortable evaluations? Peters says you have to take the criticisms to get better. "You've got to stay in it. You've got to be there and be willing to take the knocks, still. Step up and do it!"

In his teens, he followed his own advice to take criticism to improve and volunteered for the National Guard and was then called for war. When he returned from war, he volunteered to help coach high school football and eventually became head coach of the team. If civic clubs had roles to fill, he volunteered. In Toastmasters, he stepped up to serve in officer roles. "I volunteered for everything. Why? I wanted to know!" Peters says. "Scouting, National Guard, Toastmasters. I enjoyed it. I wanted to be good at it so I could say, I can do that!"

"To me he is a prime example of a lifelong learner," says Immediate Past Club President Kiran Prabhu. "Someone his age still there every morning,

smiling, happy to be there and share his stories with the rest of the club, and embracing new technology at his age—it's incredible!" she says. "It's a testimony that life doesn't stop when you retire; it begins. It's never too late to learn new things. The zest for life that he has, it's a great lesson that we should constantly strive to learn something new." Prabhu often thinks, "If he can do it, I can do it!"

### **All in the Club Family**

Over the past two decades, club members have stepped up to help Peters stay connected as his hearing and vision capabilities have waned. Today, he's legally blind. Before the pandemic, members drove him to in-person meetings. They adjusted meeting roles, regularly counting on Peters for the invocation and a thought or poem of the day. Some would call him an "unofficial evaluator," pulling members aside offering advice.

"You're not going to hear me dig any of them," Peters says, "I'll give them a suggestion. And there's a lot of times it's not my place to be the person that is going to grade the speech, but I would sure like to make a suggestion."

# Introducing: The Improved Pathways Level 1

New projects in the education program sharpen the focus on public speaking fundamentals.

BY STEPHANIE DARLING

**F**our years after the launch of Pathways, Toastmasters has released member-driven improvements to the program's core Level 1. There is a fresh focus on public speaking basics in this level, which is the foundational first step all Toastmasters take in any of the 11 education options in Pathways.

Level 1 has four projects—with five speeches—which include a mix of familiar fundamentals and new skill-building practices. The time-honored “Ice Breaker” project has been substantially updated with new content. The “Evaluation and Feedback” project remains a two-speech project and is joined by “Writing a Speech With Purpose” and “Introduction to Vocal Variety and Body Language.” Before completing Level 1, members will also need to serve as a speech evaluator.

Additionally, projects have been enhanced to improve navigation. For example, participants will now have clearer instructions on how to mark their projects complete, a process that was sometimes unclear to users before the change.

One project is leaving the Level 1 lineup: “Researching and Presenting,”

which has also been updated, and will now be an elective in Level 3.

Level 1 projects introduce the program to new Toastmasters, the majority of whom cite the desire to learn basic speaking skills as their main reason for joining. This revamping will allow them to hit the ground running toward this goal. In fact, according to a survey by the World Headquarters Research and Analysis staff, more than 84% of new members completed Level 1 during the 2020-2021 program year—even though it was a time of COVID disruptions around the world.

**Level 1 projects allow new members to hit the ground running toward their public speaking goals.**

Ultimately, by mastering Level 1's ground-floor public speaking proficiencies, members should feel positive and confident as they continue their Pathways journey, selecting and excelling in paths that most interest them.

“Not only do these changes address the immediate need of our newest members, they support the organization's mission to continually provide all members with the skills and training they seek, no matter where they are in their personal Toastmasters experience,” says Kate Wingrove, education programs and training director for Toastmasters International.

## **The Keys to Change**

The Toastmasters Education Team has been carefully tracking member observations, suggestions, and critiques since the program began its phased rollout in 2017. Pathways has undergone small modifications along the way to address simple fixes. However, the Education Team waited for time and user experiences to reveal what, if any, complex changes would be the most beneficial to members.

Pathways received early praise for developing skills in some 300 practical, professional competencies. However, feedback also gave rise to a clear, consistent message: Level 1 needed to make basic speaking and speechwriting skills “blatantly obvious.” These are skills





that members indicated they joined to learn, and what they felt they needed to achieve continuing personal and professional goals.

The Toastmasters International Board of Directors, based on Education Team

Level 1 generates a high level of interest among new Toastmasters—more than 84% completed it in their first year of membership.

recommendations, acted in August 2021 to approve the changes to Level 1.

### What to Know First

- ▶ Level 1 changes are now live on Base Camp.
- ▶ The new Level 1 projects apply only to paths purchased after October 27, 2021. Paths already in progress or completed on that date will continue

in the previous Level 1 format to ensure a smooth transition.

- ▶ New Level 1 projects are currently available only in English, with translations to follow in the future.
- ▶ “Researching and Presenting” is now an elective in Level 3 for anyone purchasing paths after October 27.

### The New Level 1

**Ice Breaker:** This speech continues as the first project undertaken by a new member. Participants learn basic speech structure, rehearsal techniques, and the value of speech evaluations, and take the opportunity to introduce themselves to the club.

**Writing a Speech With Purpose:** This project focuses on strategies for selecting a topic, defining a purpose, and producing a well-written and organized speech.

**Introduction to Vocal Variety and Body Language:** Participants learn to recognize the impact of vocal variety and identify changes in pitch, tone, volume, and pace, as well as when and how to

effectively use body language and gestures to enhance a presentation.

**Evaluation and Feedback:** This project, which comprises two speeches, teaches important skills Toastmasters will use throughout their Pathways journey and beyond: how to receive and act on constructive feedback. The requirement to serve as a speech evaluator will help members learn how to give the valuable gift of feedback to others.

### Ongoing Pathways News

Keep watching member communications, including emails, Leader Letter, and the *Toastmaster* magazine, for continuing [Pathways news](#). The Education Team will continue exploring potential program changes, such as how to better orient members to both Toastmasters and Pathways, strategies to emphasize and encourage meeting role participation, and improvements to the path selection process. **T**

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



# **BUILD A** *Great* **Speech**

Gain valuable tips for constructing a presentation from start to finish.

BY CHRISTINE A. ROBINSON, DTM

Are you ready? Ready to become an inspiring, impactful speaker? As a three-time contender for the World Championship of Public Speaking®, and with 30 years' experience teaching, authoring, and coaching, I've field-tested these strategies to elevate my speeches. Ahead are components of verbal and nonverbal communication—your keys to unlock the winning speech within you.



## Prepare Your Speech

**Determine your objective.** What do you want the audience to get out of your speech? Are you teaching, persuading, or inspiring? Are you trying to resolve conflict, give a call to action, or simply tell a story?

**Answer “The Question.”** The audience always has an unspoken question: “What’s in it for me?” Within the first minute, you need to answer their question and let them know why they are listening to you. Keep this point in mind as you develop your speech.

**Set three goals.** No matter what your topic, message, or objective, you want to focus on three aspects at the beginning:

1. Let the audience know who you are.
2. Give them a reason to listen to you.
3. Provide a structure they can easily follow.

## Set the Stage

**Create an alluring speech title.** Five words or less is ideal. The title can underscore your theme, provide a compass point, or keep your audience guessing—as was the case with Willie Jones, 1997 World Champion of Public Speaking, and his title, “A Warm Boot.” You might wonder, *a warm boot?* Turns out, a “warm boot” refers to rebooting computers. His topic broadened to include the idea of “rebooting” ourselves—a wonderful weaving of topic with title.

**Jump right into your presentation.** You have 30 seconds to capture your audience’s attention. Use your first few seconds wisely with a quick quip, an anecdote, or a self-effacing story. Done with the right tone, being vulnerable or playfully self-deprecating gets the audience on your side from the start.

**Keep it light.** Have some “get to know you” time at the start of your speech. While what you have to say might be emotional, audiences tend to be uncomfortable if they feel they have to console the speaker.

**Start with humor.** The quickest way to break down the invisible walls between the speaker and the audience is



humor. The more I looked for laughter and humor for my speech projects, the more I found, for my speeches as well as my life. For instance, the theme for one of my World Championship speeches was the power of authenticity. My opening line was “Be yourself. Everyone else is taken!”

**Put your best first.** Many speakers mistakenly save the best for last. However, numerous times my supposed “best for lasts” were really best as firsts. Put your best first and you upgrade your presentation with even greater conclusions than initially anticipated. I once opened by belting out a song rather than burying the music later on in the speech.

## Structure the Body of the Speech

**Streamline your presentation.** Initially, my speeches voluminously verged on overtime. Repeatedly, my mentor would comment, “What are you saying?” Through constant focus on purpose, the extraneous was cleared away. Refer back to the speech objective and purpose. Then bring support with examples, stories, or vignettes.

### Apply a universal theme to something personal.

If your theme involves something others may not have experienced, tie the two together: one personal, the other universal.

I began my “Empty Chair” speech with an empty chair and me on stage, to represent my absence from my family. From there, the speech built to a call for the audience to consider the empty chairs in their lives, to restore absent members to the “table of life.” Not everyone has an estranged family, but there are empty chairs. By using this analogy, I was able to inspire people to make calls and fill their empty chairs.

**Create a speech tempo.** Pace provides impact. Like a heart monitor, a speech reflects intensities, highs, and lows. Craft a speech with all three levels, and end on a high.



**Consider the “I to we” quotient.** As often as possible, use *we* and *us*. When you speak in terms of *I* and *me*, people grow bored. When you speak in terms of *we* and *us*, they become engaged. Of course they are, you are talking about them! The “I to we” quotient must be weighted with as much *we* as possible to gain maximum connectivity to your audience. Open with a phrase using *we*—something wide-ranging—right from the start so you and your audience find equal footing. To discover how many times *we*, *you*, and *I* are mentioned, take advantage of the editing “Find” tool.

**Use storytelling to establish conflict.** If you start with “Life is good, things are great, and I look forward to the rest of my life,” people start looking forward to walking out. Instead, use stories to illustrate how to overcome or strive for something. For example, describe an unfolding problem, such as arriving late at the airport. The audience can then review their life path of arriving late or facing other stressful situations. The story allows them to join you, listen, learn, and be entertained by character development.

**Add Polish**

**Repetition.** Repetition clarifies and emphasizes your message. By the third time you make a point, the audience can honestly say, “Now I know what the speaker is driving at.” Repetition can appear in phrases or even a single word.

The late British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said the following in a 1941 speech during World War II: “*Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never. ... In nothing,*

*great or small, large or petty. Never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.*” You can hear the vehemency in his voice, simply through the repetition of the word “never.”

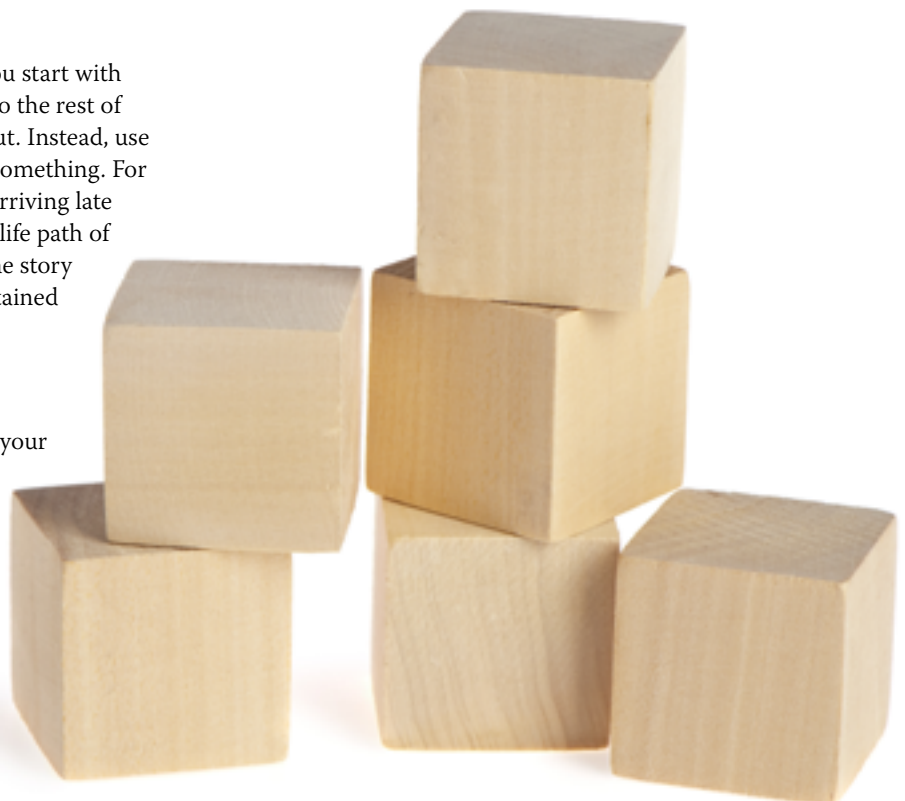
**Pauses.** Provide room in your speech to pause, slow down, and wait for your audience to appreciate what you articulated. At first, the pause may feel like an eternity; however, with practice, it will become a familiar tactic. The power of the pause is a silent and sometimes overlooked strategy to bring greater gravitas to your presentation.

**Activities.** Because people remember 80% of what they see and do (as opposed to what they hear), give them something to practice. Pose a question and ask for a show of hands, have people stand up and wiggle their arms for a minute, or have them take a deep breath.

At the outset of one of his presentations, 1999 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking Craig Valentine loudly challenged his audience, “Are you ready?!” In return the audience bellowed, “I’m ready!” Then, Craig asked his audience to “turn to your neighbor and say, ‘I’m ready!’” In the midst of a chorus of “I’m ready’s!” everyone was most assuredly ready! Noisy and memorable to this day.

**Commit It to Memory**

Once you have decided what you want to say, crafted a strong speech, and incorporated some additional polish, focus on what is often the most difficult aspect: memorizing the speech.







Here are a few techniques I suggest.

- ▶ Practice your speech first thing in the morning and before going to bed. Speeches seem to gel this way.
- ▶ Record your speech over and over, then listen to it before going to bed or in the car. Recordings never lie, and you will quickly discover your strengths and weaknesses. Yes, you'll hear your verbal chaff such as "er," "you know," or "um," but you'll also learn to appreciate the beauty of your own resonance: the sound, the music, the tempo of your voice.
- ▶ Develop muscle memory while walking and delivering your speech. With only a limited amount of air while walking, you dive down to the heart of what wants to be said. So put on your shoes and head out the door for muscle memory.

### Leave With a Memorable Ending

A strong opening and a memorable closing should be your primary focal points. Whether building a sentence or a speech, keep in mind the most impactful points lie at the beginning and at the end. When you come to the end, think about how you want your speech to be remembered. Maybe you want to inspire listeners to do something, or perhaps you want to convey a unifying moment.

**Call to action.** If the purpose is to get your audience involved in your project, give them a next step to take. This creates a linear speech from Point A to Point B. If your speech promotes the Toastmasters International Convention, your call to action at the end could be, "For the contests, for the educational talks, and for the keynote speaker: Sign up!"

**Circular structure.** The circular speech structure, where the ending picks up the threads of the opening, is my favorite. The verbiage from the opening can be woven into the conclusion, supporting the speech with symmetry and balance. My award-winning "Empty Chair" speech opened by standing and addressing an empty chair, and concluded with my filling it.

Finally, smile and enjoy your well-earned applause. You worked hard for this moment. The audience completes the cycle of giving and receiving as they thank you, putting their hands together in warm, welcome acknowledgement. **T**

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**Christine A. Robinson, DTM**, is a member of *Pitch Perfect Toastmasters*, in San Rafael, California, and a charter member of *Leaders Worldwide*, in San Francisco, California. She coaches and mentors speakers, and is the author of the newly released book *Confidently Speaking: The Speaker's Guide to Standing Ovations*. Learn more at [www.confidentlyspeaking.net](http://www.confidentlyspeaking.net).

# Including All Voices

Set the stage for more inclusive meetings—  
in Toastmasters and beyond.

BY JESSE SCINTO, DTM

**C**andace is an exchange student from New Zealand taking courses at a prestigious law school in the United States. Although she's learning a lot, her classroom experience leaves something to be desired. "Back home I run a law office with 10 attorneys, and I have no problem speaking up," says Candace (a pseudonym). "But in class, the men compete for the professor's attention, and I can't get a word in edgewise."

Candace's experience isn't unusual. Research shows that in group discussions, members of dominant social groups are more likely to speak, and speak for longer periods, than members of social subgroups. Men on average speak more than women; ethnic-majority members speak more than those in the minority. We learn about social status early in life, and those lessons are powerfully reinforced by society. Toastmasters clubs aren't immune. You may notice that power dynamics from the outside world replicate themselves within your club. Do older members or native-language speakers volunteer more frequently than others for speaking roles? Do long-standing members act as unofficial referees, interrupting and correcting newcomers when things don't go according to plan? Is your real-world boss also the boss of your corporate club?

Although unequal speaking time isn't necessarily a sign of bad intentions,

there's much to gain from inclusion. Aside from encouraging personal expression and social equity, groups that allow more voices to be heard benefit by having more individual experiences to draw on. This leads to better knowledge sharing and decision-making. Groups get smarter when everyone participates.

## It's a Toastmaster's duty and privilege to include more voices.

To promote inclusion within our clubs and beyond, meeting leaders need to take a more conscious approach to structuring group conversations. Instead of relying on ourselves to call on people equitably, which may be hard to do while presenting, we can create the *conditions* for inclusion with seven simple steps.

**1 Send your agenda or discussion topics in advance.** This gives participants who are more reticent—whether because of communication apprehension or introversion—a chance to reflect on the topic and prepare their contributions in advance.

**2 Verbalize expectations at the beginning of the meeting.** When participants know the rules of the road—

## Voices of Inclusion

**H**ere's what others have to say about why hearing everyone matters.

***A lot of different flowers make a bouquet.***

—Islamic proverb

***When everyone is included, everyone wins.***

—Jesse Jackson

***Diversity is the mix. Inclusion is making the mix work.***

—Andrés Tapia

***Diversity is a fact, but inclusion is a choice we make every day.***

—Nellie Borrero

***Peace requires everyone to be in the circle.***

—Isabel Allende

***...We learn from each other. If you're missing on that stage, we learn less. We all need to be on that stage.***

—Juan Felipe Herrera





likely to hear opposing viewpoints if you ask, and groups reach better decisions when there's more diversity of thought.

**6 Pair and share.** If you want participants to be comfortable sharing their views in front of a larger group, allow them to first discuss in pairs or small groups. It gives them a dry-run rehearsal for their ideas and helps build confidence. In a virtual setting, this can be accomplished through breakout rooms.

**7 Invite appreciation.** At the end of your meeting, ask if any participants would like to express appreciation for something someone else has said. This technique, borrowed from Stephen Brookfield's *Powerful Teaching Techniques for Adults*, is a positive way to build community. It recognizes that valuable contributions can come from any direction.

The fact that Candace felt comfortable professionally managing a law office in New Zealand but not when taking law courses in a foreign country isn't surprising. For most people, communication confidence fluctuates depending on the situation or who is in the room. These seven tips work by reducing uncertainty and providing structure, similar to the regular agendas and defined speaking roles we use in Toastmasters. These tools help us live up to our mission of providing a "mutually supportive environment." But we can always do more.

In my home club, we have a tradition of concluding each meeting with a "Final Go-Around." Each attendee gets an opportunity to say a few words. For those who didn't have an assigned role, it's a chance to do what they've come there to do: speak. It's a Toastmaster's duty and privilege to include more voices. **T**

**Jesse Scinto, DTM**, is a Fulbright scholar and deputy director of the strategic communication program at Columbia University in New York City. He's also the founder/CEO of [Public Sphere](#), a leadership communication firm, and a member of [Greenspeakers Club](#) in New York City.

how and when their contributions will be welcomed—they'll feel more comfortable speaking. For instance, simple phrases like, "I'd like to hear from everybody" or "We'd like this to be inclusive" let participants know that speaking opportunities won't be distributed according to status. Similarly, you can verbalize how participants are to seek recognition: "Please raise your hands to be called on." Let people know whether questions will be taken throughout or whether they should hold them for a separate question-and-answer period at the end.

## Groups get smarter when everyone participates.

Verbalizing expectations removes uncertainty, and is especially important for virtual meetings, because there are fewer nonverbal cues to guide conversational turn-taking. A delay in signal transmission makes it more difficult for participants to just jump in with questions or comments.

**3 Do a round-robin.** In an in-person meeting, go around the room and allow everyone a chance to speak. This works especially well when people are

seated in a circle or around a conference table, because it's easy to see whose turn it is. In a virtual meeting, ask each speaker to choose the next speaker. Both techniques take the decision about whose turn it is to speak out of the hands of the discussion leader, making it a shared responsibility. Each participant is given a platform. Most people will speak when given the platform.

**4 Build in five-second pauses.** Confident people are quick to raise their hands and often get called on first. But if you build in a five-second pause after posing a question or finishing part of your presentation, it allows those who need more time to reflect an opportunity to get their hands up. This technique comes from Iris Bohnet's wonderfully practical book *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*.

**5 Ask: "Does anyone have a different point of view?"** It's typical for small groups to coalesce around a single dominant viewpoint and for dissenters to silence themselves—a phenomenon known as *groupthink*. But what if you specifically invite those with a different opinion to share their view? You're more

# From Toastmaster to Trainer

Expand your skills to facilitate learning and deepen your impact on others.

BY GAVIN MEIKLE, DTM

If you've ever been to a Toastmasters training for officers, or participated in a collaborative learning process at work, you're probably familiar with a trainer. While trainers need many of the same skills as a speaker—comfortable delivery, effective body language, the ability to engage audience members—they also require an additional skill set: the ability to facilitate.

Rather than simply presenting information as a speaker, trainers also need to help participants learn new skills. They must foster a two-way learning process that involves the audience's active participation. As a trainer myself, I've seen how important this process is.

"A trainer needs to be a superb facilitator, keeping the spotlight on the participants," says Andrei Popescu, DTM, a professional trainer in Bucharest, Romania, and a member of Toastmasters Club Bucharest.

Cindy Laatsch, DTM, helped conduct Toastmasters District Leader Trainings as a Region Advisor from 2019 to 2021. Her perspective is that both the facilitator and District officers learn from each other. "They have just as much data to share," Laatsch says of participants, "and we're in this journey together."

## How Adults Learn

Participants in training sessions are often referred to as adult learners, and the first step in developing a trainer mindset is understanding how adults learn best. Experts in the field say

adults thrive when they are in control of their learning, such as taking part in discussions and hands-on activities. When they participate, they are engaged and retain more information.

That's why presenters focus on content, whereas trainers focus on content and process. An e-learning module for Toastmasters' online District Leader Training states, "The best trainers use the right mix of presentation and facilitation and the right combination of telling and listening."

The distinction between simply telling someone *what* to do versus teaching them *how* to do it requires shifting the focus to others.

"That can be challenging for members because many people join Toastmasters to be in the spotlight themselves," says Popescu, a Past District 95 Director. "Making the transition from charismatic speaker to participant-focused facilitator is a key mindset switch that needs to occur."

The Toastmasters e-learning module, called Club Support and the Importance of Training, states the "definition of





facilitate is ‘to make easier,’ and great trainers make it easier for club officers to be successful.”

Such trainers actively involve the participants with group activities and facilitated discussions about real club challenges. They also encourage the officers to share best practices and ask each other for advice, suggestions, and ideas.

“When I facilitate, I want to be seeing things with the freshest of eyes, like how [the participants] are seeing it.”

—CINDY LAATSCH, DTM

Laatsch, the former Region Advisor, says District Leader Trainings can have great value for District officers. As a facilitator, she was eager to share her own experiences as a leader and work through issues with fellow members.

“I came from a point of wanting to help. I was in each of their roles—I had been Club Growth Director and Program

## Create a Learning Space

Part of being an effective trainer is fostering an environment where adult learners can flourish. An optimum learning environment includes the following:

- ▶ **It’s self-directed and goal oriented.**  
People learn best when they understand how the knowledge and skills taught will help them achieve their goals and outcomes.
- ▶ **It’s pragmatic.**  
Adults want to understand the practical application of the new information provided.
- ▶ **It offers involvement and control.**  
Adults want to have a say in what they learn and how they learn it. They want to be heard as well as to hear.
- ▶ **It’s multi-sensory.**  
People absorb and process information through all senses, including writing, discussing, debating, questioning, building, role-playing, drawing, and engaging emotions.



*The author, shown here leading a training session, has been training in communication and interpersonal skills for more than 25 years.*

Quality Director and District Director. I loved sharing what I didn't do and wished I had done better."

### Understanding the Subject

To be able to adapt and respond to a diverse group of learners in an interactive learning environment, a trainer must first possess in-depth knowledge of the subject being taught. Lisa Marie Gelhaus is a corporate trainer and member of two Toastmasters clubs in Bologna, Italy. She helps business executives become more persuasive communicators.

"Trainers have to be truly knowledgeable about their topics," Gelhaus says. "As a Toastmaster, if you give me an afternoon to do some research, I could give a pretty good speech about anything; but I can only train on a topic that I know inside and out." She says participants can sense when a trainer is unprepared, and will quickly tune out.

Laatsch, a member of three clubs in Wisconsin, agrees it's important to thoroughly know your material. But once she has done that, she also tries to "unlearn it"—in other words, liberate herself from rigidly adhering to pre-planned points and wording.

### Additional Resources

- ▶ Visit the Toastmasters website for the updated [Training Basics manual](#).
- ▶ You can also access the [Club Support and the Importance of Training e-learning module](#). It includes a section called "Selecting Your Trainers" and explores the difference between presenting information and facilitating learning.

"I allow myself the freedom to be present," she says. "When I facilitate, I want to be seeing things with the freshest of eyes, like how [the participants] are seeing it."

### How Toastmasters Helps

The Toastmasters program can help you develop effective training and facilitation skills. Being a member has helped me become a better trainer by enabling me to hone my speaking skills and teaching me the value of being clear and concise.

Gelhaus, the member from Italy, says, "Toastmasters prepares you for expressing your ideas, facing the unexpected, and communicating with and leading people."

Conflict-resolution skills can also come in handy for a trainer. Tensions can sometimes arise in training sessions—for example, if a participant is upset by something in the content. Toastmasters develop skills that help in these situations, such as learning how to thoughtfully deliver, and receive, constructive criticism, and creating safe spaces in club meetings. Laatsch says it's critical for facilitators to establish a safe, friendly environment where all viewpoints are heard and discussed respectfully. If someone is unhappy about an issue, the best thing to do is listen and be authentic in your response.

**"A trainer needs to be a superb facilitator, keeping the spotlight on the participants."**

—ANDREI POPESCU, DTM

Another thing Toastmasters emphasizes is servant leadership—placing a priority on helping others. That contributes to the facilitator mindset of putting the spotlight on participants. And it's why training and facilitating can be so fulfilling, says Laatsch.

"It's very rewarding to think you in some way have had a positive influence on someone," she says. "That's why I'm a Toastmaster for life."

### Seize Opportunities

Adopting the mindset and the techniques used by trainers will take your speaking skills to a higher level. Whenever you attend a workshop, ask yourself, *What was it that made it great? What did the trainer do that made it memorable?* Take notes and look for opportunities to test them out for yourself as soon as possible.

As Popescu says, "Embrace all opportunities to practice. I encourage all new trainers to always understand the 'why' behind the need, the actual goals and challenges behind an articulated request, then gear the training toward that end."

Most clubs run short educational sessions throughout the year. These events provide you with the ideal opportunity to dip your toe into the water. Speak to your club's Vice President Education and let them know you would like to have a go at running an educational session.

## Try These Training Tips

Over my 16-plus years as a Toastmaster, I have attended many training events at club, Area, and District levels. The most memorable sessions were lively, interactive, relevant, and challenging. Let's look at each of these four criteria and see how to incorporate them into your own educational events.

- ▶ **Liveliness.** To hold your audience's attention and engage their brains, you need to be more than a subject matter expert. You need to have an infectious enthusiasm for the subject you are training on and the flexibility to adapt your material and delivery style to your audience's needs. The best trainers regularly monitor their group's energy levels and adjust their tempo and approach as required. For example, vary your delivery speed and energy to hold your audience's attention. Try balancing dry data with engaging real-life stories and case studies that stir emotions. Stories can also be a great way to incorporate humor into your training.
- ▶ **Interactivity.** Since adults learn by doing, as well as by hearing and seeing, experienced trainers weave participation exercises into their workshops. Here are tools and techniques to try.
  - **Buzz groups**  
Split your audience into smaller groups and ask them to discuss a specific aspect of the topic for a set time. When time is up, ask a spokesperson to present their findings to the whole wider group. In online meetings, breakout rooms can be used for this type of activity.
  - **Rehearsal sessions**  
Ask two or more participants to practice skills they are learning by acting out a given scenario. For example, a Vice President Membership might

practice what they would say to a member who seems to be losing interest in the club. Their experiences can then be debriefed by the trainer for the benefit of the whole group to elicit the lessons learned.

- **Quizzes**

These are a great way to assess your participants' current level of knowledge on a particular subject.

- ▶ **Relevance.** The best speakers and trainers know they have to establish the relevance of their session upfront if they are to engage and maintain their audience's interest. When you prepare for your next educational session, ask yourself, *Who is my audience? What are their problems and challenges with the subject I am training on? What benefits will they gain as a result of attending this session?*  
Answering these questions will help you get inside your listeners' heads and see things from their perspective. This allows you to build rapport with them by acknowledging and empathizing with their desires, concerns, and fears.
- ▶ **Challenge.** Learning usually happens when people step out of their comfort zone. The best trainers build challenges into their training sessions to provide extra learning opportunities.  
Examples include asking participants to be a spokesperson for their group, practicing a suggested behavioral shift during an exercise, or even just asking questions.  
Incorporating these principles will transform your speeches and your educational sessions. Your audiences will appreciate the extra effort you have put in, and your confidence and reputation will grow dramatically.

You already know the benefits of having an experienced speaker as a mentor, so why not find yourself a training mentor? Be courageous and speak to trainers you admire. Attend Area, Division, or District events and ask such individuals to help you. Most professional trainers have benefited from mentoring and are often willing to repay that debt by passing on their experience to others.

When I started my career, I never expected to be a professional communication skills trainer, but I am immensely grateful that I took that particular path. It's been an exciting journey of self-discovery. The skills and fresh perspectives I have learned have proved immensely valuable and fulfilling.

Looking back, I can see that being a trainer has made me a better speaker by helping me to be clear about my speech objectives and reminding me that the most important people in the room are the audience members, not the speaker. **T**

**Gavin Meikle, DTM**, has been training in communication and interpersonal skills for more than 25 years and has been a Toastmaster since 2005. He is a member of two clubs in England: *Solent Speakers in Fareham and Spinnaker Speakers in Portsmouth*. He is the author of *The Presenter's Edge: How to Unlock Your Inner Speaker* and has led multiple Toastmasters workshops at club, Area, Division, and District levels.



# Behind the Scenes of a Speech Contest

Speakers may star, but contest functionaries play a critical role.

BY RUTH NASRULLAH

**C**lose your eyes and imagine a Toastmasters club speech contest. Do you immediately picture a speaker, maybe enthusiastic, maybe a little nervous? Perhaps he or she is using wit or an earnest tone to win over anonymous contest judges—all while watching for the dreaded red light.

But did you also picture the people who fill the contest roles, the ones who make the program flow and ensure that it adheres to Toastmasters International's speech contest rules? That group of 12 people (unless that number is impractical for a club) is essential to the contest. Volunteering to help run a speech contest offers a special opportunity to refine leadership and communications skills—and can amplify the experience of simply being a Toastmaster.

“A lot of times people join Toastmasters and they just go to meeting after meeting and never really get the full concept of how they have grown,” says veteran contest chair Camille Morales, DTM, of the Southwest Project Management Club in Sugar Land, Texas. “Being a functionary, serving in those roles, gives you a broad perspective of what Toastmasters is all about.”

Jason Wang of the Friendly Achievers in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, says one of the benefits of club contests, whether in a single club or done in tandem with others, is the friendship and collegiality of the activity.

“The amount of connections you need to have is a plus for the club,” he says.

“Hosting a club contest strengthens those connections.”

## Contest Roles

Depending on your specific interest and desired time commitment, consider taking on one of the roles when your club has its next contest. They include:

### Contest Chair/Contest Toastmaster:

The contest chair is essentially the event coordinator for a Toastmasters speech contest, overseeing all arrangements including budget, audio-visual and other equipment, publicity, venue, refreshments, and contestant eligibility. The chair also must ensure all roles are filled and the officials are briefed on their responsibilities. The contest chair can form committees to help plan and prepare for various aspects of the contest, but it still falls to the chair to ensure the preparation is done and all goes according to protocol before, during, and after the contest.

According to the Toastmasters [Speech Contest Rulebook](#), the contest chair can also appoint a contest Toastmaster to manage some of these duties—most importantly, running the contest, much as the Toastmaster of the Day at a regular meeting would do.

If you like the challenge of organizing a project, or if you are looking to really improve your leadership skills, contest chair is the job for you. “Contest chair is my favorite speech contest role,” notes Estella Mah, DTM, of the Friendly Achievers Club in Edmonton. “It’s more

challenging—and we are in Toastmasters to be challenged.”

**Chief Judge:** The chief judge appoints the voting judges, ballot counters, timers, and the tiebreaking judge, and briefs them before the contest. This position is also responsible for collecting timers’ record sheets and the ballots.

**Voting Judges:** The rules call for at least five at the club level, plus a tiebreaking judge. Allowance is made for clubs too small to produce five judges, although judges can be recruited from other clubs. Judges must be anonymous, although the chief judge, because that role does not include judging contestants, is not.

If you enjoy exercising analytical skills, chief judge or voting judge is the position for you. As Mary Robson, DTM, a member of several clubs in Oxford, England, says, “I enjoy the chief judge position the most—you get to lead, learn increased communication skills, and lead the contest judges.”

Two timers and two ballot counters round out the club contest roles. These have their own distinct, important spots in the lineup. Learn the details of these roles in the *Speech Contest Rulebook*.

## Planning and Promoting

Promoting your speech contest is vital. You want club members aware of the contest well ahead of time to allow for more participants in the competition and in roles.

Robson’s club uses announcements during meetings and in Facebook posts,

[Watch a tutorial](#) to learn more details about a Toastmasters speech contest and the contest roles.



timers know that “ready” is not the start of the speech!)

### Have a Great Club Contest

Club contests require diligent work, but with help and experience, they can be arranged with ease. Of course, the first step is to review the very comprehensive *Speech Contest Rulebook*. There’s no sense in planning a great event only to find out part of your planned activity is in violation of a contest rule.

Toastmasters International provides resources to help clubs maximize success, including [club contest kits](#), an [in-depth FAQ](#) on the Toastmasters website, and the best practices guide for online contests mentioned earlier. However, good planning, including back-up plans for every role or phase of the event, is a must to overcome or mitigate any glitches.

That is the principle by which Morales, the veteran contest chair, plans speech contests. She says a successful club contest is all about planning and teamwork.

“Teamwork is the main thing,” she says. “We know we’re part of an organization that’s teaching communication and leadership skills.”

Robson, the Toastmaster from England, agrees with that sentiment, saying every role has value. “Even vote counter—you are part of it,” she says.

Hear, hear! 🗣️

**Ruth Nasrullah** is a member of the *Pearland Toastmasters Club* in Pearland, Texas. A freelance journalist based in Houston, she is president of the Houston chapter of the *Society of Professional Journalists* and recently was honored with the *Howard S. Dubin Outstanding Pro Member award* from the society’s national organization. Read more about and by Ruth at [www.ruthnasrullah.com](http://www.ruthnasrullah.com).

WhatsApp groups, group email, Meetup groups, and word of mouth.

The million-dollar question: What does it take to entice people to participate?

“Lots of notice and encouragement,” says Robson. “Promoting the benefits of and the satisfaction and fun you get from competing, and how it improves your speech development and speech presentation skills.”

“I enjoy the chief judge position the most—you get to lead, learn increased communication skills, and lead the contest judges.”

—MARY ROBSON, DTM

Zenia Shipp, DTM, Public Relations Manager for District 56 and a member of the Master Evaluators in Houston, Texas, is a veteran club contest organizer. When clubs team up to hold their contests together, she says, it’s a great way to get people involved and make contests run smoothly.

She also recommends that contest chairs reach out to their Area Directors for assistance with organizing and recruiting.

Ask any successful club contest organizer and you’ll hear a few things over and over:

- ▶ Spend the time to train functionaries. Review every role and make sure the team understands each role. Consider that time to be an investment in your club contest’s success.
- ▶ Emphasize teamwork.
- ▶ Have all your contest-related paperwork ready before the contest begins. For an online contest, make sure systems are in place for submitting and sharing required documents such as judging forms, ballot-counting sheets, and timer instructions. A range of apps can be used, including Google Forms and WhatsApp.

### The Online Element

In March 2020, plenty of Toastmasters meetings went online—which meant that as long as in-person meetings were not permitted or not feasible, speech contests were done online as well, presenting a whole new set of challenges. Fortunately, Toastmasters International produced a resource to help: [Online Speech Contest Best Practices](#). These guidelines (they’re not rules) address in detail how to manage common online issues, such as specific cues to signal a transition from one portion of the contest to the next. An example: instructing contestants to turn on their mic and camera and say “ready” to confirm their equipment is working. (The contest chair also has to ensure the

# How to Succeed in Speechwriting

Experts share tips on crafting succinct, potent speeches.

BY CAREN S. NEILE, PH.D.

**B**efore becoming a professional speechwriter, Pete Weissman worked for others in various fields, including a journalist, White House press secretary, U.S. senator, and corporate CEO.

“I was fortunate to work for some amazing leaders in those roles,” says Weissman, the Atlanta, Georgia-based founder of Thought Leader Communications. “But the jobs weren’t a good fit for me.”

Speechwriting, however, was. It combined his “love of communication, leadership, and ideas.”

Communication, leadership, and ideas. Hmm, sounds a lot like what you get out of Toastmasters! And that’s no coincidence. Professional speechwriters who have been members say their Toastmasters training was invaluable to their improvement.

At one point, while Weissman was working as a speechwriter for U.S. Senator Patty Murray of Washington, he was also giving speeches in his own Toastmasters club.

“I realized that long sentences and clunky phrases were tongue twisters,” says Weissman, who belonged to the United States Senate Club in Washington, D.C. “I saw how hard it can be to keep an audience’s attention.”

## The Toastmasters Advantage

Gary Schmidt, DTM, the 2009–2010 Toastmasters International President, did speechwriting for U.S. senators Mark Hatfield and Gordon Smith (both from Oregon) earlier in his career. His

participation in Toastmasters provided a huge boost.

“Toastmasters taught me the power of words and how to craft a speech that is interesting, memorable, and valuable to the audience,” he says. And that’s what good speechwriting is all about.

When Schmidt first went to work for Hatfield, one of his key responsibilities was to draft talking points for his boss’s speeches. “The senator and his staff knew I was in Toastmasters,” he says, “so I was asked to do more and more speechwriting.”

**Professional speechwriters who have been members say their Toastmasters training was invaluable to their improvement.**

One thing that stands out about speechwriting, notes the longtime Oregon member, is the importance of writing for the ear. Chances are, your speech will not be published, and oral speech is very different from written language, says Schmidt. For one thing, sentences are shorter when you speak them, because people can’t go back and reread the line if they lose the thread. What’s more, the sound and rhythm of spoken words is more important.

Brian Jenner, founder of the UK Speechwriters’ Guild and the European

Speechwriter Network, who has written speeches for athletes, a duke, and international CEOs, says that Toastmasters is a great way to get a feel for how the words you write on the page come across to others. He was a Toastmaster working in London as a journalist when he set up a website advertising his speechwriting business.

“My experience entering Toastmasters humorous speech competitions helped me understand that what I think is funny, and what the audience thinks is funny, aren’t necessarily the same thing,” says Jenner, who belonged to the Hallmark Speakers club in Bournemouth, England. “I remember in one competition I crafted some rather highbrow witticisms about Oxford academics; I was beaten by a chap who talked about his dogs! I learned that you’ve got to meet your audience where they are!”

## Helpful Hints

So what are some other tips from these experts? First and foremost, participate fully in Toastmasters. Beyond that, here are six surefire tips from our speechwriting pros.

- Learn from the best. Great communicators are made, not born. Immerse yourself in the words of famed leaders like Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr., says Weissman. Analyze the speeches and ask yourself: How did the speakers get their audience’s attention and prove their points?





## A key to successful speechwriting is writing for the ear.

—PAST INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT GARY SCHMIDT, DTM

photograph, or something else that is clearly visible. People will lean in and pay attention because you're no longer just a talking head. And if a prop doesn't fit? You might consider reworking your speech to find a way.

- Try adding this line to every online presentation: "If you only remember one thing from our talk today, it should be this ..." Then pause and share your main point.
- You may also want to ask this question somewhere in every speech: "So what does that mean for you?" and pause before answering it. People will pay more attention when you share how your ideas impact them.

■ The pros agree that when writing for others, it's vital to listen to the way the client thinks and talks before you start writing. Then be sure you have access to them when it comes time for tweaks or rewrites. You may find yourself having to be extra persuasive about things they should or should not say. Finally, be prepared: As we know from Toastmasters, they probably won't use your script verbatim.

So what does this mean for you? It means that if you remember one thing from reading this article today, it should be this: Your Toastmasters skills and experience can open up a whole new career for you in speechwriting. **T**

**Caren Schnur Neile, Ph.D.**, teaches in the School of Communication & Multimedia Studies at Florida Atlantic University. Visit her at [www.carenneile.com](http://www.carenneile.com).

■ Study rhetorical devices—such as alliteration, anaphora, metaphor, parallelism, and triads—to create key lines that stay in listeners' minds. Not familiar with those terms? Many people aren't. Look them up and practice them!

■ Here are three no-fail ways to maintain your audience's attention and get your points across, advises Jenner, who credits speaking expert Max Atkinson for the tips:

- Three-part lists. Example: "We're going to talk about three ways you can grow your business, and they are 1) advertising, 2) networking, and 3) social media.
- Rhetorical questions. Example: "And what do you think happened next? You guessed it. I got the account."
- Puzzle solutions. This is like the structure of a joke, that is, set-up/

punchline—and the punchline, while it doesn't have to be funny, should come as a surprise. Example: "I hated being in school so much that I couldn't wait to graduate. Then I went into teaching."

■ Ask your club grammarian to help train you to write effectively for the ear by pointing out what is especially good language. Better yet, volunteer for the role yourself!

■ These days, more and more presentations are taking place on online platforms, such as Zoom. Here are three ways to keep your audience engaged when you're presenting for the screen, says Weissman, who has also penned speeches for the CEO of The Coca-Cola Co.

- If it fits, use a prop, whether a tool, a letter from a satisfied customer, a

## So There I Was ...

Start with a story and the audience will follow you all the way to Alaska.

BY JOHN CADLEY



**A**s someone eager to excel at public speaking, you have no doubt been told to “grab” the audience’s attention right from the start. This is true, although “grab” seems a bit harsh. It makes you sound like a thief: *This is a speech! Give me your attention and nobody gets hurt!*

You must understand—an audience is like a hungry animal waiting to be fed a tasty, nutritious, intellectual meal. And animals always sniff their food before they eat to make sure it’s to their taste. Well, your introduction is the sniff, that critical moment when your listeners’ psychic olfactory nerves sense whether they’re in for a nice, big, juicy bone or a bowl of mush.

There are many ways to pique curiosity. You could, for instance, walk onstage in a suit of armor. Rapt attention is guaranteed. You must also get *off* the stage in a suit of armor, which, if not negotiated successfully, will cause you to be remembered not for the brilliance of your words but for the sound of empty tin cans in the spin cycle of a washing machine.

We will not risk such low-percentage stratagems. We will go straight to the road-tested, time-proven device that has been used ever since our pre-verbal ancestors scratched pictures of woolly mammoths and odd-toed ungulates on cave walls—storytelling. Stories connect people. They are both universal and personal—as long as they aren’t too personal. Everyone can relate to your fear of ill health. No one wants to hear how you get wax out of your ears.

Storytelling sounds easy. All you have to do is begin with, “You know, a funny thing happened to me yesterday ...” and you’ve got them, right? Not exactly.

Extensive research shows that the odds of your “funny thing” actually being funny to a real, live audience are roughly 736 trillion to one. Any takers? If not, then let’s just stop pretending we’re all natural-born storytellers and go to one who is: Craig Valentine, the 1999 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking. Valentine’s resume as a storytelling motivational speaker qualifies him for the Most Incredible Person in the Universe Award, so we’ll skip the specifics and get right to some suggestions from his website, along with a little amplification from yours truly.

### Let the story breathe and the drama rise. Don’t file your nails in the meantime.

**Start in the middle.** “As I began my journey to Alaska ...” is a fine beginning but not nearly as compelling as, “There I was, facing a pack of wolves with nothing but a jar of peanut butter and a plastic picnic knife.” Your listeners will definitely want to know how you got there—and why you’re not dead.

**Invite your audience into the scene.** Make them part of the story. In the example above, you could perhaps have them throwing snowballs at the circling carnivores.

**Have a foundational phrase.** Offer a short phrase your audience can remember and repeat. For instance, your Alaskan adventure might be summed up neatly with: *The wilderness is great if you don’t get ate.*

**Take time between lines.** Let the story breathe and the drama rise. Don’t file your nails in the meantime.

**Use dialogue.** Become a character in the story. Speak as they would. Make sure it’s not someone who uses obscene language.

**Show emotional change.** A good story shows your hero’s growth. If he or she ends up crying, don’t act it out. Fake crying will clear a room faster than the cymbals section of a high school marching band.

**Escalate the conflict.** Good stories have conflict. Keep building the tension until somebody falls off a cliff.

**Employ your looks.** Facial expressions greatly enhance storytelling, especially if it’s about someone sitting on a tack.

**Keep it short.** Attention spans are getting shorter. Everyone has a smartphone. One minute too long could be the difference between you and online solitaire.

Put these tips together and you have one heck of a speech: *Imagine yourself standing beside me (involve listeners), facing hungry wolves after our picnic of peanut butter sandwiches (start in the middle) ... and you quip, “The wilderness is great if we don’t get ate” (foundational phrase), which makes me smile (facial expression) and think (pause for effect), and suddenly I change from a terrified tourist to a brave warrior (hero’s growth) who actually attacks the wolves (escalate conflict) and drives them off with a plastic picnic knife. Thank you very much. (Keep it short.)*

So, thank you, Mr. Valentine. If we ever meet, I’ll tell you about a funny thing that happened ... **T**

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



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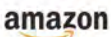


## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM

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

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

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

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

We are happy to speak with you about your publishing needs.  
Call us at 978-440-8364 or visit us at <http://www.eBookIt.com>.





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